



"SOARING INTO THE HEIGHTS!"

By

Ron G. Christian

ACKNOWLEDEMENT

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

Ron G. Christian



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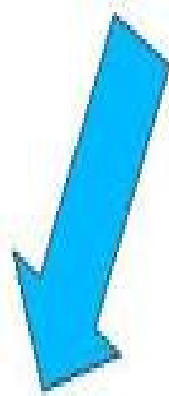
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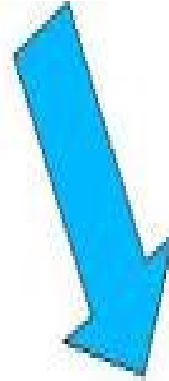
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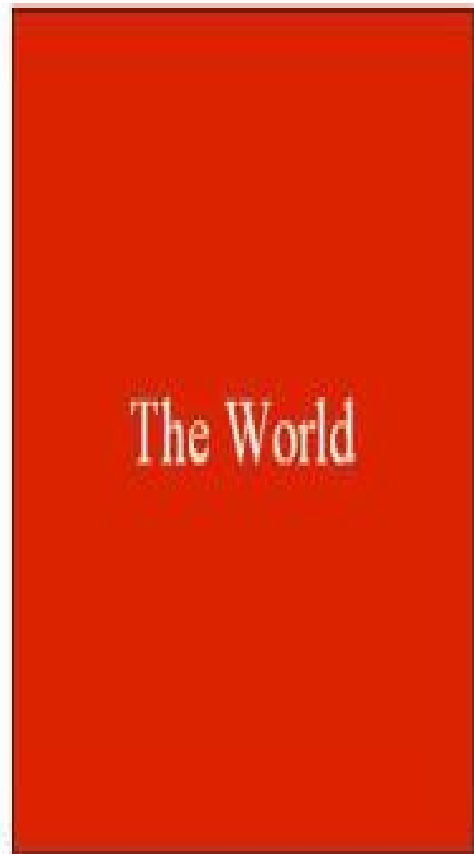
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Salvation



Judgement



1.

"HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN!"

SCRIPTURE: *"When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun! All these new things are from God who brought us back to himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into his favor and be reconciled to him. For God was in Christ, restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men's sins against them but blotting them out. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ's ambassadors. God is using us to speak to you. We beg you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, receive the love he offers you—be reconciled to God. For God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us!" II Corinthians 5:17-21.*

TEXT: *"For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved". Romans 10:9*

Why Is It Important To Discuss The Subject Of 'How To Become a Christian'?

Becoming a Christian is not done automatically. Many different answers are given to the question of 'how to become a Christian?'. Some equate being a Christian with being an American. Some equate being a Christian with being a 'nice guy' or a 'decent citizen'. Some people feel that if they are in sympathy with Christian ideals they are automatically a Christian. Some feel that if they go to church, sing Christian songs, and give to charity, they are truly Christians. Other people believe that if they believe in the doctrines, dogmas, and creeds of the church, they are Christians. Thus, the question of 'how to become a Christian' is very important because there are so many answers given to the question and because no one automatically becomes a Christian.

It Is The Purpose Of This Message, Therefore, To Give A Clear Explanation Of How To Become A Christian. Before discussing The 'Conditions For Man's Salvation', We Will First Discuss Man's Need For God's Salvation.

The great surgeon, Dr. Howard Kelly, once said to a patient, "What you need is a New Testament". Why did the patient need a New Testament? In the New Testament, a person can find assurance of forgiveness and grace of reconciliation. Man's need is still for a forgiving God.

*'Tis Heaven that lies beyond our sights,
And Hell too possible that proves;
For all can feel that God that smites,
But ah, how few the God that loves!*

Why does man need forgiveness? Because a person is a child of sin, and sin produces guilt, alienation, and condemnation.

SIN PRODUCES GUILT.. Man in the beginning overstepped his God-imposed limitation and disobeyed His Creator. Man failed to accept his created role and attempted to be a sovereign in all of his experiences.

Attempting to usurp God's rightful place of authority, man fell into the palace of a rebel. The result of man's stubborn independence is sin, and one manifestation of sin is guilt and shame.

Man still attempts to conceal his guilt, and thus hide his nakedness from God and his fellowman. Man seeks to escape personal responsibility, and conveniently chooses some scapegoat in the form of society, heredity, friends, or backgrounds."

Concealed guilt can cause one to live a life of unreality and fantasy. Concealed guilt often causes one to minimize serious problems, when these problems should be squarely faced and solved.

God may be hid from others, but others are never hid from God. There is an All-Seeing Eye watching us at all times. The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23b) "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Saith the lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:24)

Sin attempts to resolve his own guilt through self-atonement, but his attempt only complicates his problem. Some feel they can out-balance their guilt by strenuously performing good deeds. Good deeds are important, but they will never resolve guilt or appease the guilty conscience. Guilt must be resolved in some other way than through self-effort..

Sin produces alienation. Man was made to be filled with God, but sin empties one of God's inner presences, and leaves one void, estranged, and lonely. The Scripture often talks about man being lost. What a terrible feeling it is to be lost from God! The ultimate consequence of in is hell, and hell is separation from everything that is good.

Sin results in driving, one away from God, the very one that man is made for and the only one who can really help man. "And they, the human couple, heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:8)

Francis Thompson portrayed his own religious experience in his poem 'The Hound of Heaven!' In one section of his poem, he describes the way in which sin drove him from God.

*"I fled Him down the nights and down the days
I fled Him down the arches of the years
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter."*

Sin always has a way of alienating. Sin alienated the prodigal son from his father. Sin alienated the woman of Samaria from society. Sin alienated the thief from his family and friends, and nailed him to a cross. Sin alienates the spirit of man from the Spirit of God. Alienation from God destroys joy and peace and causes emptiness, misery, and loneliness.

The twentieth century might as well have been called, "The Age of Estrangement". While the twentieth-century man often rubbed shoulders in large crowds, he still felt alone. Sin produces a

sense of lostness. The spirit of a man is a universe that is filled with restless activities with no meaning!

Sin produces condemnation. Sin causes one to live under the accusing finger of God. Man was made to be a friend with God, but sin makes God an enemy to be avoided. The death penalty hangs over man! "...the wages of sin is death" – death to the true values of life and eternal separation from God.

The condemned human couple was driven from the Garden. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden a Cherubim's, and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life." (Genesis 3:24)

Why is man condemned? Because he failed to accept and to obey the 'Light of God'. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe already stands condemned. And this is the reason of this condemnation – the light came into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. Every one whose deeds are depraved hates the light, and does not come to the light, but his deeds stand convicted." (John 3:18-20)

Says Barclay, "Alcibiades, the spoilt young man of genius of Athens, was a companion of Socrates, but every now and again he used to, they break out: 'Socrates, I hate you, for every time I meet you, let me see what I am.'" (Barclay's John; pg. 131)

Some feel uneasy around God or God's children because such people realize that they are in the presence of an offended God. Because they have rejected the Light, they feel the heat of God's wrath upon them. Such is the result of Sin.

God's conditions of salvation. If it is true that man is a sinner and that sin produces guilt, alienation, and condemnation, and if it is true that man cannot solve his own predicament, then it seems very necessary for one to understand God's solution to man's predicament. As an answer to man's inner questing for peace, the Word of God gives God's solution to man's inner questing for peace, the Word of God gives God's conditions for Salvation.

It is important for us to realize that there is a great difference between meeting conditions and earning salvation. As Stanley Walters says, "The conditions which lead into Christian conversion are necessary, but not meritorious. On one hand, you can do nothing to merit God's gift of salvation; on the other hand, God does not give it indiscriminately to everyone, but to those who want it and are willing to receive it."

A gift, such as a will or an inheritance, may belong to you, but certain conditions must be met, before you receive it. You did not earn the inheritance, but you must meet certain conditions to receive the inheritance. The following are the conditions man must meet before receiving God's Salvation.

Man must be awakened before man can find God and be saved. He must first confront God and recognize his own personal, spiritual need. This 'Collision with God' or inner awakening to personal need is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can convince man of his deep inner needs. "But when He, the Holy Spirit, has come, He will convict the world of sin, and convince it of

righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8) God the Holy Spirit convicts one that he is not only a person who has committed some sins, but that he is the very kind of person that does sin.

What causes a person to look honestly at himself and to acknowledge personal need? What causes a person who is preoccupied with worldly pursuits and pleasures, to stop in his tracks and suddenly realize that he is traveling the wrong road of life? That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

"It is told that in an Indian village a missionary was telling the story of Christ by means of lantern slides flung on the white-washed wall of a village house. When the picture of the Cross was shown, an Indian stepped forward as if he could not help it! 'Come down' he cried. 'I should be hanging there - not you.'" That is the work of the Holy Spirit. (Story by Barclay, John, page. 225)

It is the Holy Spirit that enables one to say with David, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." (Psalms 51:3) It was the Holy Spirit that pricked the hearts of Peter's listeners on the Day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were picked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) It was the Holy Spirit that awakened Felix to his need. "And as he, Felix, reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." (Acts 24:25a) Coleridge said that he believed the Bible to be inspired because, as he put it, "It finds me." (Barclay's Romans, pg. 193) The Holy Spirit does find us and reveals to us our personal needs.

As the Holy Spirit makes us aware of personal spiritual need, it is then our duty to seek God with all our heart. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29: 12, 13)

Man must repent after God awakens a man to his true spiritual condition, then he must repent of his sins. Repentance is too oftentimes misunderstood. Let us, therefore, first see what repentance does not mean.

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

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

Repentance is "a moral U-turn. A change of mind toward sin, from one of embracing to one of separation." (Walters) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no less through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death." (II Corinthians 7: 9, 10)

The prodigal son is an example of true repentance. He changed his mind about his sin. He saw the results of sin and came to despise his old way of life. He turned his back on his old way of life – he made a moral U-turn – and went to his father. He confessed that he was wrong and put no blame on others. “Repentance is a change of mind and a turning from sin. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:32) Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” (Acts 3:19)

Man must exercise saving faith! If repentance is turning from sin, then faith is turning to God. Saving Faith is ‘putting yourself in the care of one who can do something. It is a transfer of trust for salvation from self to Christ.’ (Stanley Walters)

Let us look carefully at this definition of saving faith. Faith means that a person no longer trusts in himself for his salvation. Only when one realizes that his righteousness is as filthy rags, can he exercise faith in the righteousness of God. Billy Graham cites the following story to illustrate the attitude one must have towards self. “In the Middle Ages the master of an estate in England lay dying. He called to him a servant, whom he knew to be a devout Christian, and said, ‘Jim, I am dying. I am not sure that I am going to Heaven. Can you tell me what I must do?’ The wise old servant knew the pride of his master, and he said, ‘Sir, if you want to be saved, you will have to go to the pigpen, get on your knees in the mud, and say, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’.” The master said: ‘I could not possibly do that. What would the neighbors and servants think?’ A week passed and he called his servant back and said, ‘Jim, what did you say I had to do to be saved?’ The old servant replied; ‘Sir, you will have to go to the pigpen.’ The Master said, ‘I have been thinking it over, Jim, and I am ready to go.’ The servant then said, ‘Master you don’t really have to go to the pigpen. You just have to be willing’.” (World Aflame; pg. 69)

Faith means that a person transfers his weight to God who alone can cure the sin problem. Man must throw himself upon God, as a drowning man does to the lifeguard. Only when one ceases struggling and surrenders himself to God, can he be saved.

“How did you like the air plane ride?” Was asked of a nervous man who went for the first time. “Very well, he replied, “but I never did put my whole weight down.” (E. Stanley Jones; Abundant Living; 235)

Faith means putting your whole weight down on God, who alone can save. “A woman in India had learned that she was a sinner and that God is holy and cannot overlook sin. She often said, ‘I need some great prince to stand between my soul and God.’ Eventually she heard that the Bible contains the account of a Savior who had died for sinners, so she asked a pundit to read the Bible to her. He began at the first chapter of Matthew, and as he read the list of names in the genealogy of Christ, the woman thought, ‘What a wonderful prince this Jesus must be to have such a long line of ancestors.’ And when the pundit read, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins”. (Matthew 1:21), the woman exclaimed, ‘This is the prince I want! This is the prince I want! The Prince, who is also a Savior!’ (Billy Graham’s World Aflame; pg. 89)”

What is the conclusion to the whole matter? How can a person become a Christian?

First, a man must recognize the seriousness of sin, which produces guilt, alienation, and condemnation.

Second, the Holy Spirit must awaken a man in order that he might recognize his own personal, spiritual need.

Third, a man must repent of his sin, which involves changing his mind about sin and turning his back on sin.

Fourth, a man must exercise saving faith, which means putting himself in the care of one who can transform. As Walters says, "These conditions must coincide. When you meet them fully, you may be sure that God will act to justify you and make you a new creature. Confidence in God assures you of salvation.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9); "... although the Holy Spirit also gives assurance". (Romans 8:16)

2.

"THE ROAD TO GOD!"

TEXT: "Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Mark 1:15

In considering God's plan for man's salvation, we must first acknowledge that man needs salvation. This means recognition of man's low moral condition. Man is a victim of sin's tyranny, and man must feel the devastating effects of sin – guilt, condemnation, and alienation.

With the backdrop of man's plight in view, we see the Cross of Christ take the forefront on the stage of human history. While it is impossible to fully comprehend the full significance of the Cross, we must realize that it would be totally impossible for man to be saved without the Atonement. "The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start." (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis; 57) By this, it is not meant that Christ's death automatically makes us right with God. That would be to exclude the subjective aspect of human appropriation of God's plan of salvation. Preoccupation with the objective aspect of salvation – that is, Christ's work on the Cross – to the exclusion of the subjective aspect of salvation – that is, man's appropriation of Christ's work - results in a form of universalism. The doctrine of universalism asserts that, because Christ died for all, therefore, all will ultimately be saved.

Man must appropriate God's salvation. This is what we want to talk about today. What are the conditions that God has laid down for man's salvation?

Man must be awakened in speaking of man's appropriation of God's salvation, it is important to distinguish between meeting conditions and earning salvation. As Stanley Walters says, "The conditions which lead into Christian conversion are necessary, but not meritorious. On one hand, you can do nothing to merit God's gift of salvation. On the other hand God does not give it indiscriminately to everyone, but to those who want it and are willing to receive it."

For instance, a gift such as an inheritance may belong to you, but certain conditions must be met before you receive it. You did not earn the inheritance, but you must meet certain conditions to receive the inheritance.

Before a man can be saved, he must acknowledge that he needs to be saved. He must somehow see himself as he really is – depraved and corrupted by sin and an alien to the fellowship of God. In other words, before a man can be saved, he must experience a spiritual awakening. He must confront God and recognize his own personal, spiritual need. This 'Collision with God' or inner awakening to personal need is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can convict man of his deep inner needs. "But when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and convince it of righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8)

What causes a person to look honestly at himself and to acknowledge personal need? What causes a person who is preoccupied with worldly pursuits and pleasures to stop in his tracks and suddenly realize that he is travelling the wrong road of life? That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

A woman called up E. Stanley Jones and said without preliminaries, “I’m a lost person and I’ve run smack into God. I want to talk with you.” (Conversion: pg. 207) This woman had received a spiritual awakening. Says Lloyd-Jones; “Man must be convinced and convicted of his sin. He must face the naked, terrible truth about himself and his attitude towards God. It is only when he realizes that truth that he will be ready truly to believe the Gospel and return to God.” (The Flight of Man – and the Power of God; pg. 24)

Lloyd-Jones continues, “Though men decide not to believe in God and to put Him and His ways out of their lives, though they ignore all consequences and in a spirit of bravado decide to follow the other life, they do not therefore finish with God and truth at that point. The truth continues to remind them of its existence and to worry them. It does so most definitely, of course, in and through the conscience. It warns, it condemns, and it prohibits. The Truth is not static and lifeless. It is actually within us – there is ‘the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world’...The truth follows us and worries us.” (Ibid; 51)

One of the thousands of listeners at a Billy Graham Crusade suddenly arose from his seat and because rather indignant, became he thought Billy Graham was preaching right at him specifically. He thought Billy Graham was describing his own specific sins in the presence of the large crowd, and he was embarrassed and embittered. That singling out was the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Scriptures produce a spiritual awakening. “For the Word that God speaks is alive and active; it cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword. It strikes through to the place where soul and spirit meet, to the innermost intimacies of a man’s being. It exposes the very thoughts and motives of a man’s heart. No creature has any cover from the sight of God; everything is exposed before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:12, 13) Coleridge said that he believed the Bible to be inspired because, as he put it, “It finds me.” (Barclay’s Romans, pg. 193)

Said Mark Twain, “Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always notice that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand.” (Shoe-Leather Faith; No. 380) The Holy Spirit does find us and reveals to us our personal needs through the Bible.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables one to say with David, “For I acknowledge my transgression: and my sin is ever before me.” (Psalms 51:3) It was the Holy Spirit who pricked the hearts of Peter’s listeners on the Day of Pentecost. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) It was the Holy Spirit who awakened Felix to his need. “And as he (Felix) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.” (Acts 24:25a) As the Holy Spirit makes us aware of personal spiritual need, it is then our duty to seek God with all our heart. “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will harken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:12, 13) This brings us to the next condition for man’s salvation – Faith.

Man must exercise saving faith as Faith is “Putting yourself in the care of One who can do something. It is transfer of trust for salvation from self to Christ.” (Stan Walters) “This faith is much more than mere intellectual of a fact with the mind.” (Barclay’s James; pg. 95) Wrote James, “You say that you believe that there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing – and

shudder in terror." (James 2:19) The demons know that Jesus is the Son of God, and even tremble because of this belief.

Faith in Christ is not merely intellectual assent; it is commitment of one's total self to a Person of Christ . Faith is "...not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart." (Wesley's Sermons; vs. 1:14) The object of one's faith is Christ. Faith means that a person transfers his weight to God who alone can cure the sin problem. Man, must throw himself upon God as a drowning man does to the lifeguard to be saved. Only when one ceases struggling and surrenders himself to God, can be saved. "How did you like the airplane ride?" he was asked of a nervous man who went up for the first time. "Very well", he replied, "But I never did put my whole weight down". (Abundant Living; pg.235) Faith means putting your whole weight down on God who alone can save.

Says John Murray, "Faith is not the act of God; it is not God who believes in Christ for salvation; it is the sinner. It is by God's grace that a person is able to believe but faith is an activity on the part of the person and of him alone. In faith we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation...Faith is a whole-souled movement of self-commitment to Christ for salvation from sin and its consequences." (Redemption Accomplished and Applied; pgs. 106, 107)

Some say that it makes no difference what you believe, just so long as you are sincere. However, one might be sincerely wrong! Says Merv Rosell, "A New Yorker, visiting the Midwest, was guest speaker at the dedication of a building of religion. In his address he said, 'It doesn't make any difference what you believe providing you are honest and sincere in that belief.' About the same time a little Italian gentleman said, 'It makes a big difference what a man believes.' I am inclined to disagree with the New Yorker and agree with the Italian because what the Italian said is true. A man 'Must Believe' according to God's plan in order to find peace. The Bible says in John 3:18: 'He that believeth is not condemned but he that believeth not is already condemned because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten son of God.'"

The Scriptures make it clear that man is saved by faith and not by his own works. Wesley, said "Indeed, strictly speaking, the covenant of grace doth not require us to do anything at all, as absolutely and indispensably necessary, in order to our justification; but only to believe in Him, who, for the sake of his Son, and the propitiation which he hath made, 'justifieth the ungodly, that worketh not', and imputes his faith to him for righteousness." (Wesley's Sermons; vol. I: pg. 55)

Faith is self-abandonment to God and rejection of all attempts at works of self-righteousness. Some feel they must improve themselves, or their actions before coming to God. Some say, "I must first do this: I must first conquer every sin; break off every evil word and work, and do good to all men; or, I must first go to church, receive the Lord 's Supper. Hear more sermons and say more prayers." (Wesley's Sermons; vol.1: p.59) A person, who attempts to gain God's favor by his greater sincerity, is also attempting to establish his own righteousness.

The prodigal son is an example of true repentance. He changed his mind about his sin. He saw the results of sin and came to despise his old way of life. He turned his back on his old way of life - he made a moral U-turn - and went to his father. His repentance began with regret and remorse, but it ended up in action. Repentance is basically an action - "I will go to my father." He confessed that he was wrong and he put no blame on others.

Confession is advocated in the Scriptures. It is essential for spiritual, mental, and even physical health. Weatherhead said, "Suppressed sin, like suppressed steam, is dangerous. Confession is the safety-valve." (The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion; 203) Says one leading psychologist, "And so today there is a growing readiness to accept the verdict that 'therapy', or 'salvation', changed my life." (Ibid; 190) Said one psychiatrist who dealt with the disrupted of Hollywood at high fees, "All these patients of mine need is a mourner's bench." (Conversion; pg. 25)

What is repentance? "Lying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor - is what Christians call repentance." (Mere Christianity; C.S. Lewis; p.59)

CONCLUSION: The road to God is the road of faith, which involves repentance. God gives the awakening, and man makes the choice, either to accept or to reject the Savior. When man recognizes the seriousness of his sin through the Holy Spirit's awakening, then he must repent of his sins, which means turning his back on sin, and he must exercise saving faith, which means putting himself in the care of one who can transform. "These conditions must coincide. When you meet them fully, you may be sure that God will act to justify you and make you a new creature. Confidence in God assures you of salvation (I John 1:9); "...although the Holy Spirit also gives assurance". (Romans 8:16)

3.

“HOPE FOR THE GUILTY”

SCRIPTURE: *“What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record. There was a time when I wouldn’t admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night, your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, I will confess them to the Lord. And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Now I say that each believer should confess his sins to God when he is aware of them, while there is time to be forgiven. Judgment will not touch him if he does. You are my hiding place from every storm of life; you even keep me from getting into trouble! You surround me with songs of victory. I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress. Don’t be like a senseless horse or mule that has to have a bit in its mouth to keep it in line! Many sorrows come to the wicked, but abiding love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. So rejoice in him, all those who are his, and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him.” Psalms 32*

TEXT: *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.” (Psalms 32:1a)*

INTRODUCTION: *Common to every man’s experience seems to be a sense of ‘Moral Oughtness’: This fact produces guilt. There is guilt that is false, and there is guilt that is real. All people at some time or another and in varying degrees experience real guilt. Stanley Jones notes that the great surgeon, Dr. Howard Kelly, once said to a patient who was guilt-ridden, ‘What you need is a New Testament’.*

The presence of guilt in man points to man’s need for forgiveness. Guilt is real – real because it results from breaking God’s Laws and rejecting God’s Son. Guilt has serious consequences and, therefore, guilt must be seriously dealt with. Only when man cooperates with God can man find forgiveness and restoration. The need for forgiveness is found in the first four verses of Psalms 32, and draws a contrast between the blessedness of a forgiven relationship with God and the heaviness of a condemned relationship with God.

Blessedness Of Forgiven Relationship. *What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record. (Psalms 1, 2)*

The Forgiven Man Is The Blessed Man. *A sense of conviction over sin that leads to genuine and hearty repentance is a wholesome and healthy experience. The forgiven man is released from the past with its haunting accusations, and is released from the future with its paralyzing fears. Guilt is resolved and confidence and poise are imparted. The sense of alienation is replaced with a sense of fellowship. Hostile feelings, which destroy, are replaced with loving feelings, which build up relationships. The nagging void of emptiness is filled with divinely wrought purposes. There is no fearful looking forward to judgment, but instead there is a feeling of deep assurance in the face of*

an unknown future. The security that God gives is not subject to the changes and chances of life, but is founded on the unchanging promises of God.

Heaviness Of Condemned Relationship. "There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day..."

Unconfessed Sins Have Tragic Results, Tragic In Terms Of Both The Body And The Soul. Increasingly it is being shown that hidden, suppressed, and unconfessed sin infects the body as well as the soul. David wrote, regarding the result of his own unconfessed sin, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." (Psalms 32:3)

Guilt Also Impairs The Soul Of Man. Guilt produces within man a sense of God's displeasure. Man is made for God and remains restless until he finds rest in God. Guilt causes man to avoid his own best Friend (God), and makes that Friend out to be an enemy. Guilt also brings to man the sense of divine conviction. The Hand of God rests heavy upon the sinner. "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." (vs. 4)

Means Of Forgiveness, In What Way Does Man Find Forgiveness? The answer is found in verses 5 and 6.

Acknowledgement Of Transgressing Life. "...until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, 'I will confess them to the Lord'. And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."

David acknowledged his sin (verse 5). There are those who deny the presence of real guilt, and say that what people imagine to be real guilt is simply guilt feelings or guilt impulses. Some psychiatrists say that guilt feelings or anxiety feelings are caused because a person secretly wants to commit certain acts but dreads not because of parental or societal restrictions. Such psychiatrists belittle the idea of an objective Moral Law with Moral Restrictions. They regard religious restrictions and prohibitions to be harmful.

"The alternative view is that anxiety comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not, but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not. It is, in other words, a 'guilt theory' of anxiety rather than an 'impulse theory'. (The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion by O. Hobart Mowrer; pg. 25)

The Christian view is that guilt is real - real because man has ignored or defied a law of God. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (I John 3:4): "Real guilt is caused not only by disobedience to God's Laws, but more than this, by rejection of God's Son." (John 3:18)

This is not to say, of course, that Christianity denies the possibility of a person being inflicted with false guilt. Some guilt has had to be thrown into the moral wastebasket. Examples of False Guilt:

- 1. Sex feelings which are really normal;*
- 2. Self-love which is normal;*
- 3. Teenager's ambivalent feelings toward parents during struggle for individualism, which is normal.*

How is real guilt dealt with? David knew by experience: "I acknowledged my sin unto God...I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." (Psalms 32:5) There is no attempt to escape personal moral responsibility. The blame is not put on one's environment, heredity, background, society, parents, or friends. Says Dr. Boisen, perceptive psychiatrist, "My observation is that the patient who condemns himself, even to the point of thinking he has committed the unpardonable sin, is likely to get well. It is the patient who blames others who does not get well...Self-blame, even when it leads to severe psychosis, means the recognition that something is wrong, and the acceptance of one's responsibility for the difficulty. The emotional disturbance, which follows is then analogous to fever or inflammation in the body. It is not an evil but a manifestation of nature's power to heal." (The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion; O. Hobart Mowrer; pg. 66)

Involvement In Earnest Prayer; "Now I say that each believer should confess his sins to God when he is aware of them, while there is time to be forgiven. Judgment will not touch him if he does." (vs. 6) Christian psychiatrists are the salt of the earth and can do much good, but pagan psychiatrists who deny the laws of God (Exodus 20), and the Son of God (John 3), can only do temporary good at their best and exceeding harm at their worst. "One such psychiatrist, a very outstanding man, urges women who are nervous and upset to find 'a boyfriend'. Some of the women who had been given advice by this psychiatrist to practice adultery came in great distress to a minister...Through him they found God, and are released and happy. The wife of this psychiatrist, divorced from him, because he naturally had acted on the advice he gave to others, came to this same friend, and she too found God and is radiant. The false advice given by this psychiatrist produced disunity in the personality, and broke up homes - his own included." (Abundant Living by E. Stanley Jones; pg. 93)

Confessed David to God, "Against thee...have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." (Psalms 51:3) David's guilt was not imaginary guilt; it was real guilt. He had broken one of God's laws ("Thou shalt not commit adultery"). Such guilt could only be resolved by confessing his sin to God - not to man. "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities...Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." (Psalms 51:8, 9,12a) Only God, through His Son, has power to forgive sins. "The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." (Mark 2:10) Both the psychiatrist and the minister must acknowledge their limitation and make it very clear to their clients that only God can resolve real guilt.

Result Of Forgiveness; Deliverance From Former Trouble. "You are my hiding place from every storm of life; you even keep me from getting into trouble! You surround me with songs of victory." (Psalms 27 vs. 7) Declares David, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance". (Psalms 32:7) God is able to deliver one from a guilty conscience, from a sense of alienation, and from a sense of divine disfavor. (John 3:18)

Guidance Through Submissive Obedience: "I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress. Don't be like a senseless horse or mule that has to have a bit in its mouth to keep it in line!" (Psalms 27:vss. 8, 9) Promises God, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." (Psalms 32:8) God, as Creator, has a design for every man's life - a Divine blueprint that He enables the obedient man to realize.

This, of course, does not exclude the necessity of human cooperation and reasoned action. Says God to man, "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee". (vs.9) In other words, freedom from destructive guilt comes by a life lived with proper restraints and daily discipline. Thwart the laws of God and disregard love's call to duty and discipline, and you will become guilt-ridden, self-centered, and misdirected. Submit to God, respect God's Laws, and center your interests upon others, and you will be integrated, confident, and guided aright through divine counsel.

Fulfillment Through Righteous Living: "Many sorrows come to the wicked, but abiding love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. So rejoice in him, all those who are his, and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him." (vss. Psalms 10, 11)

These verses point to an objective standard by which to judge a life as a righteous life or else as wicked life. The contrast is there - 'wicked' verses 'righteous' life. Many sorrows because of a wicked life. The contrast is there - 'wicked' verses 'righteous' life. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusts in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about." (vs. 10) In the Biblical sense, the man who makes no reference to God (in the sense of real trust in God), is the man who is wicked. This lack of reference to God is the manifestation of pride, and pride is the mother of all sins. Living with no trust in God is living a life of defiance to the Creator. Such a person denies God's Sovereign Lordship over man - the crown of His Creation. Is it any wonder that man, filled with his pride and self-sufficiency, is disrupted? "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked."

What about the 'RIGHTOUS'? They are those who acknowledge God, acknowledge His laws, and acknowledge His Son. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not¹ obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36) They give God his proper place. They trust in God and they experience God's mercy. What is the result? Wholeness, health, and true happiness: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." (vs. 11)

CONCLUSION: A minister announced that he was going to preach on the greatest word in the English language, and he asked his parishioners to offer their opinions as to what the greatest word in the English language is. Several suggestions were given: Mother, Home, God, etc. Then the minister announced that the greatest word in the English language is Forgiveness. There is hope for the guilty - through Jesus Christ who gives peace and forgiveness.

4.

“HOW TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD!”

TEXT: *Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayed to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (That is, to bring Christ down) "Or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:1-13*

INTRODUCTION: *Most people, if not everyone ultimately, asks the important question: "How can I be right with God?" Man is built for eternity. There is within every man a "God-shaped vacuum" which seeks to be filled with God. Man cannot live by bread alone. Man is made to live by the eternal Word of the eternal God. Man is restless until he finds his rest in God. Man is overbuilt for time - he is built for eternity.*

*"And here at last we find
Strict diagnosis of our malady,
Which is, in short, that man is heaven-starved -
Men are born thirsting for infinity."*

Man's Futile Attempts At Self-Salvation Worthy? *Who are we? What have we done? Hard for most to accept: "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands. Thou must save, and thou alone."*

Don't Have To Be Someone Else. *You don't have to be rich or poor, Black or White, Country bred or City smart. According to the New Testament, the spiritually ignorant Ethiopian or a disillusioned woman of ill repute can be saved. A sophisticated young lawyer or a conniving political opportunist, who collects taxes, can be saved. A fearful jailer or a military leader over many men can be saved. A clever merchantman that has shaded his deals, or a humble fisherman, who knows more about winds and water than about God and men. Both the high and the low, literate and illiterate, young and old, Jew and Gentile, religious and irreligious, can be saved.*

Wrote Paul, *"In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant, such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters. And he is equally available to all." (Colossians 3:11) God loves you just as you are. The Scriptures make it clear that everyone who has faith will be saved.*

You Don't Have To Practice Your Own Goodness. The Jews sought to be accepted by God through their own righteousness. They diligently kept the law – or attempted to. They worked with tenacity to please God. They were sincere, but sincerity did not save them.

Many throughout history have likewise sought to please God and gain His approval by self-effort or religious practice and self-discipline or good works. Martin Luther was such a man, "He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb. He cast off the blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death. At times, he was proud of his sanctity and would say 'I have done nothing wrong today'. Then misgivings would arise. 'Have you fasted enough, are you poor enough'? He would then strip himself of all save that which decency required. He believed in later life that his austerities had done permanent damage to his digestion."

Said Luther later concerning his attempts at self-salvation. "I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his mockery it was I. all my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, readings, and other works." "All such drastic methods gave no sense of inner tranquility. The purpose of his striving was to compensate for his sins, but he could never feel that the ledger was balanced." (Here I Stand; by Roland Bainton; pg. 34)

Of the misdirected Jews who sought to save themselves through their own efforts, Paul wrote. "I know what enthusiasm they have for the honor of God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand that Christ has died to make them right with God. Instead, they are trying to make themselves good enough to gain God's favor by keeping the Jewish laws and customs, but that is not God's way of salvation. They don't understand that Christ gives to those who trust in him everything they are trying to get by keeping his laws. Her ends all of that." (Romans 10:2-4, Living Bible)

Wrote Paul, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as less because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." (Philippians 3:7-9)

We don't have to plead with God to come to us. He is only a prayer away! Turn to him – and you will find him with outstretched arms ready to receive you. Remember the song 'Out of the Ivory Palaces'.

***"Out of the Ivory Palaces
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love
Made my Savior go."***

Man does not have to construct a ladder up to heaven in search for God; rather, God has taken the intuitive and built a ladder down from heaven to man to provide a clear way for man to reach God and heaven. God has done the building of the ladder.

A portion of the poem, 'The Hound of Heaven' makes this truth clear.

*"I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him down the arches of the years;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
'Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace ,
Deliberate speed, majestic instance,
They beat - and a Voice beat
More instant than the feet -
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'"
And then there comes the time when the fugitive was beaten.
"Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke
My harness piece by piece
Thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten to my knee,
I am defenseless utterly."*

And then there comes the end:

*"Halts by me that foot fall'
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou sleekest:
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me!"*

"Do you ever find yourself praying as if God were a long distance away? You felt you needed to make Him hear you. You are pleading for him to turn your way and listen. How much of our praying is really this: 'Going out late the heavens to call to the God of Distance Space, shouting to get His attention, pleading with him to leave his leisure in the playground of the stars to come to our little dirty world.' How foolish to say this in your heart, says the Bible. God has come as a man, and took upon himself, all our sin, guilt, and punishment.

"Perhaps the greatest verse in the Bible is John 1:14: "And the Word (Jesus) became flesh". Augustine afterwards said that in his pre-Christian days, he had read and studied the great pagan philosophers and their writings...but he had never read that 'the Word became flesh'. The one thing that no Greek would ever have dreamed of was that God could take a body. To the Greek the body was an evil, a prison-house in which the soul was shackled, a tomb in which the spirit was confined." (E.S. Jones; pg. 8, 'The Word Became Flesh')

Jesus, who was God and who was with the Father eternally, became a man 'in the fullness of time'. You do not have to get Christ to bring Him down to you. Jesus is here!

You don't have to bring Christ up from the dead. He is resurrected. He is alive and the price for our redemption has been paid. There is nothing we have to do to atone for our own sins. Said Jesus on the cross, "IT IS FINISHED". The plan for man's salvation is finished! "The greatest News in the Universe! All can be 'saved' from sin!

"Reconciliation is not something in which we have the decisive part. It is worked out by Christ, and we enter into it by our repentance and faith. But it is his work first and foremost. This is the main thrust of New Testament teaching on reconciliation. First, there is an aspect of reconciliation, which is outside man, an objective element. We are said to have received the reconciliation, which, therefore, is in some sense independent of us. Obviously, reconciliation must be personal to be effective, and we must enter into a state of being reconciled, but nevertheless, there is a sense in which reconciliation can be said to be offered to us. In other words, the New Testament view is that reconciliation was wrought on the cross before there was anything in man's heart to correspond. There is an objective aspect to reconciliation, and this may well be held to imply that there is a sense in which God can be said to be reconciled to man." (Leon Morris)

Says P.T. Forsyth, "Reconciliation was finished in Christ's death. Paul did not preach a gradual reconciliation. He preached what the old divines used to call the finished work. He preached something done once for all - a reconciliation which is the base of every soul's reconciliation, not an invitation only."

The Good News: God Satisfied The Demands Of The Law In Christ.

God's law of His own holiness and justice was fulfilled by the only one capable of fulfilling, namely, God's Son. Christ met all the demands of the Law of God.

The Law demands the death penalty. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Christ came to die for sinners. "But God commandeth His love towards us; in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The Law demands the shedding of blood for atonement for sin. "The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanseth us from all sin." (I John 1:7)

The Law demands perfect sacrifice. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin' that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5:21)

God Has Sent The Saving Christ To Save You. Listen to Romans 8 again: "For salvation that comes from trusting Christ - which is what we preach - is already within easy reach of each of us, in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths." Saving faith of Christ is as near you as the name of Jesus. "He who calls upon the name of the lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Man cannot save himself. That is why Christ came - to save humanity. "Because of his kindness, you have been saved through trusting Christ. And even trusting is not of yourselves, it too is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good we have done, so none of us can take any credit for it." (Ephesians 2: 8, 9)

Says Watchman Nee, "Christianity is a queer business; if at the outset we try to do anything we get nothing' if we seek to attain something, we miss everything. For Christianity begins not with the big DO, but with the big DONE".

Ephesians tells us: "God has blessed us with every heavenly blessing." Christ's work for humanity is an established fact. It is futile for man to set out to attain his own righteousness or his own salvation.

What must I do to be saved? There is nothing I can do to make myself more worthy of God.

There is nothing that I can offer to purchase my salvation. All I can do is to respond to God's offer of life and grace and forgiveness and love. Trying to work out my own salvation, independent of God, is like those foolish men in the ancient world who attempted to build a tower to heaven. That was against God's will and it ended in failure - called the Tower of Babel. "There is a way that seems right to man, but the end thereof is the way of death."

What must I do, in light of what God has already done? I must respond, must come, and just as I am without one plea, but that Jesus's blood was shed for me. That means bringing nothing in my own hand to present to God. I must come empty-handed to the Savior to receive out of his bounteous store of grace and love.

Romans 10:9-13, tells us what we must do. "For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God, and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

CONFESS, BELIEVE, AND ACCEPT AND DO THIS TODAY!

5.

"ARE YOU LIVING BY GRACE OR BY LAW?"

SCRIPTURE: *"For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 20:24*

TEXT: *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24*

INTRODUCTION: *Man is restless and remains restless until he finds his rest in God. That is a statement of fact! However, many have become adept at preoccupation with worldly concerns, to the extent of obscuring the sense of spiritual need. One such person was a youth in his early twenties, with whom I talked for over two hours. I asked him what he thought of the Bible, the Church, God, and Christ. "I have to admit that I have been so busy earning my college degree during the last four years, that I have given no real thought of God." As we continued to talk together, his awareness of the God-shaped vacuum within him, became increasingly evident as he expressed the lack of meaning that his materialistic goals were giving him, and as he expressed fear in dying. I had the joy of sharing Christ with him.*

Others who keenly sense their spiritual lack and restlessness are seeking to fill the spiritual vacuum by religious efforts or humanitarian involvements. They are trying to justify their lives and gain God's acceptance by the method of good works, by the system of Law.

Martin Luther, you will recall, is a classic example of such a person, before he came to know Christ personally in conversion.

PROPOSITION: *Man cannot be saved by Law, but only by Grace. As Hal Lindsey says: "The Law was not given to produce righteousness, but to prove guilt and condemnation." It is Grace by which man can be saved.*

"The Law Is An Essential Stage On The Way To The Grace Of God." Law is the natural outworking of the Nature of God. The source of Law is God – since God is a moral being. It stands to reason that all moral law must emanate from God.

God's standard was first expressed to man through the Conscience. The Law of God was written on man's heart and mind in Romans 2. However, man became expert in rationalizing sin, and therefore the conscience no longer was effective or safe as a standard for Moral Conduct. Man trained and conditioned the conscience to guide him as he wanted to be guided.

For this reason, God had to bring into effect an objective Law (Mosaic Law) – through Jewish People. Jews became the depository and transmitter of God's Perfect Written Revelation and Law (Objective Law).

Why did God give the Law Purposes? The Law Shows What Sin Is. “Sin is any lack of conformity in thought, word, or deed, to the moral character of God.” The Law shows what is not compatible with God’s character. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) The law defines sin.

The Law Is Given To Make Man Sin More. It is important that man realizes that he cannot save himself or get rid of his own sin by his own independent efforts. Therefore, God allows the Law to explicitly reveal sin all the more in man, with the purpose of pointing man to Christ alone. The Law amplified sin and showed the exceeding seriousness of sin. The Law is given to show man’s conceit and helplessness to keep (in his own power) the Law and Standards of God. The Law reveals the real nature of man’s weakness and moral lostness.

The Law causes man to rebel and suggests to sinful man to do the very thing that the law forbids him to do. (Illustration of Halloween tricks - “You better not touch my house this year.” Draws attention to wrong and leads boys to do this very thing).

Israel took the Law (which was to show them that they could not gain God’s acceptance by human effort and goodness. The Law is too high and holy and excellent for sinful man to keep. The result of such a futile attempt: Israel reduced God’s Laws to man-made laws in attempting to keep them.

No man can accept God’s Grace, unless he becomes convinced in his own mind, that he cannot keep God’s laws in his own strength. Man will not accept grace, unless he has first been under the strict (perfect) Law of God for a time. Man finally realized that he cannot be justified by attempting to keep the Law.

The Law Condemns Man And Shows Man His Helplessness. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10) The only way to gain God’s acceptance through the system of Law is to perfectly keep every part of the Law, which no human being, excepting Christ, has yet accomplished. “Yes, and those who depend on the Jewish Laws to save them are under God’s curse, for the Scriptures point out very clearly, ‘Cursed is everyone who at any time breaks a single one of these laws that are written in God’s Book of the Law!’”

The Law Is Our Schoolmaster To Lead Us To Christ That We Might Be Justified By Faith. The presence of the Law gave man a change to try to get to God by his own human goodness, thus finally driving man to despair and helplessly to the arms of God’s mercy and grace. Law shows that man is helplessly lost outside of the supernatural power of God, even when man is as good and respectable as he possibly can be. God looks at the heart, while man looks only at the external behavior. God’s standard (as revealed in the Sermon on The Mount) says that Hate is as bad as Murder; Lust is as bad as Adultery. Man may have good works, but none of his goodness is good enough. Man’s own independent righteousness is as filthy rags in God’s eyes. ‘You see, man is not perfect, therefore his works are not perfect, and since heaven is perfect, and since God is holy, it will take a perfect plan in order for man to meet God successfully.’ The best of man’s works are not good enough for man to merit salvation or to gain heaven. Says Paul, “The Jewish laws were our teachers and guide until Christ came to give us right standing with God throughout faith.” (Galatians 3:24)

Is there any present purpose of the Law for the Believer? Yes, Christians can revert to trying to live the Christian life by his own independent effortless - by Law - rather than by Grace. The Law stands as a reminder that the believer cannot live the Christian life by his own strength. No flesh shall be justified in God’s sight by attempts to keep the Law - and that goes for the believer as well as for the non-believer. The Christian’s preoccupation must be to respond in love to His Master -

obediently – which response of love will result in keeping the Law of Love, and thus the essence of all Law. The focus of the Christian must not be the Law, but Christ who has perfectly fulfilled the Law, and who is able to impart divine love to the believer’s heart. Love is the fulfilling of the Law.

The Christian, who tries to live by Law rather than by Grace, is driven to such utter despair that he cries out to God for strength and life.

You are not ready to walk in the Spirit until you have been driven to utter despair in trying to live the Christian life on the basis of your own strength!

Says Bill Bright, “There are many misconceptions concerning the living of the Christian life. Some feel that once they have admitted Jesus Christ into their lives by faith, it is up to them to try their best to live a life that is pleasing to God. Others feel that Christ has entered into their lives to help them live and work for God’s glory. Perhaps these two ideas of Christian living look good on the surface, but there is a basic weakness in each concept that actually undermines the basis of vital Christian living. It has been said, ‘The Christian life is not hard; it is impossible.’ Only one person has ever lived the Christian life, and that was Jesus Christ. He desires to go on today living his life through Christians whom He indwells.

“What can we say, then? Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, a righteousness that comes through faith. But Israel, who pursued righteousness based on the Law, did not achieve the Law. Why not? Because they did not pursue it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on achievements. They stumbled over the stone that causes people to stumble. As it is written,

***“Look! I am placing a stone in Zion
Over which people will stumble –
A large rock that will make them fall –
And the one who believes in him will never be ashamed’.”***

“Brothers, my heart’s desire, and prayer to God about the Jews is that they would be saved. For I can testify on their behalf that they have a zeal for God, but it is not in keeping with full knowledge. For they are ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God while they try to establish their own, and they have not submitted to God’s means to attain righteousness. For the Messiah is the culmination of the Law as far as righteousness is concerned for everyone who believes.” (Romans 9:30-10:4)

The Jewish people, the most sincere and religious people in all history, have never gained God’s acceptance by their own good deeds.

There is nothing I can do to gain God’s righteousness. God looks at motives. Motives make the difference and there are many wrong motives behind many socially – acceptable actions.

The Bible says about man’s life under Law: “There is none righteous, no not one. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Believers are not now under the principle or system of Law, but under God’s Grace. Note the mutually exclusive systems of Law and Grace, as pointed out by Hal Lindsey:

LAW

GRACE

<p>1. Has definite standard which is external.</p>	<p>1. Has standard – person, Christ, who is inside of believers.</p>
<p>2. Emphasizes works alone.</p>	<p>2. Emphasizes faith with accompanying works of love.</p>
<p>3. Principle that is worked by fear-motivation. What will God do to me if I don't do this?</p>	<p>3. Love motivation is at Heart of Grace; I want to please the person who controls my life; thus Spirit-motivated.</p>
<p>4. Our acceptance by God is based on our performance. One must first perform, and then be accepted on basis of his performance.</p>	<p>4. One is totally accepted just as he is and then he performs. Performance of good works is produced in one by motivation of Holy Spirit.</p> <p><i>Good works are important, for faith without works is dead, says James. But Good Works are not enough by themselves. Good Works are the outgrowth of one's response of faith to God's Grace. Faith alone justifies but justifying faith always produces good works." (Ephesians 2: 8,9,10)</i></p> <p><i>We are zealous of good works, not because the works are meritorious, but because love for God results in working for God. As Wesley concisely put it, "Works do not give life to faith but faith begets works, and, faith is perfected by works."</i></p> <p><i>Wesley further said, "We all maintain we are not saved without works, that works are a condition (though NOT The Meritorious Cause) of final salvation.</i></p>
<p>5. Law depends upon the flesh, which means human ability and effort.</p>	<p>5. Grace depends upon the Holy Spirit within believer.</p>
<p>6. Law results in death and condemnation.</p>	<p>6. Grace results in life and peace.</p>
<p>7. To live by law results in sin having dominion over you.</p>	<p>7. Grace results in sin not having dominion over you – for we walk by faith in the power of Christ. It is my responsibility to exercise His keeping power in my life.</p>

Grace Is The Revelation Of The Nature Of God And Is The Source For Abundant Living. What Is Grace? Grace Is The Love Of God In Action – God, In Christ, Dying To Pay The Full Penalty For Humanity’s Sin.

Man cannot keep the Law’s demands, but Christ was able to keep those demands. Thus, Christ alone is the perfect fulfiller of the Law with all its stringent demands. Also, Christ paid the full penalty for the Law’s infraction. Thus, His death was substitutionary in nature. Not only did He come to redeem man from sin, but He came also to redeem or deliver man from the Law’s curse.

“Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming accursed for us – for it stands written, ‘Cursed is every man who is hanged on a tree.’ (Galatians 3:13; Barclay) “But when the fullness of time came, God set forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were subject to the law, so that we might be adopted as sons.” (Galatians 4:4, 5)

As Spurgeon says, “As many as Christ died for, are forever free from the curse of the law; for when the law cometh to curse a man who believeth in Christ, he saith, “What have I to do with thee, O Law? Thou sayest, ‘I will curse thee’, but I reply, ‘Thou hast cursed Christ instead of me. Canst thou curse twice for one offence?’” Behold how the law is silenced! God’s law having received all it can demand, is not so unrighteous as to demand anything more. All that God can demand of a believing sinner, Christ has already paid, and there is no voice in earth or heaven that henceforth, accuse a soul that believes in Jesus. You were in debt, but a friend paid your debt; no writ can be served on you. It matters nothing that you did not pay it, it is paid, with all the penalty that was due to us, Christ has borne it.” (The Passion and Death of Christ; pg. 64)

Grace Is The Sheer Undeserved Generosity Of God, Offering The Gift Of Life To The Morally Degenerate. The grace of God results in moral transformation. Christ came to seek and to save the lost, Luke 19:10. He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but to save, John 1:17. He came to ‘Save his people from their sins’, Matthew 1:21. The Just One died for the unjust, that He might make man righteous. Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, a confident and radiant life to replace a life of guilt. Through Christ, man can once again know greatness.

Christ transforms the sinful woman of Samaria into an honored messenger of love. The demon-possessed outcast becomes a respectable citizen. The proud Pharisee is made humble. Christ remakes doubting Thomas into a flaming evangelist. Thieving Onesimus becomes a ‘faithful servant’, the adulterous outcast becomes pure and respectable. The dying thief enters paradise; a guilt ridden publican experiences forgiveness. Christ restores wandering prodigals to full sonship; He breaks the shackles of sin; He seeks and finds the lost. He applies healing! “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17)

Grace Is The Power Of God Applied In The Growing Love Relationship Between The Believer And Christ. It is the Grace of God that calls a believer back to faith when a believer temporarily reverts to trying to live the Christian life by Law and by his own human efforts. It is Grace that strengthens the faltering Christian; that speaks peace to the Christian’s guilt-ridden conscience due to an impulsive sin. It is grace that keeps a believer’s relationship with God, fresh and up-to-date. It is Grace that stimulates and increasing hunger for Bible study and prayer and witnessing, and giving and caring. Grace is God’s power applied to the daily living of the Christian life.

Grace Is God's Power Applied To The Believer With The Purpose Of Enabling Him To Keep The Law Of Love. When God writes His laws upon the tablet of the human heart, there is a new power to keep the Ten Commandments and the internalized standards, which were given in 'The Sermon on the Mount'. "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this say, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:8b-10)

The operation of God's grace in a man's life is the operation of the Holy Spirit in a man's life, for it is the Spirit of God who fills the believer's heart with God's supernatural love. "...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5)

CONCLUSION: Are you trying to gain God's acceptance by your own good works? If so, then give up your human efforts of trying, and start trusting in the meritorious grace of God. It is by grace alone that we are saved. Our part is trusting and commitment to Christ.

If you are a Christian, living a defeated life, then acknowledge your weakness, sin, and pride, and surrender your will entirely to Christ, and let His supernatural power work through you.

6.

"CHRIST'S PROMISE!"

SCRIPTURE: *"They crucified two bandits with him, one on his right and the other on his left". Mark 15:27 ; "Now one of the criminals hanging there kept insulting him, "You are the Messiah, aren't you? Save yourself...and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him, "Aren't you afraid of God, since you are suffering the same penalty? We have been condemned justly, because we are getting what we deserve for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he went on to plead, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" Jesus told him, "I tell you with certainty, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:39-43*

TEXT: *"Lord remember me. Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." Luke 23:42, 43.*

INTRODUCTION: *The Conversation Between Jesus And The Thief Is Very Significant. There are at least three broad truths that are implicitly or explicitly resident in the conversation between Jesus and the thief.*

Let us look at these truths: (1) Fact of Sin; (2) Grace of God; (3) Assurance of Salvation.

The Fact of Sin. Why was the thief on the Cross? One reason was because he was a member of the human race, and, being a member of the human race, he was a member of a fallen race. Man was created in God's own image, and as such was made only for greatness and fellowship. However, due to man's rebellion in the beginning, man fell from God and thus lost his greatness. Because of Adam's transgression, all men are born in sin and have a natural inclination to sin. The thief was a slave to sin because of his sinful nature, and he was a slave to sin because of his own choice.

Several humanistic philosophies attempt to explain away the seriousness of sin. One philosophy of sin is that it is "a principle of necessary antagonism which seems to be a part of life. Sin can be regarded as dumb-bells which have to be lifted in order to develop the intellectual and moral muscles." (The Plight of Man and The Power of God by Lloyd-Jones; 43)

Another view of sin considers sin to be the opposition of "our lingering animal instincts against the demands made by our drawing and ever increasing moral consciousness." (Ibid: 44) Those who hold such a view say that so-called sin "is just that stage of immaturity where the child has not yet become the man, or where the animal has not yet become entirely human." (Ibid: 45)

Man seeks to escape personal responsibility, and conveniently chooses some scapegoat in the form or society, heredity, friends, or background.

However, the thief fully accepted responsibility and blame for his moral condition. To the thief who railed on Christ, the other thief said, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." (Luke 23:40-41)

The thief acknowledged his own guilt, condemnation, and alienation, and he pled for mercy.

Grace of God: Acknowledging his own low moral condition, the thief said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” These are the words of self-abandonment to God. Here is the acknowledgment of the grace of God. What is the grace of God? It is the sheer undeserved generosity of God. It is the gift of life offered to the morally degenerate – which includes every man. Man deserves wrath; God gives love. Man deserves separation; God gives reconciliation. Man deserves condemnation; God gives forgiveness. Man deserves hell; God gives heaven.

The grace of God results in moral transformation. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10). He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but to save. (John 1:17). He came to “save his people from their sins”. (Matthew 1:21) The Just One died for the unjust, that He might make man righteous. Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered one, a confident and radiant life to replace a life of guilt. Through Christ, man can once again know greatness.

Christ transforms the sinful woman or Samaria into an honored messenger of love. The demon-possessed outcast becomes a respectable citizen. The proud Pharisees is made humble. Christ remakes doubting Thomas into a flaming evangelist. Thieving Onesimus becomes a faithful servant; the adulterous outcast, pure and respectable. The dying thief enters paradise; a guilt-ridden publican experiences forgiveness. Christ restores wandering prodigals to full sonship; He breaks the shackles of sin; He seeks and finds the lost. He applies healing to the sores of sin, and restores the downtrodden to wholeness and health. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:17)

The angels were present that night and certainly the Holy Spirit was there. It was about 12:30 a.m., a half hour into July 29. Sitting beside me was my newfound friend of six weeks’ duration. How hungry he had been for spiritual reality when I had first talked with him on that night of June 9. Now, after four lengthy Bible Studies, my new friend was ready to be fed with Bread that perisheth not. “But I must improve my life before God will accept me.” “My friend”, said I, “look at this hymn. It says, ‘Just As I Am;’. We read together Isaiah 55:6, 7, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near! Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” I suggested that he simply open his heart to Christ. In simple, matter-of-fact faith he confessed his sins and opened his heart’s door. The angels rejoiced that night and my friend left my study, a new man in Christ Jesus! Each weekly growth bible study after that night was a spiritual delight. Rarely have I observed a new convert – a convert from Mormonism – make such rapid growth and reveal such a great interest in spiritual truths. He is a living example of the transforming grace of God. Through repentance and faith – the same kind of repentance and faith that the thief on the cross manifested – he received the “unmerited favor of God.”

Assurance Of Salvation: The thief received assurance of eternal salvation. Jesus left him in no doubt about his future: “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43) Every man who receives the grace of God is given that “Blessed Assurance”. Wrote Paul “I know the One in whom I trust, and I am sure that He is able to safely guard all that I have given Him until the day of His return.” (2 Timothy 1:12, Living Letters) Said one man to another, “I have doubts enough of my own. Don’t tell me your doubts. Tell me what you know, for sure.” The Christian is one who knows for sure that God has forgiven him his sins and has given him eternal life.

In the early days of persecution, persecutors brought a humble Christian before the judges. He told them that nothing they could do could shake him because he believed that, if he was true to God, God would be true to him. 'Do you really think; asked the judge, 'that the like of you will go to God and His glory'? 'I do not think', said the man, 'I know'. (Barclay Hebrews 1:45) The Christian is one whose hope is not an illusion, but his hope is grounded on the certainty of God's promise.

"There is a story which tells how, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Huxley, the great agnostic, was a member of a house-party at a country house. Sunday came round, and most of the members prepared to go to Church; but, very naturally, Huxley did not propose to go. Huxley approached a man known to have a simple and a radiant Christian faith. He said to him 'Suppose you don't go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and you tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian.' 'But' said the man, 'you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I'm not clever enough to argue with you.' Huxley said gently: 'I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you'. The man stayed at home and told Huxley most simply of his faith. When he had finished there were tears in the great agnostic's eyes. 'I would give my right hand', he said, 'if only I could believe that.' (Barclay's John Vol. 1; pgs. 76, 77)

After years of agonizing search for personal spiritual reality and assurance, John Wesley had his heart-warming experience. Says Wesley, "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." There was no doubt left in Wesley's mind concerning his relationship with God.

God not only saves the moral and the intellectual, but he also saves the immoral and illiterate. In 1755 a letter came to John Wesley from a father who had a prodigal son. When the revival swept England, the son was in York goal. 'It pleased God', wrote the father, 'not to cut him off in his sins. He gave him time to repent; and not only so, but a heart to repent'. The lad was condemned to death for his misdeeds; and the father's letter goes on: 'His peace increased daily, till on Saturday, the day he was to die, he came out of the condemned-room, clothed in his shroud, and went into the cart. As he went on, the cheerfulness and composure of his countenance were amazing to all the spectators.'" Like the thief on the cross, this lad was given assurance in the hour of death.

CONCLUSION: *When the thief accepted the fact of sin and when he realized his own personal guilt and responsibility, he was brought to a place of repentance. The grace of God met the cry of repentance and the result was assurance of eternal life. The same spiritual rule works today: acknowledge sin, trust in the grace of God for forgiveness, and receive assurance of life eternal.*

*Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me:
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

7.

"ARE YOU ALIVE?"

SCRIPTURE: "But God's free gift is not like Adam's offense. For if many people died as the result of one man's offense, how much more have God's grace and the free gift given through the kindness of one man, Jesus the Messiah, been showered on many people! Nor can the free gift be compared to what came through the man who sinned. For the sentence that followed one man's offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift brought justification, even after many offenses. For if, through one man, death ruled because of that man's offense, how much more will those who receive such overflowing grace and the gift of righteousness rule in life because of one man, Jesus the Messiah! Consequently, just as one offense resulted in condemnation for everyone, so one act of righteousness results in justification and life for everyone. For just as through one man's

disobedience many people were made sinners, so also through one man's obedience many people will be made righteous.” Romans 5:15-19, R.S.V.

TEXT: *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” 1 Corinthians 15:22.*

INTRODUCTION: *Says William Barclay about Romans 5:12-21, “There is no passage of the New Testament which has had such an influence on theology as this passage; and there is no passage which is more difficult for a modern mind to understand. It is difficult because Paul expresses himself in a difficult way...But, still more, it is difficult, because it is thinking and speaking in terms which were familiar to Jews and perfectly understandable to them, but which are unfamiliar to us.” (Romans, pg. 77)*

Let us then, despite the difficulty that may be involved in fully understanding the meaning of this text, seek first to see in what way all men are ‘in Adam’, and secondly to see in what way all men are ‘in Christ’.

1. In Adam All Die And Mankind's Involvement In Adam's Fall.

The story of Adam's Fall is the story of mankind's Fall. This is true because all of humanity was present in Adam. Adam was the father of the human race, and as such, all of us were involved in Adam's activity - his test, his disobedience, his Fall from God.

Says the Scriptures, “When Adam sinned the entire human race was declared guilty. His sin brought death into the world, and so everything began to grow old and die...It was because, when Adam sinned, all of us were declared guilty with him and began to die because of his sin.” (Romans 5: 12, 14b, Living Letters) “Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, being members of his sinful race, and wherever there is sin, death results.” (I Corinthians 15:22, Living Letters) Paul speaks in terms of “our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing we longed to do or thought about; we started out bad with evil nature born within us, and were under God's anger just like everyone else.” (Ephesians 2:3, Living Letters)

Watchman Nee well expresses this truth “By the Fall, a fundamental change took place in the character of Adam whereby he became a sinner, one constitutionally unable to please God and the family likeness which we all share is no merely superficial one but extends to our inward character also. We have been ‘constituted sinners’. How did this come about? ‘By the disobedience of one’, says the apostle...We are sinners, not because of ourselves but because of Adam. It is not because I individually have sinned that I am a sinner, but because I was in Adam when he sinned. Because by birth I come of Adam, therefore I am part of him. What is more, I can do nothing to alter this. I cannot, by improving my behavior, make myself other than a part of Adam, and so a sinner...Do you see the oneness of human life? Our life comes from Adam. If your great-grandfather had died at the age of three, where would you be? You would have died in him! Your experience is bound up with his. And in just the same way, the experience of every one of us is bound up with that of Adam. None can say, ‘I have not been in Eden, for potentially we all were there when

Adam yielded to the serpent's words. So we are all involved in Adam's sin and by being born 'in Adam' we receive from him all that he became as a result of his sin – that is to say, the Adam-nature which is the nature of sinner. We derive our existence from him, and because his life became a sinful life, a sinful nature, therefore the nature which we derive from him is also sinful." (The Normal Christian Life; pgs. 27, 28)

Mankind's Effect From Adam's Fall. All Men Are Sinners By Nature and It is important for us to realize that man sins because he is a sinner, and not that man is merely a sinner because he sins. Man is a sinner by birth and heredity. David understood this when he wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in (a state of) iniquity; my mother was sinful who conceived me (and I, too, am sinful)". Psalms 51:5. By nature, man has evil propensities and tendencies. It is easier to do wrong than it is to do right. There is an inner proneness to do evil. What then is this original Sin which every man experiences? "It is that evil tendency with which every individual is born, a tendency which disposes him to do wrong and thus to become not only by nature but by personal choice a sinner." (The Mature Church Member; Donald Bastian, pg. 31) Man is naturally depraved and prone to sin.

Is there any observable evidence that man is a sinner by nature? Yes, there is convincing evidence. What man is born who does not have a natural tendency to ascribe to himself what is due to God alone? Man is naturally egotistical and proud. Man worships himself and robs God of His rightful place; thus, man is an idolater by nature. Man is born with the same self-will spirit that Adam possessed when he sought independently to run his life. When man asserts that he has a mind of his own and can run his own life, man is usurping God's rightful place as lord of life. Man naturally desires the applause, praise, and honor of men, rather than the will and favor of God. There is within the bosom of man a natural pull towards the sensual pleasures of the world. There is within man a natural bent to sinning, because man is by his nature twisted and depraved.

2. *All Men Are Sinners By Choice And Though Man By Nature Has A Natural Bent Toward Sin.*

Yet, because of the redemptive work of Calvary, man is enabled to choose the right and to reject the wrong. Because of Christ's sacrifice and death, man retains the capacity for spiritual life. Although there is a natural proneness of evil, there is, nevertheless, within man the ability to choose the good and the right. This freedom is a freedom that God has given to all mankind as an unconditional benefit of the atonement. Man, in other words, is not totally depraved in his inner nature, as a result of Adam's original sin!

The Bible teaches that man is a free moral agent who is personally responsible for his actions. Says the Scriptures, "The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not be loaded with his father's iniquities nor a father with the iniquity of his son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be put to his own account, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be put to his own account." (Ezekiel 18:20) No man dare solely blame his actions or his conduct on his heredity or his environment. Because of

Mankind's involvement in Adam's Fall, man is a sinner by nature and also a sinner by choice.

3. IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE.

Mankind's Involvement In Christ's Redemptive Work, Just as all mankind is involved in Adam's Transgression, so all of mankind is involved in Christ's Redemptive Work. "As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life." (I Corinthians 15:22)

Says Watchman Nee, "Many a time when preaching in the villages of China one has to use very simple illustrations for deep divine truth. I remember once I took up a small book and put a piece of paper into it, and I said to those very simple folk, 'Now look carefully. I take a piece of paper. It has an identity of its own, quite separate from this book. Having no special purpose for it at the moment I put it into the book. Now I do something with the book. I post it to Shanghai. I do not post the paper, but the paper has been put into the book. Then where is the paper? Can the book go to Shanghai and the paper remain here? Can the paper have a separate destiny from the book? No! Where the book goes the paper goes. If I drop the book in the river the paper goes too, and if I quickly take it out again I recover the paper also. Whatever experience the book goes through the paper goes through with it, for it is still there in the book.' 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus'. The Lord God Himself has put us in Christ, and in His dealing with Christ, God has dealt with the whole race. Our destiny is bound up with His. What He has gone through we have gone through, for to be 'in Christ' is to have been identified with Him in both His death and resurrection." (Normal Christian Life; pgs.31, 52)

Barclay also helps to explain this truth: "Christ was sinless. Christ conquered death. And just as all men sinned in Adam, so all men escape from sin in Christ; and just as all men died in Adam so all men conquered death in Christ. Our unity with Christ is just The Scriptures bear out this truth: "And what a difference between man's sin and God's forgiveness. For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this one man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's mercy. Adam's one sin brought the penalty of death to many, while Christ freely takes away many sins and gives glorious life instead. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and approval are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's sin brought punishment to all, but Christ's act of goodness makes men right with God, so that they can live. Adam caused many to be sinners because he disobeyed God, and Christ caused many to be made acceptable to God because he obeyed." (Romans 5:15-19)

However, we need not only forgiveness, but we need deliverance, also. "When God's light first shines into my heart my one cry is for forgiveness, for I realize I have committed sins before Him. But when once I have received forgiveness of sins I make a new discovery, namely, the discovery of sin, and I realize not only that I have committed sins before God, but that there is something wrong within. I discover that I have the nature of a sinner. There is an inward inclination to sin, a power within that draws to sin. When that power breaks out I commit sins. I may seek and receive forgiveness, but then I sin one more. So life goes on in a vicious circle of sinning and being forgiven and then sinning again. I appreciate the blessed fact of God's forgiveness, but I want something more than that: I want deliverance. I need

forgiveness for what I have done, but I need also deliverance from what I am."
(Normal Christian Life; pg. 10)

Until man is delivered from the old nature, he is in bondage to sin, and the Law of God continues to point its accusing finger. Was real as our unity with Adam and this unity destroys the evil effect of the old. So we get two contrasting sets of facts. First, there is Adam - sin - death. Second, there is Christ - goodness - life. And just as we were all involved in the sin of the man who was first created, we are all involved in the victory of the man who re-created mankind." (Corinthians pgs.168, 169) Barclay goes on to explore this truth: "Mankind was involved in a situation from which there was no escape. Sin had man in its power. There was no hope. Into this situation there came Jesus Christ, and He brought with Him something that broke through the old situation. By what He did, by what He is, by what He gives, He enabled man to escape from a situation in which man was hopelessly dominated by sin." (Romans pgs. 81, 82)

Mankind's Effect From Christ's Redemptive Work. Because God put us 'in Christ', all that Christ went through, we went through; all that was accomplished in Christ, was accomplished in us. When Christ died, we died. When Christ arose from the dead, we arose from the dead.

4. Christ's Cross Gives Forgiveness and Deliverance Through the Cross.

We are crucified with Christ. Thus, because of the Cross, we are not only forgiven for what we have done, but we are also delivered from what we are. Our sins are not only dealt with, but our sinful nature itself is dealt with. "When He was crucified, I was crucified with Him. In the sight of God, His death included mine. On the hill of Calvary it was for ever done...All that was in the first Adam was gathered up and done away in him (Christ). We were included there." (The Normal Christian Life; pgs. 113, 133)

What a miserable state: "I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to - what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong and that the laws I am breaking are good ones. But I can't help myself because I'm not doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't. when I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway, now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is; sin still has me in its evil grasp. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; But there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin and death that are still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin. Do you see how it is; my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible thing this is!" (Romans 7:15-25)

Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?" Paul discovered the answer. "It has been done through Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free."

In Romans 6, Paul describes the deliverance over sin's power. "For sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ. Through His death the power of your sinful nature was shattered...Your old evil desires were nailed to the cross with Him; that part of you that loves to sin was crushed and fatally wounded, so that your sin-loving body is no longer under sin's control, no longer needs to be a slave to sin. For when you are deadened to sin you are freed from all its allure and its power over you. He died once for all to end sin's power, but now He lives forever in unbroken fellowship to God, alert to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Do not let sin control you any longer; bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God - every part of you - for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes." (Romans 6: 3, 6, 7, 10-13- Living Letters)

Complete surrender to Christ and trust in the work of the cross, results in death to pride, self-will, and love of the world. Through the Cross, man can receive forgiveness and deliverance.

5. Christ's Resurrection Gives New Life

Christ's death was not all. "On the third day He arose again; and since we are still in Him we too are raised." (Normal Christian Life; pg. 114) Says the Scriptures, "And so sin ruled over all men and brought them to death, but now God's kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Your old sin-loving nature was buried with Him by baptism when He died, and when God the Father, with glorious power brought Him back to life again, you were given His wonderful new life to enjoy. For you have become a part of Him, and so you died with Him, so to speak, when He died; and now you share His new life, for you have risen with Him when He rose. And since your old sin-loving nature 'died' with Christ, we believe that you are now sharing His new life. Christ rose from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him." (Romans 5:21; 6:4,5,8,9). "But God is so rich in mercy; He loved us so much that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins He gave us back our lives again when He raised Christ from the dead - only by His undeserved favor have we ever been saved." (Ephesians 2: 4, 5; Living Letters)

The secret to living a victorious Christian life is this: Christ in me, living His own life through me. It is the Spirit that gives new life, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit is the heart of the surrendered Christian. One is unable to live the Christian life by his own strength or energy. The secret to victory is to release one's self into the all-powerful Presence of Christ, who can work His own will through us.

"He is the answer to every need. That is why Paul speaks of 'the fruit of the Spirit' as one (Galatians 5:22) and not of 'fruits' as separate items. "God has given us His Holy Spirit, and when love is needed the fruit of the Spirit is love; when joy is needed the fruit of the Spirit is joy. It is always true. It does not matter what your personal deficiency, or whether it be a hundred and one different things, God has always one sufficient answer, His Son Jesus Christ, and He is the answer to every human need." (Normal Christian Life; pg. 127) "'Lord, I cannot do it, therefore I will no longer try to do it.' This is the point most of us fall short of. 'Lord, I cannot; therefore I will take my hands off; from now on I trust Thee for that.' We refuse to act; we depend on Him to do so, and then we enter fully and

joyfully into the action He initiates. It is not passivity; it is a most active life, trusting the Lord like that; drawing life from Him, taking Him to be our very life, letting Him live His life in us as we go forth in His name." (Ibid; pg. 128)

CONCLUSION: *We have tried to see the solidarity of the human race in its involvement in Adam's Fall. The result of the Fall is that all men are sinners by nature, which eventually leads to all men becoming sinners by choice. We have tried to see the solidarity of the human race in its involvement in Christ's Redemptive Work. Because God has put all men 'into Christ', Christ's death and resurrection are objectively and potentially effective in the life of each individual's life. Christ's death and resurrection are subjectively and personally effective in the life of each individual, as the individual recognizes and accepts the Work of Redemption. Because of the Cross, man can know forgiveness and deliverance. Because of the Resurrection, man can know newness of life. Christ's call and invitation is to all men: "Whosoever will may come."*

8.

"THE GIFTS OF GOD!"

SCRIPTURE: *"He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life." Titus 3:5-7*

TEXT: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)*

Faith is the activity of man; salvation is the activity of God. Among the words that describe God's salvation of man, two words are prominent: Justification and Regeneration. These are the gifts of God given to the sinner who exercises saving faith in Christ. Both are given simultaneously, but each describes a definite aspect of Christ's saving work.

Let us look carefully at each of these terms and seek an understanding of their meaning.

Justification is a legal concept, and justification is concerned with the legal status of the believer. The great frequency with which the Scriptures discuss justification shows that the Scriptures put great emphasis upon the idea of law. Justification cannot be separated from the idea of law, for justification is a legal concept. "There can be not the slightest doubt to anyone who has worked much with a concordance that justification is one of the very central truths of the New Testament." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, pg. 292)

"Justify" in the New Testament sense of the word does not mean to prove a person righteous, but rather it means to treat, to account, or to reckon a person as righteous. Justification in the New Testament means "to acquit", or "to pronounce, just or righteous".

In Considering Justification, It Is Important First To Realize The Seriousness And Sacredness Of God's Law.

God requires that man should live in accordance with His Law. "Moreover, it is part of the very nature of law as we know it that it attaches penalties to the breaking of the law, and in this respect the scriptural law is no exception. Again and again we are told that God views the breaking of the law with the gravest displeasure, that His wrath is extended towards the sinner, and that none can expect immunity, for there is no respect of persons with Him." (Ibid; 294)

Secondly, God Must Honor His Holy Nature And, Therefore, God Cannot Automatically, And Unconditionally Pronounce Forgiveness To All Men.

As P.T. Forsyth so well says, "God could not trifle with His own holiness. He could will nothing against His holy nature, and He could not abolish the judgment bound up with it. Nothing in the compass of the divine nature could enable Him to abolish a moral law, the law of his holiness. That would be tampering with His own soul. It had to be dealt with. Is the law of God more loose than the law of society? Can it be taken liberties with, played with, and put aside at the impulse even of

love? How little we should come to think of God's love if that were possible. God's holy law is His own holy nature. His love is under the condition of eternal respect. It is quite unchangeable.”

Third, Jesus Suffered For Man's sin And In Turn Gave Man A Borrowed Righteousness.

The substitutionary death of Christ must be taken into account, if we are properly to understand the true significance and possibility of justification. God takes into account that Christ has suffered for man's sin and is thus able to forgive mankind of his own sin, and yet at the same time God is able to honor His own law of holiness. God's law must be vindicated; sin must be punished. Christ took the punishment of sin and thus the demands of God's law were satisfied. In fact, because Christ has died for man's sins, God must forgive man. God acts righteously, or justly in that He honors the substitutionary death of Christ, and, dealing righteously. God is therefore obligated to forgive man. God forgives and yet He maintains the integrity of His character, simply because God, as a righteous Judge, cannot overlook the work of His Son on Calvary. “Even (God's) act of forgiveness which might be thought of as an act of mercy is seen to be also an act of righteousness

At the same time that God, for Christ's sake, forgives man's sins, Christ bestows upon man a borrowed righteousness. The borrowed righteousness which man enjoys is given to man by God, and is the basis of man's justification. The righteousness which man enjoys must be appropriated by faith. It is not the faith itself (the activity of man) which justifies man; it is Christ's borrowed righteousness (the activity and gift of God) that is the basis of man's justification. God looks upon the borrowed righteousness, and acquits man and judges him as righteous. God is just in justifying a sinner, based on God's acceptance of Christ's atonement that makes it possible for man to enjoy a borrowed righteousness.

Fourth, The Work Of Christ's Atonement Enables God To Declare Man As Righteous. God can declare man as righteous because God constitutes man as righteous by giving to man the righteousness of Christ. God reckons Christ's righteousness to our account. Justification is a change in man's relationship or status to God. Because of Christ's work of Atonement, “God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all. Instead of treating the sinner as a criminal to be obliterated, God treats him as a child to be loved. That is what justification means. It means that God reckons us not as His enemies but as His friends, that God treats us not as bad men deserve, but as good men deserve. It means He looks on us not as law-breakers to be punished, but as men and women only to be loved. That is the very essence of the gospel. That means that to be justified is to enter into a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and confidence and friendship, instead of a relationship of distance and enmity and fear. We no longer go to a God radiating terrible but just punishment. We go to a God radiating forgiving and redeeming love. Justification is the right relationship between God and man. The man who is just is the man who is in this right relationship, and – here is the supreme point – he is not in this right relationship because of anything that he has done, but because of what God has done. He is not in this right relationship because he has meticulously performed the works of the law. He is in it because in utter faith he has cast himself on this amazing mercy and love of God.” (Barclay's Romans; pg. 13, 14)

REGENERATION: What is the difference between justification and regeneration. Justification refers to a Christian's changed status with God. Regeneration refers to a Christian's changed nature. “Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The destination is like that of the destination between the act of surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does -

he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. It we are innocent he declares accordingly.” (Redemption Accomplished and Applied; 121)

When a person receives Christ into his life, he is made a new person. Regeneration means a sense of newness, and while the actual word is seldom used in the New Testament to denote personal salvation, the concept is implied by a variety of terms and metaphors in the New Testament. Let us look at those metaphors, all of which denote newness of life.

Becoming a Christian is like passing from darkness to light. Paul received a commission from God to turn men “...from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 26:18) One college girl expressed her experience of Christ in these words: “I felt that I had swallowed sunshine.” (Abundant Living; pg. 35)

Becoming a Christian is like freedom from slavery. Wrote Paul, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship.” (Romans 8:15) Wrote one man after he found Christ, “He lifted me out of the dungeon. I was truly free.” (Living In Two Worlds; pg. 29)

Becoming a Christian is like passing from death to life, or like experiencing a resurrection unto life. Wrote Paul, “But God is so rich in mercy; He loved us so much that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins, He gave us back our lives again when He raised Christ from the dead – only by His undeserved favor have we ever been saved – and lifted us up from the grave into glory along with Christ, where we sit with Him in the heavenly realms – all because of what Christ Jesus did.” (Ephesians 2:4-6) “You see how your old, evil nature died with Him and was buried with Him; and then you came up out of death with Him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God Who raised Christ from the dead.” (Colossians 2:12)

Becoming a Christian is called a New Birth. “Thank God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in his great mercy we men have been born again into a life full of hope, through Christ’s rising again from the dead!” (I Peter 1:3; Philips) “You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” (I Peter 1:23, RSV) Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Except one be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5) ‘Water’ refers to the purification from sinful pollution, and ‘spirit’ refers to inner newness of life brought about by the activity of the Holy Spirit. This New Testament teaching has its counterpart in the Old Testament: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36: 25, 25)

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN IS CALLED A NEW CREATION. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (II Corinthians 5:17, RSV) Wrote Paul to the Ephesians: “If you have really heard His voice and learned from Him the truths concerning Himself, then throw off you old evil nature – the old you that was a partner in your evil ways – rotten through and through, full of lust and sham. Now your attitudes and thoughts must all change; Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature.” (Ephesians 4:21-24)*

Out of large numbers of converts who were saved at a Billy Graham Crusade, about 2000 of them were asked what happened when they became a Christian. The following five statements were more often given as answers to what happened when they were converted than any other answers.

I FELT CLEAN INSIDE. Sin blackens the soul, but Christ comes to the soul of man to cleanse from the blackness and guilt of sin. One disturbed woman who found Christ, described her experience in this way: “I feel all clean within. All the old hymns about cleansing which I had laid aside as outworn superstition have come back. I find myself singing them again.” (Abundant Living; pg. 35)

I FOUND PEACE OF MIND. Sin causes one to be at enmity with God. Augustine talked about “our hearts being restless till they rest in Thee.” One lonely man in a hotel who was getting ready to pull the trigger of a gun to blow his brains out, reached for a radio dial and the speaker said, “Put down that gun! That is no solution to your problems.” The man was shocked into reality and fell on his knees before God and found peace for his troubled soul.

I WAS ABLE TO OVERCOME VICIOUS HABITS. One of the terrible characteristics of sin is that one sin leads to more sins. A practice which may appear relatively harmless can lead to a vicious habit. Sin makes a man a slave to its harsh tyranny. Christ has come to break the power of sin and set the captive free. Christ gives a ladder for deliverance from alcoholism, dope addiction, resentment, uncontrolled sex, and the undisciplined tongue. Christ is the Great Conqueror, and can enable man to conquer his vicious habits.

I AM EASIER TO LIVE WITH. One of the tragic results of sin is that sin not only makes the life of the transgressor miserable, but sin also makes the lives of those who are intimately associated with the transgressor miserable. The fruits of sin are hatred, fighting, jealousy, anger, complaints, criticisms, and selfishness - “...constant effort to get the best for yourself.” (Galatians 5:20) Christ has come to replace these evil traits with love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These God-given qualities make a person much easier to live with. Christ has come to make a person winsome and gracious, and to build strong and lasting relationships.

I AM HAPPY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE. Sin brings misery and despair. “The way of the transgressor is hard.” (Proverbs 13:15b) Christ has come to give real joy and happiness to man. Jesus said to his disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11) How true is the proverb, “Whosoever trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.” (Proverbs 16:20b) In the journal of a young convert of thirteen were found these words, “Oh, that I had a voice that would reach to all the world. I would tell them how happy I am.” (Living In Two Worlds; pg. 72)

The joy that Christ gives is not dependent upon one’s external circumstances. A young woman who became a Christian, lost her husband, and yet this did not rob her of her joy. Writing about a spiritually needy friend, she said, “I do wish I could share all the joy in my heart with her. She deserves it, and I have enough for ten people”! (Prayer and Life’s Highest; pg. 79)

CONCLUSION: Justification establishes a person in a right relationship with God, and regeneration gives an inward newness of life to the sinner. Both are the gifts of God and are simultaneously given when man exercises saving faith in Christ.

9.

"CHRIST'S SUBSTITUTION AND SACRIFICE!"

SCRIPTURE: You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! Romans 5:6-9

TEXT: "While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6, R.S.V)

Man was made for God, but sin alienated man from God. Man was made for greatness, but man lost his greatness in the Fall. Sin not only broke God's laws, but it broke God's heart. Sin brought guilt, condemnation, alienation, and death to man.

Christ came to save man out of the plight of sin. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ can all receive life. Through the death of the cross, Christ brought death to death. The day of the resurrection was the day that death died. Because Christ died, all men may live.

Let us see how Christ provided for the salvation of man through the Cross.

CHRIST'S PROPITIATION. John wrote, "He (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 1:2) John further wrote, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (I John 4:10)

What does propitiation mean? Says Leon Morris, "It is the combination of God's deep love for the sinner with His uncompromising reaction against sin which brings about what the Bible calls propitiation." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; pg. 210) He continues, "Propitiation signified the averting of wrath by the offering of a gift. Thus the use of the concept of propitiation witnesses to two great realities, the one, the reality and the seriousness of the divine reaction against sin, and the other, the reality and the greatness of the divine love which provided the gift which should avert the wrath from men." (Ibid) In other words, to understand propitiation we must take two ideas into account: Wrath of God, Substitution of Christ.

The Wrath Of God. The fact of God's wrath because of sin is well established, both in the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament prophets describe God's reaction towards injustice and disobedience in terms of fiery indignation. The prophets warn Israel to repent in order to escape the Day of the Wrath of God. God speaks through his prophets to Israel and says, "Mine anger is kindled against them". Hosea 8:5.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist warned men of the '...wrath to come' (Matthew 3:7). Of him who is living a life of disobedience, it is said that '...the wrath of God abideth on him'. John 3:36. Jesus warned men of '...the eternal fire' (Matthew 18:8). In His condemnation of Capernaum and other cities, Jesus expressed His consuming hatred for sin. Jesus warned of the wrath to come in which God will say to some at the Judgment, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire' (Mark 14:21).

What is the explanation for God's wrath? It is because of God's hatred of sin. God is a God of love, but His love demands that His own holiness be honored and sin, which offends that holiness, be punished. God's love for his own holiness demands that man's sins be punished. God's wrath is "the stern reaction of the divine nature towards evil. It is aroused only and inevitably by sin." God's holy nature recoils at the very presence of sin. Wrote the Psalmist, "Anger also went up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation." (Psalms 78:21) Rebellion and rejection of God's salvation are described as the prime causes for God's wrath. "We have transgressed and rebelled; thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered with anger and pursued us." (Lamentations 3:42) God hates sin. It is most repugnant to him. God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." (Habakkuk 1:13a)

God's wrath, however, is not like the wrath of the pagan gods. "The Bible writers have nothing to do with pagan conceptions of a capricious and vindictive deity, inflicting arbitrary punishments on offending worshippers, who must then bribe him back to a good mood by the appropriate offerings." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; Leon Morris; 148) There is none of that irrational passion in God, but God's wrath is controlled, directed, and tempered by God's love. Wrath and love are compatible in God's nature. He hates sin but He loves the child of sin. "There is a divine wrath, but if we may put it this way, it is always exercised with a certain tenderness. Even when He is angry, with man's sin God loves man and is concerned for his well-being in the fullest sense. There is a divine love, but it is not a careless sentimentality indifferent to the moral integrity of the loved ones. Rather it is a love which is a purifying fire, blazing against everything that hinders the loved ones from being the very best that they can be." (Ibid)

Substitution. Writes John Murray, "Propitiation presupposes the wrath and displeasure of God and the purpose of propitiation is the removal of this displeasure." (Redemption Accomplished and Applied; pg. 300)

How can God's displeasure toward man's sin be removed? Some think, by human effort to appease the divine wrath. But this approach is pagan, for this is the approach man used to appease the pagan deities. "There is forgiveness with God, and this forgiveness necessarily involves the laying aside of wrath. But it is important to note that the removal of this wrath is due not to man's securing such an offering that God is impressed and relents, but to God Himself." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; Morris; pg. 177)

Christ is the perfect atonement and sacrifice for sin. Man cannot atone for his own sins, for no amount of good works can out-balance man's sins. Man is the object of God's wrath and nothing man can do can remove that wrath. Says Spurgeon, "Christ has made a complete atonement; and there is none other plan by which sinners can be made at one with God, except by Jesus' precious blood. I may make sacrifices; I may mortify my body; I may be baptized; I may receive sacraments; I may pray until my knees grow hard with kneeling; I may read devout words until I know them by heart; I may celebrate masses; I may worship in one language or in fifty languages; but I can never be at one with God, except by blood; and that blood, 'the precious blood of Christ'." (The Passion and Death of Christ; pg. 36)

In other words, God's wrath can only be averted and man's sins forgiven, through the substitutionary death of Christ.

"About one hundred years ago, when men in the Army did not do what their officers told them to, sometimes they were whipped with long hard pieces of leather that would cut into the skin of their backs and make their backs bleed. Of course, this hurt very much. One day the soldiers living in a certain tent stole some money from some soldiers living in the next tent. But the men would not tell which of them stole the money. The officers told them they would all be punished with whips unless they would tell which of them had done it. Then, a boy named Willie, who was really too young to be a soldier - but they let him anyway - stepped forward to the officer and said, "Sir, punish me so that the other men in the tent will not have to be punished. I did not take the money, but I want to be punished for the men who did take it.' The leader was very sorry, because Willie had not stolen the money and should not be punished; and, besides, Willie was not very strong, and he was afraid that if he punished him it might make him sick. But the officer finally decided to whip Willie. They tied Willie to a tree and took his shirt off, and then the officer began to whip him. The big whip cut deeply into Willie's back, but he did not scream. Again the whip came down, and there was another deep cut in his back. A third time it came down and then one of the men, the one who had really

stolen the money, jumped forward. 'Stop, stop!' he said. 'I stole the money. Do not whip Willie any more. Whip me instead.' But Willie said, 'No. He has already whipped me, and he cannot whip you now. I have taken your whipping for you.' And so they let the man who had stolen the money go free and did not whip him, because they had whipped Willie instead. That night Willie died, because he had been hurt so much." (Devotion For the Children's Hour; by Taylor; pgs. 124-126)

Christ loved mankind so much that He took man's penalty for Him. The heat of God's wrath toward sin was taken out on the Innocent One - Christ. God turned his back on Christ while He was on the Cross, for Christ bore in his own body mankind's sin, and God could not look on sin. "For he hath made him, Christ, to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5:21) When Christ cried out, "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me," Christ was bearing the terrible load of mankind's sins. He was taking the whipping for man. "But God commandeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6) Christ's death on the Cross appeased, placated, and pacified the wrath of God. The wrath of God was averted from man to Christ. Christ became man's propitiation.

Says Robert G. Lee, "When God made man, God breathed into him - and he became a living soul. But when God made salvation available for men, God bled for man." Wrote Peter, "The price was in fact the lifeblood of Christ, the unblemished and unstained lamb of sacrifice." (I Peter 1:19)

God as a "provision whereby the sin might be covered and the liability to divine wrath and curse removed" instituted the sacrifice of the Old Testament. (Redemption Accomplished and Applied; pg. 25)

John called Jesus 'The Lamb of God' who takes away the sin of the world. Says Leon Morris, "The Lamb of God' does appear to be definitely sacrificial, and it awakens memories of more sacrifices than one. The term is sacrificial. But it refuses to be bound to any one sacrifice. It is a most satisfying concept that Jesus did accomplish the perfect sacrifice which completely removed the sin of the world. He is the complete embodiment of all the truth to which the sacrificial system pointed. That the Lamb is said to be 'of God' would seem, in accordance with this view, to indicate that the perfect sacrifice is the one which God Himself provides. Men might offer sacrifices which make this or that aspect of truth plain. But it is only God who can produce the sacrifice which completely deals with sin." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; Leon Morris; pg. 143)

Christ shed his blood that mankind might live. Merv Rosell relates an interesting story. "The little daughter of a friend of mine, five-year-old Mary, underwent an operation and lost so much blood that it was necessary to resort to blood transfusion. Samples of the blood of all the adults of the family were taken, but none was found to match Mary's. Then a test was made of her older brother's blood. It was found to match. Jimmy is a husky boy, thirteen years old and deeply fond of little Mary. 'Will you give your sister some of your blood' the doctor asked Jim. Jimmy set his teeth, 'Yes, sir, if she needs it!' The need was very desperate so the boy was at once prepared for the transfusion. In the midst of the drawing of the blood, the doctor observed Jimmy growing paler and paler. There was no apparent reason for this. 'Are you ill, Jim?' asked the doctor, 'No, sir, but I'm wondering just when I'll die.' 'Die?' grasped the doctor. 'Do you think people give their lives when they give a little blood?' 'Yes sir', replied Jimmy. 'And you were giving your life for Mary's?' 'Yes sir,;' replied the boy simply. Can you tell of a finer heroism than this?" (Shoe-Leather Faith by Merv Rosell; no. 448)

Says Billy Graham, "In Christ's atonement for sin, He stood in the guilty sinner's place. If God had forgiven sin by a divine decree without atonement, which involved the personal shame, agony,

suffering, and death of Christ, then man could assume that God overlooked, winked at, or was indifferent to sin. Thus, man would go on sinning, and earth would have become a living hell. But in the surrendering of Jesus we have the participation of God in the act of atonement." (World Aflame; pg. 118)

Christ sacrificed his life for us, because he loves each of us infinitely. Christ loved us before the foundation of the world. Said one old lady, "If He did not love me before I was born, He never would have loved me afterwards." (Salvation In Christ; R. G. Lee; pg. 21) It is hard to understand how great God's love is. Calvary love is not human love; it is divine love with a divine origin. "You see, salvation leaped out of eternity into time. And when it has done its work in time, it is going to leap back into eternity and carry you and me on its bosom." (Ibid)

"A minister was boarding at a farmhouse, and his host was not a Christian. Early one morning, the farmer beckoned to the minister to follow him out to the chicken house. There, on one of the nests, sat a hen with a brood of chickens peeping out from under her wings. 'Touch her, Parson,' said the farmer. As the minister put his hand on the hen, he found that she was rigid in death! 'Look at that wound in her head', the farmer continued. 'A weasel has sucked all the blood from her body, and she never once moved for fear the little beast would get her chickens!' 'Oh, Jonas,' said the minister, 'that was just like Christ! He endured all the suffering of crucifixion, though He might have come down and saved His own life. But he didn't, because our redemption depended upon His death. If He had been spared death, we would be lost!' The farmer saw it instantly. Tears of penitence began to course down his cheeks, as with grateful heart he thanked God for His unspeakable gift!" (Shoe-Leather Faith; No. 333)

CONCLUSION: *John was so right when he wrote, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) Christ substituted and sacrificed his life on the Cross for you and me that we might be spared divine wrath and that we might have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)*

"The Scripture is clear that the wrath of God is visited upon sinners or else that the Son of God dies for them. Either we die or He dies." (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; 213) He who accepts Christ's provision for man's plight need not endure the penalty of sin which is death, but may enjoy the gift of God which is eternal life. Have you accepted Christ's provision for your sin? If not, do so now!

10.

"CHRIST'S REDEMPTION!"

SCRIPTURE: *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." 1 Peter 1: 18, 19. "It is through the Son, at the cost of his own blood, that we are redeemed, freely forgiven through that full and generous grace which has overflowed into our lives and opened our eyes to the truth." Ephesians 1:7. "... and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." Romans 3:24. "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant." Hebrews 9:15*

TEXT: *"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45*

Someone said that salvation is not unreasonable, but that it is beyond reason. The Cross stands at the center of the Christian faith and is what the Christian glories in.

"On the south coast of China on a hill overlooking the harbor of Macao, Portuguese settlers once built a massive cathedral. But a typhoon proved stronger than the work of man's hands, once built a massive cathedral but a typhoon proved stronger than the work of man's hands, and some centuries ago the building fell in ruins except for the front wall. High on the top of that jutting wall, challenging the elements down through the years, is a great bronze cross. In 1825 Sir John Bowring was shipwrecked near there. Clinging to the wreckage of his ship, at long last he caught sight of that great cross, which showed him where he could find safety. This dramatic rescue moved him to write those words familiar to millions:

*In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story,
Gathers round its head sublime.
(World Aflame; pg. 113)*

There are various terms that are used to describe Christ's accomplished work on the Cross. Terms like propitiation, sacrifice, reconciliation, and redemption, each tell of a certain aspect of Christ's work on the Cross. The work of Christ cannot really be segmented but must be looked at in its entirety. However, in looking at each of the terms which describe the various aspects of Christ's work, we will be able to better understand the significance of Christ's work as it relates to man's needs.

It is redemption which we will look at today. Redemption is a work of Christ. "Just as sacrifice is directed to the need created by our guilt, propitiation to the need that arises from the wrath of God, and reconciliation to the need arising from our alienation from God, so redemption is directed in the bondage to which our sin has consigned us." (Redemption Accomplished and Applied by Murray; pg. 43)

PROPOSITION: *In seeking to understand the meaning and significance of Redemption, it is important first to state a general definition of redemption, in light of the secular usages of the word. Secondly, it is important to dwell at some length upon the three elements or components in the Biblical idea of redemption.*

Leon Morris says that the basic word from which redemption comes is “a verb with the general meaning of ‘to loose’, ‘ransom price’.” (The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross; Leon Morris; pgs. 11, 12) “A slave might buy his freedom. He would save his meagre earnings and what other small amounts of money came his way, probably over a long period of time, until he had the necessary sum. Then he could be freed.” (Ibid; 13)

Thus, we see that the basic idea in ‘redemption’ is ‘deliverance’ with a cost involved. That payment of the ransom price to secure the liberation is important in understanding the true meaning of redemption. The ransom price was sometimes substitutionary in nature.

With these introductory ideas concerning redemption, let us discuss in some details the three elements in the definition of redemption.

The Bondage Of Man. Assumed in the definition of redemption is the fact of the bandage of man. Sin makes a slave out of man. Says Morris, “It is a basic tenet of Biblical Theology that man is completely unable to grapple with the position created by the fact of sin, and the redemption passages must be interpreted in this context.” (Ibid, 61)

Man is a slave to sin by reason of his sinful nature. Wrote Paul, “But there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin and death that are still within me. In my mind I want to be God’s willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.” (Romans 7:23)

Man is a slave to sin by reason of his own choices. “Don’t you realize that you can choose your own master? You can choose sin (with death) or else obedience (with goodness). The one to whom you offer yourself, he will take you and be your master and you will be his slave.” (Romans 6:16)

Billy Graham notes the devastating results of sin. “The Bible teaches that sin affects the mind. The Bible teaches that there is a veil over his mind. The Bible teaches that sin affects the will. There are vast numbers of persons living under the tyranny of pride, jealousy, prejudice, or perhaps they are living under the bondage of alcohol, barbiturates, or narcotics. Even some who do not want to do the things they are doing are powerless to quit. They have become slaves. Sin also affects the conscience, until one becomes slow to detect the approach of sin. You no longer have a sensitivity to things you know to be wrong. You have built up a rationalistic system to keep your conscience quiet.” (World Aflame: pgs. 72, 73)

Sin makes man a slave to passion, pride, self-centeredness, anger, hate, anxiety, and fear. Says Graham, “I have met men who are habitual liars. They have lied so long that they no longer can distinguish between the truth and a lie.” (Ibid)

Stanley Jones tells of an alcoholic with whom he prayed for salvation. The alcoholic was so bound by his habit that he left the room while E. Stanley Jones was praying for him, in order to drown his thoughts of God. Through alcohol, he was trying to run from God and reality. Finally, on his deathbed, the alcoholic cried out to God for forgiveness. A soul was saved in that moment of repentance, and a life could have been saved if the man would have substituted God for the bottle, years before.

There are those today who are denying God's moral law and, in the name of 'freedom', saying that man should be a law to himself. Peter describes these modern-day 'freedom-fighters' who want to live loose lives. "They are full of boasting about their sins and conquests, and, using lust as their bait, they lure back into sin those who have just escaped from such wicked living. 'You aren't saved by being good', they say, 'so you might as well be bad. Do what you like, be free'; but these very teachers who offer this 'freedom' from law are themselves slaves to sin and destruction. For a man is a slave to whatever controls him." (II Peter 2:19) Said Jesus, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34) Inherent in the idea of redemption, is the assumption that man is in bondage to sin. "Let me assure you that there is no ruler so tyrannical as self."

Substitutionary Price Of Redemption. Redemption is deliverance but it is deliverance with a price. Biblically speaking, the price of redemption is the price of the precious blood of Jesus. Wrote Peter, "God paid a ransom to save you from the impossible road to heaven which your fathers tried to take, and the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver, as you very well know. But He paid for you with the precious life-blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." (I Peter 1:19, 20)

The Scriptures often speak of the suffering and sacrifice of the Savior. "For it became him (Jesus), for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Hebrews 2:10)

"Under the system of Jewish laws the high priest brought the blood of the slain animals into the sanctuary as a sacrifice for sin, and the bodies of the animals were burned outside the city. That is why Jesus suffered and died outside the city, where His blood washed our sins away." (Hebrews 13: 11, 12)

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor by the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

The death of Christ was substitutionary and became our ransom. Said Jesus, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Christ's Death Redeemed Man From Sin. The Scriptures make this very clear. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24) Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7)) Wrote Paul to Timothy, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself as ransom for all". (I Timothy 2: 5, 6)

The Scriptures are very clear that Christ's death was substitutionary in nature. Christ died that man might not have to die. His own lifeblood was the ransom price for man's deliverance.

What is the motivation for Christ's ransom for man. It is nothing less than love, the love that gave and suffered, and the love which conquered and achieved. Says Barclay, "In this life the tragedy of love is that it is so often frustrated; that it might bear the pain of loving and yet being unable to rescue the one it loves. But the love of Christ is the perfect love because it is backed by that infinite power which nothing can frustrate and which can rescue its loved one from the bondage of sin." (Barclay's Galatians; pg.9) Our Redemption is costly to God. "In the days of His flesh, ¹He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He¹ was heard because of His piety. Hebrews 5:7; "And inasmuch as it was not without an oath ."

7:20; “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” 12:2,3)

Christ’s death redeemed man from the law’s curse. Says Barclay, “The law is an essential stage on the way to the grace of God.” (Barclay’s Galatians) What is meant by this statement? The Law, first, revealed the perfect standard of God’s righteousness. The Law, secondly, defines sin and, in defining sin, actually diagnoses man’s moral condition. The Law, thirdly, shows man his helplessness and results in driving man to God for grace and mercy. Briefly stated, the Law condemns man. Man attempts to save himself, but the more he tries to save himself by keeping the Law, the more he breaks the Law’s standards and the greater becomes the Law’s curse upon him. Wrote Paul, “All who depend on the deeds which the law lays down are under a curse, for it stands written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not consistently obey and perform all the things written in the book of the law.” (Galatians 3:10; Barclay)

Man cannot fulfill the Law’s demands, but Christ was able to fulfill those demands. Thus, Christ alone is the perfect fulfiller of the Law with all its stringent demands. This fact alone shows that Jesus was more than human – he was divine. Christ not only perfectly fulfilled the Law’s demands, but Christ paid the full penalty for the Law’s infraction. Thus, His death was substitutionary in nature. Not only did He come to redeem man from sin, but He came also to redeem or deliver man from the Law’s curse. “Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming accursed for us – for it stands written, “Cursed is every man who is hanged on a tree.” (Galatians 3:13; Barclay) “But when the fullness of time came God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were subject to the law, so that we might be adopted as sons.” (Galatians 4: 4, 5; Barclay)

As Spurgeon says, “As many as Christ died for, are forever free from the curse of the law; for when the law cometh to curse a man who believeth in Christ, he saith, “What have I to do with thee, O law” Thou sayest ‘I will curse thee’, but I reply, ‘Thou hast cursed Christ instead of me. Canst thou curse twice for one offence?’ Behold how the law is silenced! God’s law having received all it can demand, is not so unrighteous as to demand anything more. All that God can demand of a believing sinner, Christ has already paid, and there is debt, but a friend paid your debt, no writ can be served on you. It matters nothing that you did not pay it, it is paid, and you have the receipt. That is sufficient in any court of equity. So with all the penalty that was due to us, Christ has borne it.” (The Passion and Death of Christ; pg. 64)

Freedom Of Man. Common to the idea of redemption, is freedom – the result of paying the ransom. When a ransom was given for a slave, the slave was freed. The Bible defines man as a slave to sin, and it describes Christ’s death as a death to ransom man, to free him from the bondage of sin.

Many passages from Paul speak of man’s freedom from sin’s bondage. “For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin’s bondage. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2) Paul wrote to Timothy that Christ “hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (II Timothy 1:10) Paul said that “our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” (Romans 6:6) Christ came to redeem man from the curse of the Law.

It is the glorious message of the bible that man can be freed from his sinful bondage. Christ gives liberty to man. This liberty, however, is not a selfish liberty but a liberty to serve Christ. The paradox of the Christian redemption is that he is redeemed to become a slave – a slave not of passion but of love, a slave not of self-will but of Christ, a slave not of sin but of righteousness. Wrote Paul, "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:18) "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." (Romans 6:22)

Liberty is not to be abused. Christian liberty is liberty to serve Christ, and the motivation for this service is love. Christ loved man so much that he bought man with the price of His own blood. "For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's." (I Corinthians 6:20)

How can God be glorified? By living a life of love and service to God and to our fellowmen. Says Barclay, "Christian freedom is not license for the simple but tremendous reason that the Christian is not the man who has become free to sin, but the man, who, by the grace of God, has not freedom to indulge this lower side of human nature, but freedom to walk in the life of the Spirit." (Barclay's Galatians; pgs. 50, 51)

Christ gives love for hate, a cool head for a hot temper, understanding for resentment, confidence for fear, relaxation for anxiety, peace for guilt, integration for divided loyalties, and direction for confusion. Christ came to give the more abundant life. Above all, Christ came to deliver man from the servitude of self.

E. Stanley Jones relates the story of how a wealthy businessman was freed from the bondage of self. "A businessman was in the hands of a psychoanalyst. Over a period of five years, he spent sixty thousand dollars in having himself picked to pieces. He submitted to the psychoanalyst over a thousand dreams for deciphering – often five or six a night. He kept a pad and paper handy to note them down when these dreams awakened him. At the end of five years the man was thoroughly disrupted and picked to pieces. The psychoanalyst didn't know how to put him together again on a new basis. Self-knowledge was not healing. It straightened him out here and there, but could not heal the central hurt – a disrupted self. He saw all this self-probing was ending in futility, so he gave up his last prop upon which he leaned – the analyst. As he left the hotel, a sense of infinite sadness and loneliness came over him – his last prop gone, and nowhere to turn. Suddenly a Voice seemed to say, 'Look this way'. It was the Voice of Christ saying, 'Look away from yourself, your misery, your fear, and your failures! Look to Me.' The Voice came like a breath of health into the fetid atmosphere of self-concentration. He looked away from himself to Christ. That look was followed by a life that took him out of himself, freed him from himself. Today, with an entirely new lease on life, he is healthy, harmonious, and useful." (Abundant Living; pg. 49)

CONCLUSION: In considering redemption, it is essential to consider, first, man's bondage which is the bondage of sin. Man is fettered with the shackles of sin and is in need of a greater than himself, to unshackle him.

Christ is the 'greater One' who has come to unshackle man. However, that deliverance was costly. A ransom price had to be paid, and that ransom price was the blood of Christ.

Christ has freed man, only for man to become a slave of love. It is an inescapable fact that all men are the servants of some master. Man is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. "Know ye

not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)

Man is free to choose who his master will be, but man is not free to accept or to reject the consequences of his choice. That is to say, that if man chooses to take Satan as his master, he is not free to reject the consequences which naturally come from serving Satan – jealousy, hate, strife, misery, and eventual death. The man who makes Christ his master also must live with the consequences of his choice – love, joy, peace, contentment, and eternal life.

The choice is yours, but the consequences of the choice are not yours to accept or to reject. You must accept the consequences of your choice. Satan gives bondage! Christ gives freedom! What is your choice? Christ came to redeem you! Choose Him Today!

11.

"OUR GOD IS ABLE – TO FORGIVE ALL SINS!"

SCRIPTURE: *"What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record. There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day⁵ until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess them to the Lord. And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Now I say that each believer should confess his sins to God when he is aware of them, while there is time to be forgiven. Judgment will not touch him if he does." (Psalms 32:1-6)*

TEXT: *"I said 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' – and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:5b)*

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

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

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

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." (Isaiah 53:6)

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

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

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

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

Some project the blame of their sins onto someone else – that is, they scapegoat their sins. "It is easy enough to find all kinds of defenses behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition." Daily Study Bible; Barclay; p. 39; "We ascribe the responsibility to a group, we offer up scapegoat sacrifices; we perform or partake in dumb-show rituals of penitence and atonement." Menninger; Whatever Became of Sin: p. 17

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

Have you heard people try to escape personal moral responsibility by saying, "The devil made me do it!" It is bad enough to rationalize sin. It is perhaps worse to blame others for our actions of moral irresponsibility. Worse yet, is to be callously indifferent to sin and sin's consequences. Notes Barclay, "At first a man regards some wrong thing with horror; the second stage comes when he is tempted into doing it, but even as he does it, he is still unhappy and ill at ease and very conscious that it is wrong; the third stage is when he has done the thing so often that he does it without a qualm." Barclay; Daily Study Bible; Ephesians; p. 114

There are those who "claim that sin has no effect upon them, who say that they can sin and take no harm; who insist that they can take their pleasures, and, if need be, make their mistakes and emerge none the worse for them". (Barclay Daily Study Bible; I John, p. 39) In other words, there are those who feel that they can sow 'wild oats' and yet never have to 'reap wild oats'. They do not see the cause and effect of sin. Paul wrote, "Don't be misled; remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it; a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life which the Holy Spirit gives him." (Galatians 6:7, 8; Living Bible)

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

Comments Barclay, "The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind, and who is beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven." Barclay Study Bible; John: vol. 2; p. 58

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

"Can the labors of my hands fulfill Thy Law's demands?" No, for to be justified in God's eyes, one would have to keep God's Laws perfectly! None is good enough or strong enough to merit God's favor! Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus "...gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." Ephesians 5:2 says that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

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

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

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

"Thousands of people suffer from guilt complexes. Almost everyone senses that somehow they are wrong, like the little boy who said, 'I guess I was just born wrong.' God said from the cross: I love you." He was also saying, 'I can forgive you.' The most glorious and thrilling word in any language is

"forgiveness." God in Christ had a basis for forgiveness. Because Christ died, God can justify the sinner and still be just.

"Christ's atonement is sufficient because God said it is. I know that I am a sinner. I know that I have broken God's laws. I know that I have offended God countless times. My heart, mind, and conscience have been troubled. However, when by faith I look at the cross, there is peace and joy because I know that God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His Son. My sin was committed against God. If God is content with what Christ has done on my behalf and is willing to pardon me, then I have nothing more to worry about. I am redeemed, I am reconciled, I am forgiven, I am assured of heaven – not because of any goodness or good works of my own. It is only because of the love and mercy of God in Christ on the cross that I have any claim on heaven at all. It was God who permitted Christ to die as my substitute. It was God who accepted His sacrifice when He died." Billy Graham; World Aflame; pg. 118-120

What Is The Means Of Forgiveness? In light of what God has done for you, namely, giving His Son Jesus to die for you, what must you do appropriately to respond to God's love initiative?

In order to enjoy God's offer of forgiveness, you must first repent of your sins. What is repentance? "Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, and realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—is what Christians call repentance." C.S. Lewis; Mere Christianity, p. 59

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

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

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

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

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

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

Man's nature must be changed by God. Self-improvement is not sufficient. Man must be divinely transformed.

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

Repentance is "a moral U-turn. "It is a change of mind toward sin, from one of embracing to one of separation". Stanley Walters Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death". (II Corinthians 7:9-10, RSV) Notes John Murray, "The change of heart and mind and will principally respect four things; it is a change of mind respecting God, respecting ourselves, respecting sin, and respecting righteousness".

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

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

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

Says Wesley, concerning the relationship between repentance and the fruits of repentance: "God does undoubtedly command us both to repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all; therefore both repentance and fruits meet for repentance, are in some sense, necessary to justification, but they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them, as was the thief upon the cross". Wesley's Sermons; Vol. 1, p. 387

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

Saving faith is more than a mere intellectual assent to the existence of God. James wrote, “You say that you believe that there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing – and shudder in terror.” Barclay’s James 2:19

The devil knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and even trembles because of this belief, but the devil is still the devil!

Faith is the total commitment of one’s total self to Christ. Faith is “not merely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head but also a disposition of the heart”. (Wesley’s Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 14) Faith is throwing yourself upon God, like a drowning man throws himself upon the strength of the lifeguard. Only when one ceases to struggle and abandons himself to the Divine Lifeguard, is he saved.

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

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

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

Billy Graham, in his book World Aflame, tells of “A beautiful young society leader who came to visit his wife and him. She had been converted to Christ in one of our crusades, and she was absolutely radiant in her transformation. Already, she had learned scores of Scripture verses by heart and was so full of Christ that we sat for two hours listening to her give her moving testimony. Over and over she said, ‘I cannot understand how God could forgive me. I have been such a wicked sinner. I just cannot understand the love of God.’” Billy Graham, World Aflame, pp. 122-123

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

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

This news story was written by a Christian reporter named Lee Bandy and was headlined in newspapers all around the world on November 2, 1990. The Chicago Tribune headline on page one read like this: "GOP Bad-boy: I have found Jesus Christ!" Article from "Table Talk"; Oct. 1991; pp. 12, 13

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

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

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

***Trust Him, for His word is plain;
He will take the sinfulest'
Christ receiveth sinful men.
"Christ receiveth sinful men,
Even me with all my sin;
Purged from every spot and stain,
Heaven with Him I enter in.***

***Chorus: "Sing it o'er and o'er again;
Christ receiveth sinful men;
Make the message clear and plain:
Christ receiveth sinful men."***

12.

"OUR GOD IS ABLE – TO DELIVER FROM TERRORIZING FEARS!"

SCRIPTURE: *"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want. The young lions suffer want and hunger,...Psalms 34:1-10*

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

Notes E. Stanley Jones: *"The man who fights life's battles without fear, fights one enemy – the real thing confronting him. But the man who fights with fears within him fights three enemies – the real thing to fight. Plus the imaginary things built up by fear, plus the fear itself." E. Stanley Jones, Abundant Living, p. 75*

Deliverance from Terrorizing fears comes from wholesomely fearing the Lord. *That is to say, those who profoundly respect the Lord and who reverence the Lord's power and person, and who look to the Lord alone as the source of strength – those persons find deliverance from all their terrorizing, crippling fears. This is the theme of Psalms 34:1-10. Life is Filled With Fears, But Our God Is Able To Deliver Us From Every One Of Life's Debilitating Fears.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wrote the Psalmist, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege

me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident." (Psalms 27:1-3)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wrote the Psalmist, "He (God) guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."

(Psalms 25:9) "For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end."

***(Psalms 48:14) "You (God) guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory."
(Psalms 73:24)***

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

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

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

Secondly, the Christian must claim the promise that Paul gave to young timorous Timothy: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7) God gives the Christian power to cope with any circumstance of life. God gives the Christian love – love that is centered on others and love that is centered on God. The more one becomes preoccupied with others, the less one becomes preoccupied with self. The less one becomes preoccupied with self, the less one is fearful of the future. God also gives the Christian wisdom in dealing with circumstances that will arise – be those circumstances favorable or unfavorable. God will open your mouth and put the words in your mouth to meet the challenging situations of life.

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

Notes E. Stanley Jones, "Meet today, today; for if you put the trouble of next week into today by anticipation through worry, then you spoil today. You are meeting two sets of troubles at once – one set that is actually here, and the set that you bring in by worrying about tomorrow's troubles... Worry is the advance interest you pay on troubles that never come. Some of them do come, and you can meet and conquer them separately. But tomorrow's troubles plus today's break you." Abundant Living; p.77

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

Fifth, remember that "Love casts out all fear." (I John 4:18). "Love delivers from self-attention, gives you other-attention; and therefore love, not faith, is the method of getting rid of fear. For love produces faith as a by-produce of that love. You are not afraid of people you love." E.S. Jones, Christian Maturity, p. 230

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

How To Conquer The Fear Of Failure! Terrifying fear in the face of a problem or a responsibility can contribute to failure. "More people than might be supposed are deeply troubled by the fear of failure. It is a dangerous fear to have working against you, for it can cause the personality to freeze and therefore induce the very failure you fear." Vincent Peale; Overcoming Anxiety and Fear, p. 25

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

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

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

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

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

Failure and success must not be the main consideration in confronting a task, but rather faithfulness in carrying out God's commands. There have been great missionaries who have labored for many years with very little apparent or visible success. Says John Wesley, "On every occasion of uneasiness we should retire to prayer that we may give place to the grace and light of God, and then from our resolutions without being in pain about what success they may have." (Wesley's Plain Account of Christian Perfection; p. 130) "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." (I Corinthians 15:58; NIV)

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

standpoint. You have released within me the greatest tension of my life. I have only to be true, thank God."

"There is a lion in the way,' says fear. But when you walk straight up to the lion of fear, he turns out to be a mouse of fact. Suppose you should fail. Is that so terrible? Not to have tried is a worse failure." (E. Stanley Jones)

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

True success means following God closely, obeying God's laws explicitly, and loving others practically!

"Father, deliver me from the fear of failure. When my terrestrial look is dark and forbidding, let me be assured that your celestial look is always bright and inviting. Your causes cannot fail, so when my cause is identified with your cause I too cannot fail!" Love never fails, regardless of the tangible results of my love!

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

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

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

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

Notes Billy Graham, "There is no shame in being afraid; we're all afraid from time to time. But there's an interesting paradox here, in that if we fear God with all our hearts, there will be nothing else to fear." Facing death, p. 59

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

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

To the repentant thief on the cross, Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise!" Notes Dr. Ryle about this repentant thief, "No child of Adam ever received such assurance as this. The morning of that day the malefactor walked the stone floor of his dark dungeon in a tumult of horror – and in the evening of that day he walked the golden street of the City of Light in a tumult of joy."

Notes Robert Lee, "At death, the soul of the believer passes immediately into glory. There is no weary waiting in the cold grave. There is no intermediate state of suffering and delay...Over every Christian's deathbed, unseen, but real, God's angels hover – waiting to bear the soul of the believer to the 'land of fadeless day.'" (Robert Lee; The Savior's Seven Statements From the Cross; pg. 49, 50)

Death for the believer is not the end, but it is the beginning, not the sunset but the sunrise! Death for the believer is not a fearful enemy, but a kind friend which allows the believer to enjoy the nearer presence of Christ in heaven.

Death for the believer is like going from the basement of the house to the top story of the house. Death allows the Christian to reach his destination. Death for the Christian is like crossing the "finish line" after a long run. Death allows the Christian to rest after a lifetime battle against sin and evil. Wrote Paul, "I have fought long and hard for my Lord and through it all I have kept true to him. And now the time has come for me to stop fighting and rest. In heaven a crown is waiting for me which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of His return. And not just to me, but to all those whose lives show that they are eagerly looking forward to his coming back again." (II Timothy 4:7-8)

Death is not a loss for the believer; death is the doorway into eternal life in heaven. Paul wrote, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" Christians are only pilgrims on the earth. Dying allows the believer to "go home"! Said Jesus to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am." (John 14:1-3)

The Christian need not fear death, for God is with him as he faces death, and God has promised His eternal companionship to the believer following death. As John Wesley was dying, he said, "The best of all, God is with us!"

Death for the Christian is not gloom and darkness and dread. Rather, it is glory and indescribable beauty and pleasantness. There may be difficulty before the believer's spirit actually leaves his body – physical pain, spiritual struggle with the evil powers of darkness, etc. – but God has promised to walk with the believer through the "valley of death." Wrote the Psalmist, "Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, all the way." (Psalms 23:4; Living Bible)

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

Placing your faith in the Deathless One – Jesus Christ – you shall never die! Of course, your body will die and return to dust, but you as a believer will never die! Said Jesus, "If a man keeps my saying he shall never see death." (John 8:5) "Whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." (John 11:26) Notes J.B. Phillips, "It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the meaning that Christ intended to convey was that death was a completely negligible experience to the man who had already begun to live life of the eternal quality." The Newborn Christian, p. 212

Said the great 19th century evangelist D.L. Moody, "Someday you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment, I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all – out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body...That which is born of flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever." (Billy Graham; Angels, pg. 162, 163)

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

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

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

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

- (1) Fasten your mind on Christ, not on the object of your fears.**
- (2) Quiet your mind in Christ's presence. "Let Go, and Let God!"**
- (3) Repeat to yourself, "God is here with me just now to help me to conquer my fears."**
- (4) Surrender each fear to Christ. Let Christ take control of the specific situations that are causing your fears.**
- (5) Begin helping other people. Fill your life with "love projects." Get your mind off yourself and your own circumstances. Lose yourself in the lives of others, and concentrate on meeting the needs of others. One of the surest ways to heal yourself is to minister to the hurts of others.**
- (6) Face life with cheerfulness and laughter. Take God and others seriously, but don't take yourself so seriously. Learn to see the "funny side" of life. Learn to laugh at yourself. Let the "joy of the Lord" be your strength!**

**"What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,**

*Leaning on the everlasting arms.
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms."*

13.

"OUR GOD IS ABLE – TO IMPART PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE!"

SCRIPTURE: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Matthew 10:29; "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? Matthew 16:26*

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

INTRODUCTION: *Is your self-worth based on human evaluation or on God's divine evaluation?*

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

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

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

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

Don't set your hopes and build your sense of self-worth on popularity, for the world's popularity is elusive and passing. Writes Sangster, "Fame is the will-o'-the-wisp which beckons others on...Sir

Walter Scott achieved it – great, and worthy, and deserved fame – but there was that in him which not all the praise of men could satisfy. When he was dying, he said, 'Bring me the book'. 'The book?' they said. 'What book?' 'There is only one book', he answered a little wearily. 'Bring me the Bible.'" Sangster's Daily Reading; p. 90

If one bases his sense of self-worth upon the evaluation of human categories like we have described, he is left with an aching void. A deep sense of self-worth cannot be found in any of earth's possessions or relationships – however good they may be. Only God can affirm you at the deepest level of your being. There are those who are constantly seeking to be affirmed by others, but who find that even those who are nearest and dearest cannot fill the inner void in their lives. God alone can give one a lasting sense of value.

"Your net worth is not equal to the sum total of your appearance, your abilities, or your affluence. It's an awful lie that tempts you to feel bad about yourself because you don't compare well with others when it comes to beauty, brains, bucks, or brawn. It's a lie of unbelievable proportions that causes us to think that real value is found in a handsome face, a well-dressed body, a quick mind, or a fat bank account. Yet the children of the world are nurtured or neglected, pampered or put off, largely on the basis of the bone structure and fat deposits of their bodies, the alertness of their minds, or the social status of their parents. Children are raised to feel good or bad about themselves, depending on how they fit into the selfish, ever-changing mold of the world around them." How Can I Feel Good About Myself? p. 13

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

God's Special Creation Of Man Was When He Said: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:26)

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

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

his hand. ‘All right, Johnny,’ she said, ‘What is here that was not here fifteen years ago?’ He said, ‘Me.’” Charles Allen; Roads to Radiant Living; p. 84

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

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

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

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

“When Muretus, the poor scholar, was overtaken by sudden sickness centuries ago in the Low Countries, he was picked up out of the gutter and carried into a hospital. It never crossed the mind of the two young surgeons standing by the table on which he had been laid that this mud-stained, ill-clad boor could understand a word of their conversation, for they were talking in Latin. The theme of their discussion was a certain dangerous operation, which was just being mooted in Europe, and with a sudden inspiration, one of the surgeons nodded toward Muretus and said to his colleague: ‘Shall we try the experiment on this worthless creature?’ But Muretus had understood every word. Who better? Nor did he say, ‘I am a scholar and a gentleman. You can’t do that to me!’ In polished Latin, he said to those startled youths: ‘Will you call that man worthless for whom Christ died?’ That is the ground of our worth: the solid, sufficient, and only basis of it. And it is the same for everyone. We were dear enough to have shed the sacred blood.” (Sangster; The Secret of Radiant Life; p. 77)

Because Christ died for us, thus forever establishing the fact of our human worth, what should be our proper human response? We ought to humble ourselves before God; we ought to surrender our pride and have a broken and a contrite heart; we ought to hate our sins and turn our backs on our sinful lifestyle; we ought to shed bitter tears of regret that our sins helped crucify the most beautiful person in the Universe! We are not worthy of the least of His favor, but we each have great worth to God because God (Jesus) was willing to die for each of us.

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

Each person should not only repent of sins, but should surrender all rights of personal ownership to God. We must no longer live for ourselves but for Christ, whose blood was shed on Calvary’s Cross to redeem us. “We must die to our own selfish pride, our self-motivated plans, and our self-centered relationships. Just as a seed must die to produce a plant, so we must die to ourselves before we can live fulfilled and fruitful lives. Anything that competes with God for control of our lives deserves to be hated and ‘put-to-death’! We were made to serve Him. We were created to feel good – feel great – about the privilege of being His servant.” (Ibid; p. 11)

God's Gift Of Special Abilities: *"Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all." (I Corinthians 12:4)*

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

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

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

God's Special Call To Each Person

*God has a special purpose for each person that is born!
"To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfill:
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master's will!"*

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

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

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

God's Tools For Redemptive Purposes was written by Paul. "Do not let any part of your bodies become tools of wickedness, to be used for sinning; but give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – for you are back from death and you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes." (Romans 6:13, Living Bible)

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

Notes Barclay, "We hear a great many sermons about the might and the majesty and the power of God; we would be well sometimes to think of the helplessness of God, that without us and without what we can do God is quite and totally helpless. He has got to get a man. We are the Body of Christ, literally hands to do His work, feet to run upon His errands, a voice to speak for Him. This is the Church's task; to be the body, the hands, and the feet, through whom Christ acts." *Life of Christ for Everyone* pg. 94, 95

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

God's Temple For His Indwelling Spirit was told by Pau, to the Corinthians: "Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that He lives within you?" (I Corinthians 6:19a, Living Bible)

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

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

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

We Are Heirs With Christ In His Suffering And In His Glory. Paul wrote o the Romans, "And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as His children, including the new bodies He has promised us – bodies that will never be sick again and will never die." (Romans 8:23)

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

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

What Are The Promise Of Future Resurrection With New Bodies? Notes C.S. Lewis, "Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. We are summoned to pass in through nature, beyond her, into that splendor which she fitfully reflects. And in there, in beyond nature, we shall eat of the tree of life...The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As Saint Augustine said, the rapture of the saved spirit will 'flow over' into the glorified body" The Living Testament, p. 361

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

The Promise Of Future Shared Power With Christ In Eternity! Said Jesus, "Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly." (John 14: 1-3, Living Bible)

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

How significant is this earthly existence for one who anticipates God's favor resting upon him forever! Life for one on this planet is filled with dignity when he realizes that "it is the Father's great pleasure to give the eternal kingdom to the children of men"!

Notes C. S. Lewis, "...The promises of scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like Him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have 'glory'; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally, that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe - ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God's temple." The Living Testament, p. 358

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

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

These are the questions we have sought to answer in this message. In summary, what characteristics best describe a person whose self-esteem is Biblically based?

1. ***He is a grateful person, for he knows he is the product of a special creation, a person made in God's image, wonderfully and complexly made by a personable Creator.***
2. ***He is a humble and repentant person, for he knows that he is a sinner whose sins helped crucify the Son of God. He sees himself as an object of God's special love demonstrated on Mount Calvary when the atoning blood of Christ was shed for the forgiveness of the entire human race.***
3. ***He is a surrendered person, having yielded all of his own so-called 'rights' to Christ, for he knows that Christ has purchased him with his own blood.***
4. ***He is an others-oriented person, serving others rather than serving himself, using all of his God-given gifts to edify the Body of Christ (the Church).***
5. ***He is an obedient person, responding quickly to God's call to ministry and outreach, as Isaiah responded with eagerness to God's call (Isaiah 6:1-6).***
6. ***He is a cooperative person, surrendering himself as a tool in the hands of God, realizing that God's redemptive purposes are fulfilled only through willing servants.***
7. ***He is a person who is sensitive to the presence of the mighty Holy Spirit in his life, and he surrenders his body as the temple that the Holy Spirit constantly indwells and controls.***
8. ***He is a person who is proud to be identified with both Christ's suffering and Christ's glory. He maintains courage as he suffers on earth with Christ, and he is filled with joy as he anticipates future glory in heaven that someday he will share with Christ.***
9. ***He is a person who is learning patiently to wait upon God until the time in the future when he shall receive his new resurrected body.***
10. ***He is a person who is filled with "wonder, love, and praise" as he contemplates the glory that shall someday be his, when God shall assign to him an official position of power in eternity where he shall reign with Christ.***

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

14.

“OUR GOD IS ABLE - TO RESTORE THE FALLEN”

SCRIPTURE: *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world”.* (1 John 2:1-2)

Is It Necessary For A Believer To Yield To Temptation? *The simple and important answer to that question is ‘No’. Jesus ‘suffered being tempted’, and yet He never once sinned! Hebrews 2:18 states: “For since He, Jesus himself has been through suffering and temptation, He knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and he is wonderfully able to help us.”*

God promises to help us during temptation. *“And no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can’t stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation’s power so that you can bear up patiently against it.”* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

As believers, we need never to yield to temptation. *We can say ‘NO’ to Satan’s allurements. Because God controls even the temptation that beset us, every believer can handle temptation. God is strong, able, and willing to help every believer during his time of moral struggle and spiritual warfare. Jesus has already won the battle on Mount Calvary, and the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is available to give Christians victory over temptation. We do not work for a victory: we work from a victory. The victory belongs to Jesus, and each believer has a right and a responsibility personally to appropriate that historic victory as his own personal victory.*

Great is God’s protection of his trusting children. *“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (II Thessalonians 3:3) *“He is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen.”* (Jude 2:4)

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

*“And though this world, which devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.”
(A Mighty Fortress Is Our God)*

Yes, Jesus has come to save us from our sins (Matthew 2:21) – not in our sins. John wrote, *“My children, in writing these to you my purpose are that you should not commit sin.”* (1 John 2:1) *“So*

victory over temptation should be the norm. Nothing below this is healthy. Even so, we do something fail. We get careless, we stealthily lessen our trust in God, and we let a spirit of disobedience bewitch us. Suddenly, we have yielded to temptation and are filled with sorrow.” (A Faith to Grow by Donald Bastian; pgs. 42, 43)

As long as a believer is in this fallen world, there are many perils to avoid and many temptations to resist. But if a believer fails and falls spiritually, God does not abandon that fallen believer. There is hope for recovery. The fallen may rise again.

What Are The Possibility Of Spiritual Failure?

*Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief there is no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?
Oh yes, he cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long night dreary,
I know my Savior cares.
Does Jesus Care?*

**By Frank Ellsworth Graeff)*

Have you ever failed morally? Have you ever failed spiritually, or socially, and after your failure wondered if God still cared for you? Have you ever felt so guilty that you had a hard time thinking that you could never love yourself again? Have you ever had a hard time looking at yourself in the mirror after you did, said, or thought something that was ignoble? Have you ever had an experience when you felt, like Simon Peter., that you had denied your Lord? “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly? (Luke 22:61, 62)

He who climbs the highest, may fall the hardest. Jesus warned us to watch and to pray, lest we fall into temptation. He said that the spirit of man is willing but that the flesh is weak. Everyone is vulnerable at one time or another. Wrote Paul to the overly confident Corinthian believers, “So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.” (I Corinthians 1:12)

What happens when one does fall on his face spiritually? Does God care for people who miserably fail?

It is interesting that the Bible records the failures of its heroes. “Norah got drunk, Moses got angry, and Gideon got scared. Peter could be inconsistent, Paul was Inconsiderate, Thomas doubted, Martha pouted. But God dealt with them and used every one of them for His glory and for our blessing. (What Happens When Life Doesn't?; Briscoe; pg. 135)

There are many perils along life's way – perils against which every believer must constantly guard! Jesus talked about the peril of an unforgiving spirit. Said Jesus, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

There are also the Perils Of False Teachers Who Seek To Deceive Believers. Said Jesus: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ’, and will deceive many.” (Matthew 24:4-5)

There is the Peril of Temptation, which assails the believer during times of weakness. Said Jesus “Watch and pray that ye enter not into the temptations; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.”

There is the Peril of Murmuring and Ingratitude. Wrote Paul, “And don’t murmur against God and his dealings with you, as some of them (the ancient Israelites) did, for that is why God sent his angel to destroy them. All these things happened to them as examples – as object lessons to us – to warn us against doing the same things; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days as the world nears its end. So be careful. If you are thinking, ‘Oh, I would never behave like that’ – let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin.” (I Corinthians 10:10-12)

There is the Peril Of Money. Wrote Paul, “For the love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. Some people have even turned away from God because of their love of money for it, and as a result have pierced themselves with many sorrows.” (I Timothy 6:10)

There is the Peril of Bitterness Against Which Believers Must Always Guard. “Look after each other so that not one of you will fail to find God’s best blessings. Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives.” (Hebrews 12:15)

There is the Peril of Spiritual Neglect and Drifting. Wrote the author of Hebrews, “So listen very carefully to the truths we have heard, or we may drift away from them. For since the messages from angels have already proved true and people have always been punished for disobeying them, what makes us think that we can escape if we are indifferent to this great salvation announced by the Lord Jesus himself, and passed on to us by those who heard him speak?” (Hebrews 2:1-3)

There is the Peril of False Teachers and False Teachings. Wrote Paul to Timothy, “The Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some in the Church will turn away from Christ and become eager followers of teachers with devil-inspired ideas.” (I Timothy 4:1)

There is the Peril of Rejecting the Dictates of a God-sensitized Conscience. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Cling tightly to your faith in Christ and always keep your conscience clear, doing what you know is right. For some people have disobeyed their consciences and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn’t surprising that soon they lost their faith in Christ after defying God like that.” (I Timothy 1:19)

There are just some of the perils against which every sincere believer must guard. It is possible for a Christian to enjoy consistent spiritual victory. However, it is also true to say that many believers ‘slip and fall’ spiritually.

What Are The Provision For Spiritual Failure? Our God is able to heal the broken-hearted. Our God is able to restore the fallen, to reclaim the lost, to revive the fainting, to strengthen the weak one, to forgive the guilty, to reconcile the alienated, and to give dignity for shame to the prodigal!

It is said that where a broken bone is healed, the bone at that point is stronger than at the points where the bones have never been broken! Where one is weakest, as a fallen believer, he can become, by God's grace, the strongest. God loves the backslidden believer. The Good Shepherd loves His Lost Sheep!

"THE NINETY-AND-NINE!"

***There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the flock,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off in the cold and dark;
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender shepherd's care.***

***"Lord, thou hast here thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?"
But the Shepherd made answer:
"This of Mine has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep."***

***But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night which the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the bleak desert He heard its cry-
All bleeding and helpless, and ready to die.***

***"Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?"
"they were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."
"Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?"
"They're pierced tonight by many a thorn.***

***And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a cry to the gates of Heaven,
"Rejoice! I have found My sheep!"
And the angels echoed around the throne,***

"Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!" (Words by Elizabeth Clephane)

God wants to restore the backslidden person. To backslidden Judah, God said, "Return faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." (Jeremiah 3:22)

Broken-hearted, repentant David prayed, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." (Psalms 51:11, 12)

To backslidden Israel, God said, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he said (Israel) will bloom like a lily." (Hosea 14:4-5) Not only does God promise healing to the backslider, but God promises to restore dignity and fruitfulness to the backslider!

Declared Micah regarding God's merciful nature, "You cannot stay angry with your people, for you love to be merciful. Once again, you will have compassion on us. You will tread our sins beneath your feet; you will throw them into the depths of the ocean! You will bless us as you promised Jacob long ago. You will set your love upon us, as you promised our father Abraham!" (Micah 7:18-19)

God cares for the fallen person. God has made provision for forgiveness, and that provision is through His Son. "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins- and not only our sins but the sins of the entire world." (I John 2:1-2)

It is possible for a Christian to sin, but if a Christian falls into an act of sin, God, because of Christ's atonement, will forgive and restore to fellowship. (I John 2:1, 2)

If a Christian should find himself with guilt as a result of an act of sin, "We Christians have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Jesus Is Our Advocate! Jesus pleads our case before God the Father. "An advocate is a helper, a supporter of someone's cause, an advocate in someone's defense." (Barclay) Jesus is the one who intercedes on man's behalf before God the Father. Jesus alone is worthy to be an advocate before the Father, because Jesus alone is absolutely righteous.

Jesus Christ Is The Propitiation! To show the relationship between Advocate and Propitiation, Stott quotes Smith as saying, "Our Advocate does not plead that we are innocent, or adduce extenuating circumstances. He acknowledges our guilt and presents His vicarious work as the ground of our acquittal." (pg. 82)

"The great basic truth behind this word is that it is through Jesus Christ that man's fellowship with God is first restored, and then maintained." (Barclay)

To put it more clearly, the idea behind the word is this: God is wrathful toward man's sin. Also, God's righteous and holy wrath toward the sinner must be averted or appeased if man is to be forgiven. God's judgement does rest upon man, but God's wrath is appeased since God has let the penalty for sin (which man deserved to receive) to be inflicted upon Himself.

A simple human analogy would be that of a parent who is wrathful because of his child's disobedience. The child deserves punishment, but the parent takes the punishment for the child and thus releases the child from the punishment and at the same time appeases the wrath of himself - the parent. This is a simple illustration, but it is very doubtful that a parent would choose to take the punishment for his child!

As Stott so clearly states: "It is appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God. The initiative is not taken by man, nor even by Christ, but by God Himself in sheer unmerited love. His wrath is not averted by any external gift, but by His own self-giving to die the death of sinners. This is the means He has Himself contrived by which to turn His own wrath away."

Jesus' propitiation (or Jesus' death on the cross for man's sins, which has become the means of appeasing God's wrath against the sinner) is for the whole world. The offer of salvation is universal (John 3:16; John 12:32; I Timothy 2:4)

What Is Our Recovery From Spiritual Failure? The God who, through His Son, has made wonderful provision for the recovery of the fallen person, has certain expectations in regards to man's response to God's grace initiative. There are certain steps in the recovery process.

- 1. Recognize the reality and the seriousness of sin.***
- 2. Don't rationalize or deny your sins.***
- 3. Accept personal moral responsibility for your failures and your sins. Remember, every temptation is resistible. No one needs yield to temptation. It is because one has become careless or overconfident that he has fallen into sin.***
- 4. Recognize that forgiveness is always costly. It took Jesus' death to make possible your forgiveness!***
- 5. Confess all your sins to God, and repent deeply of your sins. Humility and contrition is the door back to God. Peter, after his betrayal of Jesus, wept bitterly and repented wholeheartedly. Do not try to conceal your sins. If you yield to temptation, follow David's example! He wrote, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalms 32:5)***
- 6. Accept God's forgiveness gratefully and humbly. Never take God's forgiveness for granted! One man was asked how he could sin so brazenly. He replied something like this: "O, I am not worried, for it is God's business to forgive!" Such blasphemy! Remember that God is not obligated to forgive anyone! Forgiveness is a gift of God's mercy. We cannot earn it, deserve it, or purchase it! We can only receive it with brokenness and humility. We all deserve to die! If God gave us what we deserved, we would all be in hell!***
- 7. After you have confessed your sins to God, be willing, if necessary, to confess your sins to others. Notes Bishop Donald Bastian: "If in your lapse you have wronged others, make amends. If you have wronged God alone - by failure in your imagination, for example - confess to Him. If you have wronged another person, correct it with him. If you have wronged the Church, confess to the Church. This is a costly thing to do. But it is right, an doing so will help prevent future failures." (A Faith to Grow By; pg. 43)***

Restitution - i.e., confessing your sin to someone else whom you have wronged - is a 'bitter pill' to swallow, but restitution will give you at least four positive benefits:

- (a) *It will give you humility, which, in God's eyes, is very valuable. (“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”):*
- (b) *It will give you a “clear conscience” which is important if you are to maintain your joy and confidence in Christian Living:*
- (c) *It will leave a positive witness with the one whom you have wronged. God can use your humble confession to another as a means to incite repentance in the life of that other person to whom you are confessing. Confession is often contagious. Unbelievers (as well as believers) are impressed with persons who are courageous enough to confess their wrongs, especially in a world where most like to blame others rather than accept personal moral responsibility for actions. You do not lower yourself, but you raise yourself in the estimation which others have of you when you confess your sins to them:*
- (d) *It will act as a deterrent against further sinning in the future. Anything that is so painful (and humbling) as restitution is, will act as a barrier against yielding to temptation in the future.*

8. *Forgive yourself and learn valuable lessons from your moral failures. Notes William Sangster: “Having accepted the forgiveness of God, don’t brood over the past. There are many people in the family of God who do not doubt God’s forgiveness, but they never seem able to forgive themselves. The memory of their sin lacerates them. It is hardly ever out of their minds. So, far from being able, as some are, to forgive themselves lightly, they seem unable to forgive themselves at all. Just like some unhealed wound in the body, this unhealed wound in the spirit drains their strength, hinders their progress, pours pus into the blood-stream, and keeps them in a state of spiritual invalidism.*

“God has forgiven you; forgive yourself. Who are you to have superior moral values to the Almighty God? Here are two things, which will help you to forgive yourself.

Can’t you see that your unwillingness to forgive yourself is a form of spiritual pride? What you are really saying, at the deep level of your mental and emotional life is this: ‘How could I ever have done that?’ (Note the stress on the ‘I’) ‘Me! A spiritual giant like me!’ Now, look! That self-hate is doing you no good...It is like poison injected into your veins. Accept the forgiveness. You cannot undo the past. God has forgiven it, and, if God has forgiven you, who can justly accuse you? That is the first thing: forgive yourself.

Here is the second. In some mysterious way – beyond your human fathoming – God can use sin...the God who is mighty in creation is also mighty in transformation.” (Daily Readings; pg. 71)

God will not allow anything in our past lives to be wasted. He can take even the Bad of one’s past and use it in the development of Good! One man, before

he was a believer, involved himself in deceptive practices and ended up in prison for several months. After becoming a Christian and after he was released from prison, he began a Christ-centered prison ministry which gained national recognition and acceptance! So, whatever your past sins are, confess them to God, and allow God to use even your past sins to bring about some good! Doing this helps you to learn to forgive yourself.

Simon Peter, after his dreadful fall into sin, wept bitter tears of regret and remorse. However, God's mercy made possible the forgiveness of Peter and, as a result, Peter was restored to dignity and usefulness. However, after Peter's terrible fall, caused largely because of pride and overconfidence, Peter forever thereafter maintained a spirit of deep humility and trust in Christ alone.

Allow your failures to help you to develop greater character in Christlikeness. If you have been lustful in the past, be notable for your moral purity now! If pride has been your downfall, let yourself be clothed with the 'garments of humility'. If stinginess has been a problem for you, then make generosity a way of life now!

Where you were in the past weak, you can now be strong. The eagle with a broken wing can be healed and can again soar high in the sky! The future for people who have failed can still be bright because of God's mercy and God's love and forgiveness.

9. *After you have accepted the forgiveness of God, and after you have forgiven yourself, "...then put yourself again under God's control and submit to His testing." (Bastian)*

Remember, what is from Satan's viewpoint a temptation is from God's viewpoint a test. God intends to use problems and troubles in life to produce steadfastness in believers. Christ-like character is achieved in the life of a believer through the testing experiences of life. When we look at temptation from God's viewpoint, then temptation becomes, not a stumbling block to defeat us, but a steppingstone to perfect us! Notes Barclay: "Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger, finer, and purer, from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use." (Barclay's Matthew; pg. 56)

Remember, all throughout life, we will encounter temptation. It was even so with Jesus. After Jesus successfully resisted the devil and overcame temptation, what does the Scripture say about Satan? "And when he (Satan) had exhausted every kind of temptation, the devil withdrew until his next opportunity." (Luke 4:13)

After you have overcome temptation, just remember that temptation will eventually return. Satan only leaves for a little while.

But also remember the benefits from successfully meeting one temptation:

***"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin.
Each victory will help you,
Some other to win."***

Expect continuing or periodic temptations, for Satan does not easily give up. But remember that, what are temptations from Satan's viewpoint, are tests from God's viewpoint. God will allow continuing trials (temptations) to come to our lives in order to perfect our character. Peter, in his letters, had much to say about the purposes of trials. "These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it – and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return.

- 10. *Accept without complaint the God-allowed consequences from your past wrong moral decisions (sins), but expect God to continue to use you even while you are suffering from the consequences.***

It is true that, as an on-going consequence of his sins, David faced serious troubles in his household for years, following his restoration to God. Even though God forgave David his terrible sins, there were some consequences that David lived with for many years. Internal rebellion, dissensions, and plots made life weary at times for David. However, in spite of the ongoing consequences, which David had to bear because of his past sins, David enjoyed restored fellowship with God.

When David confessed his sins to God, he cried out, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." (Psalms 51:12a) Joy that is lost because of willful sinning can be restored because of sincere confession and total surrender.

David further prayed, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." (Psalms 51:13) The joy which God gives to the repentant believer is combined with dignity, which comes as a result of God's willingness to use a restored believer in effective evangelistic ministry! "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." (Psalms 51:13) A person who personally experiences forgiveness and inner cleansing is equipped to help others whose experiential needs are the same as his own.

So, while David had to bear some of the scars of his past sins, David's future was not totally jeopardized by his past sins. Yes, David had to live with some

regrets because of the wrongs of his past. But David's fellowship with God was mended and his joy was restored. God continued to use David effectively, and no greater compliment could be given to any man than this: "He (David) was a man after God's own heart!" This shows us that, however bad our past has been, if we confess our sins and if we surrender totally to God, we too (like David) can 'turn our scars into Stars'!

Let me share a dramatic example of this truth. I once received a letter from a convicted man – a man who was a backslidden believer but one who had been restored to fellowship with God. I met him while having Wednesday morning Bible studies at the County Jail. Here is an excerpt from his letter:

"I was given a 32 year sentence in Fort Collins. It came as no surprise. My attitude was one of a fighter, knocked down but not knocked out. I've had the ultimate privilege of leading a young man to Jesus in this jail and the Lord used me in preventing a suicide, so I am not idle at all. I don't believe for a second that God put me in here, but I do believe He will use me where I am at. I turned myself in on all of this. I could not run from God any longer. Being right with God meant more to me than being physically free. I believe with all my heart I will be free again on the outside to lead a productive life, one that will count for Jesus, so while I'm disappointed in some things, I am not discouraged." (Personal letter, June 1987)

CONCLUSION: *What if you yield to temptation? Here is what to do:*

- 1. *Recognize the reality and the seriousness of sin.***
- 2. *Don't rationalize or deny your sins.***
- 3. *Accept personal moral responsibility for your failures and your sins.***
- 4. *Recognize that forgiveness is always costly.***
- 5. *Confess your sins to God, and repent deeply of your sins.***
- 6. *Accept God's forgiveness gratefully and humbly.***
- 7. *After you have confessed your sins to God - be willing, if necessary, to confess your sins to others.***
- 8. *Forgive yourself and learn valuable lessons from your moral failures.***
- 9. *Put yourself again under God's control and submit to his testing.***
- 10. *Accept without complaint the God allowed consequences from your past wrong moral decisions (sins), but expect God to continue to use you even while you are suffering from the consequences.***

NEVER FORGET!

"OUR GOD IS ABLE TO RESTORE THE FALLEN!"

!

Personal Spiritual Growth



PART II – EXPERIENCING THE DELIGHTS OF THE HEIGHTS’ – Spiritual Growth!

15.

"THE POWER OF PENTECOST!"

SCRIPTURE: *"In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This, he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:1-8 "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." Acts 2:1-4*

TEXT: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8*

INTRODUCTION: *Our Scripture reading tells us of a most significant happening in the beginning days of the Christian Church. The significance of Pentecost however is best understood, not in its historical remembrance, but rather in its contemporary relevance. Perhaps some of the experiences of that memorable day of Pentecost are not meant to be repeated, but there are some basic realities of Pentecost that are meant countless to be repeated in every age. It is these abiding realities which must capture our interest and attention.*

Let us ask the same questions of this historical event that any discerning reporter would ask of any news event: 'WHO?', 'WHAT?', 'WHEN?', 'WHY?'.

I. 'WHO?' – DISCIPLES. *Of whom was Jesus speaking when He said, "Ye shall receive power?" To answer this question we must look at the context of this verse – the verses which come before this verse. In verses 2 and 4, it is stated that it is the 'apostles' who were commanded to wait for the promise of the Spirit.*

Jesus was speaking to His own disciples when He told them to remain in Jerusalem. We can see from this Scripture that the promise of the Spirit's baptism is given to Christ's disciples. It is these very

men that were called by Jesus to be His followers. Look at Mark 1: 16, 17, 20 for an account of two disciples' call. "...now as he walked by the sea of Galilees, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him. The last verse refers to the call of James and John.

Luke 6:13 tells of the choice of twelve men out of many disciples. "And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." These twelve disciples were invested with special power. "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick." (Luke 9:1, 2) The men to whom Jesus promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the first chapter of Acts, are the same men that Jesus addressed as friends and considered as His chosen followers. Jesus addressed these men in a very intimate way, a short time before his death.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:14-19)

These men were not of the world. They were chosen out of the world to be Christ's men. Later they were appropriately called 'Christians'.

II. 'WHAT?' - PURITY FULFILLED PROMISE : *The question of 'What?' must be asked about this event of which we are seeking to report. The answer to the question of 'What?' is found in Acts 1:4. "And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." The answer is 'promise'. But to go a step further, we must ask the question, 'Promise of what?' This question is best answered from Acts 2:2, 3 which is the account of the fulfillment of the promise which was recorded in Acts 1:4. The Scripture says, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." One important answer to the question 'Promise of What?' is answered by 'Promise of Purity'.*

The cloven tongues of fire that sat upon the head of each disciple, is symbolic of the cleansing and purifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. But logically, we are compelled to ask, "Why should Jesus' own disciples and followers need to be cleansed?" "If they needed to be cleansed, what did they need to be cleansed from?"

In other words, "Is there any evidence that Jesus' own disciples possessed carnal traits and attitudes which needed to be cleansed away?"

BEFORE PENTECOST: *We must go to the record to look for any evidence of traits in the disciples' lives which needed to be purged and eliminated.*

Before Pentecost, there were times that carnal ambition was manifested among the disciples. “And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, what would be that I should do for you? They said unto him, grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? Be baptized with baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:35-38)

The disciples strove between themselves to favorably compare themselves to one another. Each strove for greatness and honor. “And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, the Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.” (Luke 22:24-27) When Jesus washed their feet at the Last Supper, he showed them by example what true greatness consisted of.

The comparative, competitive, and contemptuous attitude is what the disciples needed to be cleansed of. They fought for status, position, and honor. They loved to be served, but hated to serve. Each was too proud to bow to his fellow disciple. Their love for God and their fellowman was incomplete. They failed to realize that the lowliest of tasks ranks the same with God as the tasks that bring with them the most honor and recognition. We need to be cleansed from the same carnal traits as the disciples needed to be cleansed from. We need to learn the same lessons as the disciples had to learn. As Mrs. Browning had it: “All service ranks the same with God.” (Barclay John; pg. 133)

How greatly the disciples were changed after Pentecost. The opening pages of the Acts form a new chapter in the lives of the disciples. It is a chapter which is cleansed from carnal ambition and strife for positions and honor. It is a chapter which is aglow with the warmth of fellowship and mutual care one for another.

Look at the picture of the sanctified and purified church. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42) The disciples after Pentecost were Faithful, Harmonious, and Prayerful – characteristics that every vibrant and spiritual church must possess.

“And fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common.” (Acts 2:43) The disciples after Pentecost were Decisive in Action and United – characteristics that every vibrant and spiritual church must possess. “And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” The disciples after Pentecost were more compassionate – a very important characteristic in the life of every church and Christlike.

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” (2:46) The disciples after Pentecost were filled with Joy – a very important characteristic in the life of every church and Christian.

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, praise and thanksgiving were constantly on their lips. The Spirit-filled Church became a soul-winning Church. Before the modern-day Church will ever become a soul-winning Church, its members must be cleansed of carnal traits and become people who are Faithful, Harmonious, Prayerful, United, Compassionate, Joyful, and Thankful. These were the characteristics of the 1st century Church that made it effective and winsome.

‘Purity’ then is the answer to the question ‘What?’ Purity, however, is the negative aspect of the Spirit’s baptism, while Power is the positive aspect of the Spirit is baptism. The Spirit not only cleansed away the carnal traits from the lives of the disciples, but the Spirit empowered the disciples to live a victorious life, as shown by the characteristics which who have just described. We will discuss in more detail a little later the positive aspect of the Spirit’s Baptist – Power – but the important truth for us to realize just now is that cleansing comes before empowering.

WHEN? – AFTER WAITING, PRAYING, EXPECTING! The next question we should, as reporter, ask ourselves about this story is the question of ‘When?’ If the question of ‘What?’ is answered in terms of ‘the promise’ then the question of ‘When?’ should also be asked in terms of ‘the promise.’ “When was the promise fulfilled?” “Were there conditions that had to be met before the fulfillment of ‘the promise?’

We have seen that the promise of Jesus was the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. What were the conditions that must be met before this Baptism could be received? Again we must go to the record to find the answers.

WAIT ON GOD! Acts 1:4 says, “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me.” Thus, the first condition for receiving the promise of the Spirit, is to Wait. Throughout the Scriptures, we are exhorted to wait upon God and to still our minds before Him. “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say on the Lord.” (Psalms 27:14) “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.” (Psalms 62:5) “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalms 46:10)

PRAY TO GOD! Acts 1:14 says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” God is a Father who wishes to bestow good gifts to His children. However, as a Father, He wants His children to ask. Through prayer, the earnest speaker expresses his deepest longings to a loving Father. Prayer is the instrument by which the needy believer can tap the boundless and exhaustless resources of grace.

It is recorded that the disciples ‘continued’ in prayer. They were consistent and persevering in their prayer. The intensity of their desires is related by that important word of action – ‘continued.’ They were determined to pray until they received their answer. God always honors this kind of praying.

MUTUALLY EXPECT FROM GOD! The members of the Church of the Upper Room were jointly as well as individually cleansed, because their whole attitude was that of mutual expectation. “They were all with one accord in one place.” (Acts 2:1) The expressed desire of one intensified the desire of another, until the desire of each became the desire of all. The assembly of the Upper Room was an assembly of united believers who mutually anticipated the Spirit’s Baptism. Because they cherished

no hidden and inner reservations, God honored the desire of one and the desire of all. “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:4)

“WHY”? – POWER FOR WITNESSING! Why did Jesus’ disciples wait and pray in the spirit of expectancy? In order to be cleansed. We have noted the difference in the attitudes of the disciples after Pentecost, compared to their attitudes before Pentecost. Cleansing was important if the disciples were ever to be effective and influential. While cleansing was important, the cleansing itself was for a definite purpose. The Spirit’s cleansing was to make the disciples more winsome in their character and more powerful in their witness. The disciples needed Power as well as Purity.

What evidence is there that Pentecost made a difference in the disciples’ witness? To answer this, observe the actions of the disciples before Pentecost as contrasted with their actions after Pentecost.

BEFORE Pentecost Too often, the disciples were unstable, unpredictable, and unfaithful in their witness before the experience of Pentecost. One episode can serve as an example. “Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” (Matthew 26:35, 40) Peter denied his Lord and all the disciples forsook Jesus during His most needy hour in the Garden. The disciples were sometimes moody, despondent, and ineffective in witness.

AFTER Pentecost was a decisive event in the lives of the disciples which had far-reaching and permanent effects in terms of effective witness. Look at Peter after he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. He was transformed from a failure into a dynamic witness. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Man and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as a many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, “Save ourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:37-41)

No longer was Peter and the other disciples paralyzed by fear, but they were bold as lions. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (4:13, 19, 20)

Even in the face of persecution, imprisonment, and beating, the disciples did not lose courage. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men, and we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him’. When they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” (Acts 5:29, 32, 40-42)

What explains such a change in the disciple's attitudes and actions? "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:4) The Book of Acts is the account of how the promise of Acts 1:8 was truly and actually fulfilled through the lives of once-weak disciples. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

CONCLUSION: Do you ever manifest any of the same carnal traits that Jesus' disciples manifested before they were baptized with the Holy Spirit? Carnal ambition and status-seeking do not make for a beautiful, winsome, and effective Christian witness. Have you waited upon God in prayer in the attitude of expectancy for the Baptism of God's Spirit? Is your life cleansed of all carnality and do you experience the power of God's Spirit in witnessing?

Remember "...the promise is unto you and to your children". (Acts 2:39) Will you come just now to a loving Father who wishes to give to you the gift of the Spirit's Baptism?

COME TO HIM IN FAITH AND SURRENDER!

16.

**“SPIRITS MINISTRY TO CHRISTIAN –
‘Joy and Friendship!’”**

SCRIPTURE: *“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.” John 14: 18-24*

TEXT: *“I will not leave you forlorn. I am coming to you.” (John 14:18)*

INTRODUCTION: *Two of the greatest psychological and spiritual needs of man are a genuine sense of security and a genuine sense of acceptance. When one is insecure, he is plagued by fear. When one is rejected, he is plagued by inferiority. Insecurity creates misery and the opposite of misery is joy. Joy is a quality of life which is bestowed upon man as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Because God is a God of forgiveness, man needs no longer feel insecure, guilty, and miserable. Instead, man can know forgiveness which automatically brings joy. The Christian can know the joy which is undisturbed by adverse, external circumstances. Joy then is one gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Another gift of the Holy Spirit is friendship. This is good news for all men. Man needs to know that he is accepted, and he needs to know that there is One who will share his problems and his successes. Christ came not to condemn or to plague man with inferiorities, but he came to save and to bestow a sense of dignity to man.

Those are gifts of the Holy Spirit that all men need to know about. The one who is acquainted with the Holy Spirit knows the very joy and friendship of God.

Holy Spirit Gives Joy! *Said Jesus to His disciples, “I have spoken those things to you that my joy might be in you, and that your joy might be complete.” (John 16:11) To understand the Christian joy, one must see it in contrast to the joy that the world has to offer. The joy the world offers might better be called pleasure. Let us first try to describe worldly pleasure and then describe Christian joy.*

The World’s Pleasure Is Temporary And Dependent Upon External Circumstances. The man of the world depends upon his external environment to provide him pleasurable stimuli. Excitement and thrill are found in the situation itself, and thus the man of the world is at the mercy of his circumstances. The constant restlessness of many is explained in terms of trying constantly to find new and stronger pleasurable stimuli in one’s surroundings. The thrill of the world is short and transitory. The pleasures of the world give no lasting satisfaction, but instead leave an empty void and longing. To satisfy the recurring longing, the world has to find greater thrills and more intense pleasures. Each worldly thrill leaves it adherent dull, drab, and bored. Thus, life for the man of the world becomes a mere vicious circle of seeking new thrills and pleasures. When the sensual stimuli

no longer satisfy temporarily, life becomes cruel and suicidal despair sets in. (Law of Diminishing Returns)

Barclay comments on the vicious circle that sensual pleasure creates: “There is all the difference in this world between pleasure and joy. The Cynic philosophers in the ancient days declared that pleasure was the unmitigated evil. Antisthenes made the queer statement that he would ‘rather be mad than pleased’. Their argument was that ‘pleasure is only the pause between two pains.’ You have some longing for something that is the pain; you get it; the longing is satisfied and there is a pause in the pain; you enjoy it and the moment is gone’ and the pain comes back again. And, in truth, that is the way that pleasure works.” (Barclay’s Romans, pg. 218)

This world believes that pleasure is found through the escape of personal responsibility. To the world, an arduous task is unpleasant and should be avoided if at all possible. This philosophy explains the reason why so many shirk their responsibility when they are not seen by their employer. To many, work is just the opposite of pleasure.

The Christian’s Joy Is Lasting And Dependent Upon The Quality Of One’s Inner Life. Says Barclay, “The Christian is the man of joy, the Christian is the laughing cavalier of Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes sinner; and therein lies his joy. How can any man fail to be happy when he walks the ways of life with Jesus?” (Barclay’s John, vs. 1: pgs. 206, 207)

A Christian’s joy does not depend upon one’s external circumstances. Rather, the joy of the Christian life is found in the consciousness of a right relationship with God. The Christian carries joy with him and does not have to search for it within his environment. In fact, the Christian molds his own environment instead of the environment molding him. A Christian does not have to make a frantic search for some passing pleasure to stimulate him. The joy of God leaves no bitter taste or empty spot in the Christian’s life. It is full, complete, and lasting, and is not disturbed by the changes or chances of circumstances.

A Christian need not be disturbed by the irritations inconveniences, or limitations of life. As Barclay notes, “This Christian joy enables a man to accept even them with a smile. John Nelson was one of Wesley’s most famous early preachers. He and Wesley carried out a mission in Cornwall, near Land’s End, and Nelson tells about it. ‘All that time, Mr. Wesley and I lay on the floor’ he had my great coat for a pillow and I had Burkett’s notes on the New Testament for mine. After being here near three weeks, one morning about three o’clock Mr. Wesley turned over, and, finding me awake, clapped me on the side, saying: “Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer; I have one whole side yet, for the skin is off but on one side!” They had little enough even to eat. One morning Wesley had preached with great effect: “As we returned, Mr. Wesley stopped his horse to pick the blackberries, saying: “Brother Nelson, we ought to be thankful that there are plenty blackberries; for this is the best country I ever saw for getting a stomach but the worst I ever saw for getting food!” Christian joy made Wesley able to accept the great blows of life, and to greet the lesser discomforts with a jest. If the Christian walks with Christ, he must of necessity walk with joy.” (Barclay’s Philippians; pgs. 64, 65)

A Christian may be surrounded by unfavorable circumstances and yet experience the fullness of joy. How can this be explained? It is because joy lies not in the circumstances, but in the fellowship of the Divine Person and in the fellowship of fellow Christians. Rev. Wurmbrand, who was imprisoned for fourteen years because of his faith in Christ, experienced indescribable joy in the midst of his sufferings. How could this be possible! Says Rev. Wurmbrand, “I don’t feel frustrated to have lost

many years in prison. I have seen beautiful things. I myself have been among the weak and insignificant ones in prison, but have had the privilege to be in the same jail with great saints, heroes of faith who equaled the Christians of the first centuries. They went gladly to die for Christ. The spiritual beauty of such saints and heroes of faith can never be described.” (Tortured For Christ; pg. 26)

Christian joy is not found through escape of responsibilities, but it is actually found through accepting responsibilities. The musician would not be happy if he were given a similar piece to play after he had mastered a difficult piece of music. His joy is increased only when he is given an opportunity to master a more difficult piece. The athlete is given harder competition when he has mastered the easier competition. So it is with the Christians. After one task is successfully completed, God gives him the joy and challenge of accepting greater responsibilities. The Christian’s joy is found in a task well performed, regardless of the difficult circumstances surrounding this task.

Says Barclay to illustrate this point, “In his rectories address to the students of St. Andrews University, J. M. Harris quoted the immortal letter which Captain Scott of the Antarctic wrote to him, when the chill breath of death was already on his expedition: “We are pegging out in a very comfortless spot...We are in a desperate state – foot frozen, etc., no fuel, and a long way from food, but it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and our cheery conversation.” (Barclay’s Philipians; pg. 89)

The Spirit of God can take a dull, bored life and transform it into a radiant and joyful life. The Spirit can give joy even in the midst of sorrowing circumstances. Paul Rees cites the following illustration: “A typically empty, bored American sophisticate of the female variety became a transformed person. Someone gave her the clue to the Spirit-filled life. Her radiance, even when an accident robbed her of her husband, was phenomenal. Writing about a spiritually needy friend, she said; ‘I do wish I could share all the joy in my heart with her. She deserves it, and I have enough for ten people!’” (Prayer and Life’s Highest; pg. 79)

The world depends upon its environment to provide sensual stimuli, but the thrill of the moment is soon gone, only to leave a bedraggled and disappointed pleasure-seeker. A Christian’s joy is found through the consciousness of a right relationship with God, and through the consciousness of work well done for the Master!

The Holy Spirit Gives Personal Friendship! Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend. You are my friends, ‘if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I had made known to you everything that I heard from my Father.” (John 15: 12-17)

To properly appreciate the impact of this marvelous passage, we must realize that no other religion has ever claimed that its God could become a personal and intimate friend. Before we consider in detail this personal friendship with God that the Holy Spirit grants to the Christian, let us first note what other religions have said about man’s approachability to God.

The World’s Religions Deny The Possibility Of Personal Friendship With Deity. To pagan religions, the very idea of God becoming a man is unthinkable and impossible. This was so in ancient times and it still is so among pagan religions today. Barclay notes, “Augustine afterwards said that in his pre-Christian days he had read and studied the great pagan philosophers and their writings, and

that he had read many things, but he had never read that the Word became flesh." (Barclays John; vol. 1, pg. 44) Pagan religions consider that God is so far removed, that he is impossible to approach. God lives, so they say, in a world all of his own and is completely unconcerned and indifferent to the needs of finite creatures of dust. The pagan gods send their worshipers away in terror and shame. To think of a God who is loving and who is actually seeking man's personal and intimate friendship, is completely inconceivable to many in pagan religions. That God could look down on man in pity, mercy, and forgiveness and pagan religions. That God could look down on man in pity, mercy, and forgiveness and could fold man to His breast of love, is beyond the highest imagination of pagans. To think of a God who takes the initiative to seek the lost and to save the sinner, is a fact of which there is no parallel in any other religion of the world.

Even modern-day man finds it hard to believe that God desires to become a personal friend of man. Barclay says, "In one of H. G. Wells' books there is the story of a man of affairs whose mind was so tensed and strained that he was in serious danger of a complete nervous and mental breakdown. His doctor told him that the only thing that could save him was to find the peace that fellowship with God can give. 'What!' he said, 'to think of that, up there, having fellowship with me! I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with the stars! God, to him was the completely unfindable.'" (Barclay's Romans; pgs. 70, 71)

For God to become a man, let alone a personal friend, is inconceivable to anyone other than a Christian. Only a Christian claims that God has become a human being and can become a personal friend to man.

The Christian Religion Believes That God Became A Man And Desires To Become A Personal Friend To Man. "So the Word of God became a person, and took up His abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we looked without own eyes upon His glory, glory like the glory which an only son receives from a father." (John 1:14)

Said one about this verse, "It might well be held that this is the greatest single verse in the whole New Testament." (Barclay's John, vol.1, pg. 46) The God whom Christian's serve became a human being.

*"Little Jesus, wast Thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel to be
Out of Heaven and just like me?"
Barclay's John, vs. 2; pg. 186)*

In coming to earth, God did not rend the heavens asunder and blast His way into the earth to take His seat on a throne and to establish an earthly kingdom.

*Rather, God came to earth as a babe.
"They all were looking for a king
To slay their foes, and lift them high'
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry."
Ibid, pg. 186(*

God came to be one of us, to establish his home among the lowliest, and to care for the needy. The God of Christians had time for the poor, despised outcasts, as well as for the needy and dissatisfied

rich man. This God saved "a simple Galilean lad and lass from shame and humiliation: at a wedding in Cana. It was this God who rested in the warm abode of two sisters and a brother. This Jesus of Nazareth was the God-man who cared for "simple, homely things, and people." It was this God who entered the home of Peter and cooled the hot fever of his mother-in-law. This God befriended the lonely comforted the sorrowing, cheered the despairing, and lifted up the fallen. He cared for ordinary people and desired the friendship of the lowliest. He is a God who cares for the sinner and who even seeks the lost. In brief, He is a God of unmeasured love who desires to establish a personal, intimate friendship with man. In fact, this God loves each man as if he were the only in the world there was to love.

How different is the Christian's God of love from the pagan's gods of hate. "Rosita Forbes, the traveler, tells of finding shelter one night in a Chinese village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated man." (Barclays Romans; pg. 71)

The good news which every Christian has to tell is this: God the Holy Spirit seeks to become the divine guest in the heart of every man.

CONCLUSION: *Because the Comforter has come, every man is offered joy which source is God Himself. This joy is not temporary and incomplete, but it is permanent and satisfying. This joy is not dependent upon external circumstances, but this joy is internal and is the result of a right relationship with God. The joy that God gives is "unspeakable and full of glory." For the empty, dissatisfied, despised, or estranged person, there is good news: That news is that God has become a man and has shown that He is not hateful but loving, not condemning but saving.*

*"Teenager, are you lonely,
Do you need a friend,
Take Jesus as your Savior,
He'll go with you till the end."*

What goes for teenagers, goes for everyone. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28: 20)

**Discussion Questions For
SPIRIT'S MINISTRY TO CHRISTIANS – Joy and Friendship**

1. ***If a sense of security and a sense of belonging are two of man's greatest inherent needs, then how can the Holy Spirit meet these needs in the life of a sincere seeker?***
2. ***Give specific illustrations which demonstrate the truth of the following statement: "The constant restlessness of many is explained in terms of trying constantly to find new and stronger pleasurable stimuli in one's surroundings."***
3. ***Contrast and describe the difference between worldly pleasure and Christian joy.***
4. ***Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statement by Barclay: "A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces."***
5. ***If it is true that a Christian carries his joy with him rather than seeking it within his environment, then demonstrate how a Christian can mold his environment rather than the environment molding him.***
6. ***Why is it possible for a Christian, who is surrounded by unhappy and by unfavorable circumstances, to experience fullness of joy? Can you share a time in your life when you were unhappy and yet, at the same time, you were abounding in Christian joy?***
7. ***Tell how the life of a conscientious musician or the life of a disciplined athlete illustrates the truth of the following statement: "Christian joy is not found through escape of responsibilities, but joy is actually found and intensified through accepting greater responsibilities."***
8. ***In contrast to the pagan's belief that their many gods are unapproachable to man and condemnatory towards mankind, what is the Christian's belief regarding the approachability and the attitude of God towards mankind?***
9. ***Why do you think some Christians believe that John 1:14 is the greatest single verse in the whole New Testament?"?***
10. ***Tell why you believe the following statement is either an 'amazing statement of fact' or a 'gross overstatement of human wishful thinking': "The God and Father of Jesus Christ loves each person as if there were only one person in the whole world to love."***
11. ***Tell how you are daily conducting your life in such a way that the blessed Holy Spirit increasingly 'feels at home' in your heart. (Note Ephesians 4:30 and I Thessalonians 5:19)***

17.

**"RULES FOR HEALTHFUL LIVING -
'Rejoice Evermore!'"**

SCRIPTURE: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near". Philippians 4: 4, 5

TEXT: “Rejoice in the Lord at all times.” Philippians 4:4a

INTRODUCTION: The Christian life is a life of joy. If the Christian life means anything, it means a joyful life. It is Jesus’ desire that His followers be filled with joy. Jesus said to his disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:11) Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father, “And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” (John 17:13)

Comments Barclay, “The Christian is the man of joy; the Christian is the laughing cavalier of Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces.” (Barclay’s John, vol. 2; pgs. 206, 207)

Paul exhorts Christians to ‘rejoice evermore’. What should the Christian rejoice in? The Christian should rejoice in (1) Prayer, (2) Fellowship, (3) Suffering.

Rejoice In Prayer. Context Of Prayer *Historical Summary*. When we pray, we should thank God that we have the privilege of prayer. No longer does man have to pray to God through the intercession of a man, as was the practice in the Old Testament. Christians are not confined to any one time or to any one place in praying to God. Christians are not confined to any one time or to any one place in praying to God. The Old Testament Jews went to the temple to pray for it was there that they felt God’s presence dwelt. The New Testament enlightenment is that God is a Spirit and as such saturates the Universe with His Presence. Those who worship God must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. We can be thankful that we can pray to God at any time and at any place.

What should be the content of our praying? “George Reindrop in his book ‘No Common Task’ tells how a nurse once taught a man to pray, and in doing so changed his whole life, until a dull, disgruntled, and dispirited creature became a man of joy. Much of the nurse’s work was done with her hands, and she used her hand as it were, a scheme of prayer. Each of her fingers stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest and closest and it reminded her to pray for those who were nearest and closest and dearest to her. The second finger is used for pointing; those who teach us point to us with it when they would ask us a question; therefore her second finger stood for all her teachers in school and in the hospital. The third finger is the tallest and it stood for the V.I.P.’s, the leaders in every sphere of life, and in every party. The fourth finger is the weakest finger, as every pianist knows; and it stood for those who were weak, and in trouble, and in pain. The little finger is the smallest and the most unimportant, and to the nurse it stood for herself. That indeed is a lovely scheme of prayer.” (Barclay’s Philippians, pg. 17)

What Is The Concept Of God In Prayer! What is the healthy concept of God that one should have in praying to God? To experience peace through praying, one should realize that God is loving, all-wise and all-powerful. As Barclay said, “When we pray, we must always remember three things. We must remember the love of God, which ever seeks and desires only what is best for us. We must remember the wisdom of God, which alone knows what is best for us. We must remember the power of God, which alone can bring to pass that which is best for us. He who prays with a perfect belief and trust in the love, the wisdom, and the power of God will find God’s peace.” (Philippians, pg. 96)

One who prays much and who prays rightly is a radiant person. One who knew John Wesley well said of him, “He thought prayer to be more his business than anything else, and I have seen him come out of his closet with a serenity of face next to shining.” (Power Through Prayer, pg. 38)

REJOICE IN FELLOWSHIP! *The Christian's life is enhanced and filled with joy through fellowship. The Christian's fellowship includes his home, his Church and his God.*

FELLOWSHIP OF HOME. *The Christian should enjoy the fellowship of his home. The home is a sweet refuge in which every member can share burdens, joys, and goals. Where love binds the family together there is joy, regardless of the external circumstances. How meaningful and true is the song, "Happy The Home When God Is There".*

*"Happy the home when God is there,
And love fills every breast;
When one their wish, and one their prayer,
And one their heav'nly rest."*

FELLOWSHIP IN THE CHURCH. *The Christian should enjoy the fellowship of the Church. The person who is looking for a perfect Church will search in vain. People are imperfect and, therefore, every Church is imperfect, for the Church is the people.*

The Bible says, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24, 25) The Christian should desire to be with those who are like himself. In the natural world animals of like kind group together., birds flock together, fish swim together, bees swarm together, cattle herd together, beavers work together, and ants travel together. Why should not God's highest creations, men, worship together? God has made us to fellowship, and what better place is there for us to fellowship than at God's house periodically?

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

FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST. *A Christian rejoices in the fellowship of Christ. Barclay notes, "Marvin R. Vincent says that when Paul spoke of the Christian being in Christ, he meant that the Christian lives in Christ as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, and the roots of the tree in the soil." (Philippians pg. 14) Barclay well comments on the Christian joy, "The Christian joy is independent of all things on earth, because the Christian joy has its source in the continual presence of Christ. Two lovers are always happy when they are together, no matter where they are. That is why the Christian can never lose his joy, because he can never lose Jesus Christ."*

The Christian life should constantly be enraptured with joy, for the Christian's heart is the home of Christ. Christ's shed blood makes it possible for Him to shed abroad love, joy, and peace in the heart of the Christian. Christ is the Agent of man's Creation, the Redeemer of man's soul, the Source of man's wisdom, the Guardian of man's life, and the Hope of man's future. Christ is the all-sufficient Helper for all of the changes and the chances of man's life. Christ is called the Great Physician, the Loving Shepherd, the Faithful Friend, the Prince of Peace, the all-wise Counsellor, the Dependable Guide, the Tender Comforter, and the Merciful Savior. How glorious is the life of us Christians, for "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." (I John 1:7)

REJOICE IN SUFFERING. Paul was able even to rejoice in suffering. Paul was imprisoned in Rome for his faith at the time he wrote to the Philippian Church. Paul knew the kind of man Nero, the Roman Emperor, was. Nero was a cruel, cunning, bloody man who hated the Christians and eventually used the Christians as scapegoats. Despite Paul's realization that he might be awaiting eventual death at the hand of Nero, he was able to live a radiant and joyful life. Wrote Paul to the Philippians, "But if my own life is to be poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and I do rejoice with you all." (Philippians 2:17) Paul was able to seek to encourage the Philippians even while he was going through the trial of imprisonment.

WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN REJOICE IN SUFFERING FOR CHRIST? A person should rejoice because suffering willingly for Christ shows that love conquers over hate. Barclay describes that Christian love as follows, "Christian love is that unconquered benevolence and good-will which will never know bitterness, and which will never seek anything but the good of others. This Christian love is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; a victory of the will achieved by the help of Jesus Christ. It does not mean loving only those who love us; or those whom we like; or those who are lovable. It means an unconquerable good-will even to those who hate us; it means the power to love the people we do not like; it means the Christlike ability to love the unlovely and the unlovable. Herein is the very essence of the Christian life; and herein is that which affects us in time and in eternity." (Philippians, pg. 41)

Wurmbrand tells about one Christian who was sentenced to death by the Communist because of his faith. "Before being executed, he was allowed to see his wife. His last words to his wife were 'You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don't know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don't have bitterness in your heart because they kill your beloved one. We will meet in heaven.'" (Tortured For Christ, pg. 25)

Wurmbrand quotes St. Macary as saying, "If a man loves all men passionately, but says only about one man that him he cannot love, the man who says this is no more a Christian because his love is not all-embracing." (Ibid, pg. 34)

A PERSON SHOULD REJOICE BECAUSE SUFFERING WILLINGLY FOR CHRIST SHOWS THAT ONE IS FOLLOWING CHRIST'S EXAMPLE. If it is a joy to be identified with a great person, how infinitely greater it is to be identified with Christ, even in his suffering. Wrote Paul to the Philippians, "For to you has been given the privilege of doing something for Christ - the privilege of not only believing in Him, but also of suffering for Him." (Philippians 1:29) Barclay notes that "in the hour of his martyrdom in the flames Polycarp prayed and said, 'I thank Thee, O Father, that Thou hast judged me worthy of this hour.'" (Philippians pg. 18)

Wurmbrand relates an incident in a Communist prison camp that shows the substitutionary love of one who was glad to be identified with Christ in his sufferings. "One of the really great heroes of the faith was Pastor Milan Haimovici. The prisons were overcrowded and the guards did not know us by name. They called out for those who had been sentenced to get twenty-five lashes with a whip for having broken some prison rules. Innumerable times, Pastor Milan Haimovici went to get the beating in the place of somebody else. By this he won the respect of other prisoners not only for himself, but also for Christ whom he represented." (Tortured For Christ, pg. 21)

A Person Should Rejoice Because Suffering Willingly For Christ Is Confined Only To This Life, After Which Heaven's Glory Comes. Paul glimpse heaven's glory and this makes him homesick for his true and heavenly home. Said Paul, "For living is Christ to me, and death is gain. And yet-what if the

continuance of my life in the flesh would produce more fruit for me? What I am to choose is not mine to declare. I am caught between two desires, for I have my desire to strike camp and to be with Christ, which is far better; but for your sake it is more essential for me to remain in this life." (Philippians 1:21-24) Heaven lies beyond this veil of tears, and, therefore, despite the hardships of this life, the Christian can rejoice.

Rev. Wurmbrand maintained a glowing hope despite the sufferings and tortures of his ugly imprisonment. Writes Rev. Wurmbrand, "Around me were Jobs, some much ore afflicted than Job had been. But I knew the end of Job's story; how he received twice as much as he had had before. I had around me men like poor Lazarus, hungry and full of uncared-for boils. But I knew that angels would take them all to the bosom of Abraham. I saw them as they will be in the future. I saw in the shabby and dirty and weak martyr near me the splendidly crowned saint of tomorrow." (pg. 36)

CONCLUSION: *Christians should be the most joyous people in the world, despite the external circumstances that would seek to oppress the body and depress the spirit. Paul exhorted the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord at all times. I will say it again - Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)*

REJOICE *is the privileges of prayer. Prayer moves the hand of God and changes the world of men and nations. It is the Christian's joy to pray for loved ones, teachers, leaders, the needy, and weak, as well as for himself.*

REJOICE *in the privileges of prayer. Prayer moves the hand of God and changes the world of men and nations. It is the Christian's joy to pray for loved ones, teachers, leaders, the needy and weak, as well as for himself.*

REJOICE *in the beauty of fellowship. Rejoice in the warmth of the home; rejoice in the friendship of the Church; rejoice in the matchless love of Christ.*

REJOICE *in the challenge of suffering. Suffering willingly shows that love conquers hate. Suffering courageously shows that Christ's example is worthy of following. Suffering hopefully shows that faith's eye sees heaven's rewards.*

REJOICE *in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."*

18.
"RULES FOR HEALTHFUL LIVING -
'Be of One Mind!'"

SCRIPTURE: *"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, to help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:1-4.*

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

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

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

I. UNITY IS THE GREATEST CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH! *It is the natural tendency of any other organization than the church to divide into splinter groups, each contending for its own petty standards and opinions. None other organization has stood the test of time better or maintained its original distinctives more clearly than the church. Throughout the ages, it has triumphantly endured persecutions and stood strong against the threats, which sought to undo it.*

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

- B. WHAT IS LOVE? The highest type of love is agape. Let Barclay define it. “Agape, the Christian word, really means unconquerable benevolence. It means that no matter what a man may do to us by way of insult or injury or humiliation we will never seek anything else but his highest good. It is therefore a feeling of the mind as much as it is of the heart; it concerns the will just as much as it does the emotions. It describes the deliberate effort – which we can only make with the help of God – never to seek anything but the best, even for those who seek the worst for us.” (Barclay’s Galatians pgs. 54, 55)**

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

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

One cannot claim to know God if he does not love his fellowmen, for ‘God is love’ and he that would know God must love the same ones that God loves. John wrote, “If any one says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. It is this command that we have from Him, that he who loves God, loves his brother also.” (I John 4: 20, 21)

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. ***Love Means Humility. One man has noted that the chief causes of disunity within a Church are selfish ambition, personal prestige, and concentration of self. (Barclay Philippians, pg. 39, 40)) Humility is a trait that is cultivated in the lives of great men. It must be a quality that every Christian cultivates, if the Church is to be united. To prefer others before ourselves and to acknowledge that we are wrong in our judgement is necessary if unity is to be maintained in the Church.***

"Lord keep me from becoming talkative and possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject. Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong. Make me helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it does seem a pity not to use it all. But thou knoweth, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Amen." (None of These Diseases, pg. 138)

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

II. UNITY IS THE GRATEST POWER OF THE CHURCH. The course of history has been influenced and actually changed by the power of the Church. Wherein lies the power of the Church, first internally, and secondly externally.

A. The internal power of the Church is found in the unity within the Church as it is expressed through diversity of gifts. Paul wrote, "For just as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have we the same function, so, although we are many, we are one body in Christ, and we are all members of each other. Since, let us use them in mutual." (Romans 12:4-6) The diversity in gifts makes a powerful, unified church.

There are queens, drones, and workers among bees and ants, each of which have a specific and different function to fulfill in contributing toward a unified organization. There are different instruments in an orchestra, each cooperating to produce beautiful harmony. There are different voices within a choir, each contributing to the harmony of the unified choir. So it is in the Church. There are many different gifts, none of which seeks to display itself, but rather seeks to blend itself with the whole to make a beautiful church.

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

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

Comments Barclay on this passage, "The world cannot be evangelized by competing Churches. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be as fully one as He and the Father are one; and there is no prayer of Jesus which has been so hindered from being answered by individual Christians and by all the Churches than this prayer." (John pg.2)

Dick Sheppard, a great open-air preacher who spoke to people who were outside of the Church, declared that the greatest "handicap the church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians." (Barclay's Corinthians, pg. 209)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22) The world is seeking something which only the Church has. Are we, the Church, going to disappoint them? Will the world find in the church peace for its turmoil, joy for its misery, forgiveness for its guilt, hope for its despair, fellowship for its loneliness, love for its rejection, comfort for its sorrow, harmony for its discord? The world has a high standard for the Church, despite the world's seeming indifference to the Church. The world knows if a church is complementary or competitive saving or striving, compassionate or carnal,

united or divided. If love, joy, peace are dominating a church as they should be, there is no room for clans or cliques. The world hears too much of bickering, clamoring, fighting, and quarreling. Let the Church sound forth the harmonious notes of love, peace, and unity. Let all discord and disharmony be eliminated, and let only the sweet music of peace and joy be heard. The world needs the Gospel. Let us not fail to live up to the high standard the world expects of us.

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

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

19.

“RULES FOR HEALTHFUL LIVING – ‘Prefer One Another!’”

SCRIPTURE: *“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”* *Philippians 2: 1-4*

TEXT: *“In humility think more of each other than you do of yourselves.”* (*Philippians 2:3*)

INTRODUCTION: *The book of Philippians has been called ‘The Epistle of Excellent Things.’ It describes the excellent way of life. It has been called ‘The Epistle of Joy’. It teaches one how to maintain joy in all of the changes and chance of life.*

Philippians shows us the way to healthful living. Each of its great themes encompasses an area of life, the adoption of which leads to healthful living. What are the great themes of Philippians? They are Joy, Unity, Thanksgiving, and Humility.

It is this latter theme that we wish to investigate today. The reward for genuine exercise of Christian humility is health. Let us note (1) The Motivation For Humility, and (2) The Meaning of Humility.

I. MOTIVATION FOR HUMILITY!

A. CHRISTIAN ACKNOWLEDGES CHRIST’S SUPREME SACRIFICE.

There is no greater motivation for humility than Christ’s humility, which was manifested by his supreme sacrifice. Perhaps the greatest portion of Scripture that describes Christ’s sacrifice is Philippians 2:5-22, “Have within yourselves very form of God, yet He did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at, but He emptied Himself, and took the very form of a slave, and became like men. And when He came in appearance as a man for all to recognize, He became obedient even to the extent of accepting death, even the death of a cross. And for that reason God exalted Him, and granted to Him the name which is above every name, in order that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things upon the earth, and things below the earth, and that every tongue should confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2: 5-11, Barclay)

In this Scripture we learn that Christ surrendered his divine rights as God, to become a true man with all the characteristics of humanity, excepting sin. Jesus was truly man. This Scripture also teaches that Jesus was essentially and truly divine. In fact, while Jesus' humanity was real, it was only temporary and passing. Jesus' divinity remained. Jesus came from God, and was the God-man on earth, fully man and fully divine. And Jesus went back to God as the Divine Son!

It was Christ who emptied himself, giving up all rights to heaven's glory and comforts, to become a man. He came "...to pitch his tent" among man, to experience all that men experience. "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." (Hebrews 2: 16-18)

Christ was "...a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" whose heart was "moved with compassion" as he looked upon the needy multitudes. He cleansed the leper, restored the lame, healed the diseased, opened the eyes of the blind, delivered the demon-possessed, resurrected the dead, forgave the outcast, humbled the conceited, rebuked the hypocrite, taught the confused, comforted the bereaved, befriended the lonely, and called the committed.

Christ humbled himself and was obedient even unto death. He denied any rights of his own and was willing in the end to surrender himself to the cruel cross. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isaiah 53: 5, 7)

His heart was burdened for the sorrows of man. His soul was anguished for the sins of man. His body was broken for the forgiveness of man. The attitude of his entire life was, "not my will, but thine be done". He said on the cross, "It is finished." What was finished? The redemption of mankind. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (I Peter 3:18) Christ sacrificed his life in order to save mankind.

Christian Follows Christ's Sacrificial Example. Says one man, "The great characteristics of Jesus' life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation." (Barclay's Philippians, pg./ 47) Says the Scripture, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (I Peter 2:21)

Paul exhorted, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1)

What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? It means to follow Christ's sacrificial example. A servant must be like his Master. Therefore, a Christian must be humble. A Christian is willing to take a back seat as it were. Humility excludes all boasting, selfish ambitions, or personal prestige. The Christian asks not, "What can others do for me", but rather, "What can I do for others."

A Christian must be obedient, even if necessary unto physical martyrdom. Christ learned obedience through the trials of life. A Christian too must inwardly and constantly say, "Not my will but thine." Jesus said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14)

A Christian must renounce self. As Christ died to his own comfort and in the end died on the cross, so a Christian is one who has been crucified to pride, pomp, and selfishness. In teaching humility, Jesus said, "Your greatest man must become like a junior and your leader must be a servant. Who is the greater, the man who sits down to dinner or the man who serves him? Obviously, the man who sits down to dinner - yet I am the one who is the servant among you." (Luke 22: 26, 27) A Christian is to serve his fellowmen gladly and humbly, because Christ is the supreme example to follow.

II. MEANING OF HUMILITY.

In our discussion of the motivation for humility we have touched upon the meaning of humility. Let us now explore in more detail what Christian humility means.

A. CHRISTIAN PREFERS OTHERS BEFORE HIMSELF.

The Scriptures explain clearly what it means to live a humble life. Like the Scriptures define humility within the social context. "Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities. (Romans 12:3)

"Let your love be perfectly sincere...allowing one another to enjoy preference of honor...do not aspire to eminence, but willingly adjust yourselves to humble situations; do not become wise in your own conceits." (Romans 12:9-10) "Live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry yourselves." (Philippians 2:2-3) The essence of humility is love, manifested by practical and willing service to one's fellow.

B. CHRISTIAN POSSESSES A HUMBLE ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF.

It has been shown that unhealthy results come from striving for recognition and first place. The Christian life is a life of service, not striving. A medical doctor shows in a practical way the unhealthy results of selfish striving.

This doctor has dealt with students who have overly-striven for good grades, and as a result, rendered themselves unhealthy. One college girl who was in the habit of making "A's", began to slip in her grades during her senior year. She could not bear the thought of not being on the Dean's list and having the pride of recognition for good grades. She became tense and was unable to concentrate. She became an anxious over her grades that she finally was unable even to read. Thinking there was something physically wrong with her, she went to the college infirmary. She was diagnosed and told that her trouble was "somatic conversion systems" or, to put it more simply, mental turmoil. She was told that she needed more relaxation and play, and less striving for the all-important, elusive grades. Her selfish motives is merely competing for grades, had rendered her mentally unhealthy.

Dr. S. I. McMullen says that "The teaching of Jesus translated into college language is: Don't get your heart set on being a four-pointer or being on the Dean's List. Don't lose sleep over being selected queen, don't try to be the leader of any class, any committee, or anything else. Graduate work is necessary but don't 'lengthen the tassels' on your robes." (None of These Diseases, pgs. 133, 135)

Says Paul S. Rees, "The famous Kansas psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, 'was asked at a forum what he would do if he felt a nervous breakdown coming on. Perhaps the questioner expected him to say, 'I would go to a psychiatrist'. If so, he was disappointed. What Menninger said was, 'If you feel a nervous breakdown coming on, lock yup your house, go across the railway tracks and find someone in need and do something for him'. What lies beneath that advice is clear enough, is it not? Most cases of nervous distress grow out of preoccupation with ourselves." (Illustration of Minister who suffered Nervous Breakdown because of striving to be 'successful'. Wonderful peace came when he ceased to strive and began to trust God for growth.) (Prayer and Life's Highest; pg. 55)

Few there are who are willing to serve instead of being served, who are willing to follow instead of to lead, who are willing to play second fiddle instead of first fiddle. Timothy is paid a great tribute in the Scriptures. He was called Paul's son and helper. However, Timothy was willing to serve and not always to lead Christ's Church. Timothy is the patron saint of all those who are quite content with the second place, so long as they can serve." (Barclay's Philippians; pg. 60)

One girl who wanted very much to go to college was asked on her application blank. "Are you a leader?" Conscientiously but with fear that she would not be accepted into the college, she answered 'No' to the question. She was surprised like this: "A study of the application blanks reveals that this year our college will have 1452 leaders. Therefore, we are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have one follower." (None of These Diseases, pg. 137)

True humility means that a Christian prefers others before himself, and that he is willing to serve others.

C. THE BIBLE TELLS US NOT TO CHERISH EXAGGERATED IDEAS OF OUR OWN IMPORTANCE. WHY IS THIS?

1. ***Because A Christian Knows Who He Is. A Christian well knows that he is saved by grace and not by any merit of his own. (Ephesians 2:8) The Christian cannot boast for he knows that he is a sinner saved by grace. William Jay, of Bath, as an old man once said, "My memory is failing but there are two things that I never forget - that I am a great sinner, and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior." (Barkley's Romans, pgs. 51, 52) John Newton passed a long estimate of himself.***

*"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see."*

Said George Whitefield, as he was a criminal walking to the gallows, "There but for the grace of God, go I." (Barclay's Romans, pg. 176)

In recent years, a great revival has taken place among the East African Churches, the greatest feature of which has been public confession of sin. The natives took active part in public confession, but the Europeans stood aloft and wouldn't involve themselves in this part of the revival. One of the missionaries comments on this, "It is felt that to hold back from it is to refuse to be identified with the fellowship of forgiven sinners."

2. ***Because A Christian Seeks Only To Glorify Christ. Christian does not possess exaggerated ideas of his own importance because he seeks by his words and actions to glorify only Christ.***

The true minister does not seek recognition in his preaching, but rather seeks only to point others to Christ. Barclay notes the "Leslie Weatherhead tells of a talk he had with a public schoolboy who had decided to enter the ministry of the Church. He asked him when he had comment to his decision and the lad said he had been moved to make it after a certain service in the school chapel. Leslie weather head very naturally asked who the preacher had been, and the lad answered that he had no idea who the preacher was; he only knew that Jesus Christ had spoken to him that morning. That was true preaching; for he who serves Christ can never think of making others look at himself and praise himself; he must make them look at Christ. (Barclays Ephesians; pg. 147)

Christ is everything; he is all-important; he is indispensable. It is He to whom we must turn all of the attention of man.

"Toscanini was one of the greatest orchestral conductors and interpreters of music in the world. Once when he was talking to an orchestra when he was preparing to play one of Beethoven's

*symphonies with them he said: 'Gentlemen, I am nothing; you are nothing: Beethoven is everything.'" (Barclays Ephesians; pg. 147)
Christ is everything; we are nothing. A Christian seeks only to glorify Christ.*

CONCLUSION: *One rule for healthful living is 'Prefer one another' - "In humility think more of each other than you do of yourself." (Philippians 2:3)*

The motivation for humility is Christ's sacrificial love which he manifested by taking the place of the servant. Christ is the Christian's example. A Christian must serve his fellowman. Humility, obedience, and self-renunciation characterize the life of the Christian.

A Christian possesses a low estimate of himself, because he realizes that he is merely a sinner saved by grace. He endeavors to glorify Christ in his words and actions. The all-consuming passion of the Christian is to please GOD. The single-minded, humble Christian is a healthy person.

20.

"THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS!"

SCRIPTURE: *"Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* **Philippians 4:11-13**

TEXT: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* **(Philippians 4:13)**

INTRODUCTION: *Note the common concept in society as to what makes one happy.*

- (1)** *Emotions tickled, or living for thrills, with no enjoyment of simple routine - pleasures for a season - 'wine, women, and song' is the philosophy of happiness for millions.*
- (2)** *Lusts for food, sex (never had more of it and enjoyed it less than in our society, pleasures of all sorts (never had more things to do and yet society never more bored), power (forceful drive that only leads to jealousy, rivalry, and great unhappiness).*
- (3)** *Intellect challenged - greater universities and greater knowledge than ever before, but greater unrest and confusion of thought and disillusionment.*

PROPOSITION: *True happiness comes by being independent of the conditions and circumstances of life. To be happy 'in spite of' is to be a masterful man. How does this masterful life come?*

I. **FIRST, SEEKING TO CHANGE THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH NEED TO BE CHANGED AND WHICH CAN BE CHANGED.**

A Christian is not a complacent person, who 'buries his head in the sand' and fails to see the gross injustices about him. No true Christian can remain indifferent to social evils, when those evils can be abolished.

At one time slave trade dominated the economic life of Great Britain, and anyone who talked about liberty, social reform, and Democracy was simply ‘beating the air’. However, some godly men despised the very thought of humans being treated worse than animals, and they raised their banners against the slave traffic and finally cleansed England of this degradation. Men like Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce were men who could not be satisfied with the evil conditions of slavery in their day, Martin Luther King was a man of our own day who would not be satisfied with the gross evil of racial inequality, and, although it cost him his life, he peacefully and prayerfully and diligently sought to do something about the problem. Many others could be noted who did something about society’s evils. When Paul said that he had learned in all states to be content, he was not suggesting that a Christian be passive and indifferent to social injustices that could be eliminated. The happy man is the involved man – involves in helping people to improve their social, and physical, and spiritual conditions.

II. THE HAPPY MAN IS THE MAN WHO RISES ABOVE THE CONDITIONS, WHICH CANNOT BE CHANGED, AND DOES NOT ALLOW THE CONDITIONS TO CONTROL HIM.

Paul was such a man. Paul was cast into prison because of his faith in Jesus. To teach and preach and about Jesus was against the Roman law, so, although Paul could not change the Roman Law, he did not allow the Roman law to control him, and he did not allow the punishment which he incurred from breaking the law, control him. Paul rose above circumstances. The theme of the letter to the Philippians (which was written while in prison at Rome) is Joy. He says, “Rejoice and again I say rejoice. Have no anxiety about anything. Be thankful. Don’t become self-preoccupied or self-pitying, but rather look after the interests of others. Be glad and rejoice with me.” Instead of feeling sorry for himself, Paul is triumphant in spirit, undaunted and filled with joy.

Paul tells us the secret to his triumphant spirit, in spite of adverse circumstances. “Not to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance, and want.” (Philippians 4:11, 12)

There are few men who are content, in spite of their circumstances. How many men can say with Paul that he is content even when he is abased? What is it to be abased? It meant a lot to Paul: “They say they serve Christ? But I have served him far more! (Have I gone mad to boast like this?) I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me their terrible thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I was in the open sea all night and the whole next day. I have traveled many weary miles and have been often in great danger from flooded rivers and from robbers and from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the hands of the Gentiles. I have faced grave dangers from mobs in the cities and from death in the deserts and in the stormy seas and from men who claim to be brothers in Christ but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food; often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the constant worry of how the churches are getting along: Who makes a mistake and I do not feel his sadness? Who falls without my longing to help him? Who is spiritually hurt without my fury rising against the one who hurt him? But if I must brag, I would rather brag about the things that show how weak I am. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is to be praised forever and ever, knows I

tell the truth. For instance, in Damascus the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me; but I was let down by rope and basket from a hole in the city wall, and so I got away! What popularity!” (II Corinthians 11:23-33) And yet Paul could rejoice!

Who can remain contented what he is despised, rejected, and mistreated? “Can I suffer the need of food and clothing, can I be abased in my profession or office or work, can I somehow or another be put down and still remain in spirit exactly as I was before! What a difficult thing this is, to take a second place, to be hurt, to be insulted, to see others suffering in the same way, to suffer physical need or pain – to know how to be abased, how to be hungry, how to suffer need in some respect. One of the greatest tasks in life is to discover how to suffer any or all of those things without feeling a sense of grudge, without complaint or annoyance or bitterness of spirit, to discover how not to be worried or anxious.” (Spiritual Depression; 280, 281)

Paul also knew how to abound. Paul was first among the apostles, in terms of intellect, ability, accomplishment, energy, vision, and honor. Wrote Paul in II Corinthians 12: 2-9a: “I am anxious for you with the deep concern of God himself—anxious that your love should be for Christ alone, just as a pure maiden saves her love for one man only, for the one who will be her husband. But I am frightened, fearing that in some way you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to our Lord, just as Eve was deceived by Satan in the Garden of Eden. You seem so gullible: you believe whatever anyone tells you even if he is preaching about another Jesus than the one we preach, or a different spirit than the Holy Spirit you received, or shows you a different way to be saved. You swallow it all. Yet I don’t feel that these marvelous “messengers from God,” as they call themselves, are any better than I am. If I am a poor speaker, at least I know what I am talking about, as I think you realize by now, for we have proved it again and again. Did I do wrong and cheapen myself and make you look down on me because I preached God’s Good News to you without charging you anything? Instead I “robbed” other churches by taking what they sent me and using it up while I was with you so that I could serve you without cost. And when that was gone and I was getting hungry, I still didn’t ask you for anything, for the Christians from Macedonia brought me another gift. I have never yet asked you for one cent, and I never will.”

How difficult it is for some people to remain true to God, while abounding. “Some people can stand adversity who are ruined by prosperity.” (A.T. Robertson) Some people who fall into riches become very independent, and forget God. Some people who are advanced to a higher position in their work become power-obsessed or indifferent to subordinates.

The truly happy man is the man who remains content and sweet in his spirit, regardless of prosperity or poverty. That type of man is a wholesomely self-sufficient, independent man – not dependent upon circumstances for his happiness, but happy because of his inner relationship to God, regardless of the changing conditions around him.

III. THE ABILITY TO BE CONTENT REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES MUST BE LEARNED.

How did Paul learn such content? How did he become such a masterful man?

A. FIRST, LIFE’S EXPERIENCES TEACH US TO BE CONTENT. *Some of us may have to learn patience and contentment the hard way. The ‘thorn in the flesh’*

which Paul had to contend with produced surrender to GOD's will. Life's obstacles can either be our stumbling stone or our stepping stone. (I know of one dear woman who in her young married life wanted a nice new home, but she never got that new home. Now in older age those things have lost much of their attraction to her, for she has learned to place value upon eternal things. Life's experiences have taught her that true contentment is found, not in the world's possessions, but in a loving relationship with God. And what a beautiful person that lady is – she is my mother!)

The Scripture says, "We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have good and clothing, with these we shall be content." (II Timothy 6:7, 8)

B. TO LEARN TO BE CONTENT, YOU MUST RECONDITION YOUR MIND.

Learn to look at conditions and circumstances around you, from God's perspective. Learn to use Paul's logic which would run something like this:

- (1) Conditions are always changing, therefore I must obviously not be dependent upon conditions.*
- (2) What matters supremely and vitally is my soul and my relationship to God – that is the first thing.*
- (3) God is concerned about me as my Father, and nothing happens to me apart from God. Even the very hairs of my head are all numbered. I must never forget that.*
- (4) God's will and God's ways are a great mystery, but I know that, whatever He wills or permits, is of necessity for my Gods love and goodness. Therefore, my business is to look for this peculiar manifestation of God's goodness and kindness and to be prepared for surprises and blessings because 'His ways are not my ways, neither His thoughts my thoughts'.*
- (5) I must regard circumstances and conditions, not in and of themselves, but as a part of God's dealings with me in the work of perfecting my soul and bringing me to final perfection.*
- (6) Whatever my conditions may be at this present moment they are only temporary, they are only passing, and they can never rob me of the joy and the glory that ultimately await me with Christ. (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spiritual Depression; 284)*

C. To learn to be content, is to realize that your pleasure and joy is found not in things or in conditions, or even primarily in people (all of which can change quickly), but pleasure and joy is found always in the unchanging, faithful,

and loving Jesus. Therefore, to know true contentment, develop an intimate love relationship with Christ.

D. *To learn to be content, look constantly at the example of Jesus. Some people are only happy and contented if they feel successful in their work. Success in one's work is important and should be sought, but if this human standard were applied to Jesus, than humanly – speaking Jesus was not a success in his work. "Jesus cared little about success or failure. The story of Jesus is a story of apparent failure - rejected by His nation and crucified by the Romans, He ended on a cross. A faith that has a cross at its center cannot be a faith that worships success. I do not have to succeed: I have only to be true to the highest I know – success and failure are in the hands of God." (Abundant Living; pg. 82) Therefore, I must look at Jesus to learn that my contentment does not depend upon whether or not I am a success or a failure in the eyes of the world. My contentment depends only upon my being true to the highest that I know in Christ.*

E. *The contented life is the abundant life, and the abundant life is the life that can cope effectively with any of life's circumstances, and can make these circumstances serve your highest interests. Paul said, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) The better translation is this: 'I am strong for all things in the One who constantly infuses strength into me.' The secret to contentment is constantly experiencing the infusing of God's strength and energy. Many scriptures speak of God's might, energy, and strength which are imparted to the true Christian: Ephesians 1:19 – "Working of his great might"; Ephesians 3:7 "...gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power"; Ephesians 3:16 – "...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man"; Ephesians 3:20 "...power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think:"; Philippians 2:13 – "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"; Philippians 4:7 – "...peace of God...will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"; Colossians 1:11 – "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might"; Colossians 1:17b – "Christ in you, the hope of glory"; Colossians 1:29 – "Striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me"; II Timothy 1:14 – "Guard truth...by Holy Spirit who dwells within us."*

Some people complain about being so powerless in their Christian life, and yet they acknowledge that God is a powerful God and that the Bible speaks often of God's power. Some seem to fail to realize that this power of God is given only to those persons who are willing to cooperate with God in receiving this power.

Example: A house may be properly wired electrically, but there will be no light in that home unless one plugs into that power. The electrical power plant (with its immense generated electrical power) and the electrical power plant (with its immense generated electrical power) and the electrical

current available in the home, are of no avail unless the simple condition of plugging into that power is met. Every Christian must daily plug into God's limitless power.

Some people talk a lot about health or the lack of it. One need not talk a lot about health but can instead experience and enjoy health if the simple rules for good health are observed: (1) Have a proper diet, (2) Get sufficient and regular rest, (3) Regularly exercise, (4) Work hard but not strenuously, (5) Learn to relax and recreate and laugh regularly.

One need not talk about power or lack of power in his life, but can instead experience and enjoy God's power in his life, by obeying the simple rules for spiritual health: (1) Read, meditate, and assimilate the Word daily, (2) Maintain a quiet Time each day, and cultivate the attitude of prayer throughout the whole day, (3) Learn to listen for God's voice and obey it; (4) Learn to involve yourself unselfishly in the interests and needs of others; (5) Cultivate right thinking. "And now, brothers, as I close this letter let me say this one more thing: Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about." (Philippians 4:8)

If one obeys these spiritual health rules, he won't have to worry about spiritual weakness - lack of power - for power will be his spontaneously. "As thy day so shall thy strength be" - and that will make you happy, contented person.

21.

“THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT!”

SCRIPTURE: *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”* **Philippians 2:12-18**

TEXT: *“There is great gain in godliness with contentment.”* **(I Timothy 6:6)**

INTRODUCTION: *Our text says that godliness leads to contentment and such a life has great gain. contentment is a bi-product of godliness and not a trait to be sought within itself. To find contentment, one must live a godly life. There is great gain in godliness – to GOD, to self to the world of men. GOD gains a soul for his Kingdom, self-gains contentment, the world gains an example.*

The world of men wants contentment, but often the worldling fails to realize that contentment only comes through godliness.

No man can find a lasting contentment outside of a personal relationship with God, which relationship may be described in terms of a cooperative salvation. Salvation is both of God and of man. Permanent contentment is a natural outgrowth of this cooperative relationship, and contentment is the trait that marks the winsome person and the winning person.

I. PRINCIPLE OF CONTENTMENT – Perfect Trust In God.

Paul tells in one short phrase (which has two parts) what the essence or the principle of Christian contentment is.

"Do all things without grumbling". This word is used in a special connection with the rebellious children of Israel who were led by Moses across the wilderness. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness." (Exodus 16:2) Rather than accepting their circumstances, they bitterly complained and grumbled. Such grumbling issued forth from a heart of unbelief, and just as godliness brings contentment, so unbelief brings destruction. "Now I desire to remind you...that he who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." (Jude 5)

"Do all things without questioning." A life that has an absence of grumbling is a life that has an absence of questioning. Paul is not condemning a quest for intellectual understanding of GOD's will and purposes. Paul himself was an intellectual giant who questioned and questioned again the mystery of God's will, hidden in ages past but revealed marvelously to Paul. The principle of contentment excludes however any moral doubting of God's purposes or person. The life of contentment is the life of perfect trust in God's love, wisdom, and power. Confidence in God's love means no questioning of GOD's perfect good will towards the believer. Confidence in God's wisdom means no questioning of God's knowledge of what is best for the believer. Confidence in God's power means no questioning of God's ability to bring to pass what is best for the believer. The man who does not question God's person or providences is the truly contented man, and molds his circumstances instead of his circumstances molding him.

It is one thing to know the principle of contentment, and another to know the power to realize such contentment.

II. POWER OF CONTENTMENT – Salvation as Cooperative Endeavor.

The secret of realizing true contentment is found in the word 'Salvation'. Salvation is a cooperative endeavor between God and man.

Declares Paul, "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (vs. 13) The beginning, process, and end of salvation are of God. He is the Initiator, Worker, and Completer of man's salvation. God is at work in man, ever before man makes a move towards God ('prevenient grace' – the grace that goes before, persuading and stimulating a desire for God.) God is at work in man, imparting both the desire and the strength to do God's will.

Salvation is also dependent upon man's response. Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to cooperate with God for the salvation of their souls. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Paul reminds these Christians that obedience and earnest effort, born out of deep reverential fear of God, are essential ingredients in their final salvation. Fear of God comes from recognition of God's power and person, and issues forth in a constant guarding against disobedience and slothfulness. Contentment is the atmosphere of the obedient, God-centered heart.

III. PURPOSE OF CONTENTMENT – Witness By Character and Word.

The work of God in the human heart accompanied by man's obedient cooperation, (vss. 12, 13), results in a Christ-like character – the kind of character that influences the present crooked and perverse generation. (vs. 15) What is Christ-like character? It is the character which is described by three words, all found in verse 15.

***BLAMELESS** – a term describing the Christian in relationship to the world. Like as the world could not find blame in Jesus, so the world cannot find blame in a Christ-like character. In contrast to the world's crooked character, (vs. 15), the Christian's character is straight and upright. In contrast to the world's perverse and impure behavior (vs. 15), the Christian's character is wholesome and pure.*

***INNOCENT** – a term describing internal heart condition of the Christian. A Christian is sincere and pure in motive and desires. He is unmixed, unadulterated, and single-minded in purpose. “Purity is to will one thing,” said Kierkegaard. The Christian's sole motive is to please God. The literal meaning of the word ‘sincere’ in Greek means ‘sun-tested’. Among the ancients, the hypocritical sculptors at times filled the cracks of blemished stone with wax and painted over the wax to make the sculptured piece look perfect. Of course, when the sun shone on the painted wax, the paint peeled and the wax melted, only to expose the unguineness of the work. The Christian is to be genuine, without pretense or insincerity.*

***UNBLEMISHED** – a term describing the Christian in relationship to God. As the Old Testament sacrifice was required by God to be unspotted and without blemish, so the life and character and sacrifice of the Christian is to be of the very best caliber. The Christian is a specimen of maturing humanity. A mature man is a man who fulfills the purpose for which he was created (just like a perfect glove is one that perfectly fulfills the purpose for which it was made – fitting snugly and comfortably on a hand). Thus, a perfect man (Matthew 5:48) is one who is fulfilling the purpose for which he has made – fulfilling and fitting into the will of God. Such a man passes the scrutiny of God and is an unblemished man.*

Thus, the blameless, innocent, and unblemished man is the truly contented man, whose witness in the world is effective. Contentment is for a purpose – to show a contrast to the world's darkness (“Shine as lights”, vs. 15) – character and silent witness of Christian), and to show a contrast to the world's ignorance and distraction (“Holding fast the word of life”, (vs. 16) – message and verbal witness of the Christian).

IV. PEACE OF CONTENTMENT (vss. 17-18) – Rejoicing In Face of Death.

The contentment which God gives to the human heart is not subject to changing circumstances. It abides amidst the changes and chances of life, whether life brings plenty or poverty, honor or dishonor (Philippians 4:10-13). This contentment releases one from all fears and gives peace, in life or in death. (Philippians 1:19-26)

The scope of this contentment is shown by Paul's peace and rejoicing even in the face of possible death (Philippians 2:17-18). Says Paul, “Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” (2:17) ‘Libation’ was a very common heathen sacrifice in the form of a cup of wine which was poured out as an offering to the gods. Just as a lavation was poured out to the gods, so in an immeasurably greater way the lives of the Philippian Christians were being poured out on God's altar of sacrificial and faithful living.

Paul, who was in prison awaiting possible death for his faith, goes on to say that he would greatly rejoice if God asked him to 'our out' his own life upon the altar of sacrifice to God. Paul rejoices in the prospect of dying for Christ, which sacrificial death would be as a libation poured upon the present living sacrifice of the Philippians. Paul is not regretful but rejoicing, and asks others to rejoice in this prospect with him. "Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me." (2:18)

CONCLUSION: *The contented life is the life of perfect trust in God. This perfect trust in God is described in terms of salvation – a cooperative endeavor between God and man. God initiates faith in man, but man must obediently respond to that faith and consistently work with God to accomplish his salvation. The natural outgrowth of this cooperative endeavor is contentment – a characteristic that has great appeal to a distraught world. The scope of this contentment is seen in its peace in the face of changing circumstances, and in its peace in the face of impending death.*

22.

"THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY!"

SCRIPTURE: *"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in*

humility count others better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”. Philippians 2:1-4.

TEXT: “In humility count others better than yourselves.”

INTRODUCTION: The church at Philippi was very near and dear to the heart of Paul. The Church at Philippi was a healthy church, sound in doctrine and vigorous in action. But this Church had one major danger threatening it – the danger of disunity. Notes Barclay, “There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy Church. It is when people are really in earnest, when their beliefs really matter to them, when they are eager to carry out their own plans and their own schemes, that they may collide.” (Barclays Philippians; pg. 38)

What is the cure for disunity? The cure is humility. Humble Christians are cooperative Christians and cooperative Christians are united Christians. It is important to understand the motivation for humility and the marks of humility.

I. MOTIVATION FOR HUMILITY. Philippians 2:1 tells us the motivation for humility. Let us read this in a modern translation to better understand the meaning: “Now if your experience of Christ’s encouragement and love means anything to you if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy.”

A. “EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST’S ENCOURAGEMENT AND LOVE”.

Christians’ common experience of the indwelling Christ outright to stir the hearts of all to greater love and understanding, which results in unity in a group amidst diversity of ideas. “Christian love is that unconquered benevolence and good-will which will never know bitterness, and which will never seek anything but the good of others.” (Ibid; 41) This highest of all kinds of love is God-imparted and is an exercise of the will of man. It is not the kind of love that we know when we speak of ‘fall going into love’. Rather it is the kind of love that loves the unlovely and even hateful. If experience of Christ gives this kind of love for unbelievers, should not experience of Christ surely give love for fellow Christians? Christ’s love and encouragement within the heart will surely give motivation for humble acceptance one of another, creating strong unity in the Christian fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SPIRIT WHICH MEANS KINDNESS AND DEEP SYMPATHY. The Spirit is the person of the Trinity who sheds abroad God’s love in the heart of the believer. The Spirit binds man together and gives a sense of unity. He reveals God’s will and enables men to live a life of love which is the life of God. The indwelling Spirit creates an atmosphere of deep sympathy within the heart which expresses itself outwardly in acts of kindness. One of the greatest motivations for humility is the fellowship of God’s Spirit.

**“Gracious Spirit, dwell with me;
I myself would gracious be;
And with words that help and heal**

*Would thy life in mine reveal;
And with actions bold and meek
Would for Christ my Savior speak.”*

MEANING OF HUMILITY. *The Scriptures oftentimes exhort man to be humble, but the question before us now is ‘What does it mean to be humble, especially as it relates to the Christian fellowship?’*

HAVING THE SAME MIND. *Wrote Paul, “Complete my joy by being of the same mind”. Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:21) As one says in comment to this verse, “We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus; claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.” (Christianity Today; Sept. 11, 1970; pg. 8)*

Oneness among Christians excludes bickering over doctrine and practice, which always leads to disunity. The world which sees a fighting church pronounces a judgment of rejection upon the Church. Oneness among Christians does not mean oneness of organization or oneness of denomination, for if such were even possible, this would not guarantee true oneness of spirit and love. The oneness that must be among Christians can exist despite individual, organizational, and denominational differences. True oneness is oneness of spirit oneness of purpose, oneness of love.

HAVING THE SAME LOVE. *This is another characteristic of humility, and is very similar to having the same mind. Said Jesus, “Little children, yet a little while I am with you., ye shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, Whiter I go ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all man know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:33-36)*

That which convinces unbelievers of the reality of Christianity, more than anything else, is the exercise of love between fellow Christians. The mark of a Christian is brotherly love. We may at times fail in our love one for another as Christians, and still be Christian. However as far as the world is concerned, “If I do not have the love I should have toward all other true Christians, the world has the right to make the judgment that I am not a Christian.” (Ibid; pg. 7) One characteristic of humility is brotherly love expressed between Christians.

“The observable and practical love among true Christians that the world has a right to be able to observe in our day certainly should cut without reservation across such lines as language, nationalities, national frontiers, younger and older, colors of skin, levels of education and economics, accent, line of birth, the class system in any particular locality, dress short or long hair among whites and African and non-African hairdos among blacks, the wearing of shoes and the non-wearing of shoes, cultural differentiations and the more traditional and less traditional forms of worship.” (Ibid; pg. 8)

HAVING MUTUAL PREFERENCE FOR ONE ANOTHER. *The Scripture says, “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.” (vs. 3)*

Selfishness or selfish ambition is the opposite of humility, and selfish ambition always destroys unity in a Christian group. When people seek to advance themselves rather than the group, then disruption takes place.

Conceit or personal vanity and seeking for personal prestige always destroys the unity of a group. When people seek for personal attention and personal honor and display self before the group, then group harmony and solidarity is destroyed. The truly great men of the Church, far from having self-display as their aim, have instead had self-obliteration as their sin. “Carey was one of the greatest missionaries and certainly one of the greatest linguists the world has ever seen. He translated at least parts of the Bible into no fewer than thirty-four Indian languages. He began life as a cobbler. When he came to India, he was regarded with dislike and contempt. Once at a dinner party, a snob, with the idea of humiliating him, said in a tone that everyone could hear, ‘I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoe-maker.’ ‘No, our lordship’, answered Carey, ‘not a shoe-maker, only a cobbler.’ He did not even claim to make shoes – only to mend them. No one likes the ‘important’ person. Man ‘dressed in a little brief authority’ can be a sorry sight.” (Barclay Corinthians; pgs. 134, 135)

MUTUAL INTEREST IN ONE ANOTHER’S AFFAIRS. This is another characteristic of true humility. The R.S.V. says, “Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also to the interests of others.” Phillips puts it like this, “None of you should think only of his own affairs, but each should learn to see things from other people’s point of view.” (vs. 4) Do we seek to see things from other people’s viewpoint, or are we so self-preoccupied and close-minded that we are determined to live a life to ourselves, caring little or nothing about other people’s viewpoints or interests? Can we humble ourselves, as it were, to get into the skins of other people in order that we might understand them better? If we are self-sustained financially, are we willing to walk in the shoes of the man who can never make ends meet? If we are a white man, are we willing to try to view conditions as a black man sees them? As members of the Western culture, are we willing to try to understand the actions of men of other and different cultures? If we are young are we willing to see things from the viewpoint of the older generation, or vice versa? If we dress one particular way, are we willing to try to understand the viewpoints of others who dress differently? Example: Mrs. Turner on beach who closed the generation gap with long-haired youth – She sought to see things from their viewpoint). A wonderful characteristic of humility is open-mindedness and ability to listen, observe, and learn from others. We need not agree with all we observe or hear, but the least we can do as humble Christians is to try to understand why other men ‘tick’ as they do, why they act and react as they do. If the Christian should be open-minded and interested in the way the world thinks and views things, how much more should the humble Christian be open-minded and vitally interested in the affairs and viewpoints of his fellow Christian brothers?

One of the things which destroys Christian unity is concentration on self. “If a man is forever concerned first and foremost with his own interests, then he is bound to collide with others. If for any man life is a competition whose prizes he must win, if he forever regards life as a struggle to overcome, to surpass, and to conquer others, then he will always think of other human beings as enemies, or at least as opponents who must be pushed out of the way. Concentration on self inevitably means elimination of others; and the object of life becomes, not to help others up, but to push them down.” (Barclays Philippians; pg. 40) Never forget, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

CONCLUSION: *How can man be humble? Only through the indwelling Christ who stirs and thrills the heart, Only through the fellowship of the Spirit who gives sympathy and kindness to the believer.*

Such a humble man is most winsome, for he possesses characteristics that ennoble others: Love and concern for others which brings unity to the Christian group, preference for his fellow Christians (a

true servant, like as Christ), genuine interest in the affairs and needs of his fellow brothers. The practicing Christian is the man who is practicing humility.

23.

“THE FRUIT OF CHRISTIAN JOY!”

SCRIPTURE: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:22-24*

INTRODUCTION: *Writes William Sangster, “The fact that there is a cross at the heart of the Christian faith, and that following Christ involves some rigorous self-denials, does not alter – and cannot alter – this central truth: the fruit of the Spirit is joy...Tertullian said ‘The Christian saint is hilarious’...The summons to rejoice is sounded no less than seventy times in the New Testament...Honest men at Pentecost thought that the apostles were drunk, and, whenever the living water was burst fresh from the rock again, the same exuberant gladness has been manifested.” (Daily Readings; pg. 144)*

The Greek meaning behind the word ‘Joy’ “means ‘to be glad to the point of madness’. The joy of the Christian in this word is so vivid and so visible that he seems to be a man who has taken leave of his senses.” (Barclay)

“When Dr. Farmer, organist at Harrow, pleaded with the Salvationist drummer not to hit the drum so hard, the beaming bandsman replied: ‘Lord’ bless you, sir, since I’ve been converted, I’m so happy, I could burst the blooming drum’.” (Sangster; Ibid) The man who has Christ is ‘on tiptoe with Joy’. It is not a high that lets you down, but a high that is natural and deep!

What a contrast there is between ‘Happiness’ and ‘Joy’. “Pleasure comes through things and by our senses. Happiness comes from people through our fellowship with them. But Joy is a gift of God through the Spirit and it comes by means of Jesus Christ. When Paul and Silas were in the Philippian Jail there was no pleasure (for they were beaten with rods), and there was no happiness (they were alone and away from the warm fellowship of their friends). But they did sense great JOY because of their awareness of what God had done for them, what God was doing for them, and what God would in the future do for them.” (Catalyst tape)

Writes Sangster regarding the difference between worldly pleasure and Christian Joys.

WORLDLY PLEASURES

CHRISTIAN JOYS

<i>1. Depends on circumstances</i>	<i>1. Completely independent of health or circumstances</i>
<i>2. Come and go.</i>	<i>2. Joy of God is constant.</i>
<i>3. Pleasures satiate. Revulsion sets in.</i>	<i>3. Joy never satiates. Joy rises to rise. Deeply Satisfying.</i>
<i>4. Always remains superficial. It exists only by ignoring the hard unanswered questions of life.</i>	<i>5. Joy is deep. It bubbles up even amidst life’s difficult questions, and life’s recurring troubles!</i>

PROPOSITION: *Joy is experienced, not by seeking it, but by seeking Christ and investing oneself in the interests of others. Joy comes by the realization of what God has done for one in the past, what God is doing in the present, and what God will do for one in the future.*

I. JOY COMES FROM REALIZING WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR ONE IN THE PAST.

The sin of one's past is what destroys one's joy. There are several things one can do with sin.

- A.** *One can try to rationalize the sin of one's past. That is, make excuses for one's sin and attempt to minimize its seriousness. There are those who say that their past sins were not as bad as someone else. That may be true but only God is our standard of righteousness, not other people. To compare ourselves favorably with other people whose sins are more obvious than ours, is futile and does not get rid of our problems.*

All need forgiveness – both the moral and the immoral. “The thing that is deeply wrong with human nature is not that some people commit adultery, and some steal, but that ALL of us are self-centered – the decent and the indecent, the nice and the nasty. Manners, polish, refinement, and culture only cover that disease...they can't affect the deadly disease underneath.” (Sangster's Daily Readings: pg. 228)

- B.** *One can try to suppress the sin of one's past. But to suppress sin is to drive it further into the subconscious to do great harm within. Wrote one medical doctor, “The night I asked God, for Christ's sake, to forgive my sins, I was weighed down with a sense of guilt and fear. After a few moments of confession and forsaking of sin, the guilt and fears vanished, and a miraculous, heaven-sent joy filled my mind. Instead of long-continued expensive trips to heaven – sent joy filled my mind. Instead of long-continued and expensive trips to a psychiatrist's couch to get rid of a disease-producing guilt complex, I made one trip to God's altar and got rid of guilt itself.” (None of these Diseases; 98)*

There are those who deny the presence of real guilt, and say that what people 'imagine' to be real guilt is simply guilt feelings or guilt impulses. Some psychiatrists say that guilt feelings or anxiety feelings are caused because a person secretly wants to commit certain acts but dares not because of parental or societal restrictions. But “the alternative view is that anxiety comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not, but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not. It is, in other words, a 'guilt theory' of anxiety rather than an 'impulse theory.’” (The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion by O. Hobart Mowrer; pg. 26)

- C.** *One can try to ignore or deny the sin of one's past. But this attempt also destroys one's joy in living. The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out”.*

- D.** *One can confess his past sins and find real joy in living. David, who had sinned grievously against His God, confessed his sins and found joy restored. “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities...Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” (Psalms 51: 8, 9, 12a)*

What joy and relief to know that one's sinful past is completely forgiven and wiped clean. “Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.” Guilt is gone; Sin will never be remembered against you again. As far as the East is from the West, so far has God

removed your transgressions from you. Your sins are hid in the sea of God's forgetfulness. There is no sin in the past that haunts your present.

II. JOY COMES FROM REALIZING WHAT GOD IS DOING FOR ONE IN THE PRESENT.

Joy comes when one realizes that God has forgiven the past. Joy also comes when one realizes that God is actively at work in one's life presently, moment by moment. God is constantly at work in us to perfect us and to bring us more and more into conformity to the will of God. Every day we are becoming more like Jesus, and God is preparing us more and more for the soon coming of His Son. Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. Each day there are new thrills in living the Christian life. God has surprises around every corner for the Christian.

At age 83, veteran missionary E. Stanley Jones wrote, "The best that I can say about myself is that I'm a Christian-in-the-making. Not yet 'made', but only in the making at eighty-three. And I'm glad I am not 'made', for there is joy and anticipation in 'being made.' A great philosopher said: 'If I held Truth captive in my hand, I would let it go, that I might pursue it again.' A girl, recently in the Kingdom said, 'I like the person I'm becoming'. I do too. For the 'becoming' is a part of the joy." (Accents: pg. 17)

He continues: "Every stage of being is a stage of becoming. It is open-ended. I have been ascending, am ascending and shall forever be ascending. I believe that heaven is a place of growth, the finite forever approaching the infinite but never becoming that infinite." (Ibid; pg. 188)

"A Hindu said to me one day: 'Jesus has got into your blood, hasn't He?' I replied, 'Yes, he has, and he has raised my temperature.' Not into fever where you have to come down to become well again, but into a normal that is high. I'm on a gentle, continuous up."

God is constantly working in our lives to perfect our character. God does this in several ways:

- (1) The Lord disciplines us: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's disciplines. The person He loves and He punishes. He receives.' He does it for our benefit, so that we may share in His holiness. Of course, no discipline seems at the time enjoyable, but it seems painful; later on, however, it affords those schooled in it the peaceful fruitage of an upright life." (Hebrews 12: 5, 6, 10, 11)*
- (2) The Lord permits life's trials to perfect our character: "Consider it complete joy, my brothers, when you become involved in all sorts of trials, well aware that the testing of your faith brings out steadfastness. But let steadfastness have full play, so that you may be completed and rounded out with no defects whatever." (James 1: 2-4)*
- (3) Confession of personal mistakes and sins to God and to one another results in cleansing and perfecting of our character: Says Jones: "There is always a fresh start possible. It begins by saying, 'I am wrong; I must, and will, change. You feel cleansed by the very confession. Without that note of willingness to confess to being wrong, there is - and cannot be - any progress. People who are always right are always wrong - wrong by their*

very attitude of being always right. No amendment, no attainment." (Accents; pg. 17, 18) "There is a perpetual, personal love to which I can return when I stray in thought or attitude or deed." (Ibid; pg. 23)

The fact that God is working in our lives constantly to perfect our character through (1) Discipline, (2) Trials, (3) Our confessions to God and to others, should give us considerable JOY. God is constantly working in the present – should give us great joy. Jesus is the God who is with us always, working to bring to completion (over a lifetime) what He has begun within us.

- (4) *Present sense of God's Joy in life. "The places where we are told to 'rejoice, and again I say rejoice' are meant to have times of fulfillment HERE, as well as in the future. The total equalizing of fulfillment is coming, but we are not to turn away from the joys which the Lord gives us here, any more than we are to spend our whole lives on self-centered pursuits. Putting the Lord first and the sensitivity for being ready to meet other people's needs are all bound up with learning something of the richness of capacity for enjoyment which the Lord has given us. The fact that we can taste, smell, hear, feel, touch, think, love, have ideas, make things we can think of making, communicate in a variety of ways that God has made the world with a variety of things to satisfy these capacities. There is sufficient evidence that He means us to enjoy a variety of pleasures and fulfillments. The 'endure hardship' admonitions do not cancel the rounded-out need to accept the beauty He has made possible and also to provide beauty in every possible way for other people.": (Affliction; pgs. 249, 250 by Edith Schaeffer)*

Those who see Christianity as a list of demands, will be driven to negative despair, but those who see Christianity as a reservoir of limitless resources will be leaping with positive joy! We are children of the Heavenly Father who know us well and who has declared life as positive and good! It is "ours to run out and embrace life and know with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air that the first thing about life is to enjoy it. 'It is your Father's good pleasure', said Jesus 'to give you the Kingdom.'" (Sangster's Secret of Radiant Life; pg. 109)

III. JOY COMES FROM REALIZING WHAT GOD IS GOING TO DO FOR ONE IN THE FUTURE. *Regardless of how dark the present circumstances may sometimes seem, the future for the believer is bright with joyful prospects. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." How heavenly to have God's constant presence! That is the source of perpetual joy. The more we entertain thoughts of Jesus and His Word throughout our daily routine, the more our life will be filled with joy.*

- A. *Future Sense of God's Joy In Life. Notes J. I. Packer, in his book 'I Want to Be A Christian', "Christians get so hung up with the pagan idea (very dishonoring to God, incidentally) that God's will is always unpleasant, so that one is rather a martyr to be doing it, that they hardly at first notice how their experience verifies the truth that in Christian living duty and delight go together. But they do! And if you think about your present life you will find it*

so! And it will be even clearer in the life to come. To give oneself to hallowing God's name as one's life-task means that living, though never a joy ride, will become increasingly a JOY ROAD. Can you believe that? Well, the proof of the pudding is in the eating! Try it, and you will see.” (Quoted from Bookshorts, Aug. 1979, pg. 84)

For Jesus is such a Joyous Companion. “As He comes into us, other people will be drawn to us because He is literally the most attractive Being in the universe.” (Sangster's Daily Reading; pg. 194)

The Joyful Companion of life will lighten every burden, for the burden of Christ is the believer's blessing, and the yoke of Christ is the believer's yearning.

In E. Stanley Jones' autobiography (written when he was 83), he says, “Life to me has not been a struggle. It has been, and is, a Song. The struggle has been only when I have departed from His Way.”

Heaven is a glorious future hope for the true believer. Every believer is going to see Jesus, face to face. All tears will be wiped away. He will receive a new resurrected body, and will reign with Christ, with all evil destroyed. We will grow eternally and work tirelessly for Christ in the eternal Kingdom.

Of those who have reached Heaven's home, C. S. Lewis writes, “The dream is ended: this is the morning...” “All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been between the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” (Quote from the Last Battle as quoted in 'Christianity Today'; April 11, 1975; pg. 19) “It has not entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who know the Lord.”

CONCLUSION: *Do you want Joy unspeakable and full of glory? Then do not seek joy, but seek Christ. It is Christ's presence and Christ's forgiveness and involvement in Christ's work which gives joy, real joy. “If you want joy, real joy, let Jesus come into your heart.” Confess the sins of your past, commit the interests of your present, and release the fears of the unknown future to Christ. Then joy will flood into your life. As we keep our eyes on Jesus and our hands outstretched to meet the deep needs of others, we will find a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Look daily for the Lord and enjoy the present experiences, be they ever so common. “God is constantly seeking to meet us in the common and unexpected moments of life. He does not wait for what we are pleased to call the ‘grand moments’ but He will make the common place the grand. We walk about blind to the glory that is around us because we do not expect to find it there. We mortgage the joys of the present, the quiet homely joys of humdrum days, to our anticipations of some distant time of overwhelming happiness of a kind that never comes to most people. Joy is all around us if we would only learn to see it in common things.” (William Sangster)*

***Open Your Life Anew To The God Of All Joy,
And Your Life Will Be ‘On Tiptoe With Joy’.***

24.

"LIVING THE BALANCED LIFE!"

TEXT: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." (Psalms 32:8)

INTRODUCTION: Living the Christian life involves a sense of balance and moderation. It means avoiding all extremes and excesses and walking in the middle of the road, there are many side roads which lead one astray into some type of excess. We must guard against going to the left or to the right.

Let us look at extremes that must be avoided if we are successfully to live the balanced Christian life. In looking at various characteristics, it is not a case of 'either-or' but 'both - and'.

I. MAN OF INTROSPECTIVE HONESTY - MAN OF EXTROVERTIVE WITNESS.

The Psalmist cried out, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalms 139:23, 24) Because it is out of the heart that a man speaks, the heart is what needs daily examination. If the heart is wrong, all of life is wrong. Jesus made it clear that it is the motives, thoughts, and intents that shall praise, or condemn, a man in the end.

Take heed to the writer of Proverbs: "Above all that you guard, watch over your heart, for out of it are the sources of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Wrote Paul, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves." (II Corinthians 13:5)

The great Christians of history have taken daily and personal inventory of their lives. Taking an honest look at ourselves daily will keep us from falling into the trap of self-deception. "The synod of the Church in Uganda drew up the following four tests by which a man may examine himself and test the reality of his own Christianity".

- (1) Do you know salvation through the Cross of Christ?**
- (2) Are you growing in the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer, meditation and the knowledge of God?**
- (3) Is there a great desire to spread the Kingdom of God by example, and by preaching and teaching?**
- (4) Are you bringing others to Christ by individual searching, by visiting, and by public witness?" (Barclays Corinthians, pg. 279)**

Introspective honesty is very important, but to become overly introspective can lead one to discouragement and despair. The purpose of introspective inspection is to enable a Christian to be a man of greater extroversive witness. Jesus commands his followers to be his representatives in the world of men. A Christian is not to be of the world but he is to do his greatest work in and among the world of men.

"He has no hands but our hands

To do His work to-day:

He has no feet but our feet

To lead men in His way:

He has no voice but our voice

To tell man how He died:

He has no help but our help

To lead them to His side."

Love is the ruling motive of the true Christian. One cannot love God without loving his fellowmen. This love is not theoretical but practical. In her study of the early Methodists Dr. Alice Tenney observes: "Perfect Love operates in two directions: vertically, toward God, horizontally toward man, Early Methodists really loved men. They did not sign a check for Community Chest Drives; they went into dirty garrets and nursed sick old women. Even noblemen did that sort of thing, denying themselves luxuries in order to do it. It gets right down among the needy, the evil, even the criminals, and showed them what real friendship and compassion are. People still need friends more than clothing. More than money, they need the News that inner resources are theirs for the asking. The usual social worker knows nothing about this. A twenty dollars a week contribution leaves the hungry essentially as hungry as before, for the heart is still starving. If Love could be allowed to work in the world today among the Great Hungry here and overseas, as it was released by the Methodist Revival, the ground work for world change would be laid." (Living in Two Worlds; pgs. 112, 113)

Thus, living the balanced Christian life means being both a man of introspective honesty and a man of extroversive witness. It is not 'either-or' but 'both-and'.

II. MAN OF DOCTRINE – MAN OF CHARACTER.

A Christian is a man of doctrine. He knows what he believes. He is ready to give an account of what he believes to any man. He knows what truly Christian doctrine is and what heretical doctrine is. Paul wrote, "Be ready at any time to give a quiet and reverent answer to any man who wants a reason for the hope that you have within you". (I Peter 3:15) Paul exhorted the Colossians, "Learn how to give a proper answer to every questioner". (Colossians 4:6b) Paul exhorted Christians to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints". (Jude 3b) Paul described the mature Christian as one who is stable and steadfast even amid the storms of heretical teaching. Wrote Paul, "We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching and the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head." (Ephesians 4:14, 15)

While it is true that a Christian is to be a man of doctrine, it is also true that a Christian is to be a man of character. The Christian is to be a man of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance, and self-control. It is possible to be very orthodox in doctrine and yet be quite unattractive in character. It is possible to contend for Christian doctrine and to be quite unloving with those with whom you differ. There are those who can be fiery hot in their contention for Christian doctrine, but who can strangely remain rather icy I their response to human need around them. Such should take heed to Paul's words: "If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all". (I Corinthians 13:2) It was said of one, "Your life speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you are saying."

***"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear'
And the best of all the preachers are the man who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs."
(Words of Life by Edgar Guest; pg. 128)***

III. MAN OF PRAYER – MAN OF ACTION.

A Christian is a man of prayer. Jesus "spake a parable unto them to this end that men ought always to pray and not to faint". (Luke 18:1) Wrote Paul, "Give yourselves wholly to prayer and entreaty; pray on every occasion in the power of the Spirit. To this and keep watch and persevere, always interceding for all God's people." (Ephesians 6:18) It is not just a motto but also a statement of fact: "More is wrought through prayer than this world dream of." It is true that prayer has preceded every spiritual awakening. No significant spiritual progress can take place independent of prayer. Those men who have been most influential in God's Kingdom have been those who have known the power of prayer. Prayer is the golden key for the bending knee. It is the greatest power in the universe, and therefore Christians ought "to pray without ceasing".

However, a Christian is also a man of action. It is good for us to realize as E. Stanley Jones reminds us, "God answers the prayer, not for you, but with you. The answering of prayer is a cooperative endeavor." (Abundant Living; pg. 230) "It is said that Martin Luther was close friends with another monk. The other monk was as fully persuaded of the necessity of the

Reformation as Luther was. Therefore, they made an arrangement. Luther would go down into the world and fight the battle there; the other monk would remain in his cell praying all the time for the success of Luther's labors. However, one night the monk had a dream. In it, he saw a single reaper engaged on the impossible task of reaping an immense field unaided and alone. The lonely reaper turned his head and the monk saw his face, and it was the face of Martin Luther; and he knew that he must leave his cell and leave his prayers and go to help it is, of course. True that there are some who, because of age or bodily weakness, can do nothing other than pray' and their prayers are indeed strength and a support. But if any normal person thinks that prayer can be a substitute for effort, then his prayers are merely a way of escape. Prayer and effort must go hand in hand." (Barclay James; pg. 91)

IV. NOT A MAN OF EASY BELIEVISM – BUT A MAN OF SIMPLE FAITH.

What is easy believism? Simply an intellectual assent without heart consent to the claims of Christ. There are many who advocate that if one simply says a creed to the effect, "I believe in Christ" that he immediately becomes a Christian. There are those who would never deny the historical existence of Jesus, and thus they say they believe in Christ. Such belief is little better than saying, "I believe in George Washington. There are those who say, "I believe in democracy", but many who make that claim would never be willing to fight and die for democracy. Many would rather be "red than dead". Many who claim to be Christians have no real understanding of what makes a person a Christian – commitment. Thus, there are many nominal Christians whose lives are not lived in conformity to Christ. Instead, they are living disobediently and carelessly, giving little heed to the commandments of God. Such easy believism only perpetuates antinomianism among professing Christians.

However, in refuting, easy believism, the Christian must be careful not to fall into the trap of legalism. The Christian is a man of simple faith. He does not encumber people with rules and regulations and extra requirements in becoming a Christian. He is not complex, prohibitive, in his presentation of Christianity. He believes that simple faith accompanied by repentance, is all that is necessary in becoming a Christian. The true Christian does not require more of the sinner than what God requires of the sinner. To expect the sinner to agonize so long in prayer, or to manifest certain kinds of emotion, or to give up certain practices within a certain time limit, or to adopt certain standards and convictions, is to expect more of the sinner than what God Himself expects of the sinner. A matter-of-fact, confession of faith, accompanied with little visible emotion, is just as real as a confession of faith, accompanied with great deal of visible emotion. A Christian is a man of simple faith – neither an antinomian nor a legalist.

V. MAN OF GRACE FIRST – MAN OF GIFTS SECOND.

In the Corinthian Church, there were those who highly converted the gift of speaking in tongues. "It was a generous gift. For one thing, it was abnormal and was greatly admired and therefore the person who possessed it was very liable to develop a certain spiritual pride in his gift." (Barclays Corinthians; pg. 142) There are those yet who are more interested in developing, displaying a spectacular and coveted gift than in quietly, and unobtrusively loving their fellow men. Christians are to develop their God-given talents and use them publicly and privately, but while gifts are very important, graces in the Christian life are far more important. It is possible to have the gifts of tongues, prophecy etc., but if one does not have love, he has nothing. Paul itemized several gifts in I Corinthians 112 but at the

conclusion of the chapter, he writes; “Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” (I Corinthians 12:31) What is the excellent way? The way of love. Thus a Christian is to be a man of grace first and a man of gifts second.

It is easy to judge the worth of a Christian based on his obvious gifts, instead of based on his degree of love. Gifts are greatly needed in the Church, but more than this, the fruits of Christian grace are needed in the Church. One may not be greatly gifted and yet be greatly graced by God. Gifts are limited and differ according to person. Grace is unlimited and can be the equal possession of every Christian.

*“John McKenzie, young missionary candidate, was turned down by a missionary board. He went to an adjoining room to pray. Two members of the board overheard him praying: ‘Use me, O Lord, even if you have to send me to the poorest place and darkest spot on earth. I am willing to go without much money or anything if I can be used, O God.’ The board reconsidered his case and sent him. He proved to be a great missionary.” (Story related by Myron Boyd in *The Message and Program for Our Day*; No. III) Why did he prove to be a great missionary? Not because he was the most gifted but because he was most greatly graced by God. He possessed the fruits of Christ-likeness in great degree, and this enable him to use whatever gifts he had in a significant way.*

MY SERVICE

*I asked the Lord to let me do
Some mighty work for Him:
To fight amid His battle hosts,
Then sing the victor’s hymn.
I longed my ardent love to show,
But Jesus would not have it so.
He placed me in a quite home,
Whose life was calm and still?
And gave me little things to do,
My daily round to fill;
I could not think it good to be
Just put aside so silently.
Small duties gathered round my way,
They seemed of earth alone:
I’m who had longed for conquests bright
To lay before His throne,
Had common things to do and bear,
To watch and strive with daily care.
So then, I thought my prayer unheard,
And asked the Lord once more
That He would give me work for Him
And open wide the door;
Forgetting that my Master knew
Just what was best for me to do?*

*Ten quietly the answer came,
‘My child, I hear thy cry;*

*Think not that mighty deeds alone
Will bring the victory.
The battle has been planned by Me,
Let daily life thy conquests see."*

(Poems with Power, compiled by James Mudge; pg. 58)

The exercise of Christian graces in daily living is far more important than the display of great gifts before the hosts of men. My dear friend, Rev. E. H. Humphreys, while he was sitting in the annual conference, not knowing where he would be sent to preach the coming year, wrote this little verse as I was sitting beside him, and handed it to me.

*"Not the greater place desired
With far more in the host,
Perhaps it is the smaller place
Where we are needed most."*

I repeat: A Christian is a man of grace first and a man of gifts second.

VI. MAN OF HEAVENLY VISION – MAN OF EARTHLY CONCERN.

A Christian is a man with a heavenly vision. He longs for heaven and pictures himself as a pilgrim on earth just passing through on his journey to his true home. It was written of Abraham, "...it was faith that kept him journeying like a foreigner through the land of promise, with no more home than the tents which he shared with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs with him of the promise. For Abraham's eyes were looking forward to that city with solid foundations of which God himself is both architect and builder." (Hebrews 11: 9, 10) Abraham looked forward to heaven and lived for heaven, and so will every true Christian. The reward motive in the Christian life is Biblically grounded. Jesus said, "Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven." (Matthew 5:12) Said Jesus in Matthew 10:42, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward". The parable of the talents teaches that faithful service will receive its reward.

*"For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent*

in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.’²⁷ Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 25: 14-30)

The Christian is a man with a heavenly vision, but the true Christian is also a man with an earthly concern. In fact, the man who is most living for heaven ought to be most living for his fellowmen. He whose head is in heaven ought to have his hands and feet most actively at work on earth. A Christian is a man who is living for two worlds. He who is most alive to spiritual visions ought to be most responsive to human need, for the man with the heavenly vision is seeing Reality from a broader perspective. Being alive to the spiritual ought to automatically include all of the material. Said one to Wesley during Wesley’s search for spiritual reality: “Sir, you wish to serve God and go to Heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.” (Blueprint for a Christian World; pg. 83)

A Christian should be both a man of heavenly vision and earthly concern. The tragic thing is this: Many who are most concerned about heaven today seem to be most complacent about social problems. Why is this so? Let us first say that it should not be so. It was not so during the days of early Christianity, or during the days of Wesley. Several reasons may be given for this perversion.

- (1) Evangelical Christianity has overly reacted to Liberal Christianity, which has preached a social gospel with minimum concern about the hereafter. In reacting against the social utopias, which the Liberals are seeking to build upon earth through human reformation and human progress, Evangelicals have sought to re-emphasize regeneration and the spiritual Kingdom of God, with a consequent de-emphasis upon humanism and social problems.*
- (2) Evangelicals have emphasized the importance of escaping “the corruption that is in the world through lust”, and thus well-meaning Christians have separated themselves from everything that might pollute their pure and spotless lives. “Does not the Scripture say, ‘Come out from among them and be ye separate and I will receive you, saith the Lord,’ “...reasons the sincere Christian”? Such a Christian has forgotten that while he is not to be ‘of’ the world he is to be ‘in’ the world. In other words, a Christian is to separate himself from the world of sinful practices, but he is not to remove himself from the world of sinful men. Jesus was a man of heavenly vision, but he was also a friend of publicans, harlots, and sinners of all kinds. The Christian must be both a man of heavenly vision and a man of earthly concern.*

CONCLUSION: *The balanced Christian life is not an easy kind of life to find and maintain. It involves constant vigilance to avoid going into extremes – either to the left or to the right. How comforting is God’s promise to the earnest Christian who seeks always to walk in the center of God’s will: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” (Psalms 32: 8)*

23.

"LIVING THE BALANCED CHRISTIAN LIFE!"

Let us ask the same questions of this historical event that any discerning reporter would ask of any news event: 'WHO?', 'WHAT?', 'WHEN?', 'WHY?'.

'WHO?' – DISCIPLES. Of whom was Jesus speaking when He said, "Ye shall receive power?" To answer this question we must look at the context of this verse – the verses which come before this verse. In verses 2 and 4, it is stated that it is the 'apostles' who were commanded to wait for the promise of the Spirit.

Jesus was speaking to His own disciples when He told them to remain in Jerusalem. We can see from this Scripture that the promise of the Spirit's baptism is given to Christ's disciples. It is these very men who were called by Jesus to be His followers. Look at Mark 1: 16, 17, 20 for an account of two disciples' call. "...now as he walked by the sea of Galilees, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him." The last verse refers to the call of James and John.

Luke 6:13 tells of the choice of twelve men out of many disciples. "And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." These twelve disciples were invested with special power. "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick." (Luke 9:1, 2) The men to whom Jesus promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the first chapter of Acts, are the same men that Jesus addressed as friends and considered as His chosen followers. Jesus addressed these men in a very intimate way, a short time before his death.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:14-19)

These men were not of the world. They were chosen out of the world to be Christ's men. Later they were appropriately called 'Christians'.

'WHAT?' – PURITY. Fulfilled Promise. The question of 'What?' must be asked about this event of which we are seeking to report. The answer to the question of 'What?' is found in acts 1:4. "And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me." The answer is 'promise'. But to go a step further, we must ask the question, 'Promise of what?' This question is best answered from Acts 2:2, 3 which is the account of the fulfillment of the promise which was recorded in Acts 1:4. The Scripture says, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and

it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." One important answer to the question 'Promise of What?' is answered by 'Promise of Purity'.

The cloven tongues of fire which sat upon the head of each disciple, is symbolic of the cleansing and purifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. But logically, we are compelled to ask, "Why should Jesus' own disciples and followers need to be cleansed?" "If they needed to be cleansed, what did they need to be cleansed from?"

In other words, "Is there any evidence that Jesus' own disciples possessed carnal traits and attitudes which needed to be cleansed away?"

BEFORE PENTECOST. *We must go to the record to look for any evidence of traits in the disciples' lives that needed to be purged and eliminated.*

Before Pentecost there were times that carnal ambition was manifested among the disciples. "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, what would be that I should do for you? They said unto him, grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? Be baptized with baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:35-38)

The disciples strove between themselves to favorably compare themselves to one another. Each strove for greatness and honor. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, the Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:24-27) When Jesus washed their feet at the Last Supper, he showed them by example what true greatness consisted of.

The comparative, competitive, and contemptuous attitude is what the disciples needed to be cleansed of. They fought for status, position, and honor. They loved to be served, but hated to serve. Each was too proud to bow to his fellow disciple. Their love for God and their fellowman was incomplete. They failed to realize that the lowliest of tasks ranks the same with God as the tasks which bring with them the most honor and recognition. We need to be cleansed from the same carnal traits as the disciples needed to be cleansed from. We need to learn the same lessons as the disciples had to learn. As Mrs. Browning had it: "All service ranks the same with God." (Barclay John; pg. 133)

AFTER PENTECOST. *How greatly the disciples were changed after Pentecost. The opening pages of the Acts form a new chapter in the lives of the disciples. It is a chapter which is cleansed from carnal ambition and strife for positions and honor. It is a chapter which is aglow with the warmth of fellowship and mutual care one for another.*

Look at the picture of the sanctified and purified church. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42) The

disciples after Pentecost were Faithful, Harmonious, and Prayerful – characteristics that every vibrant and spiritual church must possess.

"And fear came upon every soul" and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common." (Acts 2:43) The disciples after Pentecost were Decisive in Action and United – characteristics that every vibrant and spiritual church must possess. "And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." The disciples after Pentecost were more compassionate – a very important characteristic in the life of every church and Christlike.

"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." (2:46) The disciples after Pentecost were filled with Joy – a very important characteristics in the life of every church and Christian.

"Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, praise and thanksgiving were constantly on their lips. The Spirit-filled Church became a soul-winning Church. Before the modern-day Church will ever become a soul-winning Church, its members must be cleansed of carnal traits and become people who are Faithful, Harmonious, Prayerful, United, Compassionate, Joyful, and Thankful. These were the characteristics of the 2nd century Church which made it effective and winsome.

'Purity' then is the answer to the question 'What?' Purity however is the negative aspect of the Spirit's baptism, while Power is the positive aspect of the Spirit baptism. The Spirit not only cleansed away the carnal traits from the lives of the disciples, but the Spirit empowered the disciples to live a victorious life, as shown by the characteristics that who have just described. We will discuss in more detail a little later the positive aspect of the Spirit's Baptist – Power – but the important truth for us to realize just now is that cleansing comes before empowering.

WHEN? – AFTER WAITING, PRAYING, EXPECTING. The next question we should as reporter ask ourselves about this story is the question of 'When?' If the question of 'What?' is asked in terms of 'the promise' then the question of 'When?' should also be asked in terms of 'the promise?' "When was the promise fulfilled?" "Were there conditions that had to be met before the fulfillment of 'the promise?'

We have seen that the promise of Jesus was the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. What were the conditions that must be met before this Baptism could be received? Again, we must go to the record to find the answers.

WAIT ON God. Acts 1:4 says, "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me." Thus, the first condition for receiving the promise of the Spirit is to Wait. Throughout the Scriptures, we are exhorted to wait upon God and to still our minds before Him. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say on the Lord." (Psalms 27:14) "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." (Psalms 62:5) "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalms 46:10)

PRAY TO God. Acts 1:14 says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." God is a Father who wishes to bestow good gifts to His children. However, as a Father, He wants His children to ask. Through prayer, the earnest speaker expresses his deepest longings to a loving

Father. Prayer is the instrument by which the needy believer can tap the boundless and exhaustless resources of grace

It is recorded that the disciples ‘continued’ in prayer. They were consistent and persevering in their prayer. The intensity of their desires is related by that important word of action – ‘continued.’ They were determined to pray until they received their answer. God always honors this kind of praying.

MUTUALLY EXPECT FROM God. The members of the Church of the Upper Room were jointly as well as individually cleansed, because their whole attitude was that of mutual expectation. “They were all with one accord in one place.” (Acts 2:1) The expressed desire of one intensified the desire of another, until the desire of each became the desire of all. The assembly of the Upper Room was an assembly of united believers who mutually anticipated the Spirit’s Baptism. Because they cherished no hidden and inner reservations, God honored the desire of one and the desire of all. “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:4)

“WHY?” – POWER FOR WITNESSING. Why did Jesus’ disciples wait and pray in the spirit of expectancy? In order to be cleansed. We have noted the difference in the attitudes of the disciples after Pentecost, compared to their attitudes before Pentecost. Cleansing was important if the disciples were ever to be effective and influential. While cleansing was important, the cleansing itself was for a definite purpose. The Spirit’s cleansing was to make the disciples more winsome in their character and more powerful in their witness. The disciples needed Power as well as Purity.

What evidence is there that Pentecost made a difference in the disciples’ witness? To answer this, observe the actions of the disciples before Pentecost as contrasted with their actions after Pentecost.

BEFORE PENTECOST. Too often, the disciples were unstable, unpredictable, and unfaithful in their witness before the experience of Pentecost. One episode can serve as an example. “Peter answered and said unto him, though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” (Matthew 26:35, 40) Peter denied his Lord and all the disciples forsook Jesus during His most needy hour in the Garden. The disciples were sometimes moody, despondent, and ineffective in witness.

AFTER PENTECOST. Pentecost was a decisive event in the lives of the disciples that had far-reaching and permanent effects in terms of effective witness. Look at Peter after he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. He was transformed from a failure into a dynamic witness. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Man and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as a many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, “Save ourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:37-41)

No longer was Peter and the other disciples paralyzed by fear, but they were bold as lions. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (4:13, 19, 20)

Even in the face of persecution, imprisonment, and beating, the disciples did not lose courage. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men, and we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. When they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. and daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” (Acts 5:29, 32, 40-42)

What explains such a change in the disciples’ attitudes and actions? “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:4) The Book of Acts is the account of how the promise of Acts 1:8 was truly and actually fulfilled through the lives of once-weak disciples. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

CONCLUSION: Do you ever manifest any of the same carnal traits that Jesus’ disciples manifested before they were baptized with the Holy Spirit? Carnal ambition and status seeking do not make for a beautiful, winsome, and effective Christian witness. Have you waited upon God in prayer in the attitude of expectancy for the Baptism of God’s Spirit? Is your life cleansed of all carnality and do you experience the power of God’s Spirit in witnessing?

Remember “...the promise is unto you and to your children”. (Acts 2:39) Will you come just now to a loving Father who wishes to give to you the gift of the Spirit’s Baptism.

COME TO HIM IN FAITH AND SURRENDER!



Heaven is for
real