

*THE*



*RACE OF LIFE!*

“Brief Devotional Thoughts on  
Living a Successful Life”!

By

Ron G. Christian

DEDICATION

*As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript 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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1.

*"RUNNING THE 'RACE' OF LIFE!"*



Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. You have forgotten the encouragement that is addressed to you as sons: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline or give up when you are corrected by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he punishes every son he accepts." When you endure discipline, God is treating you as sons. Is there a son whom his father does not discipline? Now if you are without any discipline, in which all sons share, then you are illegitimate and not God's sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. We should submit even more to the Father of our spirits and live, shouldn't we? For a short time, they disciplined us as they thought best, but God does it for our good, so that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. Therefore, strengthen your tired arms and your weak knees, and straighten the paths of your life, so that your lameness may not become worse, but instead may be healed." Hebrews 12:1-13.



"Get on your mark..., get set..., and ...Go!" Do those words sound familiar to you? Every child and teen who has ever run a race knows the meaning of these words. Every race has a 'starting line' and a 'finish line'. No race is easy, but for the winner there awaits some kind of award. The Christian life is like a race - a long race! Like a marathon!

The 'starting line' is the track of life where the Christian runs with endurance and perseverance. How much effort is involved in 'running' for Christ? What obstacles must be overcome if the spiritual runner is successfully to complete the race of life? Is there a cheering crowd in the grandstands to encourage the weary runner? Who is the best example of 'Running The Race', whose example ought to be modelled? From whence do the energy and the power to run the race come, and what motivates the runner to continue to run when he is weary or discouraged. For what purpose is the runner so strongly disciplined. These common and important questions often are asked. To answer these questions is to understand the nature and the purpose of the spiritual race of life.

Every Christian is in a race - a race, the outcome of which will determine the quality of his eternal rewards. Every Christian on the track of life is urged by his Divine Coach to "forge steadily onward". From a study of Hebrews 12:1-13 you can learn about 'The Race of Life and How to Complete the Race' successfully.

First, think of the 'goal' of the race. The goal of our spiritual race is nothing less than Christlikeness! *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."* (Hebrews 12:2a) We are to gaze at Jesus - His person and His purposes and His power to transform our human nature. Becoming Christlike in our responses and in our reactions in the principles by which we live and in the priorities which we establish. In the words of our mouth and in the motives of our heart, in the way we treat our neighbors and in the way we treat those who despise us - these indicate the degree of growth we have attained in our pursuit of a Christlike character.

A Christlike character is the pursuit of life, the goal of the spiritual racer of life, the overriding objective never to be forgotten during the battles of life! *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."* (Galatians 5:22-23)

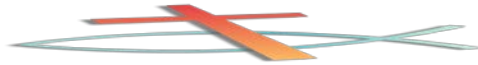
"O to be like Thee! Full of compassion,

Loving, forgiving, tender, and kind;  
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,  
Seeking the wandering sinner to find.

O to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer,  
Pure as Thou art!  
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness, –  
and stamp Thine own image deep on my heart!

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:**

'To Be Like Jesus' – Heaven's Greatest Command, God's Greatest Of-  
fer, Earth's Greatest Privilege!



2.

"ARE YOU 'IN EARNEST TO GET TO HEAVEN'?"



*"Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us. Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God. If you want to keep from becoming fainthearted and weary, think about his patience as sinful men did such terrible things to him. After all, you have never yet struggled against sin and temptation until you sweat great drops of blood. And have you quite forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his child? He said, "My son, don't be angry when the Lord punishes you. Don't be discouraged when he has to show you where you are wrong. For when he punishes you, it proves that he loves you. When he whips you, it proves you are really his child." Let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a son who was never corrected? If God doesn't punish you when you need it, as other fathers punish their sons, then it means that you aren't really God's son at all—that you don't really belong in his family. Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to God's training so that we can begin really to live? Our earthly fathers trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they knew how, but God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share his holiness. Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening—it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character. So take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight, smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame, will not fall and hurt themselves but become strong." Hebrews 12:1-13.*



We noted that the 'goal' of the race is nothing less than becoming Christlike in our character! God's command is 'high and lofty' - ***"Be ye holy, for I the Lord thy God am holy!"*** We noted yesterday, 'to be like Jesus' is heaven's greatest command, God's greatest offer, and earth's

greatest privilege! To reach such a worthy goal demands an all-out effort on the part of the earnest believer.

Second, think of the 'effort' in the race of life. Christlike character is both a 'gift' from God and a human achievement. Not 'either-or' but 'both-and'! No human can be Christlike unless God gives one a new heart – a 'gift' of God's love. However, it is also true that no one can be Christlike without the exercise of supreme 'effort' and 'faithful' human cooperation with our Loving God!

As a runner 'taxes' every muscle in his body and expands his lungs to the maximum in his strenuous effort to reach the 'finish line', so a sincere believer uses all the powers of his being to become a Christlike person. Great is one's endurance, persistence, perseverance. But his effort is enduring and, even pleasant, because he knows that God has assigned the duties to him personally. It is a God-appointed path that one is to run, and because God is 'never unreasonable', He knows that, even though the 'going may be rough' at times, the goal is attainable and the finish line is reachable.

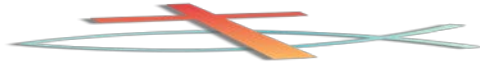
Notes Alexander Maclaren, "A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality. Unless 'we' run 'we' shall not advance, and unless 'we' advance 'we' shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith." (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*; volume 16; pg. 185)

John Wesley declared that Methodists were people who were in "earnest to get to heaven". Believers are those who have a concentration of purpose, singleness of aim, and an intensity of effort. No slothfulness or self-indulgence, but a "determination which goes steadily on and which refuses to be deflected". (William Barclay)

"Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize, and sailed thro' bloody seas?  
Sure, I must fight, if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil; endure the pain, supported by Thy Word."

Am I A Soldier of The Cross? By Isaac Watts

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My 'Divine Coach' will not run the race of life 'for' me, but He will run the race 'with' me! What a glorious 'Running Companion'!



3.

"WHAT ARE YOUR 'OBSTACLES' IN THE RACE OF LIFE'?"



*"Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. You have forgotten the encouragement that is addressed to you as sons: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline or give up when you are corrected by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he punishes every son he accepts." When you endure discipline: God is treating you as sons. Is there a son whom his father does not discipline? Now if you are without any discipline, in which all sons share, then you are illegitimate and not God's sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. We should submit even more to the Father of our spirits and live, shouldn't we? For a short time, they disciplined us as they thought best, but God does it for our good, so that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. Therefore, strengthen your tired arms and your weak knees, and straighten the paths of your life, so that your lameness may not become worse, but instead may be healed." Hebrews 12:1-13.*



We have looked at the goal in the race of life, and the importance of putting forth 'effort' in running the race to reach that goal. The goal

of Christlike character makes the supreme efforts of earnest believers all worthwhile.

Third, think of the 'obstacles' in the race of life. Putting forth supreme effort to live the Christlike life involves the putting off of all sins, and all needless "weights" which hinder the runner in his race of life. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." Hebrews 12:1b. Just as a runner runs best when he runs 'light', so a believer runs the spiritual race of life best when he is not encumbered with a guilty conscience. A clear conscience and a pure heart are great aids in living the Christian life! When King David failed to confess his sins, he found himself weighed down with an unbearable load of guilt. *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me: My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."* (Psalm 32:3-4) The needed strength to run well is dissipated by guilt of unconfessed sins. The believer is to throw off the obstacle through confession of his sins.

There are other obstacles which hinder a believer in his race besides the obstacles of outright sins. The believer is to lay aside every "weight" which slows down his progress towards his ultimate destination in heaven. Notes Alexander Maclaren, "A 'weight' is that which, allowable in its self, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us - is, for some reason, a hindrance and impediment in 'our' running the heavenly race. Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you. The one is a legitimate thing turned to a false use; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whosoever performed a transgression of God's law." (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*; vol. 16; pg. 185)

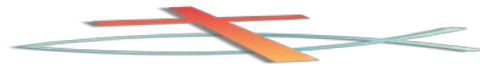
Weights which must be thrown off are those legitimate desires and activities that have become an 'obsession' for a believer, the result of which is a loss of focus on Christ, and a dissipation of spiritual energy, and a disinclination towards holy practices such as Scripture reading or prayer or regular church attendance. "There may be habits, there may be pleasures, there may be self-indulgences, there may be associations which hold us back and hold us down. They have to be shed

as the athlete sheds his outer cloak as he goes to the starting mark."  
(*Daily Study Bible*; Hebrews; William Barclay; pg. 96)

"Seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful, the path of prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them." (Alexander Maclaren; *Ibid*; 193)

"Father, please tell me what 'weights' in my life need to be cast off. Help me to have a 'clear vision', 'undivided loyalty', a 'simple lifestyle' – centered in Kingdom purposes.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I must not allow the 'good things' in life to destroy the 'best things' in my life – my intimate communion with my Lord!



4.

"HEAVENLY 'FANS' CHEERING EARTHLY 'RUNNERS'!"



*"Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us, fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. You have forgotten the encouragement that is addressed to you as sons: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline or give up when you are corrected by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he punishes every son he accepts." When you endure discipline God is treating you as sons. Is there a son whom his father does not discipline? Now if you are without any discipline, in which all sons share, then you are illegitimate and not God's sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. We should submit even more to the Father of our spirits and live, shouldn't we? For a short time, they disciplined us as they thought best, but God does it for our good, so that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. Therefore, strengthen your tired arms and your weak knees, and straighten the paths of your life, so that your lameness may not become worse, but instead may be healed." Hebrews 12:1-13.*



We noted yesterday that there are certain weights, which the spiritual runner must 'shed' if he is to run a successful race in life. These 'weights' are not only outright sins which must be 'put aside' (by all 'runners') through repentance and confession, but these 'weights' are

also 'legitimate interests and activities' which (for a 'specific runner') must be 'put aside'. For instance for a believer to get sufficient sleep is legitimate, but sleeping late into the morning must be stopped if a lack of time for meaningful devotions (a 'quiet time') is the result.

Acquiring material possessions is legitimate, for God gave us a physical world in which to live and He has given us all things richly to enjoy. But if the acquiring of too many possessions is causing a depletion of monetary resources which should be used to meet basic family needs and spiritual 'ministries' within God's Church, then a simpler lifestyle must be accepted.

What is a 'simple' lifestyle for one Christian, however, may be a rather 'extravagant' lifestyle for another Christian. Each believer must determine, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what is a 'weight' for him/her. A desire for 'ease and relaxation' is legitimate, but if pleasure has become too important, with the result of church and family duties being neglected, then a believer had better 'throw off' some of his pleasure pursuits and accept a greater disciplined lifestyle.

I heard of a famous evangelist who was convicted because of the large amount of time he was spending playing golf. He felt that he had to give up this legitimate pursuit, to spend more needed time in spiritual ministry. There have been many believers who have gotten rid of their television set, for they found that they were spending far too much time seeking passively to be entertained by the TV.

*This Fourth Section thinks about the 'encouragers' During Our Christian Race of Life. We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses in the grandstands, cheering us on. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old] gained approval." (Note Hebrews 11:1-2)*

Perhaps, although we cannot say with absolute certainty, the redeemed saints in heaven are looking down from their glorious abode, as spectators; looking down from a grandstand on the courageous runners on a track.

William Barclay believes that such is the case. "It is of the very essence of life that life is lived in the gaze of the heroes of the faith who lived and suffered and died in their day and generation. How can a man avoid the struggle for greatness with an audience like that looking down upon him?" (*Daily Study Bible; Hebrews; William Barclay; pg. 196*)

"Father, I thank you that I am not alone in my 'race of life', but that I am surrounded by fellow believers who are running beside me, and by that huge 'crowd of heavenly witnesses' - the 'saints' who have successfully run their earthly race and who are now 'cheering me on' towards my heavenly destination!"

#### AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY!

The 'fellowship of the saints' - past, present, and future - gives me great joy and unspeakable comfort, as I run my 'Race of Life' for Christ!



5.

"GOD LOVES BACKSLIDERS - DO YOU?"



*"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves." Galatians 6:1-3.*

*"My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins". James 5:19-20*



*Not only should you desire to lead a person to the foot of the Cross - one who has never been a Christian - but you should be deeply concerned to seek and to recover a "wandering sheep" (a one-time believer who has fallen into a sinful lifestyle).*

*With what attitude should you approach a backslidden person? An attitude of deep humility! Wrote Paul, "Dear brothers if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is fooling himself. He is really a nobody." (Galatians 6:1-3, Living Bible)*

*Not only with a sense of humility, but also with a sense of great urgency and deep compassion, should believers reach out to backslidden persons! Wrote James; "Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord, and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings him back to God*

will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing *about the forgiveness of his many sins.*" (James 5:19-20, Living Bible) The Scripture teaches that the backslidden person (the one-time believer who has reverted to a lifestyle of sinning) faces spiritual death and destruction (eternal loss) if his broken relationship with God is not restored and his many sins are not forgiven. Passion for lost souls includes not only passion for souls who have never been saved, but also passion for souls who were one time saved but who are now engulfed in a lifestyle of sinning and who are in peril of losing their souls if they do not return to the Lord in repentance.

God greatly loves the backslidden, and wants to restore, to heal, and to reclaim them as His very own! Says the Lord, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God." (Jeremiah 3:22)

*"Sinner, Jesus will receive:*

*Sound this word of grace to all.  
Who the heavenly pathway leave,  
All who linger, all who fall.*

*"Come, and he will give you rest;  
Trust him for his Word is plain;  
He will take the sinfulest;  
Christ receiveth sinful men.*

*"Sing it o'er and o'er again;  
Christ receiveth sinful men;  
Make the message clear and plain;  
Christ receiveth sinful men."  
(James McGranahan)*

*It is all-important that every Spiritual 'runner' continues to run his race well, without stumbling, without becoming discouraged and deciding to 'give up' in the 'Race of Life'. One time, when I was involved in running a difficult course up a steep hill, I was very tired and I wondered how I could finish the race! Just then, one of my friends ran up beside me and spoke encouraging words to me. We are supposed to help each other in the 'race of life'!*

6.

"WHAT IS A 'GREAT COMMISSION CHURCH'?"



*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20.*

*One of the distinctive marks of a healthy local church is its focus on Jesus' Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (King James Version)*

*The Local Church is God's "launching pad" for penetration into the world of lost souls - to heal the broken and sick, to rescue the perishing ones, to bring the wandering ones back to Jesus and to enjoy fellowship of caring Christians.*

*"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.  
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,  
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.*

*"Rescue the perishing, duty demands it -  
Strength for your labor the Lord will provide;  
Back to the narrow way patiently win them,  
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died.*

*Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying.  
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save."  
(Fanny J. Crosby)*

*It is said, "Love Always Finds a Way!" The person who is passionately in love with Jesus will find a way (method) to share his love for Jesus*

*with his fellow human beings! He will find a way practically to share the Good News with sinners and to incorporate new believers into the local church where they may be taught to follow Christ in mature ways (discipleship training).*

*A "Great Commission Church" is a healthy church, for it is a church where most members are committed to "reach out in love" to a lost and dying society which desperately needs conversion to Christ. A "non-witnessing Christian" is a contradiction in terms. The person who loves Jesus truly is the person who seeks to share Jesus openly!*

*Whether or not a believer is a 'natural extrovert', he can't keep quiet about the most important treasure of his life - his vital love relationship with the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ!*

*"Lord of the 'harvest of human souls', give me a 'vision' of the world as you see it, for 'without a vision the people perish'. For Jesus' sake, and for the sake of lost souls."*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: To the extent that I deepen my love relationship with Christ, to that same extent will I increasingly open my mouth to share the Good News of Christ's love for humanity, with my friends and neighbors and relatives and associates.*



7.

"THROW OUT THE LIFELINE!"



*"But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame'. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news'! But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message'? Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." Romans 10:8-17.*

*"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives." Proverbs 11:30.*



*I was pastor of one local church for over 25 years, and it was my privilege to share God's 'plan of salvation' with many hundreds of people - both from 'the pulpit' in multiplied sermons and 'in person' in the homes of hundreds of people. I thank God for one of the greatest joys of my life, - namely witnessing the conversion of hundreds of adults, children, and teens! Through personal appointments in the homes of people (called 'Salvation by Appointment' Home Bible Studies), I enjoyed leading scores and scores of families to a 'saving knowledge of Jesus Christ'. Seldom did a wife or a husband accept Christ as Savior without the spouse accepting Christ at the same time. Nearly all*

*adults who accepted my offer to lead a Bible Study in their home, prayed the "Sinner's Prayer" and claimed assurance of forgiveness of all their sins! Sometimes entire families would accept Christ together, around their dining room table! Many of these new believers became active participants in the local church where I pastored.*

*Over and over, through the years of my long-term pastorate, I opened the Word of God to share the story of the 'Old Rugged Cross' with heart-sick souls who were desperately in need of forgiveness of sins and power to live a transformed life. Every time I shared the simple and basic facts regarding God's 'plan of salvation', my heart was thrilled anew!*

*What are those 'basic facts'?*

- 1. The universality of human sin – its nature and causes, etc.;*
- 2. The seriousness of sin's consequences – separation from God and from one's fellowmen;*
- 3. The insufficiency of one's own attempts at self-salvation – the inadequacy of one's own good works and self-righteousness as the meritorious basis for forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life;*
- 4. Christ Jesus, because of his atoning death and glorious Resurrection, is alone able to forgive all sins, to deliver from all bondages, and to reconcile all sinners to a Holy God, to enjoy an abundant life on earth and eternal life in heaven following physical death.*

#### *THROW OUT THE LIFE-LINE*

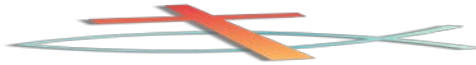
*By Edward S. Ufford*

*"Throw out the Life-Line across the dark wave,  
There is a brother whom someone should save;  
Somebody's brother! Oh, who then will dare?  
To throw out the Life-Line, His peril to share?"*

*"Throw out the Life-Line with hand quick and strong:  
Why do you tarry, why linger so long?  
See! He is sinking; so, hasten today  
And out with the Life-Boat! Away, Then, Away!"*

*"Throw out the Life-Line to danger - fraught men,  
Sinking in anguish where you've never been:  
Winds of temptation and billows of woe  
Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow."*

*"Throw out the Life-Line!  
Throw out the Life-Line!  
Someone is drifting away!  
Throw out the Life-Line!  
Throw out the Life-Line!  
Someone is sinking today."*



8.

"ARE YOU 'BOUND FOR THE PROMISED LAND'?"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

*"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion,  
during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors  
tested and tried me,  
though for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry  
with that generation;  
I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,  
and they have not known my ways.'  
So I declared on oath in my anger,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

*See to it, brothers, and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today", so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said:*

*"Today, if you hear his voice,*

*do not harden your hearts  
as they did in the rebellion."*

*Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:1-19*



*There are various ways to picture the Christian life. You can think of the Christian life like a 'House'. A house has both a foundation and superstructure. How foolish it would be to build only a foundation and fail to complete the house by refusing to build the superstructure. After one's conversion, there is a large 'superstructure' yet to build!*

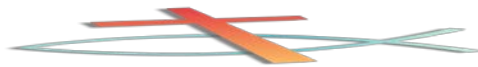
*You can think of the Christian life like a marriage. It takes only a short time to exchange wedding vows, but it takes much effort throughout a lifetime to implement the vows in the marriage relationship. It takes only a short time to pray a 'prayer of confession and repentance' - to become a Christian - but it takes much effort and cooperation with God to remain a Christian.*

*The illustration which the writer of Hebrews uses to describe the Christian life is the story of the Israelites under Moses, travelling from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan (Hebrews 3). Just as the Israelites were delivered from their bondage in Egypt, so sinners are delivered from the slavery of sin. It was God's intention, when delivering His people out of Egypt, to lead them to the place of - "milk and honey" -The Promise Land of Canaan. So, likewise, when God through Christ delivers a person from the slavery of his sins (represented by Egypt), it is God's intention miraculously to take believers to their eternal home where abundance - "milk and honey" - is enjoyed. However, as in the case of Israel, there is a journey through a desert, before a believer enters the Promised Land of Heaven.*

*Just as there were perils in the desert for the children of Israel, so there are perils in the journey of life for the believer. It is easy to start a race, but difficult to finish a race. It is easy to start the spiritual journey, but it is not always easy to complete the spiritual journey of life. Throughout life, the believer is constantly subject to the tests of God, the trials of circumstances, and the temptations of Satan. Only after the believer reaches the Promised Land of Heaven, will he be finally and eternally secure.*

*"Heavenly Father, your purposes are good, your 'keeping' power is great, your love is unceasing, your longsuffering is evident, and your forgiving grace is lavish! Help me daily to 'fall in love' with you, and daily to appropriate your amazing resources."*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The faithfulness of God and the power of God to keep me safe and secure at all times and in all circumstances are never to be questioned!*



9.

"IS IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO 'FORFEIT' YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE?"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

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*There are many warnings in God's Word against the dangers of spiritual drifting and apostasy. There is great safety and security, as long as a believer maintains his faith in the living God. While it is true that 'faith' is a gift from God, given to a believer, it is also true that 'faith' is a volitional response on the part of a believer. Salvation finds its source alone in God (because of the 'finished work of Christ on the cross), but God's salvation must be initially received (in faith) by the repentant sinner, and salvation also must be continually maintained (in faith) by the obedient believer. In other words, it is possible for a believer to abandon his faith (trust) in God and to harden his heart against God, and, if he does not return to God (in repentance) from his 'backslidden condition', he will ultimately be eternally lost! This is not a 'popular' belief, but it definitely is a Biblically - based teaching!*

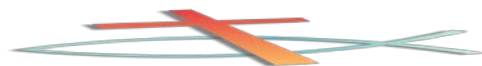
*According to the third chapter of Hebrews, what causes believers to abandon their faith in God and thus to forfeit their spiritual life? First, a wandering heart (hardened affections). The writer of Hebrews warns: "And since Christ is so much superior, the Holy Spirit warns us to listen to him, to be careful to hear his voice today and not let our hearts become set against him, as the people of Israel did. They steeled themselves against his love and complained against him in the desert while he was testing them... 'But' God says, 'I was very angry with them, for their hearts were always looking somewhere else instead of up to me, and they never found the paths I wanted them to follow.'" (Hebrews 3:7, 8, 10; Living Bible)*

Guard the affections of your heart, for your heart guides your life! Keep your affections fixed on God and His will, not on worldly pursuits and pleasures - the craze for sex, the love of money and material things which money can buy, and the love of worldly recognition and power and position. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:15-16)* "Luke warmness" in one's reaction to Christ spells eventual disaster. To the Laodicean Church, God said, *"I know you well- you are neither hot nor cold;...since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth!" (Revelation 3:15)*

Another cause of the Israelites' fall in the desert was their rebellious will (wrong decisions). The wandering (indifferent and lukewarm) heart is the heart that directs the will to rebel against God's ways. Given ever so much intellectual knowledge about the ways and the will and the Word of God, a person (like the Israelites) will nevertheless, make the wrong decisions if the heart is not fixed on God! The 'will' of man is 'slave' to the 'affections' of man! 'Actions' are directed by 'Emotions'. As a person 'feels', so he will 'act'. If his heart is wayward, his actions will be unrighteous. Out of the 'heart' of man proceeds actions.

*"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." (Psalm 139:23, 24)*

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY:** *I will carefully guard the 'affections' of my heart, for my 'affections' guide my life - and determine the decisions of my will!*



10.

"MAINTAIN YOUR 'FAITH' IN ALMIGHTY GOD!"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

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So I declared on oath in my anger,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

*See to it, brothers, and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today", so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said:*

*"Today, if you hear his voice,  
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*Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:1-19*



*"Because the hearts (affections and sentiments and desires) of the Israelites went astray, the result was that these Israelites did not know God ways." (Hebrews 3:10). Disobedience regarding God's will, and a decision to take their own way rather than God's way, was the essence of their sins, and the result was most terrible! They "...left their bones in the desert." (Hebrews 3:17), and they never saw the Promised Land of Canaan! The Bible says:, "In all thy 'ways' acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths". It also says: "There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is the way of death!" Man's ways, independent of God's wisdom, lead to death! God's way, humbly accepted and followed, leads to life! Failing to keep a tender heart and failing to obey God's laws resulted in the Israelites abandoning trust in God's provisions and promises. The final result was 'death in the desert'! What is the ultimate consequence when a 'backslidden believer' maintains a 'hardened heart' and a 'rebellious will'? Eternal death! But it is possible for such a person to return to the Lord and to be wonderfully restored to a vital relationship with God! Wrote James; "Dear brothers, if anyone has slipped away from God and no longer trusts the Lord and someone helps him understand the Truth again, that person who brings him back to God will have saved a wandering soul from death, bringing about the forgiveness of his many sins." (James 5:19-20)*

*Another (third) cause of the Israelites' fall in the desert was their untrusting spirit (abandoned commitments). "To whom did God swear that they should never enter into his rest? Was it not these very men*

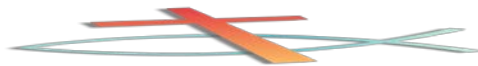
*who refused to trust him? Yes, it is all too plain that it was refusal to trust God that prevented these men from entering his rest." (Hebrews 3:18, 19) Because man is "incurably religious", the person who chooses to disbelieve God and His promises, is the person who turns to a false god in whom he places his trust. Idolatry - serving another god rather than the true and the living God - is an advanced and serious manifestation of apostasy.*

"Then they (the children of Israel) despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise. They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the Lord. So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would make them fall in the desert, make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands. They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods.' (Psalm 106:24-28)

*To abandon God and His ways will result in God's anger being incited. Mercy spurned is judgment earned! Disobedience and unbelief forfeit God's promises! "And to whom was God speaking when he swore with an oath that they could never go into the land he had promised his people? He was speaking to all those who disobeyed him. And why couldn't they go in? Because they didn't trust him." (Hebrews 2:18-19)*

*"Father, keep me from deliberate and damnable sins - the sin of hardening my heart against your love, the sin of choosing disobediently to follow my own selfish ways, the sin of turning to false gods for provisions. Keep me 'true and faithful' to you always!"*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As a believer, I must 'heed the warnings' and 'meet the conditions', if I am to 'claim' the promises of God's Word - ultimate heavenly rewards!*



"THE CONDITIONS FOR MAINTAINING YOUR SPIRITUAL  
LIFE!"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.<sup>4</sup> For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

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*"Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Hebrews 3: 1-19.*



*There is 'eternal security' in the Christian life, but that 'security' is not automatic or unconditional or irrevocable. It is 'conditional' security - a security that depends upon the believer's relationship with God that is maintained through dynamic faith, obedience, and trust. Through a careful observation of the Israelites in the wilderness, one can gain much wisdom, and one can be motivated to avoid the pitfalls, which eventuated in their loss of physical and spiritual life. Because we are 'focusing' on the lessons from Hebrews 3 for several days, it would be helpful if you would endeavor to read this chapter in as many different translations as you can.*

*The Christian life is fraught with perils. Because of the seductiveness and deceitfulness of sin, there are one-time believers whose hearts have become hardened, whose wills have become rebellious, and whose spirits have abandoned trust in God. As in the case of the unbelieving (faithless) Israelites in the wilderness, those one-time believers today who abandon their faith in God will incite the wrath of God, verse 10, and these unrepentant backsliders will be rejected from the Promised Land (Heaven), verse 22, and they will die in the 'wilderness', verse 17 (suffer eternal loss)!*

*Hebrews 3 carefully describes those 'conditions' which believers must meet, if they are to maintain a vital spiritual life. In 'overview', the following are those 'conditions'.*

1. *Realize the superiority of Christ's person, verses 1-5;*
2. *Respond with a 'soft' heart during testing, verses 7-8;*
3. *Recognize God's miraculous intervention in your life, verse 9;*
4. *Reset the personal tendency of one's heart to drift, verse 12;*
5. *Receive corrective counsel from one's caring group, verse 13;*
6. *Reiterate one's faith and repentance to the end of one's life, verse 14.*

*Let us take time to look at each in more detail.*

1. *Realize The Superiority of Christ's Person. The most important 'condition' which you must meet, if you are to maintain a vital spiritual life, is to realize the altogether unique personhood of Jesus Christ and affirm your thoughts regarding Him. Everyone has 'faith', but it is the 'object' of one's faith, which determines the 'value' of one's faith. Putting faith in anyone other than in Christ will never suffice. Jesus is not one among many persons through whom a human being comes to God, and God comes to him. Jesus is the one and only one who can take a person to heaven!*

*While Moses, the great lawgiver of the Old Testament, was a created man and worked in a created universe as a part of the 'house', Jesus is the Creator of the 'house' and, thus, Jesus is much greater than Moses is! Only as you keep your 'faith' centered alone in Jesus Christ will you be able to maintain a vital spiritual life. To worship any other person besides Jesus Christ would be to commit spiritual apostasy.*

*"Jesus, you are 'The Way, The Truth, The Life'. No one comes to the Father except through You, for You alone are God's Son and Savior of mankind. Bowing low at your feet, I will be able always to walk steadily on life's rough pathway towards heaven!"*

*AFFIRMATION OF THE DAY: Jesus alone is worthy of the full devotion of my heart, and the praise of my lips, and the sacrifice of my total life - now and forever!*



12.

"KEEPING 'TENDER' AND 'RESPONSIVE' TO GOD!"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

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*We are looking at the 'conditions' for maintaining your spiritual life, as described in Hebrews 3.*

*Second. Respond with a 'soft' heart during testing, verses 7-8. The time of testing in the wilderness was intended for the character development of the Israelite people. Instead of 'softening' their hearts and submitting their will, they hardened their hearts and disobeyed God's commands. When God is testing you, humble yourself in His presence. Don't harden your heart. Keep it 'soft' and responsive to His correction. Hebrews 12:5-9.*

*Third. Recognize God's miraculous intervention in your life. "But God was patient with them forty years, though they tried his patience sorely; he kept right on doing his mighty miracles for them to see." (Hebrews 3:9) Closing your eyes to the miracles of God in your life will result in opening your mouth with complaints and murmuring. The greatest deterrent against a bitter spirit is a mouth that is open with praises to God for the countless benefits and provisions, which the Creator lavishes upon His unworthy creatures!*

*Fourth. Resist the personal tendency of your heart to drift. "Beware then of your own hearts, dear brothers, lest you find that they, too, are evil and unbelieving and are leading you away from the Living God." Hebrews 10:12. A daily examination of your heart will help you to confess fresh sins and to check the wanderings of your affections toward*

*lesser objects of delight than the Lord God Almighty. Guard your heart, for your heart will guide your life. Keep your heart full of God, for He alone is worthy of your love, and there will be no room for lesser loves! Beware of a divided heart – a heart that tries to divide its loyalty and its love between God and ‘mammon’ (money). Love God supremely, and all other loves will be subordinate – the love of family and friends and jobs and possessions will be ‘sanctified’ for God-honoring purposes. Eternal ‘vigilance’ - keeping guard over your own heart – this is the price you must pay in order to walk safely through the ‘maze of life’. The hardening of your heart is far more serious than the ‘hardening of your arteries’! The latter may lead to physical death, but the former will surely lead to spiritual death! To maintain a close relationship with your God, you must constantly guard against heart hardening. “The hardest hearts were soft once, and the softest may get hard...Judas Iscariot must have been once a tender and impressionable lad. But hearts harden gradually, like the freezing of a pond on a frosty night.” (The Way into the Holiest; F.B. Meyer; pgs. 51-52)*

*“Father, help me not only to ‘hear’ the truth, but to ‘obey’ the truth. Open my mind to understand your thoughts, make my heart tender that I might feel your compassion, strengthen my will that I might choose the right, and refuse the wrong! For Jesus’ sake.”*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I intend each day to walk in the light, as He is in the light that I might enjoy wonderful fellowship with God and experience Jesus’ cleansing blood.*



13.

"LEARNING TO BE 'ACCOUNTABLE' TO FELLOW BELIEVERS!"



*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

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*As has just been said:*

*"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts  
as they did in the rebellion."*

*"Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." Hebrews 3:1-19; Living Bible*



*Let us continue to look at the 'conditions' for maintaining your spiritual life. Fifth, receive corrective counsel from a caring group. "Speak to each other about these things every day while there is still time, so that none of you will become hardened against God, being blinded by the glamour of sin." Hebrews 3:13; Living Bible*

*Satan is definitely a 'defeated foe', but, even though his future 'execution date' has been set by our victorious Lord, he is now 'on the loose'. Therefore, believers must always be 'on alert', for the devil is like a 'roaring lion' seeking whom he may devour, and temptation is sometimes subtle. The 'flesh' is weak, and the possibility of being enamored by sin's allurements is always a possibility. Also, in our independently-oriented society, which takes a great pride in the 'self-made' man, there is a tendency among many Christians to 'solo' the Christian life. That is a sign of pride, and it is the essence of folly! Every believer needs to be 'accountable' to a caring and sharing group. If you wish to grow in the Christian life, maintain fellowship with God, and also be answerable, and responsible, to a small prayer group. Meet weekly and help examine each other's soul. Never be judgmental, but always be your "brother's keeper". An important, though not 'comfortable', question to ask your fellow believer, within the intimacy of a 'Tender Loving Prayer Group', is this: "How is it with your soul, my dear brother/sister?"*

Wrote James to fellow believers; *" You should get into the habit of admitting your sins to each other, and praying for each other so that you may be healed."* James 5:16; Phillips Bible.

*Guarding each other's soul is part of the Christian responsibility. Wrote Paul, "Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back into the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's commands."* (Galations 6:1-2; Living Bible)

*Sixth, reiterate your faith and repentance to the end of life. "If we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as we did when we first became Christians, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." Hebrews 3:14, Living Bible. It is not he who starts the 'spiritual race', but it is he who finishes the race who shall be crowned with the crown of life! It is not he who is fascinated with the foundation of the house, but it is he who builds the superstructure of the house who shall be honored! It is not he who merely leaves the 'house of bondage' in Egypt, but it is he who like Joshua and Caleb, obediently follows the commands of God and maintains faith in the provisions of God and who rejoices in the gifts of God - it is to such a person that the land of 'milk and honey' belongs! "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."*

*"Father, when you initially transformed me by your power, I started the spiritual journey with great enthusiasm. May it be that the longer I serve Thee, the more zealous my devotion to you becomes, that some glorious day I might finish my life's journey well!"*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As a follower of Christ, I will endeavor each day to be responsive to God and transparent before my fellow believers!*

14.

*"'FAITH' AND 'REPENTANCE' - LIFETIME ATTITUDES!"*



*We noted that one of the important 'conditions' for maintaining your spiritual life is to reiterate your faith and repentance to the end of life. Hebrews 10:14.*

*One of the most respected and brilliant expositor of the Word during the 19th century was Alexander Maclaren, 1826-1910. This well-known Baptist preacher, in many Biblical commentaries he wrote, took seriously the Scriptural 'warnings' given to believers, as demonstrated by his comments on Hebrews 3, which, for several days we have been studying.*

*He wrote, "We receive Jesus Christ and all that He has and all that He is on condition of faithfully holding fast by the beginning of our confidence. We are all apt to drop into a complacent taking for granted that the old energy lasts, and that our religious life is based on the old foundations and that it yields to and is guided by the old motives. When all the while an entire change came over the man, and what he used to do from fresh impulse he now does as a matter of routine. There have been ships wrecked at the harbor-mouth. Keep a firm grasp of the elementary initial truths, which at first drew you to the Master. Any advance, which is to be according to the true law of the Christian system, must not be away from, but deeper into that which we apprehended at first."*

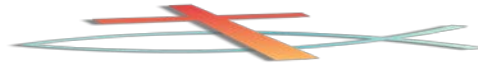
*To whom are granted the privileges of sharing in Christ, or receiving abundant life from Him? It is to those who hold firmly till the end the initial confidence which they had in Christ when they were first converted. Repentance or confession of sin is not only a decisive past act by which we initially became Christians. Rather, repentance and confession are attitudes of the spirit, which must be maintained throughout a lifetime. John wrote, "If we 'continue' to confess our sins, faithful is He and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9, Wuest's translation.*

*Believing in Christ as Savior is not only an initial act by which we transfer faith from our own selves to Christ alone as our only Savior, but faith in Christ is an ongoing, dynamic relationship in which we continuously surrender to Christ and by which we regularly draw new strength for daily living. John 15:4.*

*It is he who 'continues' to confess his sins, and who 'continues' to believe in Jesus, that maintains a vital relationship with God. 'Reiterate' means to do something, repeated again and again, or to repeat over and over. To maintain vitality in the Christian life, we need not confess old sins repeatedly to Christ in order to enjoy assurance of sins forgiven, but we must daily confess any new sins, and we must daily surrender new areas of our lives to Christ's Lordship!*

*"Father, teach me daily to confess any 'new sins' in my life, and help me closely to follow you day by day, until I reach my 'destination' in heaven to be with you forever!"*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! My passionate desire is to maintain a living communion with my loving God!*



15.

"DON'T PLAY THE FOOL!"



*Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'" So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine.<sup>6</sup> Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites. Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night. Early in the morning, Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal." When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." "Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied. Samuel said, "Although you were once*

*small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.<sup>1</sup> And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?"*

*"But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal." But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king. Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin, and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD." But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind." Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD. Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal. Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And*

the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. 1 Samuel 15:1-35.



*"I have played the fool." Samuel 26:21. This is the confession of King Saul. Is he referring especially to one act or to one series of acts in his life? He is condemning his conduct toward a young man that he once admired and loved, named David. But his same confession might have been used as a final summing up of Saul's life. It might serve as his autobiography. And that which deepens the paths of his confession is the fact that this role was self-chosen. Saul was not sent into the world to play the part of a fool; God did not plan to deck him out with cap and bells, he was intended to play the part of a king. God planned that he should wear the garments of royalty; but he thwarted God's plan. He chose the role of fool, but he was not the type of fool that makes us laugh, he is a fool over whom we must weep if we can find any tears bitter enough." (Old Testament Characters; Clovis Chappell; pg. 131)*

*There are some characters in the Bible whose lives are characterized by a great beginning but a tragic ending. Saul is one of those characters. That need never be true of our lives as believers. We can start well, continue well, and finish well. God is able to keep us true to Him until the very end of life, if we do our part in keeping ourselves obedient to God's commands.*

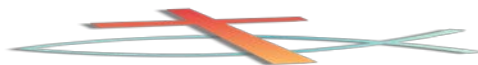
*What was the cause of Saul's tragic fall from God's favor? It was rashness, impulsiveness, disobedience, and insincerity. Saul did not truly repent; David did. Both Saul and David sinned greatly against God. Saul was filled with remorse; David was filled with genuine repentance. Saul did sin; he sinned deeply. However, there have been countless others who have sinned in a far more ugly and hideous way than Saul has, yet whose lives ended in glory and in victory. Saul was never guilty of any sin half as detestable as the sin of his successor, David, who came to be a man after God's own heart.*

*"The tragedy of the life of Saul was not so much in the fact that he sinned as in the fact that he could never be brought to face his sin and to confess it and to hate it and to put it away." Ibid: pg. 136.*

*Saul's lonely despair, murderous plots against David, insane behavior, demonic relations, suicidal death! The lack of true repentance was the cause of Saul's ultimate downfall and tragic end. Seldom has any person started so well, and yet ended so tragically. As believers, we must always be careful not to grieve the Spirit. "Do not quench the Spirit." I Thessalonians 5:19. We must explicitly obey the Lord's timing "...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40:31. We must not neglect the 'means of grace'. Hebrews 10:22-25. We must maintain fellowship with God, as we 'walk in the light' of truth. (I John 1:7) If, or when, we sin, we must quickly and humbly confess all known sin to God in the spirit of true repentance. (I John 1:9)*

*"Father, I accept the 'warnings' of your Word most seriously. Enable me always to remember that a state of backsliding, as in the case of King Saul, is dangerous, for it can lead to complete apostasy and a tragic end. Help me to obey you explicitly!"*

*AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: "Obedience is far better than sacrifice. Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols." (I Samuel 15:22-23, Living Bible)*



16.

"THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST!"



*"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." 2 Timothy 4:4, 8.*

*"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus".  
Philippians 3:12-14.*



*One of Paul's favorite analogies was the analogy of a Christian as an athlete. Paul describes the striving for the prize in 1 Corinthians 9:24. "In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win."*

*Paul describes the hindrances to the runner in Galatians 5:7, 8: "You were getting along so well, i.e., you were running the race so well. Who has interfered with you to hold you back from following the truth? It certainly isn't God Who has done it, for He is the one who has called you to freedom in Christ."*

*Paul describes the athlete's pressing toward the goal in Philippians 3:14: "I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us."*

*Paul describes the athlete's stripping for the contest in Hebrews 12:1: "Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds*

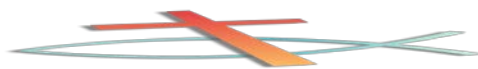
*us back, from running well, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up, during our race of life; and let us RUN with patience the particular RACE that God has set before us."*

*The home stretch of the athlete is referred to in 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought long and hard for my Lord, and through it all I have kept true to him, (i.e., I have kept running till the end)."*

*The prize of the winning is noted in 2 Timothy 4:8: For those persons, believers, who have run the race of life, until the end of the race, there will be granted an amazing reward: "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 me, but to all those whose lives show that they are eagerly looking forward to His coming back again."*

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

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



*"IS COMPASSION YOUR TRUE 'PASSPORT TO HEAVEN'?"*



*According to the famous passage in Matthew 25, it seems quite apparent that Jesus, as the judge in the End, will applaud each person's HEART RESPONSE to the needs of one's fellow men, even if some of the compassion-givers do not have a so-called 'evangelical conversion'! Jesus said of the compassionate persons (who do all kinds of good deeds) that '...inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done unto me.' All they know is that they desire to help people, to alleviate their terrible sufferings, to befriend the lonely, to give a listening ear to the troubled words of persons, to give a generous portion of their money to help the poor, to visit those who are grief-stricken, to share their presence with those in prison, to give away their talents to bless the despairing, and so much more. You may respond to these compassion-oriented persons that they could not do all these 'acts of charity' unless they are 'born-again Christians'. Precisely!*

*These 'fruits of godliness' come not from mere 'sentimental inclinations'. No. The one who is humbly compassionate (i.e., the one who has sincere motives not to glorify his own 'ego', but instead to genuinely help others, with no desire for personal profit or praise) – I say, the one who is humbly compassionate is the same one who is a 'child of God' – truly 'born again'. Such a person has surrendered his heart and his will to others – to serve, to care, to empathize, and to be an instrument of healing. Such a person (and there are multitudes of these kinds of persons, among all classes and races and religious affiliations throughout the world) whose life is largely defined by voluntary works of charity, would be dumbfounded if you asked him if he had been 'born again'. Because such persons cannot 'pinpoint' a time of personal conversion, and they cannot intelligently describe the meaning of 'repentance', 'confession', 'justification', and 'regeneration, and all the other difficult theological salvation terms, does NOT mean that these persons are unconverted or not in God's family.*

*I personally believe, based on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25, that there will be a multitude of persons in heaven who, while they lived on earth, did not profess a deep and personal relationship with Christ, but who, nevertheless, will be are in heaven, apparently to their own surprise! According to what Jesus taught in Matthew 25, they 'walked in all the light of truth' that they knew - namely, the 'Light Of True Compassion' towards their fellow man on earth. They did not realize, while they carried on their active life of compassion on earth, that they were manifesting the compassionate heart of Jesus Himself! Such persons responded to the 'saving grace' of Jesus rather ignorantly, when they committed their entire life and energies and talents and skills and training and motivations to caring for the imprisoned and the starving and the weak and the oppressed and the widow and the poor and the injured. They manifested the 'fruits of Christlikeness', so, indeed, they surely possessed the very person of Christ (the Holy Spoirit) in their heart, even though they never really understood the (theological) dynamics of 'evangelical conversion'.*

*"Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art!" Those (humans) who manifest your type of compassion surely belong to you, Jesus! Compassion, motivated by unselfish love, is the practical and the 'visible' manifestation of 'God's love on the earth'! If compassion is the concrete expression of divine-like love, then surely all persons who have compassion in their heart will gain a glorious entrance into the 'Heaven of Love'! Only compassionate ones (tender-hearted ones) are in Heaven!*



18.

"ARE YOU ON A 'DEAD-END' ROAD OR ON AN 'OPEN-ENDED' ROAD?"



*Do you ever long to be different, to be self-controlled, serene, loving, contributive, winsome, faithful, or confident? Do you ever wish that you could start life all over again? Do you ever wish that your secret past would no longer haunt you? Have you ever wished that your guilt could be resolved and that your future could be bright with hope and cheer?*

*It seems that so many people in our world today think that they can find a positive answer to all these questions, 'on their own', with no need of 'outside help'. They think that, if they search diligently, if they work tirelessly, if they wait patiently, that someday, somehow, they will find the solution to their problems, a 'new life' in which their 'dismal past' will no longer 'haunt' them! In other words, they will finally 'make sense' of their lives which have been 'riddled' with sorrow, lives that have been 'full of grief and pain, and heartbreak'! They are quite sure that they are not on the 'right road' of life, but they do not know, for sure, where to find the 'right road' - the 'road' that is full of joy, peace, love, and meaning.*

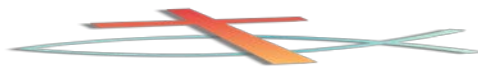
*Solomon, son of David, was known as the 'wisest man' in his time. Solomon was the man, supposedly, who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible. There are some 'glimmers of hope' in this 'confessional book', but this book is largely an account of Solomon, who experienced so many 'despairs' - because he 'traveled' so many 'dead-end roads'. Very relevant to our modern-day! He traveled the dead-end road of materialism. A sampling of his disillusionment: "The man who speculates is soon back to where he began - with nothing." He traveled the dead-end road of pleasure! Solomon again, "Of laughter I said, 'it is madness', and of amusement, 'What does it accomplish?'" Solomon traveled the dead-end road of power and popularity, and for a long time he was applauded and honored as a great king. But, no power lasts forever, even for well-known persons. The day comes, of course, on this fragile planet, when, at best, the great leaders are only*

*occasionally talked about (or read about in history books). Solomon lost his glory and his power. He also traveled the dead-end road of knowledge. "I said to myself," ' "Look, I am better educated than any of the kings before me in Jerusalem. I have greater wisdom and knowledge'. So, I worked hard to be wise instead of foolish - but now I realize that even this was like chasing the wind. For the more my wisdom, the more my grief; to increase knowledge only increases distress."*

*One man who, like Solomon, traveled many dead-end roads before he finally found the 'open-ended' road of Christ was Herman Cohen. "I searched for it in the poetic nights of glorious climate, in the clear waters of the Swiss lakes, in the most magnificent scenery. I have also sought it in fashionable drawing rooms, in splendid dinners, balls, and festivities. I have been looking for it in riches, in the excitement of gambling, in romance, in an adventurous life, and in the satisfaction of an unmeasured ambition. I have sought happiness in artistic name and in all the pleasures of the senses and the mind. Indeed, where, O my God, did I not seek it, this happiness, and the dream of all human hearts? God alone can satisfy the longing of the human heart.*

*God descended into the world in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ; he has become the companion of our pilgrimage, the Bread of our souls. Someone may say I do not believe in Jesus Christ. I can only answer: nor did I. And for this reason I was unhappy. Let us love Jesus. There is only one happiness, to love Jesus and to be loved by him."*

*Jesus is indeed, the 'open-ended road' - the road to true fulfillment, purpose, wisdom, joy, forgiveness!*



19.

"CAN YOU GAIN 'SELF-ESTEEM' FROM YOUR OUTWARD  
WORLD?"



*People everywhere are in a desperate search for personal 'self-esteem', that is, a sense of personal value and individual significance! But so many persons, unfortunately, are looking in the 'wrong place' or to the 'wrong people' to give them a sense of 'worthwhileness'. Everyone wants to feel accepted and acceptable. Teens and even adults will go to almost any 'effort', use any means, to be a part of the 'in group'. A feeling of rejection by one's peers is almost unbearable! I suppose that some teen crimes are, at their root, caused because there is a rebellion by the lone teen who feels that he has never been accepted by society in general, and by his family, or friends, in particular. Thus, teens are extremely angry, outraged, against those who have rejected them, or have turned a 'cold shoulder' of judgement against them. Now, one thinks, they will show others around them, including those who have long bullied them, that they are significant, even if it means that they kill people around them who are innocent, like mere children. One's violent, senseless actions are the counter attack against the actual ones who have terribly mistreated them, or even against others who are the innocent scapegoats - the stand-ins.*

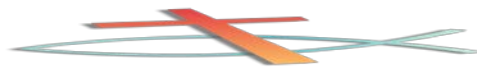
*According to the truth of God's Word, God of Love cherishes human beings He has made. Therefore the human being, made in God's image, is made to love - and to be loved! For example, take a person, teen or otherwise, who has not received love from one's parents or from other significant persons. This unloved person will probably not know how to love others. Thus, the unloved one is depleted, in his spirit, of the very greatest need that he has. As a human, he is created to receive love and to give love. Such a person, teen or adult, is therefore strongly driven to fight back - to shout to the world that he exists and that he is going to have a say in this world - even if it is the voice and action of violent reaction! Most, maybe even all, murderers have not been loved, and they, in turn, have never themselves known how to love, and as a 'sick human being', this love-depleted person (teens or adults) has feeling no sense of genuine 'significance' for himself or for*

anyone else. Such persons are going to take out their deep hurt and hate upon their perceived 'enemies', (i.e., upon those who have long 'put them down', despised them, 'ridiculed' them, 'overlooked' them, sexually abused them, long neglected them and belittled them, underrated them, and hated them). Is it any wonder that there are so many 'teen murders'?

There is, of course, no ultimate excuse for violence by teens or adults. The victims of their crimes are to be defended and protected – but, the cause of violence oftentimes 'boils down' to the perpetrator being painfully 'sick' because of his never discovering true 'self-esteem', genuine significance.

Where is one's self-esteem found? Not from your peers, for the praise of peers is changeable and is often based not on 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'. Nor is self-worth based on material things. This is also unreliable, for you may suddenly lose your money or what money can buy. There are adults also who are still hanging on to their symbols of youth – fads and fashions in clothing – as an attempt to maintain a crumbling sense of self-worth. Don't set your hopes or build your sense of self-worth on popularity, for the world's popularity is elusive and passing.

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 you a lasting sense of value. Remember, to have a quiet smile of God's approval resting on your life is worth more to you than the applause of all of the earth's kings!



*"WILL THE LIVING CHRIST RECEIVE 'GREAT SINNERS - LIKE ME'?"*



*Christ (the Son of God who came from His throne in heaven) is the 'Friend of sinners', the divine 'redeemer', 'the Hound of Heaven' in 'heavy pursuit' of the lost ones who are 'running away' from God! Jesus came to 'seek and to save the lost ones' - and that includes you, who may think that you are a 'great sinner'! There is no sin so great but what God, through Christ, is able to forgive! The price of forgiveness is beyond calculation - for God only is able to forgive sinners - justly because of the price that Jesus paid on the cruel cross of Calvary. It is only because of His death, in place of the death that you should have died for your own sins, that God can now forgive you (and can declare you 'justified' - a new standing with God). So God is both 'just' and the 'justifier' of the ungodly, all because of the bloody sacrifice of Jesus Christ (God's sinless Son)!*

*Whether you are a 'great sinner' (having broken most of God's Commandments, over a long period - and, thus, deserving eternal damnation), or are a young child (who has sinned very little) - either way, 'Christ receives sinful men and women, boys' and girls'! A song that I often sang when I was a young person is titled '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.*

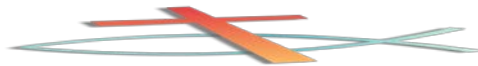
*The Bible says in the book of James that if you have broken only one of God's Ten Commandments, you are (in the sight of God) as guilty as if you had broken several or all of the Commandments. We all should know that 'guilt' is 'guilt', and any amount of guilt brings God's condemnation, and eventual 'death'. It is like saying: A small amount of deadly poison in your milk can 'kill' you as quickly as a large dose of that same poison! All sin is 'deadly'. "The wages of sin is death", the Bible tells us! But the 'Good News' (i.e., what Jesus is all about) is that there is a total 'remedy' for our 'sin problem'.*

*The very purpose for which Jesus came to earth was to provide a means by which every human being (sinner) could be 'saved' - for time and for eternity! Abundant life on earth, freedom from sin's bondage, guilt, power, and eternal life. Unbounded freedom, joy, and life after we die. You can be a 'double winner', instead of a 'double loser'!*

*IF - the biggest word of the English language, IF - you honestly accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and seek to follow Him every day of your earthly life!*

*Do you remember Matthew the tax collector, who probably (like most tax collectors during the Roman times) was 'shady' in his 'business dealings'? Matthew was so thoroughly converted by Christ that God eventually used him to write one of the several Gospels! Zacchaeus - the man of 'short stature' - was so thoroughly converted that he pledged to 'give fourfold' back to anyone from whom he had 'stolen' through dishonest (deceptive) business practices!*

*Christ is able to 'change the leopard's spots'. He is able to 'save to the uttermost'. He is able to make a 'bad' man 'good'! "God is of purer eyes, than to behold evil", but, while God hates sin in every form and in every degree, God, nevertheless, deeply loves every sinner. God is ready and able to change the 'corrupt' into the 'pure' and 'holy' and 'wholesome' and 'honest'! There is no 'case' that is too hard for the Almighty Savior, for He paid the price (with His blood) for the redemption of the 'chiefest of sinners.' Are you too 'sinful' for Christ to 'save'? Never! Christ receives sinful men!*



21.

*"ARE YOU A 'DOWN-AND-OUT' SINNER OR AN 'UP-AND-OUT' SINNER?"*



*The Bible makes it very 'clear' that there are both of these 'kinds' of sinners! Chapter one and Chapter two of the book of Romans reveal 'two sides of one coin'. The coin is sin. One side of the 'coin' is the life of sensuality. The other side of the 'coin' is the life of self-righteous morality. Almighty God condemns both ways of life. Neither the down-and-out sinner nor the up-and-out sinner can gain God's approval. The repulsive life of sensual perversion and the respectable life of self-righteous morality are equally offensive to the all-holy God, and both ways of life lead to the same terrible eternal destination!*

*The man of self-righteous morality is shallow in his understanding of the nature of sin. He can easily condemn the immoral behavior of the 'down-and-out' sinners. Adultery, stealing, cheating, murder, and other such gross actions, are easily and rightly condemned. However, the man of morality finds it difficult to diagnose the universal disease of all mankind - the disease of self-centeredness. "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 the disease, like rouge on the face of a woman dying of anemia. They can't affect the deadly disease underneath." William Sangster.*

*God says to the self-righteous Jews in Rome; "You are just as bad as the Gentiles. When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are talking about yourselves, for you do these very same things. God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have his written laws, but don't obey them. They know what is right, but don't do it. After all, salvation is not given to those who know what to do, unless they do it."*

*At the time of my conversion, I was an 'up-and-out' sinner. I was living a morally respectable life, with no noticeable 'bad' habits, and I was*

*attending church services three times a week. I read the Bible, I memorized some Bible verses, I even 'said' my prayers, and I performed my share of 'good deeds'. I believed that, because I was a fifth generation Free Methodist, I was morally acceptable to God and that God would automatically let me go to heaven.*

*I, like the morally upright Jews described in Romans, felt that God favored me. I reasoned that, because I didn't indulge in grossly immoral sins, surely I was acceptable enough to God! The day came, however, when I realized that God has no grandchildren, only children. A second-hand experience of God, through my godly mother, would never suffice. I needed personally to repent of my sins - my sinful attitudes, my pride, my self-righteous claims, and my dependence upon morality alone to save me. I realized that up-and-out religious sinners needed God just as much as down-and-out irreligious sinners. One kind of sinner can go to hell as quickly as the other kind of sinner! I finally 'got my spiritual eyes opened' - to reality! To God's Reality! "There is a way that seems 'right' unto man, but the end thereof is the 'way of death!'" How many persons are 'deceived' by thinking that their own morality, good works and nice personality, will give them a 'passport to heaven'! Thank God for His awakening of my blinded soul! I realized that he, who is born once, dies twice, but he who is born twice dies only once! BE BORN AGAIN!*



22.

*"TWO MASTERS – TWO CHOICES - TWO DESTINIES!"*



*There, of course, are several 'distinguishing characteristics' of human beings, in contrast to God's lower creation, but probably the greatest and the most frightening 'distinguishing characteristic' of a human being is his/her ability to choose. Free will is what decides between 'moral alternatives'. We all know this intellectually and experientially. Some of us, probably all of us, have exercised our 'volition' in ways that have caused us regrets and even tremendous 'guilt', because we can't deny, in all honesty, that we live in a moral universe, controlled by a real and personal 'God'. When we 'fail morally', by breaking the Laws of a just God, we feel 'bad', that is, unless we have sinned so frequently that we have paralyzed or 'seared' our conscience; that state is worse than physical paralysis!*

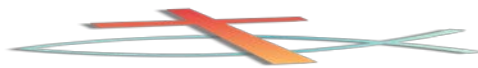
*Joshua, the commanding officer who became leader after the great Moses died, made it very clear that all of the Israelites had to make 'moral decisions'. He said boldly; "Choose you this day whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" I would like to ask you, since everyone, without exception, serves someone or something: "Who have you chosen to serve?" There are only two masters -God and Satan, and there are only two destinies, heaven and the other place, which is too painful for me to name and to describe!*

*If you believe in God and in God's Son Jesus – really believe, that is, trust in, adhere to, rely upon Jesus – and if you continue to obey this wonderful Savior – "You Will Surely Enjoy Heaven As Your Eternal Home!" The Bible says that, "...eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." With that promise from God, in your mind, why would you not want to surrender your life to the loving Savior? He is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should repent, and believe, and be 'saved' – wonderfully saved! Again, remember that you have a 'free will' – and the way you exercise that 'free will' will ultimately determine your 'eternal destiny'. That is why I say that the 'power to choose' is the most 'frightening power' that you have. Some persons,*

*most foolishly, have used their 'free will' to 'put their fist into the face of Almighty God'. To resist any 'overture' of God's initiating love – love that is urging you to choose heaven as your eternal home – spells disaster! The Almighty God could have sent the entire rebellious and disobedient human race to a 'devil's hell', for after all, every one of us, is a sinner, by nature and by our own willful choice. But God, the God who is perfect love, chose to do the most 'unbelievable' thing in the entire Universe – that is, to step down from His throne in heaven to live for 33 years on this planet, to 'take the just punishment' for our sin – dying in the place of all sinners who should have died for their own sins. Such love!*

*No one needs to take his own just penalty for his own willful transgressions against the known laws of God! If you and I truly believe that Jesus is the sinless Son of God, the perfect atoning sacrifice for sins that paid the ransom for all sins, past and present, then 'Our Sins Are Forgiven'. Our sins are hid in the 'Sea of God's Forgetfulness', 'As far as the East is from the West, so far has God removed our sins from us'.*

*We 'shout' at a ball game, but should not we powerfully shout about this glorious fact – shout for the remaining days of our life? In addition, remember, in heaven, you, and a multitude of other 'redeemed saints' like you, will 'raise your voice' in praise to the 'King of Glory' – the 'Prince of Heaven. 'Saints' like you, will 'raise their voice' in praise to the 'King of Glory' – the 'Prince of Heaven'! Take the way of Christ! Take the way of love, kindness, peace, and so much more! Remember: the way of sin is the way of hardship and misery ultimately. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." – Jesus.*



*"IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU DEALING WITH YOUR  
'FEELINGS OF GUILT'?"*



*One of the most respected and influential leaders, writers, lecturers, and educators in 'World of Psychology' was Dr. Karl Menninger (who founded the famous 'Menninger Foundation' in Topeka, Kansas). For many years, counselors (out in the 'field') recognized his 'thoughts' and sought to follow his 'guidance'. His was a 'household' name among serious psychologists in America. Then, several years ago (during his later career), Dr. Menninger published a book that was to become quite 'revolutionary', not only in the narrower world of psychology, but in the wider world as well, including the 'world of Christian ministers'. The name of the book was rather 'shocking' to many psychologists: "Whatever Became of Sin?" Imagine a well-known psychologist, perhaps even the 'grandfather of modern psychology', focusing upon the subject that was 'off-limits' to many, maybe most, psychologists! In this book, Dr. Menninger, compassionately, but, nevertheless, firmly and rather sternly asks why ministers, perhaps many ministers, no longer spoke boldly and honestly about 'sin' from their pulpits.*

*Why are the ministers 'afraid' to tell parishioners that there is a serious problem, called sin, and that a person's 'guilty feelings' are the result of actually 'breaking the universal moral code', The Laws of God? In this book, that soon became 'the talk of ministers' as well as the discussion of professional psychologists, the author 'pinpoints' many, many sins, personal sins as well as societal sins, and he communicates that, facing the reality of these many different, overlooked sins could finally 'bring forgiveness and healing'. No, guilt is not the result of one 'wanting to do something but can't because of societal, or parental, restrictions', but instead guilt is the result of actually having done something that he/she should not have done, the actual breaking of an objective moral law of God.*

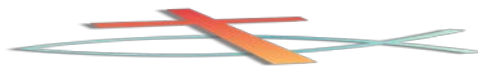
*How do you deal with the 'guilty feelings', which you experience when you know that you have deliberately 'broken God's Laws', violated the*

universal 'moral code'? There are, of course, unfounded 'guilty feelings', feelings you have when you know you have not done 'anything wrong' - but that is for another day and for another discussion. We are talking now about 'genuine guilt', breaking of one or probably more than one of the Ten Commandments. You know about some of the 'terrible consequences' when you 'sin' openly, or more likely, secretly. Mental anguish, bondage of your inner spirit, emotional disturbance, irrational behavior in your attempt to keep your sinful act concealed from others, social alienation with no 'freedom' of movement and laughter among your closer friends, and even physical illness. A terrible toll, all because of 'guilty feelings', that invade your total life! Of course, just as there is the reality of 'physical paralysis', there is tragically, the reality of 'spiritual paralysis', that is, some persons have 'sinned so long' and sinned with such variety and 'sinned with such intensity' that they no longer feel the 'fever' from their 'wrongdoing'. They have resisted God's Spirit so long, and they have broken God's Laws so frequently, that they have 'talked themselves into believing' that there really is no such thing as 'Sin', and they many times doubt that there is even a 'Living God' before whom they someday must give a 'final account' of the quality of their earthly life.

What do you do if you, an honest person, want to find relief from the terrible 'burden of your guilt'? There are 'inadequate ways' to respond:

1. Blame others;
2. Rationalize your behavior;
3. Deny any wrongdoing;
4. Project your guilt on others.

There is only one way to adequately respond by doing what King David, when he faced his terrible sins, Psalms 32 and 51. In deep humility, he confessed all his sins, I John 1: 9. *"But if we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."*



24.

"WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE 'TEN  
COMMANDMENTS'?"



*For the sake of a simple 'illustration', think with me for a few moments about the old-fashioned 'floor furnace', which, of course, appeared only in homes which were built many years ago. Centered in the middle of the living room, the heat from the underneath furnace came 'billowing out' of the furnace - to heat the entire house. I can imagine the caring mother, with several 'preschool children', declaring to these children: "The floor furnace is 'off-limits'. Do not step on it, lest you 'burn yourself', on your bare feet. Now, obey your mother! Period!"*

*In this 'word picture', think of the floor furnace as the Laws of God, the Ten Commandments and other important Laws of God. There are three different reactions to the 'floor furnace', as there are to the Ten Commandments. One is defiance, outright disobedience to the 'voice' of the mother, i.e. defiance against God and His Holy Commandments. Two is ambivalence, double-mindedness (legalism) - the children sometimes obeying the command, and sometimes the children being attracted to the floor furnace, just as some persons at times seek to obey God's commands, and at other times are inclined to 'step on the commands', the 'the floor furnace'! Three is surrender to God to allow God to 'change your inner nature', so that you will gladly respect and obey the commands of God, just like submissive children gladly obey their mother's declaration not to step on the 'floor furnace'.*

*Again, remember the First reaction is Defiance, 'Rebellion'! "If I want an abortion, I will get one, and no one will dare tell me what to do with my own body." "The German people are the superior race, and all other races must 'bow the knee' to us." Moral Relativity, - "There is no 'North Star' to guide me in my moral decisions. I will do what feels right to me! Everyone does what is right in his own eyes." (Ancient Israel) Relativism (very self-centered) eventually leads to chaos and destruction!*

*Again, remember the Second reaction is Legalism. Trying to 'pull yourself up by your own bootstraps', is futile. Why? Because the 'corrupt nature' with which all humans are born, original sin, keeps a sincere person from reaching God's standard of 'moral excellence', the Holy Laws of God. "There is none that is righteous, no not one. We have all gone astray and followed our own evil ways." The Laws of God can be likened to a 'Mirror' – showing us our sinful condition. But a 'Mirror' can only reveal, it cannot 'save', cannot change human nature. A disobedient child was told to go and sit in a corner. After awhile, the little boy shouted to his mother: "I am sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up in the inside". "Defiance and rebellion" – that is true of all humans! Because of our 'fallen nature', our selfishness and pride and independent spirit, we are incapable of keeping the Laws of God. We are sadly 'drawn' to the 'floor furnace' (sadly defieant of God's Holy Laws, because of our corrupt heart)! We seem to believe that 'stolen fruit is sweetest of all'! Why do we find it so 'easy', to break the Commandments?*

*Again, remember the Third reaction is Grace. When you 'lay down your arms' and surrender to Christ, you will be 'inwardly changed' in your nature. The love of God is "shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit". As a 'new person in Christ Jesus', truly converted within yourself, you now have a deep love for God – a passionate desire to please Him, in all you do and say and think. Amazingly, you find yourself with a growing 'feeling' of love for all persons, even for enemies.*



25.

"UPON WHAT 'ROAD' ARE YOU TRAVELING IN LIFE?"



*One of the 'broad roads' upon which many people today are traveling is the 'road of materialism'. Don't get me 'wrong'. God made the 'material' world; therefore, it is legitimate to enjoy what God has made. And God has not condemned 'money', for money, obviously, is necessary, and money can be very beneficial as means of helping other persons. Believers in Jesus are to be generous in the use of their money! No, it is not material things that we are to despise and it is not money, as such, that we are to despise. It is not money itself, which is the result of our hard work, and which is to be used, in part, to help the 'unfortunate' ones in our midst. It is the 'love of money' that is the 'root of all evil'! Making 'money our god' is what defines 'materialism'. The person of 'common sense' needs to note 'briefly' the limitations of money, and the folly of loving money! Jesus, Himself, said that we cannot serve 'two masters' - God and Money at the same time. We must serve God and use money for the glory of God and the good of humanity!*

*The road of materialism is a dead-end road: First, because of the inheritability of laboriously gained riches.*

*Second, because riches cause sleepless anxiety.*

*Third, because riches can be easily lost. Paul instructs us not to set our hopes '...on the uncertainty of riches.' (I Timothy 6:17)*

*Fourth, because money cannot be taken with us when we die. "We didn't bring any money with us when we came into the world, and we can't carry away a single penny when we die." (I Timothy 6:7)*

*Fifth, because material possessions do not have the ability to satisfy the inner longing of the soul.*

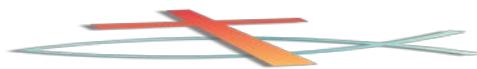
*There is the road of Pleasure. Do not get me wrong. Jesus says that He came to bring us an 'abundant life', not a life of grief, shame, and*

*misery. He came to give us life in all its fullness. There are, according to the Bible, 'pleasure forever more', some now on earth, and fully in heaven - for the believer! But, worldly pleasures are simply a 'perversion' of the true and wholesome and God-given pleasures - pleasures not 'centered in our body', (although there are legitimate sexual pleasures and other bodily pleasures, given by God). The pleasures which God gives are centered in an intimate and loving relationship with God. The mere pleasures of this world are short-lived, and ultimately lead to a 'shriveling' of the human constitution and personality! The pleasure-obsessed persons engage in endless attempts to gratify their lusts, only to find themselves forever frustrated and heaven-starved.*

*There is the road of popularity and power. A ballerina dancer was asked if her fame had not given her much pleasure, as a popular person. She replied, "It is a strange thing, but after many curtain calls, much applause and tremendous acclaim, I go to my room. There, when alone, I feel a desert in my heart."*

*There is the road of Knowledge. Knowledge, of course, is not to be despised or belittled - for all truth is God's truth. However, knowledge that is separated from God leads to madness and folly. Science as a methodology is fantastic, but science, as a god, is folly and can lead to the destruction of the human race!*

*There is the 'Open-ended Road' of Christ! Christ gives a new vision of new opportunities, and the strength to 'conquer obstacles, and to discover new vistas'! And constant divine companionship.*



26.

"ARE YOU STRONGLY ANTICIPATING THE 'GLORIES OF HEAVEN?'"



*Like so many thousands of dear women, throughout our 'fair land', who 'fight the battle against breast cancer', there was one beautiful, fifty-five year old woman (Sharon) - an active parishioner in the church where I was pastor (in Ft. Collins) - that 'lost her battle' with this dreaded and widespread disease! She was so 'radiant' and 'triumphant' in her 'faith in Christ', as she realized, after 'challenging the disease' for a few years, that she was definitely going to leave this 'place' that she loved so much (she was an outdoors person, going hunting with her husband, and so much more!). Even though all medical procedures were used (the 'typical methods' for several years), she found herself suffering terribly during the last few days. She had great assurance that she would soon 'meet her dear Savior' in peace and love (the moment she died), but she, nevertheless, was troubled. She finally (humbly) acknowledged to her husband, why her 'dismay'! Strangely enough, this woman of great 'faith' was troubled because she wondered how, amidst the vast crowd in heaven, she would be able to find (i.e., to locate) her loved ones when she entered the 'gates' of heaven. She was 'distraught' for several days. Then, as is always true of 'God's mercy and provision', Sharon was given what might be called a 'glorious vision' - a 'vision of reassurance'. God told her that she need not worry that she could not find her loved ones in heaven, amidst the throngs of sainted people. She would immediately feel at home in heaven. Her loved ones, who would be there to welcome her, alongside Jesus Himself, would first greet her! What glorious assurance was given to her, a short time before her 'home going'!*

*God makes man, and man is made for Heaven. As important as earth is, and as beautiful as earth is, it is, from God's perspective, only the 'prelude' to heaven. God prepared heaven for man's 'final dwelling place' - a place of indescribable joy and fulfillment - a place where each earthly inhabitant has a special place to live and a special assignment to carry out for the Father.*

*A place of glorious fellowship with the multitudes of redeemed souls who lived during all the ages of the earth - deep fellowship with all, with absolutely no comparison and no competition and no jealousy between the inhabitants of that happy place. New (spiritual) bodies - with no aging, no sickness, and certainly no death. Each for all, and all for each! And, just think of it, the best of all is the fact that every heavenly citizen (redeemed by the 'blood of Jesus') will unitedly focus on worshiping and praising the 'King of the Universe', the 'Lord of All Things', the 'Giver of Eternal Life' in heaven! We will never tire of ascribing 'glory' to the One who saved us from all our sins, and who granted us 'heavenly, eternal life'! This (and so much more that can't even be described) constitutes 'Reality' - for the 'children of God', for those who gladly 'bow their knees' in surrender to the 'Creator of the Universe'! It is not hard to love the One who poured out His life's blood to redeem a lost and undone race of sinners! Heaven will be most wonderful, and Jesus has prepared this 'eternal abode' for you! Now, you must receive His gift. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind, what God hath prepared for those who love Him!"*

*The last words of dying persons have often been recorded. Here are a few:*

*"The Chariot Has Come, And I Am Ready To Step In." (Margaret Prior)*

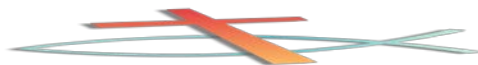
*"Eternity Rolls Up Before Me Like A Sea Of Glory." (Jordan Antie)*

*"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 Arthur Lyth)*



*"THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST EXERCISES RIGOROUS  
DISCIPLINE!"*



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

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

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

*As a junior in high school, I distinctly remember the rigorous practice that some of us runners underwent, just the week before the big state track meet. I thought the coach would run our legs off that week! However, that hard training paid off, for the next week at the state track meet, our school took first place. At that track meet I had my best recorded time for running the quarter mile in 52.6 seconds.*

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

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

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

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

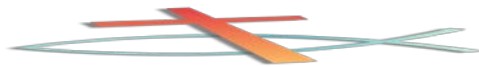
*The athlete of Christ disciplines his soul. How does the Christian discipline his soul? He learns to face sorrows with fortitude and endurance. Barclay defines endurance as "...the courageous and triumphant ability to bear things which enable a man to pass the breaking-point and not to break and always to greet the unseen with a cheer." Barclay further comments, "The Christian is the athlete of God whose spiritual muscles become strong from the discipline of the training of difficulties". The Christian also disciplines his soul by learning to face disappointments with courage. The courageous man is the man of faith who is not daunted by disappointments, but who is patient in waiting when nothing seems to be happening. As Barclay notes, "The hardest*

*time of all is the time in between. At the moment of decision, there is the excitement and the thrill. At the moment of achievement, there is the glow and glory of satisfaction. But in the in-between time there is necessary the ability to plod and to wait and to work and to watch when nothing seems to be happening...the man of faith is the man whose hope is flaming bright, whose effort is intensely strenuous even in the grey days when there is nothing to do but to wait".*

*The Christian also disciplines his soul by learning to face temptations as an aid rather than as a hindrance to one's growth. Says Barclay, "What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger, 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."*

*"Why should I complain of Want or Distress,  
Temptation or Pain? He told me no less;  
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,  
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."  
By John Newton*

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



28.

*"THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST STRIVES TOWARDS  
ONE GOAL!"*



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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Christian must become goal-oriented. We are living in a world in which there is excessive activity, but few real and worthy goals. Says Barclay; "Someone once drew a cartoon showing two men on Mars looking down at the people in this world scurrying here, there, and everywhere. One said to the other, 'What are they doing?' The other replied, 'They are going.' 'But', said the first, 'where are they going?' 'Oh', said the other, 'they are not going anywhere; they are just going.' And to go just anywhere is the certain way to arrive nowhere".*

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

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

*An inferior and wrong goal, upon which the athlete of Christ can become focused, is the goal of materialism. Money can be greatly used by a person, or money can greatly use a person. Money can be either the servant or the master of man. When man develops the greedy and grasping hand, money becomes his master. When man uses money as a means to a great and noble end, then money is merely the servant of*

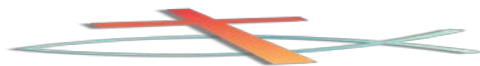
man. *The athlete of Christ must make Christ the Master and Coach of one's life. All must be brought into submission to Christ.*

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

*George Muller was one whose goal of life was to please God. Said Muller: "There was one day when I died - died to George Muller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of my brethren and friends, and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."*

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

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



29.

*"THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST GUARDS AGAINST OVER-CONFIDENCE!"*



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

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

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

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

*At the end of life, Paul could say, "I have fought the good fight; I have completed the course; I have kept the faith." How wonderful to be able to say that at the end of one's life. It is tragic that some people start well and never finish.*

*Says Barclay, "It is easy to begin; it is hard to finish." The one thing necessary for life is staying-power, and that is what so many people*

lack. It was suggested to a certain very famous man that his *biography should be written while he was still alive. He absolutely refused to give permission, and his reason for his refusal was: 'I have seen so many men fall out on the last lap.' It is easy to wreck a noble life by some closing folly; it is easy to spoil a fine record, in our work both in the world and in the Church, by something which spoils it all.*"

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

- 1. Sin of idolatry.*
- 2. Sin of fornication.*
- 3. Sin of presumption.*
- 4. Sin of murmuring.*

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

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

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

*The Christian must guard against the sin of murmuring. We American Christians are the richest and most healthy people in the world. We are blessed with more opportunities in education and job advancements, etc. We have so much, while others have so little.*

*And yet, we sometimes are like the Israelites - chronic complainers and unthankful for the miracles God has wrought for us.*

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

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

*"I want a principle within of jealous godly fear  
A sensibility of sin, A pain to feel it near.  
Help me the first approach to feel of pride or wrong desire,  
To catch the wand'ring of my will,  
And quench the kindling fire.*

*The Scriptures exhort us to be watchful and vigilant. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:41*

*Peter says, "Awake: be on the alert! Your enemy the devil like a roaring lion, prowls around looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8, NEB)*

*Paul calls a Christian an athlete of Christ. Just as an athlete submits his body and mind to rigorous discipline, so the Christian learns to exercise discipline in his body, in his mind, and to his soul.*

*A good athlete is a single-minded person, one who strives toward one goal. So it is with the Christian. The Christian is able to brave pain, persecution, perplexities, and cares in order that he may reach his supreme goal, which is Jesus Christ.*

*The downfall of the athlete is over-confidence, and so it is with the Christian. The Christian must realize that he cannot rest on his laurels or be satisfied with any accomplishments. The Christian must ever be on his guard against sin. The race is not over until we cross the 'finish line', when Christ calls us home to heaven. Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*

*Crown of life! That is the reward of the athlete of Christ, who is disciplined, single-minded, and never overly-confident.*



30.

"CROSSING THE 'FINISH LINE' OF THE RACE!"



*I have participated in dozens of races, starting when I was a young teenager. My last competitive race was when I was 56 years old. I enjoyed racing over a 44 years period! At my present age of 70, I continue to jog on most early mornings!*

*There is something exhilarating about running and jogging. Breathing the fresh air, listening to the sounds of the beautiful birds, watching the hopping bunnies, beholding the changing colors of the leaves, greeting fellow joggers, meditating and praying to the God of Creation!*

*However, when I often involved myself in competitive running in my younger years, I had to concentrate, not on Nature, but on my breathing, my pace, my sense of timing, as I viewed the scores of 'fellow runners' around me, competing for their own 'best time'. When running competitively, I had to retain enough energy and strength during the earlier part of my 'race', so that I would have the ability to finish my race with the maximum speed that I could engender. I always wanted to run the last 100 yards of the race with a fast stride! I wanted to finish my race with great gusto, with great strength, and speed.*

*Often during the last 100 yards of the racing course, I would pass some of my fellow competitors. I wanted, of course, to achieve the best time for the race that I possibly could. Finish with speed was important to me! Because of my 'running strategy, and proper pacing' throughout the running course of several miles, I was able, because of 'God's enabling', to place 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in many of my races, that is, in my particular age group. As I record these thoughts, during this early summer morning, on June 2015, I sit at my desk, which is located about three feet from my filing cabinet. On top of my filing cabinet there rests a dozen or more trophies - impressive - looking trophies and beautiful ribbons that are testaments of my committed efforts in running many races throughout my 40 plus years of athletic competitions! No, I never was a truly elite runner, but I did participate regularly in many of the well-known races, for 'average' people' in my city.*

*When I look back and reflect upon some of the races from former years, and when I think about some of my running times, I am amazed at how good those times were, in light of the slowness of my present-day times when I daily jog, as a 70-year-old man!*

*The passing of time does 'make a difference'! My times are much slower, as I continue to age!*

*In the 'ancient world' during the time the New Testament was written, running was a popular sport. The apostle Paul used several analogies to describe the meaning of the 'Christian Life', including the analogy of running. As Paul came to the closing of his long, enduring Christian life, he described himself as a 'runner'. As a follower of Christ, he had run hard and long and he had endured great persecution for the cause of Christ! He was not a 'quitter', he had stayed on course! In spite of his great hardships and trials, he loved his earthly life - his run in life, accompanied by his 'Divine Coach' Jesus Christ! However and understandably, Paul anticipated the time when his earthly life (race) would be over. He looked forward to the time when he would cross the finish line of his earthly existence, to enjoy the glorious time when he could 'rest from his hard run', and when he could enjoy life in eternity, heaven, with his blessed Master, Savior!*

*Near the end of his life on earth, Paul said he had fought a good fight, one of Paul's favorite analogies, and he said he had finished the race! (2nd Timothy 4:7, The 'Racing Analogy')*

*What did Paul say would be his reward from God, because he had 'finished' the race? Every runner like myself, who performs well in a race, anticipates receiving during the award ceremony, an award, a trophy, or a ribbon. I take pride (humbly) in my rather large collection of trophies, which I have crammed on top of my file cabinet.*

*Even though we Christians must serve Christ because of who He Is, not because of what we want to receive from Him, nevertheless, God desires to reward all persons who seek to faithfully serve Christ. Even those who give a cup of cold water to a child, in Jesus' name, will not go without a reward, so promised Jesus! God loves to give rewards to His faithful children - forever! What a most gracious, and lavish God of Love!*

*Paul did not blush when he spoke about the heavenly reward that he anticipated, because he endured his spiritual race on earth. He wrote, "There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8)*

*How should we, as Christians, understand the REWARD that we shall receive when we cross the 'finish line', following our courageous race that we ran on earth for our blessed Lord? To answer that important question, carefully meditate on the following detailed Scripture! It describes the unbelievably great REWARD that God will give to the faithful 'RUNNER FOR GOD'! Let us all 'keep on keeping on' as we daily run the race of life. Let us remember that we never run alone!*

*Let us remember that there is a 'great cloud of witnesses' in heaven's grandstand who are cheering for us, when we become 'tired' during our Race of Life!*



31.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-5:10, LIVING BIBLE (TLB)

*"That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day. These troubles and sufferings of ours are, after all, quite small and won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever! So we do not look at what we can see right now, the troubles all around us, but we look forward to the joys in heaven which we have not yet seen. The troubles will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever. 5:1-10*

*For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies that we shall put on like new clothes. For we shall not be merely spirits without bodies. These earthly bodies make us groan and sigh, but we wouldn't like to think of dying and having no bodies at all. We want to slip into our new bodies so that these dying bodies will, as it were, be swallowed up by everlasting life. This is what God has prepared for us, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. Now we look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies, realizing that every moment we spend in these earthly bodies is time spent away from our eternal home in heaven with Jesus.<sup>7</sup> We know these things are true by believing, not by seeing. And we are not afraid but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So our aim is to please him always in everything we do, whether we are here in this body or away from this body and with him in heaven. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged and have our lives lain bare—before him. Each of us will receive whatever he deserves for the good or bad things he has done in his earthly body."*

*NOTES AND COMMENTS*

