

Articles by Steve Hulshizer

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A Blurry World

We live in a blurry world. A world in which distinctions are no longer clear. In fact, to even make distinctions is considered improper, and in some cases illegal.

It began with “unisex” clothing in which there was no distinction made between how men and women dressed. Now the distinction between the sexes has reached the point where homosexuality is an accepted life style. A life style in which two people of the same sex are viewed as a couple and want the same rights as a man and woman who are married. Sadly, our children are growing up in a world where the distinction between the sexes is blurred.

It is true with religion as well. The new age movement has made an attempt to blur the distinctions between all religions. All religions lead to God, there is no difference. Even students in one of the country’s largest “Christian” colleges see no distinction between evangelical Christianity and other so-called “Christian” religions around us.

It is true when it comes to the church as well. Many saints in our local assemblies see no difference between a local assembly which attempts to follow the New Testament principles and pattern, and a church that ignores such truth. To make a distinction as to how a group of Christians function at the corporate level is legalistic and narrow-minded. The distinctions have been blurred and minimized.

The blurring of distinctions can be found in many other areas as well. The roles of husbands and wives. In some

homes even the distinction between parents and children is blurred when it comes to authority.

May God give us the grace, wisdom, and spiritual strength to make Scriptural distinctions clear.

Absolutophobia

Writing in the July 21, 1997 issue of U.S. News & World Report, John Leo writes, “Overdosing on nonjudgmentalism is a growing problems in the schools. Two disturbing articles in the Chronicle of Higher Education say that some students are unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery, because they think that no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture.”

Robert Simon, a college professor, reports that 10 to 20 percent of his students can’t bring themselves to say that killing millions of people in the Holocaust was wrong. One student said, “Of course I dislike the Nazis, but who is to say they are morally wrong?” Simon calls this “absolutophobia”-the unwillingness to say something is wrong.

Leo closes his article by saying, “But the wheel is turning now, and ‘values clarification’ is giving way to ‘character education,’ and the paralyzing fear of indoctrinating children is gradually fading. The search is on for a teachable consensus rooted in simple decency and respect. As a spur to shaping it, we might discuss a culture so morally confused that students are showing up at colleges reluctant to say anything negative about mass slaughter.”

“Values clarification” is a product of the New Age Movement, and was designed to make everyone agree to disagree. No one is right and no one is wrong. This would allow the world to come together in a New Age. It has obviously failed as we have our current society to

show as an example of its results. But the greatest single factor in this tragedy was, no doubt, the removal of the Divine moral standard from our schools. If our society wants to provide "character education," there would be no better way than to re-institute the Word of God in our schools.

However, "absolutophobia" is not limited to our schools and society. The attitude that judging is wrong has evaded the professing Christian church as well. A movement that claims to be Christian is accepted as Christian without being tested by Scripture. If a group speaks of Christ they must be one of us. If the music has the same beat as the world's but is performed by those professing to be Christians, it must be Christian music, and we must not judge!

Not only has the Bible been set aside in public schools and society, it has been set aside in professing Christianity. Many are quick to quote, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." However, few are quick to quote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4:1)

While the Scriptures do warn us concerning judging the motives of others, it repeatedly instructs and encourages us to be judging both the message and the messenger, "For many deceivers are entered into the world...." (2 John 7)

Paul writing to the saints at Philippi said, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;" (Phil. 1:9-10)

While Paul prayed that their hearts might be expanded in love, he did not mean that in love they should accept all things or all people. Their love, like a river, was to flow within the banks of knowledge and judgment. It was to be restricted by truth and discernment. They were to discern what was “excellent.”

Many believe that in the professing church discernment is at an all time low, sadly at a time when deception is at an all time high. Many have not taken time to search “the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11) Things are handled at a superficial level, and few search deep into the Word to test movements, their teachers and their teachings. Size and excitement often take precedent over truth.

Others have laid hands suddenly on men. Those who appear quickly on the scene and quickly gain a following with a new line of teaching. Christian psychology and its teachings are rarely compared to Scriptures. Teachings often based on a partial verse or short portions of Scripture, and often taken out of context, are quickly swallowed like chocolate covered candy. Subjective teaching that touches ones feelings is considered more important than the objective truth of the basic doctrines of Scripture.

In addition to not exercising discernment and making necessary judgments, many local churches often condemn those who do. They are viewed as legalistic, or “wet blankets” who hinder the advancement of the church. The apostle Paul experienced this, and replied, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to pray that the Lord will heal the church of “absolutophobia.”

All the Scriptures

“Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ... And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Luke 24:25-27 Apparently the disciples were selective in their focus on the Scriptures. They, like most in Israel, had focused only on those Scriptures which spoke of the Messiah coming in great glory and power to establish His kingdom. Thus when Christ was crucified their hopes were dashed.

Christ draws near and ministers to them from all the prophets, and all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. He asked, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” Prophecy had foretold the sufferings of the Messiah, and they should have known this from the Scriptures. (And from Christ’s own teaching. Matt. 16:21) How important it is that we preach Christ from all the Scriptures, showing Him to be both the Redeemer of lost humanity and the coming Ruler.

All You Can Eat - \$6.99

Most of us have been there—the restaurant where you can eat all you want for one low price. The normal mentality at such a place is "the more you eat the cheaper it is." Since you paid one price regardless of how much you eat, the more you eat the more you get for your money.

You start with a bowl or two of your favorite soup and a salad. Next you have some roast beef, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, and a freshly baked roll loaded with honey butter. You pass by the broccoli and green beans because you do not want to fill yourself on such mundane food. After finishing the first plate, you head back for some carved ham, rotisserie chicken, fried eggplant, fried clam strips and shrimp, and another roll. After all this you have another bowl of clam chowder and some fresh fruit.

Then comes the dessert. Soft ice cream covered with chocolate sauce, sprinkles, crushed cookies, and a big scoop of whipped cream. After all is finished, you feel like someone put an air hose in your stomach and blew it up. You can hardly move, your stomach hurts, and you feel the need to let out the belt a notch or two.

Sadly, many of us who are Christians are numbered among those who eat for the sake of eating. While many in the world eat to live, we live to eat. The Hebrew word for glutton is translated "riotous eaters" in Proverbs 23:21. It gives the sense of one who is totally out of control and running wild. In other places it is translated "vile." It is used in Deuteronomy 21:20, where the rebellious son is described, among other things, as a

"glutton," In other passages gluttony is often connected with the drunkard. One who is out of control, both in his eating and drinking.

The fruit of the Spirit is "temperance," or "self control." We would never advocate a lack of self control when it comes to satisfying other lusts, yet when it comes to food, we have no problems—in fact, we encourage it! Yet, we would never imagine the indwelling Holy Spirit leading us to stuff ourselves without control.

I am writing this article the morning after doing exactly what this article condemns. That is why I could so accurately describe the food and the feelings after the meal. (I did not eat all that was described.) While driving home I came to the conclusion that, for me, this is sin. You will need to come to your own conviction.

While many around the world starve for food, many Christians in the western world stuff it in without control!

And the fruit of the Spirit is:...temperance: against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:23)

An Alternative to Sunday School

In the minds of many Christians, Sunday School is a biblically mandated gathering of the local church. To suggest something different is like attacking the American flag, motherhood, and apple pie. To many others it would be considered heresy to suggest anything different.

Few saints stop to consider that Sunday School, as we know it, is less than 200 years old, and was originally started to evangelize "unchurched" children. Today it is a large institution with many programs and in many cases the majority of a local church's building facilities and funds are dedicated to it. In a typical Sunday School many teachers, the majority of which are sisters, are unable to attend the meeting in which the Word of God is preached due to their teaching responsibilities. In some cases this has also created a situation that may not be in accordance with Scripture. (1 Tim. 2:12-14)

The truth is, many Sunday Schools, like Christian Schools, have become a substitute for the teaching of the children by the fathers. (Eph. 6:4) The fault is not with Sunday School or the Christian Schools, but with the fathers who have placed their responsibility to teach their children upon the local assembly and/or Christian School.

This may shock some, but Sunday School, as it is run today, may actually have weakened some local churches. In far too many cases children are kept at very shallow levels for many years. Some have been taught by teenage teachers, while others were taught by those who have limited knowledge of the Word of God -

Thankfully, many have been taught by knowledgeable and dedicated teachers. In other cases it has led to a generation gap where young people have been kept separate from the older saints, even through college years. In such cases a generation gap should not surprise us, we created it!

However, the greatest damage may have been to fathers. As mentioned, many fathers have turned over their responsibility to teach their children to the church, and thus they themselves spend very little time in the Word of God. It has been said many times, "the best way to learn is to teach." (This does not mean all men should be teaching publicly.) As a result the assembly is very weak due to the fact that the men of the assembly, who are to be the spiritual leaders in the home and church, spend little time in the Word and instructing their children.

Am I saying that Sunday School is not Biblical? Does it mean that it should be scrapped? Not at all. What I am saying is that Sunday School, while obviously used of the Lord to reach many children with the Gospel and to teach countless others the Word of God, is not the only way for the assembly to function. There is an alternative.

What if the assembly concentrated on teaching "families." What if we had real "Family Bible Hours?" What if everyone, with the possible exception of very young children (Neh. 8:1-2), sat under the sound of the "preaching" of the Word, and then families went home and the fathers reviewed the message with the family, answering any questions and explaining further certain aspects. (I Cor. 14:35, Eph. 6:4) This would put the men

of the assembly into the Word more. It would make family members better listeners. Over time it would most likely raise the level of instruction. It would not divide up the assembly, with many sisters missing the ministry of the Word. It would help eliminate the generation gap. It would greatly reduce the need of large facilities, and programs. Would not our assemblies be stronger as a result? Personally, I think so.

Isn't this pure theory? No, I have seen young people who were placed into the Family Bible Hour in their early teens, and who today are parents themselves. Their knowledge of the Word goes well beyond Bible stories. They are able to "endure sound doctrine." They are part of the assembly and contribute in a variety of ways, and work well with the older saints. The parents of these young people went home and while having dinner discussed the message, and fathers used the opportunity to answer questions, or build upon the message. The fathers of these young people were in the Word and were the spiritual heads of their families. They were contributors at Bible studies, and worshipers at the Lord's Supper, and the assembly was stronger for it.

Many other young people who were raised basically on Bible stories, dating classes, and volleyball are at a different level today, and many have not matured as they should. Thankfully, many have, but generally speaking many are still spiritual infants.

Does this mean this alternative solves all the problems associated with Sunday School? Not at all, in fact, it introduces other problems. What about families without fathers? What about children who only come to Sunday School?

It may mean a Friday night outreach to evangelize children with the Gospel. It may mean Sunday School plus Family Bible Hour. It may mean sisters in fatherless homes may have to review the message with their children. Local oversight will have to determine what is best for the situation.

Just as in the financial world where, one can be penny wise and dollar foolish, assemblies can spend much on Sunday School while in the long term actually be undermining the strength of the assembly. Certainly the evangelization and instruction of children are important, but a Sunday School program, in and of itself, does not guarantee that the assembly and families are being strengthened by it.

As we read the Scriptures we get no indication the assembly was divided up, and while normal reasoning would think this best, perhaps in the long term the assembly is better staying together when gathered for spiritual purposes. (Neh. 8:1-2) This certainly is conducive to making the assembly a family, rather than an organization. (The larger the assembly the greater the chance that it will become an organization, rather than a family.)

As stated, this is only an alternative. An alternative that some assemblies may find helpful. An alternative that might just make families and assemblies stronger in a day in which many are very weak.

An Urgent Need for Prayer

The Lord's people are often encouraged to pray for missionaries and the presentation of the Gospel of Christ around the world, and rightfully so. These laboring brothers and sisters face danger, discouraged, and disappointment daily. They need our prayers.

Unfortunately, the prophet in his own country is often forgotten, or overshadowed by the rightful care for those laboring abroad. Many laboring saints in their home country are forgotten when it comes to prayer. Thankfully, there are many who do pray, and many of them are godly widows and widowers who use their available time wisely in prayer.

However, there still remains an urgent need for prayer for home workers. They face a variety of problems, not the least of which is temptation. The adversary is very active in attempting to bring down those desiring to serve the Lord, and who are in the limelight. Obviously, he desires to defeat all Christians, but some are bigger targets than others. In recent years we have lost some very active and gifted brethren due to failure. This is not only sad and disappointing, it is also discouraging to the Lord's people, while adding to the load of other workers.

None of us are above falling. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12) Workers need to be alert to these attacks and understand the severity of such a fall. If the apostle Paul would ask for prayer — "Brethren, pray for us." (1 Thess. 5:25)

— how much more should laborers covet the prayers of the saints and fellow laborers. They, themselves, need to be crying out to the Lord often to preserve them.

We need also to pray for their recovery, and for those who are spiritual to work toward that end. Failure, while shutting certain doors of service, does not render the restored saint useless. The adversary would love to convince the fallen it does, and other saints as well, but it is another of his lies.

Temptations in this country no longer wait for us to seek them, but they are advanced upon all saints almost constantly. Due to governmental breakdown in the area of prohibiting pornography, and other immoral activity, temptation is at our door step, and even forces itself into our homes by way of the phone lines and computers.

We need to be praying for the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad, but we must also be praying for those individuals who are laboring in many ways—teaching, shepherding, publishing, counseling, and evangelizing. There is an urgent need for prayer for those laboring at home!

Anything For a Profit

Yesterday I received a newspaper-like flyer from a discount Christian book company. I had known for some time that Christian books and music are a very large commercial business for many. This was made very clear some years ago when a large secular recording company bought out a “Christian” recording firm. Of course they would only do this if it was a profitable business.

Unfortunately, many who publish solid material for Christians who really have a desire for the milk of the Word are struggling these days. It is far easier to sell shallow material from well known authors and psychologists than it is to sell books that actually teach the Word of God.

A review of the books offered in the advertisement provided a clear explanation of why the church is so shallow and so unscriptural in many ways. If this is what the saints are spending their time reading then we need look no further for the cause of our current condition. The following are just a few of the descriptions of the books or music being offered.

“...’s tour brought together Christian music’s finest artists for a concert celebration of Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. Now go behind the scenes with one-on-one interviews and never-seen before concert photos.

‘You can have something better, even if it takes a miracle,’ says best-selling author.... This book has changed hundred of thousands of lives, and it can change yours! He’ll show you 10 attitudes that hinder

success, 9 biblical principals for prosperity, and ways to overcome any problem.”

This list could go on and on, but these examples give a flavor of the reading material presented for sale. Sadly, many Christians are spending their time and money on this type of material. This being true there can be no doubt in our minds why there is such little Bible knowledge among many saints today.

Another example of this “make a profit” mentality can be seen in the fact that they promote books side by side that are in complete disagreement with one another. They do not care which view you take, just so you buy a book. The promotion of one book states, “Unemployment, inflation, the national budget out of control-an economic upheaval is inevitable. Well known Christian financial analyst ... offers sound advice on the state of the economy, how inflation will affect you, and what you must do to survive an economic earthquake.” Now there is nothing here that is disconcerting, but on the same page is another book which is described as follows. “Is an economic earthquake imminent? Dr.... is the only financial expert to say no! His Bible-based perspective about the future of the U.S. economy refutes the doomsday money myths and gives an alternative view for consideration.” Now I am not saying which author is right, but it is clear to me that the sellers of these books do not really care who is right as long as they can sell books.

However, the most critical piece of evidence which shows the mercenary objectives of the book sellers was on the very first page. There, with a brightly colored block which said “Save \$10,” was Robert Hicks’ book,

The Masculine Journey. Upon seeing this book being promoted I wrote to the book company and requested that my name be taken off their mailing list. This book, which was widely distributed at Promise Keepers (PK), and which PK has refused to condemn, promotes many strange views and often directs men deeper and deeper within themselves. Speaking of teens having their first experience with the police, or their first drunk, or their first experience with sex or drugs, he suggests that “true elders could come forward and confess their own adolescent sins and congratulate the next generation for being human.” This is pure intellectual garbage! It is certainly not Biblical and certainly will not build up the saints and the church.

However, most importantly this book blasphemes the person of Christ. Without going into the ugly details, Hicks, referring to the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, states concerning Jesus, He “may have thought about it as the movie ... portrays.” (pg. 181)-referring to Jesus thinking about having sexual relations with a woman! Hicks also suggests that Jesus had to overcome homosexual desires.

Why would anyone claiming to be a “Christian” book seller sell such books? Because they will sell “anything for a profit.” Sadly, Christians buy it too!

Aprons of Leaves

...and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. Gen. 3:7 There is a great debate raging today over what is called “Lordship Salvation.” The debate centers around the question, “Does a person need to accept Jesus Christ as Lord when he accepts Him as Savior, or is that a subsequent decision dealing more with sanctification than salvation?”

We might begin by asking the question, “Is it possible to accept Jesus Christ as Savior only, while not coming under His Lordship as well?” The question being asked is not, “Does the person need to make Christ Lord of all areas of their practical Christian walk at the time of his conversion in order to be saved?” It is rather, “Can we separate these two aspects of Christ in our lives.” Can He be selected from a spiritual menu as Savior, while putting off the selection of Him as Lord until a later date, or perhaps not at all?

Personally, I do not think so. Do we select Him as our High Priest separately from being our Savior? Our Advocate? Our Lord? Are they not all part and parcel of “accepting Christ?” Is not the saved individual “redeemed” —purchased with the blood of Christ? The apostle Peter is exhorting holiness when he writes, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Pet. 1:13-23) The apostle Paul writing on separation states, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost

which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:19-20) If one is redeemed by the blood of Christ, Christ is His Master and Lord. Whether the individual is in the good of this truth is another question.

However, while these questions deal with the

Lordship of Christ, I wonder if Lordship is the primary question. I believe the primary question has to do with "life." Can there be spiritual life which is never manifested? Even a person in a coma exhibits some form of life! If we come across an individual without any breath and pulse, we do not hesitate to declare him to be dead. Can a person accept Christ as personal Savior and manifest no evidence of eternal life? Can there be life without fruit? Fruit is not a question of service and Lordship, but a question of "life" - eternal life. Fruit is outward evidence of inward life, just as the rising and falling of the chest when breathing and the beating pulse when the heart is functioning are evidences of physical life.

Adam and Eve made themselves aprons of leaves, which provided some coverage, but not in the presence of God. They may have had leaves, but leaves alone without fruit are never an expression of inward reality in the Scriptures. In fact, Christ condemned the fig tree with only leaves, a picture of Israel with its outward forms, but no inward life. "And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only." (Matt. 21:19) Christ saw leaves only as "pretense" without reality.

The apostle John gives us some clear vital signs of life in his first epistle. In his Gospel he tells us how to obtain eternal life. (John 3:16) In his first Epistle he tells us how to know we have it. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13) The first sign of being a child of God is given in chapter 2, verse 29. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." The logic used by John is that if you know the Father you will be able to recognize His children from their common features. Those who habitually practice righteousness are born of Him.

The second sign is in contrast to the first.

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9) The result of the presence of the new nature is the absence of the practice of sin.

"Therefore the person who is born of God cannot continue practicing sin, he is not able to habitually sin, because out of God he has been born." (Wuest). John adds in the next verse, "whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God."

The third vital sign is given in verse 14 of the same chapter. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Lenski translates it, "We have stepped over out of death into life (we know it by this evidence) because we are loving brothers." Brother A.M.S. Gooding writes, "We have changed masters, spheres, kingdoms; we are under new ownership; we belong to a new family and the evidence

is found in this: ‘we love the brethren.’” One who does not desire to be with the children of God and love the family of God has a vital sign that shows no evidence of life. (1 John 5:2)

The sacrificial love of God shown in the believer is also a vital sign of new birth. (1 John 4:7) “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” To continue to live for self alone and exhibit no God-like love to others is a concerning vital sign. (James 2:14-20)

Lastly John writes, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” The use of the present participle “believeth” indicates a continuous condition, meaning He who perseveres in his belief is born of God. What God starts, He completes. (Phil. 1:6) Their continuance is the result of, and proof of their new birth.

Based on the Scriptures could we ever conceive that an individual would be the object of the recreative work of God (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10) and remain the same as he was before conversion? Hardly! To do so is to divide up the work of God in the soul through the Holy Spirit. If one truly has new life, and is a new creature in Christ Jesus, the evidence will manifest itself. (Not that which merits salvation, but that which flows from it. (Eph. 2:10))

In a day when a shallow Gospel is often presented, and prayers are repeated as mantras, often under pressure, it should not surprise us to see many “professors,” but in reality fewer “possessors.” May we faithfully preach the Gospel of Christ, clearly presenting man’s lost condition and Christ as the Savior of sinners, patiently allowing

the Holy Spirit to do His work in the heart. (1 Cor. 3:6) A work that will lead to repentance and faith, and eternal life which will be evidenced by its fruit. (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:26)

Battlefield or Playground

One has said, “The Christian life is a battlefield, not a playground.” This is certainly true for those Christians who take their walk seriously, for the greater the desire to walk and serve the Lord in accordance with His Word, the greater will be the onslaught of the enemy.

This being true, why is it that we spend so much time teaching young people how to play, rather than how to do battle with a powerful enemy. Much of our time, energy, and resources goes into giving them a good time, but sadly, in many cases, their training for spiritual battle is minimal. We need to ask ourselves, “Are we preparing our young people for a life of play, or a spiritual battle?”

Beyond Immodest

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety. (1 Tim. 2:9)

The hemlines rise as the necklines plunge. The dresses are so tight and short that sitting down is very difficult. In others long slits expose the legs well above the modest hemline. Short tops leave the naval exposed. Tight fitting tops with soft underclothing reveal every detail.

Who wears such clothing? While our first thought might be of those we see in the world everyday, I am thinking more of professing Christians I have seen in local assemblies and other Christian gatherings.

This type of dress goes beyond being immodest and enters the realm of being immoral. The Lord himself said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

The truth is, there are young, and even some older, sisters who dress in ways that not only draw attention to themselves (immodest, 1 Tim. 2:9-10), but who unknowingly, I trust, encourage young men, and some older ones, to sin. Their dress is so revealing and provocative that it is very difficult for the opposite sex not to take that second look.

Dress among professing Christians has gone from casual to sloppy and inappropriate, and now to immoral. It is time for older sisters to approach younger sisters and

speak to them on this issue. In some cases, elders may need to address this problem..

It is not only women who are dressing immorally. Young men also need to take into consideration the temptation they place before the opposite sex. Many young men also dress inappropriately for assembly gatherings. This is not to say that a jacket and necktie are mandatory, but looking like one just came off the ballfield or basketball court is not appropriate for an assembly gathering of Christians. These same young men would never dress in this fashion for an employment interview, or to attend a wedding, but have no reverence for meeting with the Lord's people in the Lord's presence.

Perhaps of even greater concern is that Christian parents seem to say little or nothing to their children about their dress, and it would be reasonable to assume that they supply the clothing that is worn. Is it because they condone this type of dress, or is it that they are simply afraid of speaking about this subject?

Some in assembly leadership may be fearful of driving the youth away by addressing such issues. What a shame it would be if in an effort to keep our young people we ignore the obvious. (1 Cor. 13:6) We may keep them, but what will be the product of such thinking? Certainly not mature and godly young people. The same grace that saved us also teaches us "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," and we need to teach it as well.

Given the atmosphere of the day in which the guilty often claims to be the victim, it may well be that those who do speak to the issue will be labeled as legalistic, or

worse. Let us not allow such labels to deter us from speaking the truth in love concerning the immoral dress which is evident among professing Christians. Brethren, these things ought not to be.

Calvary

Thirty miles to the west of our home in York, PA is the town of Gettysburg. On the west side of this small town lies the well-known battlefield. On July 1st, 2nd, and 3rd of 1863 nearly 50,000 young men were wounded or killed there. It was a critical battle and a turning point in the American Civil War.

Calvary too was a critical battle, no doubt the most important in all of human history. It was the critical point in God's redemptive plan. God's plan for redeeming lost souls was based on what was to be accomplished there. Eternity past looked forward to this hour, and eternity future will look back to it.

Jesus spoke of this critical hour on different occasions. In the garden of Gethsemane He mentioned it several times. He prayed that "if it were possible, the hour might pass from him," and after praying He said to His disciples, "the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." (Mk. 14:35,41) When speaking to the Father He said, 'the hour is come.'" (John 17:1)

Let's briefly consider some different aspects of the cross of Calvary.

The Place

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him....(Lk. 23:33)

Calvary was a historical place. There was nothing secret about it. Like great battlefields in history, it was open for the world to see. Like Gettysburg and other such fields,

many have gone back to the historical place called Calvary.

It was the same place that Abraham and Isaac had gone together many years earlier. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning.... and Isaac his son, and... went unto the place of which God had told him." (Gen. 22:3)

Calvary was also a horrible place-the place of a skull. There was nothing pretty about the cross. Romans in polite society of that day would not speak of the cross. Men have made the cross attractive. They have hidden its horribleness. In reality, the day Christ was crucified was the darkest day in man's history. It is one thing for man to mistreat man, but on that day man mistreated God! What men thought of God they poured out upon Christ. "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." (Rom. 15:3) It was the day that man spit in God's face!

Calvary was also a holy place. It was the place where a Holy God's view of sin was clearly manifested. All the fury of God's wrath was poured upon the Holy One who was made sin. If any man thinks God will overlook his sin, Calvary clearly states otherwise. If God would not lessen His righteous judgment upon His precious Son who bore our sins in His body on the cross, there are no grounds to think that God would simply overlook man's sin.

The Person

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.... (Lk. 23:33)

There have been many crucifixions down through the centuries. Thousands had been subjected to such

inhuman treatment. What makes Calvary stand out from all the rest? It was the Person crucified there. Never was one like Him crucified before or since.

The One crucified that darkest day in man's history was no one less than God incarnate, the Creator and Sustainer of this world and the universe. Man in his foolishness crucified his Creator manifest in the flesh.

In all of the history of fallen mankind there was never an individual who did no sin, and with whom God could say that He was well pleased. The Son of God willingly set aside His glory and took on humanity and servanthood, and of Him alone God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased..... (Mt. 17:5) Man, in his hatred and blindness, chose to release a criminal and crucified the spotless Son of God. Is it any wonder that Calvary is forever written in the pages of human history, and the eternal pages of Scripture?

The Pain

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.... (Lk. 23:33)

Man poured out all of his hatred on Christ, and Scripture says His "visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Isa. 52:14 Despite the fact that "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,...he opened not his mouth." (Isa. 53:7) With all of his hatred and cruelty, man could not do what the pain of being made sin would do-cause the Lord to cry out!

Out of that mid-day darkness came that cry from the lips of the Holy One made sin, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46) The depth of suffering

by the Lord is unknown to the human mind. Gethsemane provides some light, but even this must not be taken as a full expression of the grief suffered at Calvary. If -the anticipation of Calvary caused such great sorrow and grief in the heart of Christ, what must those dreadful three hours of Calvary brought upon the Holy One?

The Provision

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4: 10)

The great and wonderful truth of Calvary is that a holy and righteous God has been satisfied with regard to our sins and now He can come out in all His grace to lost humanity. Based on the provision of Calvary God can "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:26)

The Preaching

"...to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." (I Cor. 1: 18)

The cross is always in danger of being made of none effect. Many today do not preach the cross, while others distort its truth. It is imperative that we preach the cross, its horribleness and all of its glory. Its message is the "power of God unto salvation." We must avoid trying to make it palatable to the flesh and preach it in simplicity and all its power.

Commitment or Convenience

And they were continuing stedfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and the fellowship, and the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. Acts 2:42 (Strong)

In the New Testament there is only one Church, and all who by faith are in Christ Jesus are in the Church, and as such are members of Christ's body. (Eph. 1:22-23). However, there are local expressions of the Church, or local assemblies of called-out believers. These local assemblies are to reflect the truth of the One Body, and thus they are to function according to the New Testament Scriptures, gathering only to the Name of Christ. (Matt. 18:20; Acts 13:1; Rev. 1:4)

Clearly the local assembly is to be a fellowship of believers. It would be contrary to Scripture for Christians to be "in fellowship" with those who are outside of Christ. (2 Cor. 6:14) It thus becomes incumbent upon the local assembly to know those in the local fellowship.

Sadly, many saints do not truly understand what it means to be "in fellowship." They see fellowship as something they "do." To many it speaks of the good times of fellowship around the meal table, or in some other social activity.

While such things are certainly proper for Christians, fellowship in a local assembly is far more than this. In Acts 2:42 the word "fellowship" is a noun. In the original language the verse reads, "the fellowship," as shown by Strong's translation above. It is a place as well as an

activity. "The fellowship" was where the saints continued steadfastly!

The word fellowship comes from the root word translated "partners" in Luke 5:10. James, John, and Peter were partners in the fishing business. "The "fellowship" in Acts 2:42 was in reality a "partnership of believers."

When one is taken into a partnership it is because he has common beliefs and goals. So it should be in a local assembly of believers. An assembly should know who they are receiving into "the fellowship." Now this may be by the report of others, such as with Phebe (Rom. 16:1,2), or it may be by two or three witnesses hearing the testimony of those desiring to come into the fellowship. With the increased pressure for numerical growth these steps may be easily bypassed.

When an assembly accepts a believer into the fellowship it takes on added responsibility. The assembly is to be a place where he is cared for, edified, encouraged, comforted, and protected. It is a partnership in which the corporate body cares for the individual saint.

However, coming into fellowship involves a commitment of the individual believer to the local assembly. Since he is identified with the local testimony his daily life is not to bring shame upon the fellowship and its testimony for Christ. He is to be involved in the partnership. The assembly does not merely exist for the convenience of the saints. It is not a supermarket to which customers come at their convenience to obtain their needs and leave.

Those in fellowship are to contribute to the operation of the fellowship as the Lord enables. It may be financially.

It may be by physical labor, or it may be in spiritual labor. In whatever way they contribute they are to do it as unto the Lord for the good of the local assembly of believers. (Col. 3:23)

Partners also have the responsibility of being at the gatherings of the local fellowship of believers. Those who attend inconsistently, or attend only a small percentage of the gatherings, barring illness of course, could hardly be considered partners in the work—at least not faithful partners!

Are you in fellowship, or do you simply attend the activities of a local fellowship at your convenience? Just because you attend some of the gatherings does not mean you are in the fellowship of believers. One can easily attend meetings without being in fellowship. To be “in fellowship” means you are convinced and convicted of the same truths as the assembly, and are committed to the local partnership of believers.

Is the assembly a commitment or a convenience?

Consistency

Consistency—we expect it from the newspaper boy, the weatherman, the local restaurant, our employer, and basically from anyone with whom we do business.

Unfortunately inconsistency characterizes many saints and it consequently impacts their marriages and assemblies. In the assembly it is seen most evidently in sporadic attendance.

It is difficult to function as a body of believers when you never know what members will be in attendance.

Imagine in our own bodies if various members functioned on an inconsistent basis. We would have a medical crisis! So too in the spiritual realm! Consistent attendance is not only important for individual saints, but it is vital for the proper functioning of the local assembly. Are you consistent? Can you be counted on? (Heb. 10:25)

Dangers in Leadership

The following was first given as a message at the May, 1999 Elders and Workers Conference in Markham, Ontario.

In my travels among the assemblies it is evident that the general spiritual condition of many of them is poor. Attendance is often a small portion of those who would claim to be in fellowship. Worldliness has made inroads and it is manifested in a lack of commitment to the local assembly and a strong commitment to careers, hobbies, sports, and recreation.

Another very evident need is for godly oversight—men who are committed to caring for the Lord's sheep even though it means great personal sacrifice. In many assemblies there is no identifiable leadership and the Lord's people go from week to week like sheep without a shepherd. In other gatherings, there are those who have been identified as elders but do little or none of the work involved in shepherding the Lord's people. Thankfully, there are those assemblies with identifiable and godly overseers who with personal sacrifice, care for the saints.

When he was about to leave the Ephesian elders for the last time, Paul exhorted them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) One danger that a shepherd faces is that of neglecting himself. While expending himself for the Lord's people he neglects his own spiritual condition. In a similar way, one can get so involved in

the Lord's work that the Lord Himself is set aside. Like those at Ephesus, one's works, labour, and patience may be commendable, but he has left his "first love." (Rev. 2:1-4)

In addition to taking heed to himself, the shepherd must be on guard for those grievous wolves who come from without with the desire to destroy the local testimony. (Acts 20:29). This requires discernment as they will often come in sheep's clothing, speaking softly and acting graciously. (Rom. 16:18) Shepherds must also be on the alert for those who arise from within the local fellowship who would desire to gain a following.

It is evident that those in oversight are subject to many dangers. The adversary of the sheep and of the Chief Shepherd is constantly on the prowl, using his many methods in an attempt to have the shepherds fall, leaving the sheep unguarded.

We will take a brief look at some of the dangers those in oversight are subject to by looking at the experience of leaders in the Scriptures. We should always learn from experience and, if possible, from the experience of others—it is far less expensive!

Timidity

In the beginning of 1 Samuel 10, Saul is privately anointed by Samuel to be the king of Israel. Later in that same chapter Samuel calls the people together to publicly present Saul to the nation. After Samuel works his way through the tribes and families, Saul is selected but when the time came for him to be set before the people "he could not be found." (1 Sam. 10:21) How sad that after the Lord had clearly marked him out that Saul would hide himself "among the stuff."

At first glance one might mistakenly see this as humility but, in reality, it was fear—timidity. In a similar way, it is possible for one whom the Holy Spirit has clearly marked out as an overseer (Acts 20:28)—and only the Holy Spirit can do so—to hide himself among the stuff.

Could it be that many in oversight who are failing to do the work lack conviction that the Lord has raised them up to do this important work? Such a lack of conviction will surely lead to being fearful and ineffective. If one believes he has been raised up for this valuable work then he should move forward with a holy boldness to act accordingly.

When the apostle Paul was called to be an apostle there was no hesitancy. He clearly identified himself as "an apostle by the will of God." He clearly understood his calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter, likewise understood his calling and identified himself as an elder. (1 Pet. 5:1). He in turn exhorted other shepherds to "feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." (1 Pet. 5:2) He encouraged not hesitancy, but definite action.

David, the shepherd, when coming upon the battle scene and beholding Goliath taunting God's people, did not exhibit timidity. As a true shepherd he moved forward, knowing the battle was the Lord's.

It was Paul who exhorted Timothy to stir up his gift and reminded him that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim. 1:7)

Now to have a definite conviction of one's call to shepherd the Lord's people also requires humility. There

is such a thing as holy boldness with humility. The same Paul who clearly knew his unique calling also referred to himself as the "chief of sinners," "the least of all the apostles," and "less than the least of all saints."

Certainly one danger for those in oversight is timidity: timidity that comes from a lack of a conviction that the Holy Spirit has raised them up to shepherd the Lord's people.

Power

Amazingly, the same one who was hiding "among the stuff" when he was to be introduced to the nation of Israel as its new king is later found exercising the power of his position to the point of ignoring God's Word. The prophet Samuel had clearly conveyed the message of the Lord to Saul. "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." It could not be more clearly stated.

When Saul failed to do as the Lord commanded, the prophet Samuel reminds him, "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?" The one who was taken from among the smallest of tribes and least of the families was now taking things into his own hands and thereby rejecting the Word of the Lord.

Saul offered the explanation that the animals which were not killed were kept in order to offer them to the Lord. Samuel responds with those words that have rung down through the centuries, "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1 Sam. 15:22) The great lesson here is that obedience to God's Word is better than good intentions!

So while one danger is that of timidity, another danger is that of power. The overseer can, perhaps with good intentions, take things into his own hands and neglect the Word of the Chief Shepherd. He may even act as a lord over "God's heritage." Many have failed when placed into a position of leadership because they could not control their power and authority. Sadly, down through the years many saints have been "driven" rather than "led." May the assemblies be spared the misuse of power by those who provide oversight.

Preeminence

Scripture clearly informs us that Diotrephes "loveth to have the preeminence." (3 John 9) He left no room for others, even to the point of not receiving the apostle John. It is often true in leadership that there is one who seeks to have the chief seat among the brethren, even to the point of shutting out all others at times.

Paul addresses this competitive spirit in his epistle to the Philippians. Apparently there was a spirit of competition among the saints there and Paul writes, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Paul also states that the saints were not to concentrate on themselves. He writes, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:3-4)

It is in this context that Paul brings in the ultimate example of the Lord Jesus. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." What was the mind of

the Lord Jesus? The One who was very God did not concentrate on Himself. He was "others minded," and being so, He came from the heights of glory and took on humanity and the form of a servant. He took the low place, even to the point of the cross, with the good of others in view.

We see this clearly as we view Him in the upper room washing the feet of His disciples. It was a ministry that needed to be done and, since none of the disciples had the mind to do it, He did! How beautiful that mind and how much we need to think upon it that it may in turn become ours.

We find in Scripture that overseeing the Lord's sheep is to be done by "servant leaders." The Lord Himself said He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." May we entreat the Lord to provide those godly overseers who lead by example and who serve in humility, not seeking the preeminence.

Self-confidence (Pride)

Too often men are recognized as elders because they are successful leaders in the secular world. If this is the sole or primary reason for their recognition it will most likely lead to failure in spiritual leadership. Success in the business world is not a qualification for spiritual leadership. This is not to say that one who is successful in worldly terms is not qualified to lead the assembly, but he must be recognized only for his spiritual work in caring for the saints.

Success can lead to self confidence. It is after the victory that we are most open to the adversary's counter attack. Joshua and the children of Israel are excellent examples of this truth. The Lord had instructed the children of

Israel to march around Jericho once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. At the completion of this march they were to shout at the sound of the trumpets. Having done as the Lord commanded the mighty walls came crashing down. Victory had been gained.

The next obstacle to their occupying the land was the small city of Ai. So small that Joshua felt no need to consult with the Lord concerning it, and with confidence gained from their victory at Jericho Joshua decides to send only a few to take the city of Ai.

The result is absolute failure. The men sent by Joshua are soundly defeated and sent running like rabbits. Scripture foretold this result when it says, "Pride goeth before destruction." (Prov. 16:18) Now there were several things which lead to this failure. There was sin in the camp. There was the dividing of the Lord's people, with only a few felt to be necessary for the battle. There was self-confidence and pride as a result of their victory at Jericho.

When it comes to assembly oversight, self-confidence and pride in previous accomplishments, whether in the world or in the assembly, are the prescription for failure. The apostle Paul warned of this when he wrote concerning those desiring the oversight, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Those in oversight were not to be novices—newly planted trees which were not rooted by godly experience. Experience that manifests the weakness of the flesh and the necessity of dependence upon God. Experience that causes one to

look away from success, ability, education, wealth, etc., and to depend solely upon the Lord.

Popularity

No one likes to be disliked and thus acceptance by others can often lead us to do things simply to please the people. Throughout Scripture we find those who were driven by "the people." In 1 Samuel 15 we find Saul trying to justify his disobedience and several times he speaks of "the people." "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep." (vs.9) "And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep...." (vs. 15) "But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal." (vs. 21)

We find a similar thing with Aaron. Moses had gone up to the mount and when he did not return for sometime Aaron built the golden calf. Moses returns and asks, "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron replies, "Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us" (Ex. 32:19-23) Once again a leader is persuaded by the sentiment of the people.

In contrast to this we read concerning Paul, "...do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10) Writing to the Thessalonians he says, "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Paul

was not driven by acceptance by the people, but by obedience to the Lord, which to him was of utmost importance.

Nowhere do we find that Christ was driven by man's opinion and desires, but rather He would say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34) May it be so with those who seek to shepherd His sheep. May they seek to please the Chief Shepherd above all else. May the Lord provide the needed grace to obey His Word and absorb the reproach of the people when their mind is different from the mind of the Lord.

Frustration

Often those in leadership are the objects of the people's rage. Moses is an excellent example. The nation of Israel had come to a point where there was no water and so "they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron." "And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!" (Num. 20:2-3) It is not uncommon that when things are going well those in leadership are unappreciated, but when hard times come the blame is immediately placed on those in leadership. So it was with Moses and Aaron.

No doubt Moses and Aaron were frustrated as a result of the people's constant murmuring and they "went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces." The Lord instructed Moses to take the rod, and gather the people and to speak to the rock before his eyes and it would provide the needed water for the people.

Moses did as instructed, except in frustration he struck the rock with the rod. His frustration with the people was evident in his language. "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10) His frustration led to anger and his anger to disobedience.

How different is the Lord Jesus. Many times His disciples were dull in hearing and yet He continues to deal graciously with them—and with us! In one case, after just feeding the five thousand, He desires to feed four thousand people and the disciples ask, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" (Matt. 15:33) We, like His disciples, are so dull at times and yet He graciously leads us on.

May the Lord encourage the hearts of those in oversight, particularly when they are dealing with a murmuring people. May they be enabled to be gracious in situations which normally promote frustration.

Relatives

There are many accounts in Scripture where leaders failed because their relatives were involved. At the very beginning the adversary used Eve to bring about the downfall of Adam. This was a difficult situation for Adam. The only one of his kind on earth with whom he could communicate and enjoy a relationship had been deceived by Satan, and now he must decide whether to follow her or to obey God. His choice may well exemplify the magnitude of the influence which relatives can have on those in leadership.

Sarah, Rebecca, and Jezebel, and many other relatives recorded in Scriptures had an influence on those in leadership. David and Absalom would be another

example. As is often the case, David could see no wrong in Absalom. He overlooked Absalom's slaying of Amnon and even after Absalom had rebelled and attempted to overthrow him and become King of Israel, David still saw no wrong in him.

A great danger for leaders is to treat relatives differently than other saints. The failures of their children or other relatives is swept under the carpet while others are openly rebuked or disciplined for their failure. I had the privilege of being brought up in a godly home and in an assembly where men of God taught and practiced the Word of God. I still recall the day that a letter of discipline was read to the assembly. I recall it because the brother who read the letter was the father of the individual being disciplined. There was no favoritism shown and I have admired the brother for his faithfulness in that situation ever since.

Those in assembly oversight must also be careful what information they share with loved ones. Most information known to those in leadership should be kept confidential. Often the failure to do so has brought relatives into the situation. This can be disastrous!

May the Lord enable those in oversight to be faithful to His will and keep them from the influence of relatives that so easily brings failure in leadership.

These are but a few of the dangers which those in assembly oversight face. May we pray for them often and ask the Lord to keep them from falling as they serve Him and care for His sheep. May those in oversight be aware of such dangers and seek to serve the Chief Shepherd faithfully, avoiding the pitfalls of timidity, power, preeminence, self-confidence, popularity,

frustration, relatives, and the many other dangers that the adversary may place in their path.

Drifting

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. Heb. 2:1 The translation quoted above would give the thought that there is a danger of the hearer of the Gospel allowing truth revealed by the Son to slip away. There are, however, many who believe the thought is that the careless hearer of the Gospel may drift by it, thus simply ignoring that which is revealed by the Son. Brother Darby's translation reflects this. "For this reason we should give heed more abundantly to the things we have heard, lest in any way we should slip away."

The imagery here is of a boat slowly drifting away from or past a safe and secure harbor. Just drifting aimlessly along, carried by the currents, without any regard for the signs of danger which lie ahead. Many who hear the Gospel today could be described in this way. They have heard the message which was brought Personally to this lost world by God Incarnate. One vastly superior to the created angels who functioned as Divinely sent messengers, and yet they are carried by the currents of this world and drift right on by. (Heb. 1:4-14; 2:5-9) The writer warns, if disobedience to the message of the angels brought just judgment, "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord." (2:2-3) It is a dangerous thing to take the Gospel of Christ which was Personally delivered by God through His Son casually and simply drift silently past to eternal damnation.

Isn't this also a warning to those of us who know Christ, those who have believed His report. Isn't there the real danger of slowly drifting away from the things of Christ? Not losing our salvation, but being carried by the currents of this world away from the things of Christ. Was this not true of Demas, about whom Paul writes, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." (2 Tim. 4:10)

This drifting is not sudden and swift, but slowly, silently, almost without any sense of movement. A meeting missed, a day without prayer, a new hobby found, an advancement in business, and one step leads to another until we find ourselves carried further and further away from the things of the Lord. The writer of the Proverbs gives a very clear picture of this departure in chapter 24:30-34.

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man."

He sees a field filled with thorns, obviously not cared for. No doubt productive at one time, but now producing that which is not only of no value, but harmful. His observation was that the owner took a little break, sat back, folded his hands, and fell asleep. Isn't this the way a once production spiritual life comes to ruin. A slow,

silent drifting away until one awakens to see a tragic scene.

There is a principle given to us here. "Unkept soil always returns to nature." There is no need to deliberately plant weeds, just doing nothing will bring out the weeds of the flesh. Taking a little break, as David did, and our unfed soul will slowly return to the control of nature. The writer of the Proverb likens it to a traveler. "So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth." (v. 34)

I remember the days our family packed up the car and drove to the shore. My parents and three brothers packed in the car with the trunk jammed full and maybe things tied to the roof. No air conditioning in those days, nor Interstate highways. Seventy five miles on two lane roads through the hot, flat, sandy land of southern New Jersey. We kept asking our parents, "How much further?" It seemed like we would never get there, but given time, we did! So too with the saint who takes a spiritual nap. He never envisions the weed filled life, but given time he arrives there.

Is it possible that this is an accurate picture of your life as a Christian? You met the Savior and went on well, until you took a little break. A little folding of the hands. Just a short nap, but without realizing it you began to drift. For whatever reason you started to miss meetings, and your interest became centered in things which were not spiritual. You began to watch and to read things which were far from edifying. You saw little of your former Christian friends. And now your life, with its potential of being productive for the Lord, is filled with the weeds of the flesh.

What a warning to us all. A spiritual nap can be the beginning of spiritual ruin. There must be an alert mind, one constantly aware of the slightest drifting, and when noticed, fleeing to the security of the throne of grace.

Excuses

What would you think if I told you I had a way of making you a millionaire in a month? How about if I knew a way you could lose 25 pounds in one month or a way to make you look younger in one week? If you have any discernment at all you would be skeptical of such promises.

There is, however, one easy way that we can increase our spiritual growth in sanctification and service. It is a rather simple method eliminate excuses! We have all made excuses in our lives. Society around us is filled with them, many of them ridiculous. For example, in New Zealand a woman who drove for 25 years without a license explained to the judge who fined her, "I only drive on roads that have very little traffic. And none of those roads lead to an office where I could apply for a driver's license."

The Bible tells of those who made excuses for not accepting the Gospel. Felix waited for a "more convenient season." (Acts 24:25) Those invited to the great supper had their poor excuses as well. One purchased land and had to go see it-had he not seen the property before he bought it? Another purchased oxen and had to prove them-had he not tried them before he purchased them? One married him a wife and could not come-could he not bring her as well? Who is kidding who? Like the man who says he can't keep awake through a thirty-minute sermon and stays home with his 700- column newspaper, or the man who says Sunday is

his only day to rest and gets up at 4:30 a.m. to go fishing. Such excuses can lead one to an eternal Hell. There will be no excuses there!

Then there are those who had an excuse for wrong action, better known as sin. Adam actually shifted the blame to God when he said, "The woman Thou gavest me." Aaron blamed the people and Moses for his sin of making the golden calf. The people were full of mischief and when Moses stayed away so long, they forced him to make them a god! (Ex. 32:21-23)

Saul also blamed the people for his failure to slay all the Amalekites and all of the animals. (I Sam. 15) "The people made me do it." was his excuse, along with the notion that they saved the best of the animals to sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel informed Saul that "Obedience is better than sacrifice," and that he would lose his kingdom because he rejected the Word of the Lord.

Excuses are often used in reference to serving the Lord. The sluggard always has excuses. (Prov. 22:13) When it is inconvenient for us to serve we have our excuses as well-"Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee." (Luke 11:7) The excuses come in great variety. Moses attempted to use his lack of eloquence. Gideon used the social status of his family. Jeremiah claimed his age. Elisha wanted to kiss his father and mother.

Before we become too critical of these men, what has been the nature of our excuses for not serving the Lord? Have we not claimed lack of gift, family status, our families, our careers, etc., as excuses. We have failed to see that the Lord uses "earthen vessels, that the

excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

" (2 Cor. 4:7) Often our excuses are no better than those who purchased the land and oxen, and married a wife. At times we even know the foolishness of the excuse as we offer it.

Often our excuses are like those used by a family who argued against God's choice of Sunday as the Lord's Day. "You see, God, it's like this: We would attend church more faithfully if your day came to some other time. You have chosen a day that comes at the end of a hard week, and we're all tired out. Not only that, but it's the day following Saturday night, and Saturday night is one time when we feel that we should go out and enjoy ourselves. Often it is midnight when we reach home, and it is almost impossible to get up on Sunday morning. And you must realize that you have picked the very day on which the morning paper takes the longest to read-the day when the biggest meal of the week must be prepared. We'd like to go to church, and know that we should; but you have just chosen the wrong day."

Then too, like the Pharisees of the Lord's day we have our excuses when it come to sacrificing for the Lord. They claimed their possessions as "corban" so as not to support their parents. (Mark 7:1 1) We have our excuses too for not supporting the Lord's work. There were, however, those who offered no excuses. The Macedonian saints gave out of their poverty. The widow gave her last two mites. The widow of Zarephath gave Elijah her last cake. (I Kings 17:13)

While we may not be able to become millionaires, or lose twenty five pounds in one week, we would make great strides forward in our spiritual service and sacrifice if

we would simply eliminate the excuses we often make for our failures or lack of service.

Faith

Many in the world, and even some Christians, have a misunderstanding of faith. To some it is something we build up like energy and when it reaches a certain level we are able to accomplish miracles. To others it is blind faith which believes something when, in fact, there is no basis for believing it. For example, many are convinced they will be healed despite the fact there is no basis for their belief. The doctor has not told them they will be healed and the facts are contrary to it, yet they would say they have faith.

When asked to define faith most Christians would quote Hebrews 11:1 -"faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." While true faith does produce a confidence with regard to things hoped for, and a conviction of things not seen, these are the products of faith and not faith itself.

Faith is believing a divine testimony or revelation. Faith is believing God when He speaks. The Christian then has a basis for His belief—God's Word. Many believe in God, but far fewer believe God when He speaks. The first man Adam started man on a course of unbelief, and down through history man has refused to believe God when He speaks.

Faith is always in response to a Divine message. "Who hath believed our report?" (Isa. 53:1) "So faith then is by a report, but the report by God's word." (Rom. 10:17 JND) "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." (Heb. 1:1)

Those who have faith believe God, regardless of what He speaks about. If He speaks about creation, they believe Him. (Heb. 11:3) If He speaks of coming judgment, they believe Him. (Heb. 11:7) If He speaks of that which man has never seen, they believe Him. (Heb. 11:8) It is believing God when He speaks that separates the Christian from the unbelieving world around him, just as when Joshua and Caleb believed God concerning the promise land and it separated them from the unbelieving nation of Israel.

Whether God speaks concerning salvation, marriage, the future, money, creation, or the operation of the local assembly, those who have faith believe Him. Now this belief goes beyond whatever our senses tell us.

Regardless of what our sight, touch, feelings, or our reasonings may tell us, faith believes God when He speaks.

Faith which believes God always results in appropriate action. (James 2:20) Whether it is repentance, building an ark, or walking around a city, when we believe what God says it will always lead us to action, even if that action is standing still and seeing His salvation. (Ex. 14:13)

May the Lord increase our faith. (Luke 17:5) May we learn to believe God when He speaks, regardless of the subject. May we willingly submit to His Word and act accordingly.

Faster than the Speed of Light

The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. How fast is that? If we take the circumference of the earth as 25,000 miles, this means that light, assuming it could bend around such circles, would travel around the earth over seven times in one second, or almost 27,000 revolutions of the earth in one hour. Bringing this down to a more understandable level, light would travel from New York City to Los Angeles in about two one hundredths (2/100) of a second. That would mean you could live in New York and go to an assembly in Los Angeles, and those who live the furthest away from the assembly are usually on time!

Now as fast as light is, prayer is faster! Think of Nehemiah. The king asked him why his countenance was sad, and Nehemiah explained that Jerusalem "lieth waste and the gates are consumed with fire." The king then asked Nehemiah, "For what dost thou make request?" And then Nehemiah writes, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." (Neh. 2:4) Instantly his prayer is heard in heaven! No delays, not even two one hundredths of a second, but instantly his prayer is heard.

Is it not encouraging to know those little prayers that we render while driving our cars, walking the street, lying in bed, or on our knees, are instantly heard at a throne of grace? It should encourage us "always to pray." (Luke 18:1)

From the Tomb to the Throne

In the first chapter of Ephesians we are taught that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3) Here we learn the source, nature and sphere of our blessings. They are from God, and are spiritual and heavenly, and are thus vastly different from the physical and earthly blessings of the nation of Israel.

These Scriptures also teach us that we were selected by the Father, saved by the Son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. (1:4-14) In addition, God has also made known to us the mystery of His will, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth...." (1:10) How important it is for us to know and remember that all of God's purposes are centered in His Son. How often we have the idea that man is the center of His divine purposes. However, His Son, our Savior, is the center of the Father's purposes and we are blessed in association with Him. (Rom. 8:29)

In the latter portion of the first chapter we have Paul's prayer for the saints. Paul did not pray that God would give the saints something they did not have. Rather, he prayed that God would give them an understanding of what they already had. So great were their blessings in Christ that Paul must pray that God would open their understanding, in order that they might know, or grasp, the hope of His calling-that's their portion-and the riches

of the glory of His inheritance in the saints-that's Christ's portion-and the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe-the same power that He demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.

The subject of God's power continues into the second chapter of this epistle. The same power of God that was demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead is seen operating in those who are associated with, and blessed in Christ Jesus.

The amazing grace of God is set forth so clearly here. Those who are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ are those who were formerly dead in trespasses and sins. Lost souls who were under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air, and walked accordingly. Those who fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind. (2:1-3)

After describing the helpless estate of mankind, Paul brings in the power and grace of God. God has quickened, or made alive with Christ those who were dead. In addition, He has raised us up and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ. (2:4-6)

(Notice that "quickening," not "new birth," is the need of those who are dead. New birth is necessary because the flesh is corrupt. [John 3:6; 1 Pet. 1:23-24] Man obtains a new nature by way of new birth, and he obtains life by way of quickening.)

Think of it! Those who were hopelessly dead in their sins, God's power and grace have lifted from the tomb to the throne in Christ Jesus. They will be trophies of grace in the ages to come (2:7)- "for by grace are ye saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (2:8)

While we are not saved by good works, we are saved unto good works, and are to walk in them. (2:10) They are to characterized the believer's life. Not just a good work here and there, but a way of life.

Now this wonderful truth of God's power and grace is not simply to occupy our minds, but to motivate our hearts as well. Paul was motivated by the grace of God, for he fully understood that he was only what he was by the grace of God. (I Cor. 15:10) How about us? How much do we appreciate what God's power and grace has accomplished in our lives. How much have we entered into our spiritual blessings by faith. Like Joshua and the children of Israel we will find conflict when we attempt to occupy the land of our spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but we too can gain the victory by faith.

Paul exhorts us to be heavenly minded and to set our affections on things above. (Col. 3:1-4) How easy it is to become occupied with the things of earth. How easy it is to put all our effort into accumulating things on earth that are temporary when we already have eternal blessings that are ours to enjoy.

The story is told of a man who sent his servants around the world in search of art treasures only to discover he already owned them. So it is with many saints. We know so little of what we already have in Christ, and often go searching in the world for that which does not satisfy. We would do well to pray as Paul prayed, asking the Lord to reveal to us what we already have in Christ.

Giving

Touch a man's wallet and you have touched a nerve. When Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to part with his money it struck a nerve. The young man apparently did not realize the grip his money had upon him until he was confronted with giving it away. (Lk. 18:22-23) So it is with many of us. We do not always realize how much we trust in riches, and how much importance we place on money. Money gives us a sense of security; however, Scripture would teach us that riches have wings, and really provide very little security. (Prov. 23:5)

When it comes to Christians and giving to the Lord, it has been said, "A giving Savior should have giving disciples." (2 Cor. 8:9) It was the Lord who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) Instruction on giving to the Lord occupies a good part of Scripture and is a very important part of the Christian pathway.

Throughout the Old Testament we are given accounts of those who gave abundantly. When the tabernacle was to be constructed the children of Israel gave their jewelry, linen, and other materials to such an extent that Moses needed to command them to stop giving. (Ex. 36:3-6) The widow of Zarephath gave her last meal to the prophet (1 Kings 17). In the New Testament we read of the widow who gave "all that she had" (Mk. 12:44). Mary and Martha provided hospitality to the Lord (Jn. 12:2), while Lydia did so for Paul and his company (Acts 16:40.)

Often "giving" is viewed in a negative light, and many fail to see that it is more "blessed" to give than receive.

Many miss a blessing by failing to give of that which the Lord has placed in their hands. All is His, and David stated, "for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." (1 Chr. 29:14) In addition to blessing, giving is a way of honoring the Lord. "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:" (Prov. 3:9). What Christian would not want to honor the Lord in the way he lives? Yet, despite this, many fail to see giving as a way of honoring the Lord. Giving needs to be seen in a more favorable light. We need to view it, not as a chore, but as an opportunity to honor the Lord and to be a blessing to others, and in turn be blessed.

There are some very simple principles associated with Christian giving. One is that of secrecy. The one giving is not to blow his trumpet and announce it to the world. It is not to be done for the praise of men. (Matt. 6:1-4)

Giving is also to be systematic. Paul instructed the Corinthian saints to set aside each Lord's Day in accordance with how the Lord had prospered them. We do many other financial activities in a systematic way, and yet giving is often done in a haphazard fashion. We pay mortgages, loans, and utility bills on a regular basis, and giving to the Lord should also be done in an orderly way.

As noted above it is also to be proportional. It is to be 'according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.' (2 Cor 8:12) We need not compare our giving to others which will most likely cause difficulty. We are free to simply give in accordance with what the Lord has placed in our trust.

Perhaps most important is that our giving is to be from a willing and cheerful heart. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7) In a selfish world giving is usually viewed as a duty-something we ought to do. The Lord is desirous for the Christian to have a cheerful attitude toward giving. Thankfully there are those Christians who really enjoy giving to the Lord. It should be true of all of the redeemed.

We often speak of developing and using our spiritual gifts, and it needs to be done. When writing to the saints in Corinth Paul said, "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." (2 Cor. 8:7) The "grace" of which Paul is speaking is that of "giving." No doubt he would exhort us today to "abound in this grace also."

Paul concludes this exhortation with the example of "giving" by the Lord Jesus, Who was rich, but for our sakes became destitute in order that we might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9) Certainly His grace is to stir our hearts to be cheerful givers.

Labour hard, consume little, give much - and all to Christ. Anthony Norris Groves

Godliness and Giving

Some define "godliness" as "God-likeness."

Others describe it as "behavior which displays the character of God." It is evident from these brief definitions that godliness is the manifestation of God's presence and character in one's life. The godly life is one which takes God into consideration in all areas of life. Whatever is being done, is done with a consciousness of God and His will.

God is holy and this is to mark the godly believer. (1 Pet. 1:15) God is righteous and this too is to be seen in the life of a saint. (Tit. 2:12) God is love and love is to characterize His people. (1 John 4:11)

God is also a giving God, and thus if we are to manifest His character, giving should characterize us as well. Giving is not limited to the giving of money. Time can be given to God and to others. Things can be given as well. Of course, the ultimate gift is to give yourself. Paul said of Christ, "who loved me, and gave himself for me." We often find it easier to give our money than to give ourselves.

From one end of the Bible to the other, God is seen as a Giver. In the beginning He gives man the herb bearing seed, and fruit yielding tree. He provided the first man with a wife fit for him. He gave Abraham and his seed the land. He also gave Sarah a child. God clearly is a giving God.

God's giving is not limited to physical blessings. The greatest of all God's gifts is the "unspeakable gift" of His own Son. (2 Cor. 9:15; John 3:16) Scripture speaks of

eternal life as a gift. (Rom. 6:23) And every believer has been blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. 1:3)

In contrast to God, the natural man is a "taker." It has been said, "The world is composed of takers and givers. The takers may eat better, but the givers sleep better." Even among the saints there are those who are spigots and those who are sponges. Those who are always pouring themselves out for the Lord and others, and those who are always on the receiving end.

In contrast to the natural man, godly men and women are givers. The godly men in assembly oversight are not to be greedy for money, but are to be given to hospitality. (1 Tim. 3:2-3) Barnabas, unlike Ananias, and Sapphira, was a giver of all the proceeds from the sale of his land. (Acts 4:37) Paul, speaking to the Thessalonians, said, "we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls...." (1 Thess. 2:8) The Macedonian saints gave out of their poverty to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. (2 Cor. 9:2) Then there were the two widows. The one "of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." (Mk. 12:44) The other gave her last handful of meal to the prophet. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

The Scriptures give us a number principles regarding our giving. Not to give to the Lord is spoken of as stealing. (Mal. 3:8-10) Giving to the Lord is simply returning to Him that which He has given us. (1 Chron. 29:14,16) Giving is to be done in secret. We are not to advertise it. (Matt. 6:1-4) Our giving is to be systematic, or regularly. (1 Cor. 16:2) Giving is to be proportional to one's income. The greater the income, the greater the

giving. (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:3) Perhaps, most importantly, giving is to be done willingly, "for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 8:3; 9:7) It has been said concerning the Macedonian saints who gave willingly out of their poverty, "Great tribulation, plus deep poverty, plus grace, equals abundant giving and abundant joy." Another has wisely noted, "Christian giving is not a matter of finances, it is a matter of faith."

Giving is likened to the sowing of seed. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." One can hoard his seed and receive nothing in return, or one can sow bountifully and reap bountifully. Paul, writing to the Philippian saints, wrote, "I desire fruit that may abound to your account." (Phil. 4:17) Those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully in their heavenly account.

It should be noted that when one supports a work he becomes a partner in that work. (This is why we must not support false teachers.) The apostle John spoke of being "fellow helpers" or "partners" to the truth. (3 John 8) Through giving each saint has the opportunity to be a partner in the Lord's work, and to share in the rewards as well.

The apostle Paul, speaking to the Ephesian elders, said, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Godly Shepherds and Obedient Sheep

There is a great need in local churches today for godly shepherds. The absence of such shepherds is readily apparent. Many of the saints are as sheep having no shepherd. Many who are referred to as "elders" are more involved in "scheduling" speakers and activities than they are in "shepherding."

Sheep are often poorly fed and others simply wander off without the shepherd knowing or searching them out and bringing them back to the fold. (Luke 15:4) Other sheep are suffering and receive little or no compassion. Some shepherds are absent for months at a time, while others fail to attend many of the meetings of the assembly. In addition hospitality is rarely practiced. (1 Tim. 3:2) As a result of these failures those having the responsibility of shepherding the Lord's sheep barely know them. (John 10:14) Sadly, the Lord's charges against the false shepherds of Israel would be applicable to many shepherds today. (Ezek. 34:1-10)

Let's consider briefly the great need for godly shepherds today. First, it is clear that these are days of depravity. In such days there is a great need for shepherds who are men of character. Shepherds who will "Stand Out" as models whom the sheep can follow. (John 10:27; 2 Thess 3:7)

Second, these are days of discouragement, and thus there is a need for shepherds who are men of compassion. Shepherds who will "Stand By" the sheep in times of difficulty and discouragement. While shepherds

must be strong, they must also be men of compassion. We see this perfectly displayed in the Good Shepherd. (John 8:44; 11:35)

Third, we live in times of departure. The Scriptures are being abandoned and rationalized away. Pragmatism rules, and many churches have gone to the world for help. (Isa. 31:1) In days of departure we need shepherds who are men of conviction. Men who will not be swayed by public opinion. Men who know what they believe and why they believe it. Men who will "Stand Fast" in days of departure. (Tit. 1:9)

Lastly, these are dangerous days in which Scriptures are being challenged and when those who take a stand for them will come under fire, even from the saints! We need men of courage. Men, like David, who are not only shepherds, but men who will "Stand Up" and be counted. David saw Goliath and the battle in a different light than his brethren and was willing to get into the battle, even when his own brethren misunderstood him. David, the skilled shepherd and musician, stood up as a courageous soldier.

In days of depravity we need men of character who will Stand Out as models for the sheep to follow. In days of discouragement we need men of compassion who will Stand By the sheep. In days of departure we need men of conviction who will Stand Fast and hold firmly to the Word of God. In days of danger we need men of courage who will Stand Up in the battle.

While shepherds are responsible for the Lord's sheep and must give account for their souls (Heb. 13:7), the sheep are not without their responsibilities towards the shepherds. We live in a very self-centered world, one in

which individuals demand much service, but are unwilling to serve others. This carries over into the local church and many saints demand much of those in oversight, but fail to carry out their responsibilities towards those who are attempting to provide needed spiritual leadership and care. Many murmur, but rarely pray for these finite men who have such a great responsibility, and their own trials and discouragements as well.

The sheep are exhorted to "know them which labor among you and are over (leading) you in the Lord, and admonish you.." (I Thess. 5:12) Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." Sheep are to recognize those who are shepherding the Lord's sheep. Any shepherd who is doing the work will be "recognizable," and the sheep are to do just that. The sheep are to be aware of those who guide and care for the sheep.

The passage quoted above goes on to say, "And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thess. 5:13) The sheep are to recognize the shepherds and to respect them as well. They are to esteem, or value them for the work they are doing. How often do the sheep value the work of the shepherds? How often do the sheep stop to consider the responsibility and labor associated with leading the Lord's people? While the shepherds are not "above" the saints in the sense of being in a different class, they are to be esteemed for their works sake. The sheep are to be appreciative and thankful for those who sacrifice themselves for the sheep. Sadly, the sheep may demand all the attention, but be unaware of the value of a caring shepherd.

Scripture also instructs the sheep to respond to the shepherds. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief...." (Heb. 13:17) The sheep are to "obey" the shepherds, or "to be persuaded" by them. The sheep are to trust the shepherds and "submit," or "not resist" them for they watch for your souls. How important this is in a day of rebellion and the "resisting" of leadership in many areas of society. By obeying and submitting, the sheep make the task of the shepherd an enjoyable one, rather than a difficult and discouraging one.

We are also told to remember them that have the rule (lead) over you. (Heb.13:7) It was the Lord Jesus who said, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." How easy it is for the sheep to get caught up with their own needs, and to forget those who labor day and night (Acts 20:31; 1 Thess. 2:9), day after day, month after month, and year after year for the sheep. I would suggest that a major part of "remembering"

them would be to pray for them. Mere mortals attempting to provide care for the Lord's sheep as those "who must give account for their souls."

How they need to be remembered and prayed for, and yet how infrequently they are prayed for privately or publicly?

Lastly, if necessary, the sheep are to recompense the shepherds. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." (I Ti. 5:17) This does not imply some business-like contract of some sort, but a

sensitivity and exercise on the part of the sheep to the needs of the shepherds. Scriptures are far from silent in this area. "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward." (I Tim. 5:18) If the demands of shepherding eliminate or reduce the possibility of secular employment, the saints should be willing to support those who labor to provide care for the Lord's sheep.

In a day when there is so much error coming into the church, and when so many of God's people have strayed from the things of the Lord, and when many others are passing through deep waters, it may be that those who are doing the work of shepherding simply do not have enough time to do all that is required and hold down secular responsibility as well. Certainly the Biblical principle of plurality of leadership is designed to help in this area, but at times it may be necessary for the sheep to recompense those serving them in this way. It may also be true that the work of shepherding may incur some expenses which the saints should be willing to reimburse to those doing the work.

In a local assembly where there are godly shepherds who love the Lord's people and give themselves for them, and where the sheep recognize, value, and obey those doing this important work, there will be a healthy harmony and an atmosphere conducive to spiritual and numerical growth.

Haste Makes Waste!

Speed kills! This is not only true when it comes to driving. Take fertilizer for example. The right amount of fertilizer will make your lawn beautiful, while too much of it will kill your grass, making it look like a straw doormat.

In the last two or three decades there has not been a great number of young people, in particular, young men, who have committed themselves to serving the Lord and His people. (Thankfully, there have been some.) This condition has caused some, with good intentions, to press any who show the slightest interest into service before they are ready, and before they really got their roots well established. Many are rushed into the pulpit and some into an itinerant ministry. Others are made Sunday School superintendents while still very young. Sadly, the long term record of some of those who are "overfertilized" has been tragic.

May the Lord give us the wisdom to encourage young people to serve Him, while giving them the proper time to mature. Let's not rush them into instant responsibility and notoriety, and too often into failure. (1 Tim. 3:6,10) Let us also remember that education, even "Bible College," is no substitute for time and experience. The best lesson for many young people to learn is to "work," before entering the "Lord's work," (1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Thess. 4:11)

If Only!

Often hindsight is filled with painful "If onlys." If only Eve had not eaten of the fruit of the tree. If only Joshua had sought the will of the Lord before attacking Ai. If only Saul had done what the Lord directed Him concerning the Amalekites. The list could go on and on.

In our own experience maybe we look back and say the same thing. "If only I had followed my parents advice." "If only I had studied harder." "If only I had thought before I spoke." "If only I knew more about the effects of abortion." "If only I had not watched those immoral soap operas." "If only we had spent more time preparing our children for spiritual success." "If only we invested in eternity more."

Nowhere will "If only" be more painful than in the eternal lake of fire. "If only I had read the Bible." "If only I had believed the Gospel when I heard it."

Today is the first day of the rest of our lives. Let's make the decisions necessary to avoid the painful "If onlys."

Immigration - A Lesson for the Church

The saying, "Hindsight is always twenty-twenty," is a familiar one. It implies that when we look back over our past we can see what should have been done, in contrast to what was done. Given the opportunity of turning back the clock we would do things differently.

In light of the terroristic attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon we can now look back and say we made some mistakes. We allowed people into this country about whom we had very little knowledge. We opened our doors to the very people who ultimately attacked us and caused such destruction and grief.

Does this mean that the United States should close its borders, if it could. No, it means that the nation needs to be more careful who it allows in, and to hold those who do come in accountable, meaning they should be monitored for their behavior and activities. It also means that any behavior that is potentially harmful to the nation would be cause for concern and perhaps deportation.

This is a great lesson for the local church. Opening its doors to everyone and anyone may well allow those in who will ultimately lead to its destruction. It is not uncommon for people to simply "slide into" the assembly, with little or no knowledge of them. It was the apostle Paul who warned the Ephesian elders of those who would attack from without and from within. (Acts 20:29-30)

Am I advocating closing the doors and allowing no one in, of course not; however; I am saying that we should know those we receive into fellowship. If we do not know them, then we should receive a report from those who do. Letters were a common method of doing this in the early church. (Rom. 16:1) Today we have telephones, fax machines, and other means, in addition to the written letter to receive such information.

The Church has also been lax on discipline in recent decades. Its concern for growth and its image has led many local churches to overlook sin and fail to carry out the difficult and painful task of discipline. This too can lead to tragedy as noted by Paul when he said, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." (Gal. 5:9)

May we be alert to who we receive into our local fellowships, while holding open arms to those of like precious faith who are walking in accordance with the Word. May we guard the assembly and the saints from those who may be destructive and avoid the pain of hindsight.

Is the Church to be a Chameleon?

There is much being written today concerning church growth, and we would be wise to heed to some of it. For example, we cannot expect poor preaching, poor singing and an unfriendly atmosphere to produce either spiritual or numerical growth. Common sense should tell us this.

There are those however, who would urge us to take extreme measures to reach the lost. They would treat the Gospel Meeting like a presidential campaign. In such campaigns producing an “image” of the candidate by showing him kissing babies, waving a flag, or having a picnic with his family is more important than discussing the issues of the day. This is because people vote on “images,” not on issues. The “Selling of a President” requires the best publicity and advertising professionals and techniques that money can buy. Christians are now using these techniques in the “Selling of the Church.” Avoid the issues, but create an “image” of the church which the unsaved world can freely identify with. A clear example of this would be Robert Schuler’s “Crystal Cathedral.”

In order to create this image we are told that we must be willing to “become all things to all men.” This includes giving them the music they like, or a program that “excites” them. If they do not like to sing, then we don’t sing. If they are used to watching TV and being amused, then we amuse them. If they are offended by Biblical words like, sin, Hell, repentance, and judgment, then we avoid these terms. If they are offended by head coverings, then we don’t wear them. Keep everything “upbeat” and “positive” in order to produce an “image”

that the unsaved world will buy. In other words the church must be a chameleon. (A chameleon is a small lizard that changes its color to match its surroundings.)

In order to have people stay and for the church to grow numerically we are told that we must provide a place where they are comfortable. We must be willing to “adapt to them.” I can’t help but wonder if we are deceiving ourselves with this “philosophy of ministry.” Is it the unsaved that we want to be comfortable, or is it ourselves? If they are comfortable, then we are comfortable as well! If the world is happy in the church then the church avoids the offense of the cross. We avoid all uncomfortable confrontation, and thus we are comfortable.

Brother Caldwell wrote concerning 1 Cor. 1:26 (“not many wise...”), “Satan’s aim has been to get ‘Christianity,’ as it is called, allied with wisdom, philosophy, and science of the world; allied with the state and the crown; thus to strip it of its Christ-like garb of lowliness, and give it a standing and a respectability among men. In short, to lift off the reproach of the cross from the followers of Christ. But it cannot be. It is Satan’s plan to remove the cross from the disciple by beguiling the disciple from Christ.”

I wonder if this is why Christianity has turned to promoting itself through “superstars” from either the world of sports or Hollywood. The world isn’t going to belittle us for standing next to a “superstar” who they themselves idolize, but when we identify ourselves with Christ that’s a different story.

The basis for thinking that the church should be a chameleon and take on the characteristics of the

surrounding world is based on Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 9: 22 where he states, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Let's look at this portion of Scripture more closely.

First, let's consider the surrounding text. In chapter eight Paul spoke of the misuse of liberty. (1 Cor. 8:9) If a weaker brother has a conscience against eating meat which was offered to idols, it would be a misuse of one's liberty to eat such meat in front of him, and thereby cause him to eat and to sin against his conscience. One should restrict or forgo the use of his liberty so as not to cause another to stumble. The lesson for us is that we too should be alert enough and wise enough to restrict or forego the use of our liberty if we knew it would cause another to sin against his conscience.

Paul did not flaunt his authority, or abuse his liberty as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Mistaking this for a lack of authority, false teachers at Corinth raised a question regarding his apostleship. Paul begins chapter 9 by defending the fact that he was an Apostle, and as such he too had rights. (9:1-6) One of these rights was that he had a right to live from the Gospel (9:14). However, he goes on to say that he did not exercise this right because he wanted to be free of any obligation to them. He wanted to be able to declare the Gospel freely and without restrictions, and thus in his wisdom he took nothing from those to whom he was preaching it. (3 John 7) Paul received support from the Lord's people (Phil. 1:5), but he had no desire to "charge" the unsaved world (9:18), although in principle he had the right to receive material things for having sown that which was spiritual. (9:11) Paul did not exercise his rights. He wisely did not exercise the freedom that was rightly his. By so doing he

was free of any obligation to the world, and could preach the Gospel without restraint.

However, being free from any obligation to men, he did not live to himself. He had made himself a servant to all that he might win them to Christ. (9:19) He chose to give up his rights due to his love for his Master and for others. (Ex. 21:1-6)

As a servant to all men Paul states, “to the Jews I became a Jew,” and “to those who are without the law, as without the law.” As a missionary taking the Gospel to different types of people he was wise enough to, in the words of one brother, “adapt himself to the religious capacity and to the modes of thought belonging to the one and to the other, in order to gain access for the truth into their minds; and he did the same in his manner of conduct among them.” However, this same writer adds, “Observe this was in his service; it was not accommodating himself to the world.” We see this principle applied today when a missionary eats the food of a native, or dresses in clothing like that of the people among whom he is laboring.

However, at no time does the missionary become “worldly” to reach the world! Being “all things to all men” can not be interpreted as, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Reaching the minds of the lost with the Gospel is certainly not the same as satisfying the desires of their flesh. Wisely Paul did forgo the exercise of his liberty and did adapt his message to different audiences in order to reach them with Gospel, but he never “entertained” them! Paul is certainly not telling us he acted like the world in order to win them. He did not survey the unsaved world to see what they would like

the church to produce for them. Nor is he instructing the church that in its collective meetings it must adapt to the world's standards to win them.

The context is one in which Paul, as an individual, restricted his liberty, not one in which he simply conformed to his surroundings. To take this text and apply it to the local church, and suggest that the church must be a chameleon and adapt its services to the world around it is a gross misapplication. For if this were true the local church would be like a yoyo trying to satisfy the great variety of tastes of those who come through its doors.

The point of the passage is that we, as individuals, need to be wise in the exercise of our liberties, both with the saints, and with the lost. There are times when we will need to restrict or forgo the use of our liberties. On one hand so as not to cause a weaker brother to sin against his conscience, and on the other hand to give us an opportunity to win the lost. At no time is it teaching us that we must make the world comfortable in the church, and to produce a program that is appealing to the unsaved world.

If the method used to reach the lost would stumble or starve them after they are saved, then that method is worldly and ought to be abandoned. Remember too, "what you win them with, is what you will keep them with." If you win the lost by music then you must give them more music to keep them. If you win them with drama, then most likely you will need to give them more drama to keep them. If you win them through preaching Christ, then they will want more of Him.

Assemblies that are producing programs that satisfy the desires of the unsaved world are no different than the advertising world when it surveys the market to see what people like, and then produces it for them. The meeting of the assembly is not a production, like the local theater. Neither is it a product that we promote. It is a place where we should enthusiastically preach Christ.

Can you envision the early church trying to promote an assembly that was comfortable for those around it? Can you see the saints in the catacombs laying out a strategy for promoting the assembly? Can you see them polling the citizens of Rome as to what they would like to see in the church? Of course not, because there was a definite distinction between the church and the world, and yet the church grew! (Acts 5:13-14)

Applying this world's promotion techniques to the local assembly only makes it more like the world. When we format the assembly's meetings around the world's desires, it won't be long before the church is conformed to the world. (Rom. 12:2) The Bible and history should have taught us this!

The local church is not a place where we "bate" the world with one product, and then "switch" to another product once they have come in. It is a family where there is loving concern, healthy food, wise guidance, and a clear presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The church is not to be a chameleon!

It Is Better to Grow Grass

Having had the experience of starting two lawns from scratch I know it is better to grow grass than it is to pull weeds. There is no special formula for having a good lawn, simply grow grass!

Good grass keeps out weeds. The better the grass the fewer the weeds. Many people spend a great deal of time pulling or spraying weeds in their lawn, when it would be more beneficial to spend their time growing good grass. When the grass is fed and cut properly weeds will have a difficult time gaining entrance.

This is of course true in the spiritual life of the believer as well. A believer who spends time growing will have fewer unwanted spiritual weeds to remove. Christians who feed on this world's entertainment are simply sowing weeds in their spiritual lawn which will cause them to spend more time in spiritual weeding, which if they fail to do will result in a poor spiritual condition and testimony.

Many today sense no danger in this world's theaters and ungodly TV shows and the things presented in them. Little do many realize that the seeds that generate those pesty weeds are often extremely small, and once they get rooted they can be very difficult to remove. The apostle Paul encouraged the saints in Philippi to go in for those things which are "excellent." (Phil. 1:10) It is not simply the question of "What's wrong with this?", but rather "Is it the best?".

A good lawn does require some expenditure for proper food. However the cost, both in time and in money, to

remove unwanted weeds will no doubt be greater, unless, of course, one simply does not care how his lawn looks.

For a Christian to grow also requires some expenditure for proper feeding. Time in the Scriptures and with the Lord's people, and the purchase and reading of sound teaching material are a few examples. Time and money spent in these areas will spare us the awful cost associated with a weed infested life.

Are we putting our effort into growing spiritually, or do we spent much of our time constantly removing unwanted weeds in our spiritual lives? Perhaps we have reached the point where we are satisfied with a weed infested life. If this be the case it may require the Lord to take radical action to rectify the situation. This will be the mostly costly solution, but one which does not have to take place if we will begin to take the time to grow spiritually.

It is Hard to Believe

It is hard to believe, but it is true. There are men, many of them very brilliant, who actually believe that man is the result of some gaseous explosion and billions of years of evolution.

Not only is there no evidence of evolution at the moment-or in the past for that matter-but there are great holes in what evidence men do claim to have in support of evolution. In truth it takes more faith to believe the theories of men concerning man's origin, than it does to believe the Biblical account of creation.

Think of the human body. Could such a complex mechanism or system evolve out of a lower form of life? Hardly. We see no such thing in this fallen world, but rather we see things decline and decay without some outside force to preserve them.

The Bible tells us that God knows the number of hairs on our head. (Matt. 10:30) According to an article in Life Magazine, 125,000 hairs grow in the scalp, with 45 of them being lost each day. Each follicle is able to produce over 30 feet of hair in a life time.

The human heart, which has no external energy source, pumps 2, 100 gallons of blood through 62,000 miles of blood vessels each day. In an average lifetime this is enough blood to fill the fuel tanks of 56 moon rockets.

8,000,000 red blood cells are produced in bone marrow every second. Forty-five miles of nerves send impulses as fast as 325 miles per hour.

The three pound human brain stores 100 trillion bits of information over 70 years. This is equal to 500,000 sets of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The lungs breathe one pint of air seventeen times per minute, or 78 million gallons in an average life span. This is enough air to fill the Hindenburg airship one and a half times.

An average person will take one billion steps in his life and walk about 77,000 miles, landing on the 26 bones of each foot with a force triple his body weight.

While these statistics are overwhelming, they say nothing about the intricate systems which operate within the human body. Systems that would make any system designer's head spin.

Why is it that men strive so hard to prove that man evolved from some lower form of life? One obvious answer is that of spiritual darkness. The Bible tells us the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. (Prov. 1:7) Thus when man leaves God out of his thinking, darkness results and all of man's reasonings are built on a poor foundation-there is no God!

In eliminating

God, man, at least in his own mind, eliminates a higher being to whom he is accountable. Man is thus free to do as he chooses. This explains why with the increasing belief in man's theory of evolution there comes a corresponding decay in the moral fiber of society. Perhaps this is no where more evident than in the United States.

Evolution also makes man simply an animal-the highest order of animal, but an animal nevertheless. This, of course, makes life cheap. Is it any wonder why such

things as abortion and murder abound in such an environment. Strangely, many humans have a greater concern for saving an animal's life than they do for saving the life of a human being. Great effort and expense is made to save whales, seals, owls, and even mice, while at the same time the slaughter of human beings goes on. Such is the darkness and confused thinking that come from the failure to acknowledge God and His creation.

The Bible tells us that a young child who by faith believes the Biblical account of creation knows far more about how the worlds were framed than the greatest scientist who rejects God and His Word. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God...." (Heb. 11:3) Despite all their scientific equipment and all their years of schooling, men who leave God out of their thinking are foolish and ignorant with respect to creation.

Men also substitute theory for fact. They state with certainty that the earth is millions of years old. At museums school children are told that certain animals are millions of years old. Many times the age is stated so precisely; such as, 232 million years old. These statements are made as if men had proof for such facts and figures, when in fact they are simple opinions and estimates, or better yet, "guesstimates" based on man's theories.

As Christians we can have confidence in God's Word, and despite what men, even brilliant men, say, we know that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Gen. 1:1) However, we must teach our children

this truth, since many of them will be told otherwise by men of this world. *

Judas

Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. (John 18:2)

Being deceived is a terrible experience. Being led to believe something is true, when in fact it is false, can be very hurtful. Nowhere is this more true than when it comes to salvation. For a person to believe he is saved, when in fact he is not, is very sad.

Judas traveled with Jesus for three years or so. He saw all the miracles and sat under Jesus's teachings all that time. He was even the trusted treasurer of the small band.

He knew all the right phrases. He was familiar with the jargon. He even preached and healed (Matt.10:1,4, 7).

He knew all the right people. He traveled with the Messiah and kept company with Peter and John, and the others.

He knew all the right places. He knew the temple and was familiar with Gethsemane where no doubt he listened to Jesus teach a number of times.

Despite knowing all the right phrases, people, and places, Judas did not know Christ. How sad to think there are those like Judas sitting in church pews today.

Lessons From Leprosy

In Scripture leprosy is a clear picture of sin. Let's briefly consider some of the similarities.

Leprosy destroys, as does sin. It has been called

"living death," which quickly sends our minds back to the beginning and God's words to Adam, "In eating ye shall die." Brother Young translates this, "Dying, ye shall die." Because of sin we are all in the process of dying.

Leprosy destroys feeling as well. The affected members of the body lose all sense of feeling, even to the point where rats have been known to chew on numb limbs without the stricken individual being aware of it. Sin too destroys feelings as it sears the conscience. What once impacted the conscience is now repeated without any sense of guilt.

Leprosy defiles and divides. It made one unclean, and as such the individual was unfit for God's presence and for fellowship with God's people. Likewise sin makes the sinner unfit to enter the presence of a holy God. It can also cause one to be put out of assembly fellowship and render one unfit for the Lord's service.

Leprosy manifests itself in many forms and various degrees. Leviticus 13:2 notes three forms—"a rising, a scab, or bright spot." The rising, or swelling, pictures pride which is at the heart of sin. (Isa. 14:12-14) Perhaps the scab, the covering of an old wound, speaks of the hidden sins in a man's life. Certainly, in most lives there are more of these than manifest themselves openly. The bright spot may picture the pleasures of this

world. It has been said, "The bright spots in this world are often the most sinful!"

Leprosy spreads. It, like sin, starts small and spreads. Scripture also uses leaven to picture this aspect of sin. Many sins are not alarming at first, but what seems so harmless is, in fact, fatal. Many in prison tell us that they arrived there "one step at a time." They started with what appeared to be a minor act and progressed in crime until it led to their being put out of society. David experienced this path until it led to murder. He looked, lusted, and then committed adultery, followed by murder. It is for this reason that we might find it helpful to pray as one saint expressed, "Lord, keep me from sins that seem innocent."

Leprosy is diagnosed objectively. What the individual thought of his symptoms did not matter. It was what the priest determined that was important. (Lev. 13:3) What God says is sin, is sin. Man may call sin by another name, or diminish it in some other way, but what God determines to be sin will come under His judgment.

Leprosy required examination. It was obvious at times, but in other cases it took time to fully develop. Man may quickly observe and ignore the true nature of sin, but God has examined mankind for thousands of years and His conclusions are recorded for us in Scripture. (Rom. 3:10-18) Man looks only on the surface, but God looks upon the heart. He sees the true depth of sin to which man has gone.

Thus far all we have considered leaves little hope; however, lepers, like sinners, can be cleansed. Much like the serpent on the pole, the cleansing for leprosy was also objective.

The individual was brought to the priest and if he was declared to be healed the priest was to take two birds and kill one of them. He dipped both of them in the blood and sprinkled it seven times upon the one needing to be cleansed. (Lev. 14:6-7) He then pronounced him clean and released the second bird into the open field. (See Leviticus 14 for more details.)

What a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus who died and shed His blood that we might be cleansed from all the defilement of our sin. (1 John 1:7-9) The released bird picturing His resurrection which assures us of the completeness of His work and our acceptance before a holy God.

With such a clear picture of the awfulness of sin and the wonderful work of Christ, it should cause us to "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." (1 Thess. 2:12)

Living on the Edge

From the first issue of Milk & Honey

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Eutychus is certainly not a name that is often thought of when names are being considered for a new son.

Neither is he an individual that is often discussed at the mid-week Bible study. There are no books written of his life, and seldom do we hear a sermon concerning him.

We only read of this young man in one verse of Scripture. In Act 20:9 we read, "And there sat in a window a certain young man, named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." In the following verse we are told that Paul embraced him and he was revived.

While this brief incident is the only mention of Eutychus in Scripture, there is a very important and practical truth that is illustrated by this story.

In order to learn this truth we might begin by asking ourselves the question, "Why did Eutychus fall from the window?" Our immediate answer would be, "Because he fell asleep." More often than not, when this story is considered the blame is placed on the preacher. He was sleepy and Paul's "long preaching" caused him to sink into deep sleep and he fell.

It is not uncommon today among the saints to hear comments such as; the message was too long, the message was boring, the message was irrelevant, etc. Unfortunately in some cases that may be a problem.

However, I doubt whether the Apostle Paul was boring, or that the message was irrelevant. The blame for Eutychus' fall could not be placed on the preacher.

In reality the reason he fell from the window was not because he fell asleep, nor because of Paul's preaching. He fell from the window because he was sitting on the edge! If he had not been sitting on the window edge he would not have fallen from it. It was his position that led to his "downfall." If he had been seated among the saints his sleep would not have caused the fall.

From this simple story we can see why saints "fall" back into the world. Many times it is because they are living on the edge! Too often believers will attempt to live as close as possible to the world without being a part of it. They attempt to walk a fine line between Christianity and the world. In this position, it only takes a little sleep and one finds himself falling right back into the world.

How close are you walking to the world? Is it your practice as a Christian to get as close to the world as possible without being spotted (James 1:27)? Is your music like the world's, but with different labels? Do you attend the same movie theaters as they would, but only go to the movies that "aren't bad"? Do you dress like the world, but just a little less revealing or suggestive? Are your priorities similar to those of the world? Does your career take priority over Biblical principles? Are your friends also those who live near the edge of the world (Prov. 13:20)? Is your attendance at the assembly similar to the world's attendance at "church?" Do you read worldly magazines? Is your language "close" to the world's? Do you laugh at the world's off-colored jokes? Is

your "thinking" like that of the unsaved world? Are the world's standards your standards (James 4:4)?

One of the easiest ways of determining if you are living on the edge of the world is to consider this question. 'On what basis do you determine if you should go to a certain place, do a certain activity, or listen to certain music, etc.?' If you find yourself saying, "There is nothing wrong with this," then you are most likely walking very close to, if not in the world.

In Philippians 1:9-10 we read Paul's prayer for the saints. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

Paul prayed that the saints' love would grow in knowledge and discernment. Love that overflows these two boundaries can be as harmful as a river that overflows its banks. His desire is that they "approve," test and go in for, those things that are excellent, or "better." (1 Thess. 5:21) All of this is in view of the Judgment Seat of Christ (Day of Christ), at which each saint will need to give an account for the deeds done in the body. (2 Cor. 5: 10)

As believers we should be "testing" things in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, and going in for those things which are "better." Our test is not, "Is there anything wrong with this?" Our test should be, "Is this the best?" Is this the best book I can read? Is this movie the best thing I can watch? Is this the best place to go? Is this better for me than being at the assembly? Is this the best friend with respect to my spiritual growth? Is this the best bathing suit to wear? Is this the best language I

can use? It is not only a question of whether the Lord will be "displeased," but whether He will be displeased." (I Thess 4: 1b) If we evaluate our activities from this perspective we will find ourselves moving further away from the edge.

It may be helpful to distinguish between "worldliness" and "sin." A sin, as we know, is an act that is contrary to the will of God. On the other hand, worldliness could be defined as an attitude toward the things of the world (Phil. 3:19; 1 John 2:15). The Lord not only wants the believer to be righteous, but also to be "holy" (I Pet. 1: 15-16). We are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Our thinking is not to be "conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2).

Going back to the story of Eutychus we can see that living on the edge is very dangerous. One need not slip very far to suffer great harm. Scripture over and over again exhorts the saints to be awake and alert. Those who are often "sleepy" live on the edge. Those who are alert and aware of the danger "approve things that are better."

How close are you to the edge?

Looking Through Rose Colored Glasses

Those outside of Christ are familiar with looking at the world through rose colored glasses. The glasses cast a lovely hue across the landscape, hiding in most cases the true condition of things. Political and financial leaders would tell us that things look bright for the future, when any who look realistically through clear, well focused lenses can see the handwriting on the wall. The nation is falling apart morally. We are moving rapidly toward days similar to those which preceded God's judgment in Noah's day.

Not only is there an opening of the floodgates to immorality of the worst kind, but there is a corresponding increased hatred for the things of God. Citizens are now free to boldly flaunt their "alternate life-style," while others openly denounce Christianity.

We as Christians need to take off the rose colored glasses as well. Somehow we are lead to believe that politically we will preserve the nation, and in some eyes, even stop the world from collapsing. We need to be realistic. God, in His Word, tells us clearly of dispensation after dispensation which were committed to man's charge that failed. This includes the church age. Truthfully, most of what Christians fight for politically is to maintain their comfort zone.

If we take off the rose colored glasses we see failure all around us, and yes, even in the Church! In addition to the many divisions that have been introduced down through the ages, we now see clearly the world making

its way into the church in a variety of ways. Sadly, many who are wearing their tinted glasses of various shades, see little or none of it. Music no different than the world's, and in many cases worse, in that it bears the name of Christ, fills the churches, and the ears of our teens. Dress that appeals to the flesh and which saints not many years ago would have immediately associated with the world is prevalent. The casual approach to holy things is seen in the actions, words, and dress of many.

Buildings which rival the world's stadiums, both in size and technology lure thousands to a gospel often void of sin, judgment, repentance, and conviction. The activity and social schedules are often larger and of greater importance than the spiritual gatherings of the church. Of course, if one wears rose colored glasses all of these things have a beautiful and appealing tint to them!

Sadly, it isn't just Christendom, or the evangelical churches that view things with rose colored glasses. Assemblies do as well. Perhaps taking their lead from the atmosphere of the charismatic movement, "everything is great and wonderful." We all love each other and agree not to allow doctrinal differences to disrupt our unity. Sadly, when looking through the tinted lenses, most, if not all discernment is lost. They are unable to see the true spiritual condition of things as they focus on the present, ignoring the long term impact of their decisions and emphases.

Some view the good number of young people playing volleyball or softball, and enjoying the other youth activities provided, and they sit back in ease, seeing the future as bright for the assembly.

With discernment diminished by the rose hue, they fail to see the lack of conversion and/or commitment in many of these young people. The little interest in Bible study or assembly spiritual gatherings, the horrid music plugged into their ears, and the disdain shown for the older generation is somehow hidden by the excitement associated with them playing sports together.

Sadly, I fear in far too many cases, in just a few short years many of those same young people will have lives filled with activities and will have no spiritual interest, and may not even fellowship at the assembly. Lack of conviction will allow them to simply slide away to a fellowship where commitment and spiritual exercised are not required. Worse yet, they may simply fade away into the crowd who sink into the quicksand of the entangled life.

We need to see things the way they truly are. We need to ask the hard questions. "What is the true spiritual condition of our assembly?" "What is the true spiritual condition of our young people?" "What spiritual growth do we see in them that is manifested in a daily walk?" "Are there any potential godly leaders among the assembly youth?" "Could the saints, including the youth, give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in us." (1 Pet. 3:15) "Is there any interest in doctrine, or is that considered heavy, unimportant, or perhaps even as divisive?" "Is separation a forbidden word, and often equated with legalism?"

What is needed is to face reality, and if necessary, take off the rose colored glasses, and look at the real spiritual condition of the assembly and/or its youth. Many have

surprisingly found that there are young people, who when given exposure to sound teaching of the Word, found it enjoyable and wanted more time devoted to it, and less to the physical activity, which in time always fades with age. (1 Tim. 4:8)

The Lord allowed some to depart in order that He may find those in whom He could invest Himself. His emphasis was on the spiritual, not entertainment (John 6: 66-67). While not desirable, we too may find those seeking activities also leaving when spiritual activities are emphasized.

Is all hope lost? Far from it! We need to get back to the plan the all wise God has given us in His Word. We need to concentrate on spiritual training. Training that builds spiritually minded saints! (1 Tim 4:8; 2 Tim. 3:15)

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Lords Over God's Heritage

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. I Pet. 5:3 Godly shepherds are an asset to any assembly. They are men of God who labor to ensure the saints are fed well from the Word of God, protected from wolves in sheep's clothing, and cared for with a genuine love. Such shepherds are to be honored and followed. (I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7)

Sadly, many who have taken on the responsibility of overseeing the local assembly are not doing this good work. (I Tim. 3: 1) Some do not protect the sheep from false doctrine, while others fail to see that the sheep are fed well. Others fail to lead the Lord's people by way of example. In such cases, those who are normally an asset to a local assembly become a liability. They hang on to power at all cost, while doing little or none of the true work of shepherding.

Not only do they not do the work, many act as "lords" over the people. (I Pet. 5:3) Acting as dictators, they rule with a heavy hand and exhibit none of the love that is to be present in true shepherds.

Often these dictators hold the assembly captive. While doing none, or little of the work of shepherding, they want control and rule the assembly with an iron fist.

Misusing Scripture, they remind the people that they are to obey them that have the rule over you. (Heb. 13:7) Now it is certainly true that the saints are to obey those godly men who are leading God's people in accordance with God's Word; however, we must be reminded that the elders, or overseers of the local

assembly are “under shepherds,” who care for the Lord’s sheep. (I Pet. 5:2) While they may have authority as from the Lord, that authority must be exercised in accordance with God’s Word, just as with civil authorities. (Rom. 13:1-6) However, when men simply take the title of “elder” and do not do the work” of the overseer, and rule the assembly according to their own whims and wishes, the assembly is not bound by Scripture to cower to them. In such cases, as with Peter, “ We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)

Now, having made this point, it is essential that we understand that this is not a call to overthrow those in assembly leadership because some do not agree with them. That has happened far too often in the last several decades! Those who had new ideas which the oversight felt were best not implemented caused the saints to rise up against the leadership. Many godly men who put many years and much effort into establishing a New Testament assembly were put out into the street. This is not what is being spoken of here.

Far be the thought, and let no saint or saints assume that such action is being suggested or encouraged.

Disagreement is one thing, and it is highly probable that today overseers who are determined to follow the Word of God will find disagreeable sheep among the Lord’s people, but a failure to lead in accordance with Scripture is another. Acting as if they are not accountable to the Chief Shepherd and holding an assembly captive is not in keeping with Scripture. Such rule should not be recognized by the saints as that which the Holy Spirit has raised up. (Acts 20:28)

Biblical leadership is leading by example. It is leading with a willing heart. It is sacrificial. It is to be done with a deep care for the sheep and loyalty to the Chief Shepherd. (John 10:11- 12; John 13:15; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:21; 5:2-4) Conversely it is not to be done for self gain and power.

Unfortunately some of those in assembly leadership see the assembly as “their” assembly rather than the Lord’s. In such cases they operate out of fear. Fear that they may lose control, and such fear often leads to dictatorial rule.

May the Head of the Church give grace to those who rule over His sheep as lords in order that they may see their own hearts and motives, and that they may become godly shepherds who lead the Lord’s people in accordance with God’s Word and in love.

May our assemblies be freed from the dictatorial rule of those who drive the sheep rather than lead them. How we need to pray that the Head of the Church will raise up godly leaders who lead by example and who serve and protect the saints while giving their lives for them.

Where oversight is controlling by force, may the Lord give wisdom to the saints to graciously confront them, and may the oversight graciously repent of their sin. On the other hand, may the saints be submissive to those who lead according to God’s Word.

NIV Ready To Take The Next Step

According to an article by Susan Olasky in the March 29, 1997 issue of World magazine, the New International Version is quietly going "genderneutral." This means words such as; he, man, brothers, and mankind will be replaced with such words as; person, people, brother and sister, and humankind. Larry Walker, one of the 15 members on the Committee for Biblical Translation says, "At the present time, almost everyone is for it (unisex language)."

This unisex language opens the door for women to be in church leadership. In this regard, Gilbert Bilezikian, professor, writer, and a founding elder and influential theologian at the Willow Creek Community Church believes, "There cannot be authentic community as described in the New Testament without the full inclusion of the constituency of members into the ministry, life, and leadership of the group. "In other words, "You can't have a New Testament church without women being in leadership." Willow Creek has had women elders since its founding in 1978. (Willow Creek was the model for the progressive movement among the assemblies.)

The issue is more than just a translation of the Bible. The real issues are "feminism" and "obedience." Willow Creek is an example of those who are willing to set aside Biblical distinctions in order to accommodate women who desire to exercise leadership in the church, and men who lack the conviction and commitment to take a stand against it. While they are ready to supply some rather intellectual explanations for. their departure from

Scripture, in reality compromise, appeasement, and expediency become the governing principles rather than obedience to the word of God. (I Sam. 15:23)

Of course many will point to the rapid growth of such churches and attempt to justify such departure from the Word of God. The truth is, there is never justification for such departure. Once again men and women have failed to bring their imaginations (reasonings) into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5)

This is simply another step in the apostasy of the professing church. Many may mock such a thought, but the Adversary is clever and knows that the accumulation of such departures produces the same effect as a massive and radical one. In fact, it may produce a greater departure since many will not stand against small changes over time, while a quick and massive departure would receive much more opposition.

The question we each must answer, and each local church must answer is, "Will we stand against such error, or will we take the easier and popular path of compromise, appeasement, and expediency?" Are we ready to be ridiculed and belittled? Remember, God has said, "obedience is better than sacrifice."

No Gender-Neutral NIV!

Good news concerning the NIV. Shortly after our article in June, the International Bible Society, who licenses the publishing of the NIV to Zondervan, stated that there will be no gender-neutral version published in the United States. It also will make efforts to stop its publication in England.

While we applaud the Society for its decision, this will not lessen the efforts of many to make the church gender-neutral. As stated in the June issue, this is the real objective for those pushing for such a translation. This is no time to fall asleep!

One Point

The Bible tells us "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10) The world would see nine out of ten as excellent, God sees it as unacceptable. This shows us the difference between a Holy God, and fallen man. To man almost perfect is good enough, but not so with a Holy God. With Him anything less than perfection is unacceptable.

Isn't it a wonderful to know that a Holy God who expects absolute perfection accepted the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. This He demonstrated by raising Him from dead. This truth provides peace to the believer. (Rom. 5: 1) There is no fear that one sin went unjudged, for had that been the case God would not have accepted the work of His Son. But every sin was judged and a Holy God was satisfied!

Paul's Exhortations to Timothy

As the apostle Paul nears the end of his life, much of which had been poured out for the Lord, his heart is moved towards Timothy and what his son in the faith will face in the coming days. Writing from his dungeon, the veteran missionary pours out his heart and concerns for the younger, and perhaps discouraged Timothy. Surely, the younger saints of our day would benefit from listening in as Paul, who is about to depart this world, gives Timothy his final instructions.

Amid many exhortations regarding utilization of his spiritual gift, and suffering for the Gospel's sake, a few seem to take center stage. Exhortations that we would do well to memorize and follow throughout our sojourn.

Paul exhorts Timothy in chapter one, "Don't be ashamed," but "be a " partaker of the afflictions of the gospel." (1:8) Don't drawback because things are getting difficult. Be a participator! Good advice when it comes to our witnessing for Christ—Don't be ashamed!

In chapter two, in the well-known verse 15, he exhorts Timothy to be "approved of God." This is with his work in view. So too with us today, it should be the Lord's approval we seek as we serve Him. Here is some excellent advice regarding our work for the Lord—Be approved of God!

In chapter three Paul warns Timothy of the stressful days that are ahead, and exhorts him to "continue thou in the things which thou hast learned." (3:14) A fit word for us as we walk among the voices of psychology and

multiple step programs—stay with the Word of God as your guide!

In chapter four, Paul's charge is for Timothy "to preach the Word!" He was not to change the message when people turned away their ears from the truth. Good advice to us with respect to the word we preach—Always the Word!

Praying For the Sick

Much of the typical mid-week prayer meeting is taken up with praying for those who are sick, or suffering in some way. The list is usually long, and if we take in those outside our own local assembly the list can get very large. There are many of the Lord's people who are going through trials of various kinds and intensity. Many are physical difficulties, while others are related to other circumstances of life.

I know from recent personal experience that it is a great encouragement to know that the saints are praying for you. It is a real blessing when a brother or sister takes the time to send a card or to call to express an interest in your condition and to give a word of encouragement. This is truly a spiritual ministry and one that many saints who feel they have no role in the body of Christ could easily undertake.

The purpose of this brief article is to encourage us to consider all the needs of those who going through such trials. We need to be more sensitive to the emotional, and spiritual needs. Often when one is sick the body is not the only part of the person affected. Many thoughts enter the mind which cause unrest. Anxiety of the unknown, concern for loved ones, and even a weakness of faith to appropriate God's promises may be present.

Most Christians have memorized verses such as Romans 8:28 (And we know that all things work together for

good to them that love God....), and I Peter 5:7 (Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.). Often these and other verses are quoted to those going through difficulty; however, perhaps a greater need is that we pray that their faith may be strengthened to appropriate these promises and enjoy the peace of God.

We must also look beyond the individual to his or her loved ones. They too are suffering. Parents of a child with cancer need prayer as does the child. The wife whose husband is having open-heart surgery needs prayer. The husband of a wife who is suffering also needs prayer. There can be much anxiety associated with a loved one being sick.

When all is well with us we may fail to take time to be sensitive to all the needs of the sick and suffering. We may simply be occupied with the physical aspect of the problem. While praying for the health or well-being of an individual is certainly needed, the emotional and spiritual needs may, in fact, be greater ones, and yet we often fail to pray for them. This means we must stop and consider all aspects of the individual's difficulty and sympathize with them. This will lead to more heart felt intelligent prayer.

Prerequisites to Worship

Worship is not some difficult, complex, sophisticated religious activity which is limited to a few elite saints. It is to be the portion of all believers. Worship is simply bowing before the Lord and expressing His worthiness to be worshiped. (Rev.5:8) Now worship goes beyond the wonderful fact that Jesus died for us. While we should never forget this amazing fact, and the wonderful love of Christ, there is much more for which He can be worshipped.

Rather than being solely occupied with our blessings, we can think upon His beauties as seen through the eyes of Father, to Whom He always brought delight. As the hymn writer has so nicely put it, “Loved with love which knows no measure, Save the Father’s love to Thee. All His joy, His rest, His pleasure—All His deep delight in Thee—Lord, Thy heart alone can measure what Thy Father found in Thee.” If we would see some of what the Father saw in Him, we will find ourselves at His feet, and we will be worshippers!

Worship has been called the Christian’s

“highest occupation.” If this is true, and it is, then the Church is sadly failing to fulfill its highest calling. Much of what is called worship is not really worship at all. Listening to sermons and choirs falls far short of Biblical worship. Saints in many circles rarely, if ever, come together to simply be occupied with Christ and to exalt Him together.

Others come together specifically for this purpose, but often there is little worship. Many have given little

thought to Christ during the week and the best they can muster is singing someone else's thoughts penned in a hymn—this is not to say that singing hymns that honor and exalt the Lord are not worship, but they can become a substitute for real worship.

In the Bible there were two things that characterized those who were worshippers. It seems to be true of them, regardless of what dispensation they lived in. Perhaps we could view them as prerequisites to worship, and test our hearts accordingly as we come together to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thing that characterizes those saints in Scripture that worshipped was that they had a right view of the Lord. They understood to some degree, and were often overcome by, the majesty of His person, the greatness of His power, and the glory that is His. They never came into His presence in some casual way, but with great reverence—a reverence that is often missing in our casual day!

We see this in David's prayer regarding the materials for the temple and the offering of the people. "Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all." (1 Chron. 29:10-11)

Isaiah records, "... I saw also the

Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ... And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isa. 6:1-3)

Thomas uttered that short, but wonderful expression when he realized he was in the presence of the risen Christ, "My Lord, and my God." (John 20:28) Scripture records many expressions which indicate that the worshippers had a right view of the Lord.

The second thing that characterized those who worshipped was that they had a right view of themselves. After expressing his worship David asked, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?" (1 Chron. 29:14) Isaiah cries out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa. 6:5) Seeing the Lord, John writes, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." (Rev. 1:17)

Those who found themselves in the presence of the Lord were fully aware of the vast difference between the One they worshipped and the one worshipping. They were humbled to think that such creatures could be so privileged as to be in the presence of the Lord Himself. Are we aware of this great difference and the grace that has brought us to this place of acceptance and privilege? Do we with little thought of such things gather together to worship? If so, is it any wonder that we worship so little?

As accepted in Christ we may come boldly into

His presence (Eph. 1:6; Heb. 10:19), but this does not negate the need for a right view of the Lord, and a right view of ourselves as we come into His presence to worship.

Psyched Parents

Samson's parents did not say it to him. (Judges 14)
David probably did not say it very often to Absalom.
Samuel did not say it enough to his sons. (1 Sam. 2)
What is it that these parents failed to express to their children? It is the word, "No!"

With all the emphasis placed on children over the past several decades, and much of it was needed, the pendulum has swung too far. The truth is that in many families children are now the focal point and in far too many families they actually run the show. As a result discipline is completely missing, or is often threatened but never administered. In some cases the children actually come before the parents' marriage.

Too many parents are afraid that they might offend the child by saying, "No!". The psychologists have stressed so much that children need to be loved, and parents must devote "quality time" to them, that many parents simply bend over backwards in fear that the child might be deprived his wish. The result is that the family revolves around the children and the children set the direction of the family. Too often time proves this to be a mistake.

Children decide on a regular basis what the meals will be, where the family will go on vacation, or whether they will get a pool, or not. They dictate such things as, the brand of clothes they will wear, their hair style, and the family schedule. Gymnastics, soccer, little league, and other similar activities take center stage, and everyone else's schedule falls in line.

This often carries over into the local assembly where young people are given all they want, and soon the assembly finds its direction set by the younger ones as well.

Having said all this, does this mean we simply ignore our children and the young people in the assembly—not at all! It does, however, mean that we need to keep things in proper perspective, and that children and young people need to learn that the world does not revolve around them. (The natural man is already the center of his world without encouraging it further.) One of the great lessons to be learned in spiritual growth is to "look on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4) To have a concern for the interests of others, and to look away from "self." This is exactly the attitude that is being stressed in the lovely portion that follows which describes the "mind of Christ"—He was "others" minded.

To place the children above all else and to give them all that they demand, and to simply allow them to go unchecked is, in fact, an expression of a lack of love and a source of ultimate shame. (Prov. 29:15)

Reassembling the Assembly

The question is often asked, "Do assembly principles apply to meetings held outside the assembly?" The answers vary greatly depending on who you ask. The real problem is that Scripture does not address such gatherings, and, as such, in the eyes of many we are left to our own thinking.

It is evident from Scripture that in the early New Testament church the local assembly was the gathering place. We read of the Christians "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house." (Acts 2:46) The apostle Paul states, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house," (Acts 20:20) It seems that the early Christians met in small house groups, each in itself being a "local assembly."

Without large buildings and the modern means of transportation we enjoy, and with many being servants and disowned converts, the saints were forced to gather locally and to make the most of their time together. No doubt, they looked forward to gathering with other believers, and welcomed each opportunity for corporate worship and prayer.

Today things are different. Saints are more affluent and modern transportation allows saints to live miles away from the assembly. "Local" now mean those saints gathering in an area of many square miles. In addition to allowing for high speed travel to the assembly, transportation also allows saints to go to events other than assembly gatherings. The assembly now has

competition and is no longer the primary gathering center for many saints.

The assembly has been disassembled by age and sex into a number of groups. A variety of meetings and other activities held outside of the local assembly fill the calendar. In many of these gatherings New Testament principles of gathering are set aside. Women are no longer silent. Headcoverings are considered unnecessary.

It is not uncommon for those who faithfully attend such meetings and activities, many not arranged by the local assembly, to be sporadic in their attendance at the gatherings of the assembly, obviously placing a greater priority on these gatherings than on the local assembly.

Young people are separated from the older saints, in some cases, never coming together for any meeting. Youth are kept in Sunday School until they are well up in years and some rarely sit under the sound of the "preaching" of the Gospel. We should never wonder why a "generation gap" exists—we have created it!

Amazingly, despite all the different groups and gatherings inside and outside the assembly, many saints are not grounded in the Word, and often assembly principles are eventually set side in the assembly as well. It should also be noted that each gathering outside the assembly is an opportunity for error to creep in unawares.

What is the answer to the question asked at the beginning of this article? First, if we are going to divide the assembly into groups not envisioned in Scripture, shouldn't we follow the principles of gathering that we are given? Second, maybe it is time to reassemble the

assembly. To make the assembly the central place where saints are taught, and where saints pray together as "an assembly." (Acts 4:23-24) It might even mean doing away with some of the non-assembly gatherings, or not attending them, in order to place the proper priority on the assembly. We need a greater emphasis on corporate gatherings of the local assembly with all the saints coming together "in one place." (Acts 2:1)

Reflections on the Virginia Tech Tragedy of April 16, 2007

Many years later I remember exactly where I was on November 22, 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated. No doubt everyone alive on that date remembers when and where they heard the awful news. We all probably have a list of events, both joyful and sad, which are lodged in our minds and which we will not forget. Sadly, we can now add April 16, 2007 to the list.

On this day students at Virginia Tech

University in Blacksburg, VA went to their classes never expecting that their lives would quickly and cruelly come to an end. A young man had an argument with his girlfriend, and then killed her and another student. Two hours later, obviously enraged, he entered another building and began to slaughter any who happened to come across his path. Some were killed instantly, while others narrowly missed death by seconds or inches. After 32 students and faculty were killed, and many others injured, the killer took his own life. This traumatic day will be remembered, and many will have their lives permanently impacted by the events of this day.

Certainly, our thoughts go out to those directly impacted by the horrible events of the day. We lack the words to express to parents who lost a young child in such an unsuspecting way. Unless we have experienced a similar tragedy, we just can't feel what they feel, but nevertheless we sense to some degree their sorrow, and our hearts go out to them.

One lesson that is clear from this sad day, and this has been clearly stated by those directly involved, is that we never know when our life may come to an end. It will probably not be in such a tragic manner, but whatever the cause, life quickly ends for many totally unaware that their time in this life is about to end. It was true for President Kennedy and for many, many others before and after him. Alive one moment, and gone the next.

The knowledge of this truth ought to make us think about where we would go when we pass off this scene, whether old or young. In that split second when our earthly life ends and we enter the eternal state, where will we be? The Bible speaks of coming judgment for some, and eternal bliss for others. What will determine where we arrive? The Bible states that it will be our relationship with Jesus Christ which will be the determining factor. Not our religion, or our religious efforts, but what relationship we have with Him. Whether we know Him as our personal Savior, and not merely a historical figure that happened to change history. May every reader be encouraged to search the Scriptures, perhaps starting with the Gospel of John, to see how they can be sure that when the last moment comes, however it comes, they will pass into His presence.

Steve Hulshizer

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Sacrificing Children to Idols

The following article was written around 1985.

“For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into the sanctuary to profane it... (Ezekiel 23:39)

In this portion of Ezekiel God is pronouncing judgment upon Israel and Judah for their idolatry. They were so far removed from God they even sacrificed their children to idols. Most likely this is in reference to the fire god Molech. It is reported that the image was heated to a glowing red, and then the children were placed in its arms to be burned as a sacrifice.

When man turns away from God there is no limit to the depth of depravity to which he can go. (Rom. 1:21-32) This was not only true in the days of Israel, but is also very evident in the day in which we live.

God not only mentions the sacrifice of their children to idols, but their hypocrisy. He notes that “on the same day” they came into the sanctuary to profane it. Here we see the religious flesh. Sacrificing children one moment, and entering God’s sanctuary the next. Oh the depth of man’s depravity and the deceitfulness of our natural hearts!

Of course in this day and age we would never sacrifice children to idols—or would we? Is it possible that we are guilty of very much the same sin as the children of Israel? While we would never think of burning our children to death, it may be possible that we are sacrificing them to idols.

To what idols would we sacrifice them?

How about the idol of TV, or the idol of rock music? How about the idols of success, immoral dress, worldly movies, sex, etc.? (We could add today the idol of the internet.)

Is it possible that rather than pay the price of keeping them from these idols, we merely throw in the towel and give them their way? Or perhaps we actually encourage such activities and desires by our own habits, or priorities.

Television has become the number one “baby-sitter.” When all else fails, watch TV. Whatever happened to reading, games, or a little basketball or ping-pong?

The inroads that “Christian Rock” has made into Christian homes is very discouraging. Parents are under the false assumption that the label “Christian” sanctions its use. First of all there is no difference between it and the world’s rock music. Second, the words for the most part are either shallow, erroneous, or indiscernible. (1 Cor. 14:8)

In addition, it has definite effects on the attitudes of children toward Biblically based hymns, dress styles, and spiritual things in general. There is not sufficient space in such a brief paper to elaborate all the negative aspects of this idol. One thing is sure, if your child is living with rock music of any kind, your child is playing with fire and you may have been the one that sacrificed him to it.

Many parents have sacrificed their children to the immoral dress styles of this world. Clothes that are either suggestive, and/or revealing. A common cry is,

“Where can you buy a modest bathing suit today?” If you can’t find one, make one, or don’t go swimming! (They are out there if one really wants to find one.) Romans 12:2 exhorts us not to allow the world to press us into its mold. We do exactly that when we throw up our hands and allow them to dictate the clothes we wear. The world’s styles revolve, for the most part, around sex. It is no wonder that illicit sex is so rampant—people dress to encourage it. (2 Sam. 11:2-5) Have you sacrificed your child to this idol?

How about the idol of success? Many fine Christian parents do more to encourage success in the world’s things than they do in the things of the Lord. More money, time, and energy are spent making sure that Mary or Bob have the best education, the best house, the biggest wedding, etc. How much time and energy are spent making sure that they are equipped to live for, and serve the Lord? Where is our emphasis placed?

Have we sacrificed them to the god of this world?

The Creator designed the family so that parents would be able to guide their children during their early years when they are easily misguided by the world around them. (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4)

It is very easy for parents to sacrifice their children by failing to provide the proper godly guidance to them during these tender years!

Why do we often sacrifice our children to the idols of this world? One reason may be we do not love them enough to pay the price of such guidance and discipline. We may be too lazy or selfish, and therefore take what appears to be the easy way out. Love is willing to pay a price! (John 3:16; Eph. 5:25)

There is a price to be paid to truly love our children. One has said, “We either pay the price now, or pay it later.” That price may be misunderstanding. It may be children getting angry at us, or worse.

However, if we really love them we will pay the price for their future well-being. God does this for His children. (Heb. 12:6)

Perhaps we sacrifice our children to the world’s idols because we are not spiritually awake to the dangers involved. Or perhaps we do not see the world for what it really is—the enemy of God! (James 4:4)

Or perhaps we feel that setting Christian standards is legalism. The Lord said, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” Was He being legalistic? Paul desired that the love of the Philippian saints would grow in knowledge and discernment in order that they might approve and go in for “better” things.” (Phil. 1:9–10)

Love is not blind. To label all discerning judgment as “legalistic” is foolish, and/or merely a way of justifying our behavior.

May we review our practices, and priorities to determine whether we are sacrificing our children to the gods of this world, and on the same day coming into the sanctuary of the Lord. While none of us are perfect parents, may it be our desire and objective to raise our children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4)

Spiritual Weight Watchers

The statisticians tell us that the majority of Americans are overweight. This is no surprise since many spend most of their day sitting behind a desk, or in front of the TV. Add to this a steady diet of fast-foods, and you have the perfect formula for being overweight.

Many Christians are not only physically overweight, but spiritually overweight as well. This excess spiritual weight limits their ability to make progress in the race of faith that is set before them. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this when he says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." (Heb. 12:1)

Those to whom he was writing had made professions of faith in the Jesus Christ, but some of them were considering turning back to Judaism. There were two things, among others, which tempted them to return. These were "comfort" and "ceremony."

Since they were suffering persecution from family members and former friends, returning would do away with the persecution and bring desired comfort. In addition, Judaism was a visible religion. It had the temple, the priests, and the sacrifices, while Christianity had none of these. Many professing Christians are drawn by these same things today. The comfort and ceremony of a big church, as compared to the small, and often belittled small group of believers who attempt to be obedient to God's Word. (Rev. 3:8)

The writer of Hebrews goes to great length to show his readers that in Christ they have One Who is far superior to Judaism, and that they would need to live by faith, taking God at His Word concerning the blessings that were yet future. To encourage them in their faith, a “cloud of witnesses” is given in chapter 11. These were those who had gone before them and had exercised faith in God’s promises, despite great opposition. They had run the race to the end, even though they did not receive the promises. (Heb. 11:39)

In chapter 12 they are encouraged to press on in the race which they began when they came to Christ. They were to cast off any weights that would hold them back, and any sin that would entangle them, making running an impossibility. They were to keep their eyes on Jesus in glory, the One Who perfectly finished what He began, enduring the cross, counting as nothing man’s mockings and hatred.

Now the question is, “What are weights for us today?”

Weights are those things that keep us earthbound. Things that slow us down in our progress toward our heavenly home, that turn our eyes away from a risen Lord in glory, and make us feel at home in this world. That which makes us forget that this world is headed for judgment, and that our citizenship is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20) Those things that cause us to forget that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Strangers because this is not our land, and pilgrims because we are going to another.

God warned Israel on a number of occasions that when they were “fat” they would forget Him. (Deut. 32:15) So it is with many of His saints today. (Rev. 3:17) Prosperity

has caused many to be spiritually overweight. Weighed down by the drive for success, the desire to be comfortable, and the false security that riches bring, many have settled down in this world, forgetting about running the race of faith. A race that should cause us to trim down, casting off the weights of this world of sight and sound.

Just as with physical weight, spiritual weight has a way of sneaking up on us. It has been wisely said, "We do not notice excess weight while we are standing still." It is when we attempt to make progress that the weight becomes noticeable! It is when we attempt to live with eternity in view that we find we are weighed down by the things of this world. How many of the Lord's people are unable to exercise their spiritual gifts and serve the Lord and His people because they "mind earthly things." (Phil. 3:19) Like Lot and Demas, they have settled down in this present world (Gen. 14:12; 2 Tim. 4:10) Not this present "evil world," but this "present world," as compared to "the world to come." (Mk. 10:30)

May we be "spiritual weight watchers," free to run without weights towards heaven. (2 Cor. 5:7)

Spurgeon's Approach

Arminianism, free will, free choice, Calvinism, and hyper-Calvinism, are terms we may hear discussed today. In more theological circles words such as; Pelegianism, semi-Pelegianism, election, predestination, total depravity, irresistible grace, and foreknowledge are also debated. Sadly, too often the discussion is merely an intellectual contest, with a “winner take all” mentality. Calm humility rarely characterizes those who discuss such areas of truth.

I believe, like many evangelists and Bible teachers, in the total depravity of man, and the sovereignty of God in salvation. At the same time I believe man is responsible for what he does with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Believing thus I am persuaded that brother Spurgeon’s approach to preaching the Gospel is a sound one—preach as if it all depends upon man, and pray as if it all depends on the Lord. (1 Cor. 3:6)

My belief in God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility has never hindered my preaching of the Gospel. On the other hand, neither has it hindered my teaching of Scriptures which teach the sovereignty of God in our salvation. The same would be true of those Bible teachers previously mentioned.

A greater concern should be whether we are faithful in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do we stress the love of God at the expense of His righteousness? Do we stress the holiness of God at the expense of His love? Do we use Biblical terms such as; believe, repentance, sin, death, hell, eternal damnation, redemption, forgiveness, propitiation, or do we simply use terms that are vague

or meaningless? Do we take the place of the Holy Spirit and force professions of faith where there is no repentance?

I continue to be overwhelmed with God's grace that not only made salvation possible and available, but which without I would have never come to faith in Christ. Does this mean I cannot have fellowship with those who believe differently in this area? To date it has never hindered my fellowship with those who love and preach the same Christ. Sadly, there are some who have extreme views, but this is true in both ends of the spectrum.

Men through the ages have held the two views, some working side by side to take the Gospel to the lost. It is a concern to me that brothers and sisters in Christ cannot discuss these views in a spirit of love and humility. No doubt there are many common areas in which they do agree and in which they can rejoice. Certainly, they can rejoice together in God's amazing love and grace, and in their wonderful Savior. They can also labor together to "spread the Word" of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Stewardship

For many the word “stewardship” is synonymous with “money.” While money is a major part of stewardship, stewardship is a much broader subject than just money. In fact, limiting our thinking to money could be a cause for us to fail in our various stewardships.

Stewardship is a major theme in the Bible. This may not be apparent at first, but a deeper look will reveal it. Lucifer, for example, had a stewardship. In accordance with Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-19, it is believed that this highly intelligent and beautiful creature was given the responsibility of protecting the throne of God from any taint of unrighteous, much like the Attorney General is empowered to administer justice. As the “anointed cherub that covereth” he was Divinely appointed to represent God in His government. (“Cherub” is derived from charab, “to cut or engrave,” such as engraving a coin with the representation of the President, King, etc.) The first appearance of the cherub in Scripture is in the garden after the fall when God placed cherubim as agents of His government to keep fallen man out.

We also see the cherubim in the Tabernacle overlooking the mercy seat, no doubt as agents of God’s government to assure that righteousness is never compromised. As brother Jennings writes, “Never must mercy be exercised at the expense of righteousness, for as they (cherubim) were ‘of one piece with the mercy seat,’ so mercy must be of one piece with righteousness.” Whether in the garden or in the Tabernacle they had a stewardship given to them to maintain order.

A solemn warning is given to us in the fall of Lucifer. While his desire to be like God is evident (Isa. 14:13-14), it was his occupation with self that produced this desire. (Ezek. 28:17) His God-given beauties and wisdom became the very things which caused him to fall. So too with us, the very beauty, wisdom, blessings, spiritual gift, etc., with which we are blessed can become the very thing that produces pride and self-occupation. (The blessings of the Lord are not to be blamed for the fall of Lucifer and others, it is the failure to recognize that they are “received” and not self-generated. Paul states this so succinctly, “Who makes thee to differ? and what hast thou which thou hast not received? but if also thou hast received, why boastest thou as not receiving?” (1 Cor. 4:7))

Those blessed with earthly possessions and those graced with spiritual enablements must be aware that these very God-given blessings can become the very seed from which pride arises. There must be a constant awareness of their source!

Adam too had a stewardship. He was made in “the image” of God and as such he was God’s representative. He had God-given dominion over “the whole earth.” (Gen. 1:26)

In addition, he was given “a help” that was “meet,” or suited for him. God created the women and brought her to the man, and thus Adam was given another stewardship, that of caring for and protecting his wife. (Gen. 2:22) (If those of us who are husbands understood our stewardship regarding our wives we would have a different view toward them and our marriage, for stewards must give a report of their stewardship. [Luke 16:1-2])

Adam also failed in his stewardship. Like Lucifer he desired a higher position, that of being God. Rather than representing God, he too became self-occupied and sought to be what he was not, nor could become. Since the fall of the “first man,” man has failed to represent God, both in his behavior and in his religion.

Joseph was a faithful steward. It is said of him, “Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.... Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand.” (Gen. 39:4,8) Joseph was faithful even in the absence of his master. What an example to us who await our Master’s return. (Luke 19:15)

In contrast with the “first man” Adam, the “Second Man” Christ fulfilled His stewardship with absolute perfection. He Who is God was not self-occupied with His glory, but rather was willing to lower Himself and take the “form of a servant,” and to be “made in the likeness of men.” And “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8) He could say, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” (John 17:4) Truly a “faithful steward.” (1 Cor. 4:2)

All Christians are stewards! It is true whether we realize it or not. Accountability goes with stewardship. Each of us will give an account for those things which the Lord has placed under our care and direction. We are to utilize them, whether spiritual or physical, to His glory. “How have I ‘utilized’ those things He has placed into

my care?" would be a good question for each believer to ask.

A faithful steward is aware of his stewardship and of his accountability. Being accountable the faithful steward adheres to the Master's directions and desires. He utilizes his God-given abilities. He is available when the Master calls. This requires a brokenness. A dying to self and his desires, and a yielding to those of the Master. Many, many saints are unavailable due to the commitment to other interests—business, sports, hobby, social life, etc.

Lastly, a faithful steward will have the aim of honoring the Lord. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ." He also said, "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord." (1 Cor. 4:3-4) His primary concern was what the Lord thought of his work. What he and others felt about his labor was immaterial.

Stewardship goes well beyond my money and ultimately includes my very being. It is not only what I will do with those things which God have placed in my care, but what I will do with my very life! Only one life...soon will be passed! May we be found to be faithful stewards.

Striving

Growing up as the fourth child in a family of all boys it wasn't hard to develop a competitive spirit. Even when playing with those older than me I did not give an inch. In fact, I used to get a real kick out of beating some of the older boys—including my brothers! If I could not beat them with my ability, I beat them by way of psychology.

Competition in sports is fun, but a competitive spirit can be very destructive in the spiritual world. Many local assemblies have been split because of those who were "striving" to be recognized, or to win their view on some irrelevant issue. The flesh is often subtle, even deceiving the one striving to establish a name for himself or to have things go his way.

Strife was even named among the early disciples. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." (Lk. 22:24) The Lord instructed them that things were to be different in His kingdom. "But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."

The apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian saints said, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (Phil. 2:3) He then preceded to bring out the mind of Christ, and His humility in putting the interest of others ahead of Himself. (Phil. 2:5-8) Writing to Timothy he would add, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. (2 Tim. 2:24)

We must constantly be aware of the presence of the flesh and its competitive spirit. Its desire to be known, and its self-centered designs.

However, Scripture does exhort us to be "striving together for the faith of the gospel." (Phil. 1:27) Jude writes, "I...exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3)

Ironically, some who think they are striving for the faith are actually being contentious. Those who, for example, divide an assembly by constantly striving over the question of wine versus grape juice at the Lord's Supper would no doubt see themselves striving for the faith, and yet, sadly, "they strive about words to no profit." (2 Tim. 2:14)

Others who strive for the faith are often perceived by others as contentious. Those who stand firm on the Scriptures, for example, regarding the role of men and women in the assembly are often viewed as contentious. The apostle Paul, in contending for the Gospel, pronounced judgement on those who preach another gospel. No doubt many today would view him as contentious, but the glory of Christ was at stake, and the truth must be stated clearly. (Gal. 1:6-10)

How then do we determine when we should strive, and when we should not. One question we might ask is, "For whose glory am I contending?" If it is simply for "vainglory" or to have things go my way, we must confess our fleshly thinking, and put the interest of others ahead of our own. (Phil. 2:3-4)

If, however, it is for the truth of Scripture, we must stand firm. (Phil. 1:27) Too much truth has been given

up in recent decades by those who, under the banner of love, have failed to contend for the faith.

Much individual and corporate prayer is needed for the discernment necessary to know when we should, and should not strive. And when we do strive for the faith we must constantly monitor our motivation to be sure we are not striving according to the flesh. It is very easy to unknowingly slip from being well-intentioned to striving for personal glory or gain.

Sweet Corn in February

Silver Queen corn is hard to beat. Sweet white corn which seems to melt in your mouth. Lots of butter and some salt make it even better! Many freeze corn in late summer to enjoy during the winter months. In the winter the taste of delicious sweet corn makes you forget the hard day's work that went into preparing it.

Our family just finished preparing nearly four hundred ears of corn. We started early in the morning and did not finish to some time in the afternoon—usually we celebrate by having pizza! You begin by husking each ear and removing all the corn silk. Then it must be boiled for three minutes and dropped into cold water to cool briefly. This is followed by stripping the corn from the cob and placing it in freezer bags. It is a lot of work, and a lot to clean up. (It helps to live next to a corn field where you can dump the husks and cobs!)

When working hard to prepare corn for enjoyment during the cold days of winter, one cannot help but think of the Biblical principle, "Suffer now, glory later."

Throughout Scripture the Christian is instructed to be working and suffering now, but with the expectation of the glory that is to follow in the future. The risen Lord spoke of this on the road to Emmaus. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Paul spoke of it. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18) Peter too speaks of this truth. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found

unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:" (1 Pet. 1:7)

This should be an encouragement to all who suffer and labor for the Lord. The reward is not now, but later. Man seeks his glory now, only to have it fade away. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:" (1 Peter 1:24) Believers on the other hand suffer now, but look forward "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven..." (1 Pet. 1:4) Those who labor in caring for the Lord's sheep, are also encouraged by the fact that " when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

So when we are enjoying the delicious sweet corn in the cold days of February, it can remind us of this truth, "Suffer now, glory later."

That Which Is Perfect

Chapter 13

This chapter is part of the four chapters (11–14) devoted to assembly order. Chapter eleven dealt with the truth of Headship and the remembrance of the Lord in the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 12 teaches about spiritual gifts, or manifestations. The saints were previously “Gentiles carried away unto dumb idols” (v.2), and were led by spirits which were far from Holy. This may have been the cause of their infatuation with the miraculous gifts, or manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Paul stresses the unity of the body, the need for all members, and the variety of gifts sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit. (vs.11, 18) He stresses that all saints do not have the same gift, no doubt in response to their desire for a certain few gifts which perhaps were considered “better” than others, and thus thought to be prestigious. (In contrast to love which “vaunteth not itself.”)

The chapter ends with his command to the assembly to “covet earnestly the best (better) gifts.” (12:31) The word “covet” being in the plural is an indication that this command is directed to the assembly as a whole, as it collectively was to desire the better gifts — the ones that edify the saints. (14:1–3).

He then adds, “And yet show I unto you a more excellent way,” this being “love” as developed in chapter 13. This was apparently a lacking grace among the saints (11:21 for example).

In verses 1-3 Paul shows the value, or preeminence of love, without which tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith and benevolence are of no value, either to the individual exercising them or to the one to whom they were directed. Verses 4-7 present the qualities or perfections of true love. No doubt these qualities were lacking in the saints at Corinth. Gifts of the Holy Spirit are one aspect of the Christian's life, the work of the Holy Spirit another. Verses 8-13 shows the superiority of love. He contrasts the permanence of love to the temporary nature of several gifts.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

This portion of Scripture has been debated for some time, with the primary issue being, "What is meant by 'that which is perfect is come'?" (V.10) Many believe this refers to heaven, or the coming of the Lord. Others think of it as the completion of the Scriptures.

Context

When approaching any portion of Scripture it is essential that context be considered. This provides the framework in which words and thoughts are presented. The same original word or root word may be translated differently depending on the context. An example would be the words translated as "trial" and "tempt." In James 1:1-12 it is translated "trials" as the thought of "temptation," or a solicitation to do evil, does not fit the context. In verse 13-14 of the same chapter it is translated "tempt," as "trial" does not fit the context. God does "try" us, but does not "tempt" any man. This same principle is true with many others words and thus the context in which they are found is very important with regard to their meaning.

Chiasmus It should also be noted that a literary style of Paul's day was that of a "chiasmus." It was a style in which points were presented and then commented on, or enlarged upon in the reverse order of their presentation. For example, points A, B, C would be made and then commented on or enlarged upon in the order of C, B, A. An example of this can be seen in 1 Timothy 2:12-14.

Paul states two prohibitions with regard to women.

A. "I permit not a woman to teach" - v. 12a

B. "nor to usurp authority over the man" - v. 12b

He then states the basis for these prohibitions in reverse order.

B. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve." - v. 13

A. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

It is helpful in studying the apostle Paul's writings to look for this literary style. While not used exclusively, it is used a number of times. When it comes to verses 8-13 we might first ask, "What is the subject here?" The subject is the endurance and superiority of love. Paul will stress the abiding nature of love because the saints were enamored and zealously seeking those gifts which were temporary. Let's consider the flow of Paul's argument. Here the chiasmus literary style can be clearly seen.

A. v.8 Love never faileth.

B. v. 9 We know in part and prophesy in part.

C. v. 10 When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away with C. v. 11 When I became a man, I put away childish things.

B. v. 12 Now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face.

A. v. 13 Now abideth...

Verse 8

The apostle starts the portion by stating that “love never faileth.” Here the word “faileth” has the meaning of “falling” or “falling off.” In other words, true love never diminishes. It never falls away or fails.

In contrast to love, which does not diminish, and thus fail, Paul mentions three gifts which would come to an end. These are prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. Prophecies and knowledge shall “fail,” or “vanish away,” with the latter phrase better translated as “done away.” The same Greek word translated “fail” with regard to prophecies, and “done away” with regard to knowledge has the meaning of, “to reduce to inactivity,” or “rendered of no effect.” Being in the Passive Voice it means they will not render themselves of no effect, but rather, something or someone other than themselves will render them to be no longer active.

Tongues, on the other hand, are not said to “fail,” but to “cease.” The word “cease” means “to stop,” or “come to an end.” Brother Vine points out that here it is in the Middle Voice which signifies “a willing cessation (in contrast to the Passive Voice which denotes a forced cessation.)” Paul states that while prophecies and knowledge will be “brought” to an end, tongues will “come” to an end, in and of themselves. They will simply

cease to function without an outside force causing them to do so.

We can quickly look to the end of Paul's teaching in this portion in verse 13 and see that while those things mentioned in verse 8 come to an end, love abideth, or remaineth. It goes on!

Verse 9

Paul will now state the reason why prophecies and knowledge will be brought to an end. Prophecies here being the speaking forth of a message as directly revealed to the prophet by God. (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 2 Pet. 2:21) (Prophecies, specific messages from God, are not to be confused with "preaching" today from the Word of God.) Knowledge here being the direct knowledge of truth by way of revelation, as compared to that received by way of studying Scriptures.

The word "for" at the beginning of verse 9 is an explanation word. For, or because "we know in part, and we prophesy in part." Tongues are not said to be "in part" because it would not be true of them. Prophecies and knowledge on the other hand are "partial." (Interestingly tongues are not mentioned in the rest of this passage. They would cease on their own and would not be brought to an end like prophecies and knowledge by "that which is perfect.")

We might pause and ask another question. "Why did Paul only mention these gifts?" Also, "What do they have in common?" The first question will be addressed later. Concerning the latter question, they were all instruments of revelation. Prophecies being the spoken message of God by direct revelation. Tongues are a

means of delivering the message in a tongue not previously known. Knowledge is given by direct revelation of truth from God. It would appear that the Corinthian saints were taken up with these more miraculous, but temporary gifts.

Going back to Paul's chiasmus, we see in verse 12 an example of that which is partial in verse 9. Paul says, "we see through a glass darkly." It could be translated, "we see in a mirror darkly." Corinth was known for its brass mirrors, but these mirrors only gave a vague image of the face, and thus Paul likens this to partial knowledge. Details that others saw when looking at him were not visible, or discernible when looking in the dark mirror.

Verse 10

This verse is at the center of much debate. Having said in verse 9 that "we know in part (partially) and we prophesy in part," he goes on to say there was something coming which was "perfect," and which would cause the partial to "be done away with." The word "perfect" has the meaning of "complete," or "mature." The "complete" would do away with the "partial." What was coming that would cause the partial to be unnecessary?

Again referring to Paul's chiasmus, we can see in verse 11 that this progression from the partial to the complete is illustrated by a child growing to adulthood and "putting away" the things of childhood. This does not imply that there was a flaw with those early things, but merely that they were no longer necessary. So too with the "partial" spoken of in verse 9. It was not without value, but it was incomplete.

The Perfect

As stated briefly before there are different views regarding the meaning of “that which is perfect.” Some see it as the Lord’s coming, others see it to be heaven itself, and still others believe it speaks of the completion of Scripture.

There are some questions we might ask before proceeding. As asked before, “Why is it that the Holy Spirit leads Paul to mention only the gifts of prophecy and knowledge?” Why not teaching, helps, or governments, etc.? It is clear that these spiritual gifts relate to direct revelation of truth. “That which is perfect” would therefore have to be that which would render gifts related to direct revelation unnecessary. It appears that teaching and the other gifts would not be “done away” by that which is perfect.

Regarding the Lord’s coming, Paul would not use the neuter word “that” to refer to the Lord Himself. If it is the “event” of the Lord’s coming that is referred to, why not simply say that all gifts would be done away. If heaven is meant, it seems we go to it, rather than it coming to us. Also all gifts would cease when heaven is reached. Also, it seems from the words used by Paul that progress is implied. If that which is partial is progressing to completion, then that which is perfect would be of the same character. Going from that which is partial to that which is complete instantaneously does not seem to be the thought of progression here.

Many have come to the conclusion that the expression “face to face” could only refer to when we see the Lord. However, this is not the case. Previously in this epistle

the apostle spoke of the Lord's coming and of His day in a straight forward way.

- "...waiting for the coming of the Lord" (1:7).
- "...blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1:8)
- "...for the day will declare it." (2:13)
- "saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (5:5).

If he meant to speak of the Lord's coming here why would he not state it just as clearly? Why not simply say, "When we are brought into that which is perfect by the coming of our Lord these gifts will be unnecessary."?

In the first part of verse 12 Paul speaks of looking into a mirror that does not fully reveal one's face due to its darkness, or unclear image. He then looks forward to when the "perfect" comes and states, "but then face to face." Given the illustration at hand, Paul is saying that when the perfect comes we would no longer look into a mirror that only gives partial revelation, but rather we would see "face to face," or clearly and completely? We would see what others have seen all along. Our actual face would look at a clear, sharp, detailed image of itself, or face to face. All would be revealed clearly, perfectly, fully. "Then I shall know even as also I am known" is a similar expression in keeping with the example of the mirror. It ties to "face to face." When the perfect comes, Paul would see himself fully as in a perfectly clear mirror, just as others have seen him all along. (Prov. 27:19)

Given that Paul speaks of these specific spiritual gifts which relate to direct revelation, and that all gifts would become unnecessary in glory, it would appear that the "perfect" is that which relates specifically to the ceasing

and doing away “in time” of those gifts specifically related to the infancy of the church and in particular to those concerning supernatural revelation. (Eph. 2:20) This is perfectly fulfilled in the completion of Scriptures.

Also since tongues would “cease” on their own without an outside force bringing them to an end, it could not be the coming of the Lord that causes them to cease as that would be an outside force that brought them to an end. Tongues would and did cease of themselves. Nothing brought them to an end, they just ceased, and history records that this, in fact, did happen.

Some, noting Joel 2:28 and Revelation 11:3, would say that prophecy could not have ceased because there will be prophecy in the future. However, the Church will be raptured before this and the Scriptures needed by the Church have been given to it. Prophecy in the kingdom dispensation will primarily be for the good of Israel and the unsaved world. The prophets of the Church were foundational, as were the apostles. (Eph. 2:20) Prophets in the millennium would be unrelated to the Church about which Paul is teaching.

Scriptures teach that Christ’s sacrifice brought an end to the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and yet they also tell us there will be a temple and sacrifices during the millennial reign of Christ. Obviously they will be of a different character being in a different dispensation. This would no doubt be true of prophecy at that time as well.

Verse 13

In contrast to those things that would be “done away,” faith, hope and love abide, or go on. However, the greatest of these is love.

If heaven were meant by the “perfect,” would faith and hope still abide? If, however, Paul was speaking of those things that “continued” on in time, in contrast to that which “fails” or “falls off” during time, it would be proper to say, “Now abideth faith, hope and love....”

Summary

1. Love endures. It does not fail or fall away. v. 8a
2. Tongues would cease without any outside cause. v. 8b
3. Prophecy and knowledge which gave partial revelation would be “done away” by the completion of Scripture. v.10
4. Rather than seeing things partially, as in a mirror darkly, we would see clearly, or fully. v. 12 a. Face to face (Just as others have seen us all along.)
5. While gifts may either cease, or be done away, love abideth - it goes on. v. 13 a. Faith, hope, and love all go on (in time), but love is the greater of these.

The Beauty of Simplicity

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Cor. 11:3 (NKJV)

The ground is covered with a light dusting of new snow and a full moon is shining brightly in a dark and cloudless sky. While it is not flashing and multicolored, not overpowering in its brilliance, it is beautiful in its simplicity.

As you drive through the community during the Christmas season you see many homes covered with a great number of lights in a variety of colors. Your eye is immediately drawn to them, but they do not seem to impress you with the warmth of the season. Then there is the home which has a simple wreath with its red bow hanging on the front door and illuminated by a single light. Every time you drive by, your eye is drawn to it and you feel as if it is inviting you for some warm fellowship around a crackling fire. It is beautiful in its simplicity.

You sit and ponder the life of your godly parents. Your mind runs back over many years, some of them difficult, others filled with laughter. You did not think of it then, but as you sit now and review their lives there was a simplicity that marked them. They loved the Lord and each other, supported the local assembly, and then passed on to Glory. They were not flashy, or sensational, but their lives were beautiful in their simplicity.

Does your life reflect the beauty of simplicity?

I must confess that for some time my mind has been overwhelmed with the complexity of present day Christianity. By complexity I do not mean the use of technology, such as the computer I am using to write and edit these thoughts. I am thinking more of the complexity of thinking and ideas that I hear from so many Christian circles today. There are so many books, seminars, and programs that seem to turn the believer's life into a very complex maze which does not really lead anywhere, other than to the "Paralysis of Analysis." Proverbs 23:7 tells us that how we think has a great impact on what we are. One wonders if our complex lives aren't the result of getting too complex in our thinking.

After reading some books and attending some seminars, I can not help but be troubled with the complexity of what is being taught. Much of what is said is very impressive and exciting at the time, but I would go crazy just trying to remember, let alone apply the multitude of "ideas." There are books on talking to yourself, analyzing yourself, finding yourself, and losing yourself. It is no wonder that many young people today are confused, discouraged, paralyzed, and/or burnt out. We have made the Christian life so complex that one almost needs a Master's degree in psychology just to know who I am and why I exist. The Bible states these facts in rather simple language. (Gen. 1:26-27; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 2:10).

I have sat and listened to some describe what they are currently learning "from Scripture" and I must confess I just can't find it there! Large structures of "truth" have been built on very small foundations of partial verses or philosophy. In other cases I have listened to individuals

take a basic problem, or what they have thought to be a problem and by using what they have “learned” turn it into an unbelievably complex issue. Burning your husband’s toast is not an indication that you lack self-control! The fact that you do not hug every Christian you meet, does not mean that you are not a loving person! The fact that you and your husband can’t agree on the wallpaper does not mean your marriage is failing! Because you do not “feel” spiritual does not mean you are not spiritual. It seems many spend more time analyzing every act and decision in life than they do actually living! It seems that many times the results of probing are worse than if the things discovered had never been found at all.

What ever happened to the “simple life” that many godly Christians have known before us? I am not really sure. I know times have changed, but I know the Lord has not (Mal. 3:6). Maybe it is because we have gotten away from teaching the Word and are teaching the “thoughts of men” more. It may be that we read our Bibles in the light of psychology, rather than the other way around. Maybe it is because we place too much pressure on young Christians to “perform,” rather than patiently instructing them in the Word and waiting for them to grow in their knowledge of God (Col. 1:10). Perhaps it is because believers are not aware of the pleasure that the Lord receives from the life of one who “just” loves his wife, does an honest day’s work, raises his children in the fear of the Lord, and faithfully supports a local assembly (Prov. 23:24; Heb. 13:21).

Maybe it is because we have placed more emphasis on knowing “yourself” than on knowing Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:10). Maybe it is because in our attempt to get away

from dead religion and tradition, we have “thrown the baby out with the wash water.” Perhaps we threw away the “old fashioned” fear of God as well (Acts 9:31). Maybe we are placing too much emphasis on a person’s “personality,” rather than with their “character.”

Whatever the reason, it seems evident that the “much learning” has not led to the knowledge of the truth that sets us free, rather than enslaves us to our own minds (2 Tim 3:7). I know full well that life itself can be complex and I do not mean to over simplify it; however, as I read Scripture and review the life of Christ and the lives of other godly people, I am convinced that they were not, and are not characterized by complexity, but by simplicity. This is equally true of what they taught.

Is it possible that we have made the Christian life far more complex and difficult than it really is? Is it possible that we are our own worst enemy? Is it possible that we have filled our lives with many “brilliant ideas,” but lack the beauty of simplicity? (Col. 2:8) Is Christ no longer sufficient? (2 Cor. 2:14-17) Is it possible that we should drink again from the wells from which our fathers did? (Gen. 28:18; Prov. 22:28) This is not a call to return to the past, but to the simplicity of Christ and His Word.

The Bunker

There it sits, right in the middle of the beach.

Sunbathers pay no attention to it. Few ponder why it sits so high above the beach on a number of telephone-pole-size pilings which are starting to twist under the massive weight of its seven foot thick concrete walls.

The bunker was built on the Cape May beach at southern tip of New Jersey in 1942 when German submarines were menacing the east coast of the United States. When it was built it was nine hundred feet back from the water's edge, and level to the then existing beach. The large piers were driven into the sand to provide stability, but were never meant to support the entire weight of the massive concrete structure.

Over the years the beach has eroded, leaving the massive bunker sitting on the piers well above the current beach. One can imagine the shock its original designers and occupants would suffer if they would visit it today. Only a small sign, which provides a drawing of its original design, explains how it came to be sitting so high above the beach.

As I pondered this strange sight I could not help but think of many local assemblies of the Lord's people. Built on solid spiritual foundations many years ago, and yet today so weak and teetering.

Like the bunker, many assemblies have seen erosion of their foundation. The fundamental truths of the Scriptures concerning the Person and work of Christ, God's "great salvation," the local assembly, the priesthood of all believers, the dispensations, and the

heavenly hope of the church have been allowed to go untaught for years. Teaching on sanctification has been replaced by the belief that grace frees us from the "traditions" of the past. This has led to a casual approach to life and to the operation of the assembly. The assembly and the saints no longer endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3), but seek the softer sound of psychology and social, rather than spiritual, gatherings. As a result the following generations have no understanding of foundational truths and have drifted away from the foundation laid years before. (Heb. 2:1)

Now the sand of relevant sermons, music, social programs, and psychology has washed away, leaving them with no solid foundation. Just as the beach slowly eroded over nine hundred feet from its 1942 position, no doubt unnoticed on a daily basis, many assemblies have slowly experienced erosion of their foundations.

In light of the fact that the winds of enlightenment and change have eroded the foundation, simply put, we need to build it again. (Isa. 28:16) We need to get back to the Word of God and to regularly teaching the foundational truths. May the Lord give us the strength and courage to do so. (Matt. 7:24)

The Church Age

Excerpt from The Church Truth Series

Many Christians do not understand where the Church fits in God's time table. Many confuse the New Testament Church with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. As a result many bring Old Testament law and principles into the New Testament Church. This leads to great confusion and error.

It is very important that we see the clear distinction between the Church and Israel. The Bible clearly teaches us that the New Testament Church is a "mystery." (Eph. 3:1-11) This does not mean the Church is "mysterious." A "mystery" is truth that was hidden in God, and is now revealed to man. (1 Cor. 2:7) In other words, it is something that God knew, but held from man until His appointed time. Such is the Church!

The Old Testament prophets did not know about the Church. (1 Peter 1:10-12) We can look back now and see illustrations of the Church in the Old Testament, but the Church itself did not exist then and was unknown to the prophets. While the Old Testament clearly indicates that Gentile nations would come into blessing through the promised Messiah (Gen. 18:18; 22:18), the truth that Jews and Gentiles would be brought together, on an equal basis, in one new man in Christ was never revealed in the Old Testament. (Eph. 2:15; 3:5, 6)

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to Christ's reign in His kingdom on this earth. Jesus's disciples thought the time had come for Christ to set up His kingdom on the earth, with Israel being the center of

blessing on the earth. [Acts 1:6]) The prophets were not given to see the Church Age in which we now live. It is a parenthesis in God's time table with the nation of Israel, whom He promised to restore in the land. (Ezek. 36-37).

In Daniel chapter 9, Daniel was informed of God's future dealings with the nation of Israel. He was told that 483 years (69 weeks of 7 years each) after the decree was given to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:25; Neh. 2:1-8), the promised Messiah would be cut off (9:26). This was perfectly fulfilled in Christ when He was crucified. Daniel is also informed of another week (7 years) in which the nation of Israel will sign a covenant with a world leader, only to have him break it after half a week (three and a half years).

Christ referred to Daniel's prophecy and spoke of the tribulation that would come upon Israel in those last seven years, and in particular of the "great tribulation" that shall come during the last three and a half years after the covenant is broken. (Matt 24:15-24) This period is known as "Jacob's trouble." (Jer. 30:7)

Since Daniel's prophecy concerning the cutting off of the Messiah has taken place and his prophecy concerning the seven year tribulation period has not taken place, there must be a gap between the 69th week (483 years) and the beginning of the 70th week (484-490 years). This gap of unknown length in God's time table with Israel is known as the "Church Age." It is this period of which the Old Testament prophets had no knowledge.

During this age Christ is building His Church just as He said He would (Matt. 16:18). The Gospel concerning God's Son Jesus Christ is being taken unto all nations,

and each new believer, whether Jew or Gentile, is being added to the Church. (Acts 2:47)

The age is characterized by the fact that the Holy Spirit has been sent to earth by the glorified Christ to unite believers, both Jews and Gentiles, together into the body of Christ and to indwell each believer. (Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13)

The Cost of Making Money

"It takes money to make money!" This principle is seen in the business world every day. Every business has costs associated with it. Whether it is for materials or salaries, a business needs money to make money.

Many in the world today buy into programs that promise them that they will make money without any need for investment. Most of these programs only make money for those who sell others on the program.

Sadly, many Christians get enslaved to the goal of making large sums of money. They have bought into the notion that money alone will make them free from worry and provide security! The truth is they usually increase their worry about making money and their fear of losing the money they already have.

While some are successful in making large sums of money, most never do. Even for those who do make substantial income, it does not come cheap. The greatest cost to those who are involved in making money is usually time. Rarely does a person make money without spending a considerable amount of time. Often they fail to recognize the amount of time they are devoting to achieve this goal.

This investment of time diminishes the time they have available to devote to the Lord's things. The Lord Himself said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon (riches)." (Matt. 6:24) In addition to this consumption of time, there is the addition cost of stress and the associated problems. Paul warned Timothy of the dangers of striving for riches when he wrote, "But they

that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. 6:9)

Paul, using the illustration of a soldier, said, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." (2 Tim. 2:4) It is obvious that soldiers do not hold down several jobs in order to make more money. They are dedicated to their leader and achieving his goals.

The truth is, if a saint really wants to have time for the Lord, the assembly, and the family, the devotion of great amounts of time to the making of money has to be avoided. It may mean things will have to be jettisoned in order to lighten the load and provide more time. Life is too short and eternity is too long to invest the majority of our time into that which is temporary. (2 Cor. 4:18)

The Danger of Being Gifted

It is a wonderful thing to be enabled of the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord. (I Cor. 12:4-11) However, there are dangers associated with being gifted, as the flesh would always seek to glorify itself. The more public one's gift is, and the greater the sphere in which he operates, the greater the danger of pride (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:21) The more his name is in print, the more conferences he speaks at, the more the Lord blesses his ministry, the greater the danger of his falling into the snare of the devil. (I Tim 3:7)

The saints often contribute to the danger by flocking to conferences at which he speaks, while ignoring other conferences where the Word is ministered by others. Some would seek an audience with him while others treat him as the world does its celebrities. Others may accept his ministry as infallible. (Acts 17:11)

Servants and saints alike must remember that no saint has anything he has not received of the Lord. (I Cor. 4:7) They must also remember, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." While we should be thankful for faithful men who are good stewards of their gifts, we must be careful to give God the glory. (I Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 4:7)

"Pride is a vice, which cleaves so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults, one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off." (Thomas Hooker)

The Holy God

What comes to mind when we think of the word holy? Dictionaries have great difficulty attempting to define it. Usually it is associated with divinity, but never really defined. Of course the religious world makes great use of the word, but as with many Biblical words they are but part of their jargon and empty ritual.

Mr. A.W. Tozer in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, makes the following comments in the chapter on the Holiness of God. "We know nothing like divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it.

"Holy is the way God is. To be holy He does not conform to a standard. He is the standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than its is."

Ungers's Bible Dictionary offers the following assistance. "Holiness is one of the essential attributes of the divine nature. It is on one hand, entire freedom from moral evil, and upon the other, absolute moral perfection."

Another has written, "The English word holy is from the Anglo-Saxon word for 'well, or whole.' Charles Ryrie asks, 'What does it mean to be healthy?' It means more than not being sick. Likewise holiness is more than the absence of sin; it is a positive, healthy state of being right. This is what John meant when he said, that God is light (1 John 1:5)"

Scripture informs us that in regard to absolute holiness that only God is Holy (1 Sam. 2:2; Rev. 15:4). This is true of all the Persons of the Godhead. (Father, John 17:11; Son, Acts 3:14; Spirit, Matt. 1:18). The Hebrew and Greek words used in Scripture would convey the idea of being separate from impurity, sin, or moral imperfection. The word sanctify, which means "set apart" comes from one of the Greek words for holy.

The tabernacle is a vivid picture of this truth. When we think of the sanctity of the Holy of Holies we get some small sense of God's holiness. For one to enter in a wrong fashion meant instant death (Lev. 10:1-3). On the annual day of atonement, the high priest must not enter within the veil without first making atonement for himself, lest he die (Lev. 16:1-4).

The prophet Isaiah provides us with what the natural response to the holiness of God should be (Isa. 6:1-5). "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

We see that God Himself is pure, sinless, undefiled, and as such He is the Standard. Since God never changes, the standard will always be perfection. For God to allow impurity in His presence would lower the standard and as such He would no longer be holy.

Being holy, God is not only separate from sin, He abhors sin and is incapable of sinning. He is opposed to sin as light is to darkness. Here we begin to fail in attempting to describe one Who cannot sin. It is suggested that Adam was innocent, but not holy as God is. Adam was without sin, but could, and did sin. God is without sin,

and cannot sin. This of course is true of God manifest in the flesh.

In summary, when we think of a Holy God, think of an absolutely perfect standard, and as such, sin cannot be associated with Him. Sin cannot come into the presence of God for He is Holy. It is His nature to abhor evil and delight in what is right.

In this regard, Darby writes, "Holiness, on the other hand (in contrast to righteousness), is the abhorrence, in the nature, of what is evil, and delight in what is good and pure."

Pink adds, "Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the ground of creature doings is utterly impossible. A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite Purity. The best that sinful man brings forth is defiled."

It is remarkable then, and a tribute to the redemptive work of Christ, that we read concerning those who have believed on Him, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,...Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. 10:19, 22)

Amazing that we can come into the very presence of a holy God with boldness and full assurance. What a Savior we have, and what a work He has done.

The Impeccable Christ

It is not uncommon for erroneous doctrine to confine itself to one verse, or a few isolated references. This is nowhere more true than in the Kenosis theory. For this very reason we review the setting in which its key text is found. It has been well said, "For any one to pick out certain statements in that tradition which emphasizes the humanity of Jesus and on the basis of those, to represent Him as merely human, is as erroneous as to pick out certain other statements which emphasize His Divinity and to represent Him as purely Divine."

Philippians presents Christ as the believer's joy of living. The following is one possible outline of the epistle.

Chapter One -The Christian's Aim (v.21)

Chapter Two -The Christian's Attitude (v.5)

Chapter Three -The Christian's Appetite (v.10)

Chapter Four -The Christian's Ability (v.11)

In Philippians, the mind, or attitude is mentioned a significant number of times (12). The central theme of the second chapter is, what should the mind, or attitude of the Christian be? The primary attitude is to be one of unselfishness as stated in verses 2 to 4.

Paul goes on to present the attitude of Christ

Jesus. He was in His very essence God, and as such it was His right to be glorified. However, He divested Himself of this right, and took upon Himself a form in which His glory was hidden. Paul was thus saying, "Do not seek vain glory at the expense of other's welfare, but have the same attitude as Christ, who was even willing

to cover His rightful glory for the sake of others.” He then presented three additional examples. Paul himself was “poured out” for them (v.17). Timothy is then seen as one who seeks, not his own interest, but the interest of others (vs. 19-21). Lastly, Epaphroditus was also concerned about others, (v.26).

Likeness of men

Verse 7 also states that He was made in the likeness of men. Here the Holy Spirit leads Paul to use the word *homoioima*, meaning “resemblance.” Christ was like men in that He was true humanity, but he was more, in that He also possessed the Divine nature. The same original word is used in Romans 8:3. Notice that He is not referred to as the “express image” of man, as He is in Hebrew 1:3, “Who [Christ] being the brightness of his [God’s] glory, and the express image of his person....”

Glory-Humiliation-Glory

The sequence of glory, humiliation, and glory, is beautifully illustrated at the last supper as recorded in John 13:1-17. Here the Master lays aside His outer garments, and proceeds to take the place of humiliation, that of washing the disciples’ feet. After the work is complete, He again takes up His outer garments. The sequence parallels that of Philippians 2:6-11. Note that in verse 14 of John 13 He never ceased to be the Master during the period of humiliation. It was a question of position, not possession.

Hidden Glory

The Scripture often presents God as “light” (1 Jn.

1:5, 1 Tim. 6:16, Hab. 3:4, Acts 9:3, John 1:7,8; 3:19; 8:12, Rev. 1:14, Ex. 34:29, Heb 1:3, Lk. 2:9). Since sinful man could not exist in the presence of the Divine Light it was necessary that God's glory not shine forth in all its radiance when He was manifested in the flesh (Heb. 1:2). This was marvelously accomplished, not by extinguishing it, but by containing it within the veil of Christ's holy humanity (Heb.10:20). However, the Light was sufficiently manifested to expose the deeds of man (Jn. 3:21). Nowhere was this inner glory more evident than on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 7:12, 2 Pet. 1:16,17).

Summary

In summary, it is evident that Philippians 2 does not present a diminished God, but rather the remarkable example of the proper Christian attitude, that of Christ's willingness to leave His rightful position of glory in order to redeem lost men at the awful cost of the cross. Certainly no one less than God could reveal God, or be a perfect expression of Him. Christ as the "Word" was God in the flesh, and the perfect "expression" of Him. However, we rejoice today that He has returned to that position of glory. The phrase "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15) has been implied to mean that "He did not sin." He had forbidden desires like we, but "didn't give in" is their interpretation. The word "yet" has been added to the original text. The remaining portion, "without sin" would be better rendered "sin apart." The same original Greek words are used in Hebrews 9:28, where it speaks of Christ returning the second time, "sin apart," or "without reference to sin." He came the first time to be a propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10), His second

coming will not be in reference to that work again. The writer of 4:15 is trying to eliminate the very thing that many have implied it to mean. He is telling us that Christ was "tried" in every way as we, but lest we think this includes our sin, he adds, "sin apart." We do not come to the throne of grace to receive sympathy for our lust, we go to the Word and judge it. We go to the throne of grace when we suffer for righteousness' sake and need enabling grace to endure.

The Incarnation and Inspiration of the Word

The virgin birth of the Lord Jesus is an important part of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) The virgin birth of Christ is important for a number of reasons, but perhaps the primary one is that it relates to the personal holiness of Christ. (Luke 1:35) It assures that He had no relationship to the first man. He came in the “likeness of sinful flesh,” but without sin, having no connection to the first man, Adam. (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21) This assures us that He was the Lamb of God “without blemish and without spot.” (1 Pet. 1:19)

The truth of the inspiration of Scripture is important in a similar way. The Holy Spirit moved the writers of Scripture as they penned God’s Word. He carried them along so there is nothing from the first man in the Word of God.

Thankfully, when we read the Scriptures we can be assured they are not the product of man’s wisdom. We can have confidence that we have the pure Word of God.

The Lord's Supper

Excerpt from the 14-page booklet by the same title

The Lord's Supper is to be a time of "remembering the Lord," and, as such, it is a time of worship. While certain spiritual activities are appropriate at other times, they are not fitting as we gather to remember the Lord. We do not gather to hear one teach or preach the Word. Neither is it a time to evangelize the lost, although any present who may be lost may never hear a better gospel message than that declared by the redeemed in their worship. Lastly, we do not gather to perform or to be entertained.

All that is done is to focus our attention upon the Lord and to exalt Him. He is to have the preeminent place in the gathering. (Col. 1:18) If a portion of Scripture is read, it is to direct our hearts and minds towards the Person and work of Christ. Hymns and audible worship should likewise exalt the Lord.

While the men are to lead in public worship, all believers, men and women alike, are spiritual priests and should be worshipping. (1 Pet. 2:5) Each heart is to be occupied with Christ and, when this is so, much worship will ascend to the Lord.

Often man will, usually with good intentions, introduce things which detract from the purpose of such a gathering. The love feast at Corinth ultimately deteriorated into a drunken party. On the mount of transfiguration, Peter's idea to build three tabernacles may have seemed to be honorable, but the Father saw it as placing others on the same ground as His Son. After

the Father's intervention, they saw "no man, but Jesus only." This too should be our desire as we gather to remember Him.

The Love of God

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10 True love is characterized by self-sacrifice. No where is this more evident than with the love of God. (John 3:16) It is a love which is "uncaused" in the sense that there was nothing in the objects loved that "caused" God to love them. He loved them because He is love and chose to love them.

God's love is "unconditional." It is not based on the love of the individual towards Him. It is not a reciprocating love. Our love usually is in response to the love of another for us. In the case of God's love He loved despite the absence of our love for Him. His love is not conditioned upon our loving Him.

God's love is "unmerited." Since God's love is unconditional, there is nothing man can do to earn it. Many would be led to believe if they would straighten out their lives then God would love them. This is erroneous teaching.

To have some appreciation of God's love we must have some understanding of our own sinfulness. Sadly, many, even saints, have little grasp of how sinful unregenerate man is. They focus on the obvious sins of others while failing to see the sinfulness of their own heart. Some too often fail to understand that their flesh is no better today than the day they were saved.

It is those who know their own sinfulness who come to know and appreciate the love of God. (Luke 15:21; Rom. 5:8) Those who sense their unworthiness of God's love,

come to know it and now appreciate it. (1 John 4:16)
"Keep yourselves in the (enjoyment of) the love of God"
Jude 21

The Mind of Christ

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus
(Philippians 2:5)

We frequently turn to this passage during our remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread. Though we have been there many times before, each time we are overwhelmed with the downward stoop the Son of God was willing to make in order to accomplish God's redemptive will. He had a work to do, and He did it completely, despite the fact that it required Him to leave a place of glory, and take up residence in a sinful world, and ultimately be made sin itself and die upon a cross. (Phil. 2:8)

How do we measure such a stoop. Scripture states that He was rich, (abounding in wealth). Yet for our sakes He became poor (like a beggar), that we might through His poverty (destitution), become rich (to have an abundance). Such grace is too great to fathomed, but it is the example given that should cause us to be cheerful givers.

There is, however, something else that should cause us to bow in worship and amazement. It is the mind that preceded the tremendous stoop. It was the mind of Christ which led Him to take that stoop. We are exhorted to have that mind. What was that mind? It was a mind of humility! A mind that did not concentrate on Himself, but rather had the will of God, and the good of others always before Him. Without this mind there would be no stoop. Let us wonder at the stoop of Christ, but let us not overlook that lovely mind.

The Overworked Philosophy of Self-esteem

The wholesale club flyer came today and there it was right on the front cover. A picture of a young boy with a Superman T-shirt and cape, and in big red letters were the words, "Empowering your kids: Help them soar with self-esteem."

For several decades we have been bombarded with the philosophy of "Self-esteem." Christian psychologists and public school systems have promoted the self-centered philosophy in a great variety of ways.

In many elementary schools, young people spend a great deal of their time reminding themselves how wonderful they are. They sing songs and play games all with the objective of getting the child to think highly of himself or herself.

Parents and society have been told that it is the lack of self-esteem that has caused many young people to go astray. Often the blame is placed on the parents for any problems that develop in the child. If the child uses drugs or becomes violent to the point of shooting other students, the finger often is pointed at the parents for not building up the child's self-esteem.

It seems, however, the tide is turning. A number of secular educators and many parents are now beginning to question the "self-esteem" philosophy. They are finding out that many children who spend most of their day building up their self-esteem are not learning anything else. They do poorly in such basic skills as math and reading. No wonder, since teachers have told

them all along it does not matter what you know or achieve just so you think highly of yourself.

Society is also finding out that violent acts, such as that which took place earlier this year in Colorado, are not committed solely by those with low self-esteem. In many cases, they are committed by those who have been indoctrinated with the self-esteem psychology. They think so highly of themselves that, when informed of their faults or rejected for some reason, they become violent. Their self-esteem leaves them with no esteem for others. (Phil. 2:3)

While it is true that there is much child abuse today, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. In many households, the children are now in charge. They dictate where the family goes on vacation. They tell the parents what clothes they will wear. In some cases no area of the parents' personal affairs are considered off limits to the children. Children may even be privy to such information as the parents' income, the amount of the mortgage payment, and the savings account balance. We are bringing up children to believe that the world and the family revolves around them. In far too many cases when the children say, "Jump," the parents respond, "How high?"

As such, they are often at the helm of the family ship. The children's sports schedule dictates the family schedule. Even Christian families miss assembly gatherings because of their children's schedules. The child comes first and everything else comes second. At times the marriage itself may even come second. It is no wonder that we have a generation of young people who have difficulty being committed to anything. They are so

accustomed to being given the chief place that anything less is unacceptable.

It is not an accident that this comes on the heels of the Bible and prayer being put out of public places in society. The Scriptures give us the balanced teaching concerning both man's true condition and value. The heart of man is desperately wicked, and yet, man has the unique value of being wonderfully created by the living God of heaven and earth. (Jer. 17:9; Psa. 139:14)

In the Scriptures, parents are taught to love their children and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Tit. 2:4; Eph. 6:4) They are also taught the importance of discipline in the life of the child, and to ignore it is an evidence of a lack of love, and a proven formula for disaster. (Heb. 12:6; Prov. 13:24; 29:15)

At no time does the Bible present the children as the driving force in the family. They are to be obedient to their parents and to honor them. (Eph. 6:1-2) Parents in turn are to love them and bring them up in accordance with the Word of God.

In our abusive world, our children need loving care and encouragement, but in a world which is also self-centered, our children need to learn to "esteem other(s) better (more important) than themselves"! (Phil. 2:3) May the Lord give us the wisdom to maintain the proper balance.

The Perfect Assembly

If we only read the opening verses of the letter to the church in Ephesus (Rev. 2), we would no doubt come to the conclusion that the assembly was perfect.

The Lord commends them for their works. This was an active assembly. He speaks of their labor. They were not only active, but working to the point of exhaustion.

He also commends their patience. Often when we work hard, we quit early. Not so with the assembly at Ephesus. They were active, laboring, and they were not quitters.

He knew of their sensitivity to evil and their faithful administration of discipline. He knew of their knowledge of the Word and how they tried men making false claims, and found them to be liars.

However, despite the many things for which they could be commended, the discerning eyes of the Lord sensed a serious problem, they had "left their first love." They had fallen into a busy routine, and perhaps like Martha, had placed service above worship.

An important lesson to be learned is that an assembly can be busy and have the outward appearance of success, and yet its heart can be failing. It isn't that we do not love Him any longer, but He no longer captivates the heart. Instead He competes with other things, even His work, for our affection and devotion. Nowhere may this be more evident than at the Lord's Supper, where silence is often present among the busiest of saints.

The Promise, the Prospect, and the Period

In John 14 Christ encourages his disciples by declaring that while He was leaving them, He would return. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-3)

The Promise—Every believer in Christ has the promise that the Lord will come again and receive him unto Himself. A reassuring aspect of this promise is the Person who made it. It is the Lord Himself who made this promise, "I will come again." God manifest in the flesh has promised to come again. We can take comfort in this, for we read, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:." (Heb. 6:18)

It will be the Lord "Himself" who comes for us. The same One who fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fish. The same One who raised the dead, and made the blind to see. The same One who walked on water, and calmed the raging sea. The same One who walked with the two on the road to Emmaus. The same One man rejected and crucified. "This same Jesus" will come to take us home to be with Himself.

The purpose of this promise is stated by the Lord Himself, "that where I am there ye also may be." He is

coming again to take us out of this world to where He is. The bride will be with the Bridegroom. For all eternity we will be where He is.

The Prospect—This promise gives each believer a prospect—the certainty of being with the Lord. We can look forward to be taken from this world, whether we are alive and remain at His coming, or whether we have already gone to glory through the gate of death, only to be reunited with our resurrected and changed bodies.

This hope is heavenly. (Col. 1:5) It is a living hope, in that it is in the living One who sits at God's right hand. (1 Pet. 1:3) This hope is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast...." (Heb. 6:19)

One aspect of this prospect is its intimacy. It is the Bridegroom coming for His bride. The bride is to be looking for a Person, not an event. Paul said, "We look for the Savior." (Phil. 3:20) The Thessalonian saints had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. 1:10) We should be waiting for the Lord as a bride waits for her bridegroom. Not just to be taken from the scene, but to be where He is.

Another aspect of the prospect of His coming is imminency." The Lord can come at any moment. This should keep us from driving our tent pegs deeper and deeper into this world.

The Period- Between the Lord's promise to come again, and the realization of the prospect set before us is a period of time. It is an indefinite period of time. There are no "seventy weeks" for the New Testament church. How long this period is no one knows, except God.

The fact that this period is indefinite requires us to wait patiently. As in Noah's day there are some who would question whether the Lord will keep His Word. In similar fashion Israel grew tired of waiting for Moses to return from the mountain and made themselves "other gods." Idolatry is an ever present danger as we wait "for His Son from heaven" in this indefinite period.

The period is not only indefinite, but one of increasing darkness, departure, and deception. This means we must be watchful. We must "wait," and we must "watch." There is to be an expectation. We must not fall asleep as did the ten virgins. The Bright and Morning Star precedes the rising of the sun and will arise in the darkest hour of the day. We must remember the longer the night, the closer the rising of the Sun.

This period will also be marked by impurity. We must then walk as children of the light. We must flee fornication, and walk as examples to the dark world around us.

Indifference will mark this indefinite period of time. This requires the believers to be working. So many are entangled in the affairs of life, and are indifferent with regard to the things of the Lord. Worldly events take priority over the gatherings of the local assembly, and personal time in prayer and the reading of God's Word.

The Provisions—The Lord has not left us without provisions for this indefinite period of time. The following are some of those things which we have to encourage and enable us to patiently wait, watch, walk, and work until He comes again.

We have an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance reserved for us in heaven. (1 Pet. 1:4) We have the

certainty of forever being with the Lord. This fact should keep our eyes forward and encourage our hearts. (Heb. 12:2)

We have an interceding High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession for us." (Heb. 7:25) One Who has been here and suffered for righteousness sake.

The Lord has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to comfort us along the way. One who will come alongside to strengthen us during this time.

Then there is the inspired Word of God. That which never changes is able to guide us through this ever changing world.

We also have the incense of the Lord's Supper; that constant remembrance of the One who purchased us at great expense and Who will return to take His bride to be with Himself.

Having this personal promise of the Lord Himself to return for us, let us continue to wait, watch, walk, and work in this indefinite Period between the Promise and the Prospect, making use of all the Provisions He has provided.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ sets Christianity apart from all the religions of the world. Scripture presents Christ as a risen Savior on the other side of death, "alive for evermore." (Rev. 1:18) The Christian has a personal relationship with, and is in union with, a living Savior.

The resurrection of the body was denied by the Sadducees of Christ's day. (Luke 20:27) The preaching of Christ's resurrection was mocked by the heathen of Paul's day. (Acts 17:18, 32) The finite human mind struggles with this truth. The fact that a body which goes into the grave and returns to dust, or cremated and tossed to the wind, will rise again goes beyond human understanding. As long as man sets the limits, resurrection will be a puzzle. This being true, it is only by faith in the inspired written Word of God that one will come to the knowledge of this truth.

While there are many passages of Scripture which speak of Christ's resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15 is a passage devoted to this subject. In this chapter we find that Jesus' resurrection is important both to Christianity and to the Christian. It is essential truth which is to be believed for salvation. (vs. 1-2). It is part of the essence of the Gospel. (vs. 3-4) Paul then gives evidence of Christ's resurrection, including himself who had a personal encounter with the risen and glorified Christ. (vs. 5-11).

To the Christian the resurrection of Jesus Christ could be likened to a receipt. Payment for our sins was made and His resurrection is a receipt, or proof that the payment was acceptable and sufficient. (Rom. 4:25) In union with Christ we not only died with Him, but we are

alive in Him as well. (Rom. 6:4-5) By God's abundant mercy He "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3) May we rejoice that our Savior lives and will take us to be with Himself.

The Source of Undisciplined Children

We see them in the assembly. We see them in summer camp. We see them in school. Undisciplined children. Some of them have absolutely no respect for authority. Others are disorderly, not only in their behavior, but in their dress and work. Their lives are characterized by disorder. Their rooms at home look like a bomb exploded. Their school books are chaotic. They are never on time, and they watch violent and strange TV programs by the hour. The list could go on and on, but generally speaking we see children who, unless a change is made, are headed for a life of disorder, chaos, and sorrow.

Where do these children come from? The truth is that the majority of them come from undisciplined parents. Parents whose lives are also chaotic. Fathers whose lives are frantic, and who do not have the discipline to discipline their own lives, let alone their children's lives. (Prov. 13:24; Eph. 6:4) Mothers who are not keepers of the home (Titus 2:5), and who themselves have little order in their lives. Parents who have no consistent attendance at the assembly, and whose schedule is so full that it leaves little time for spiritual things, and for the children. As such, children are left to raise themselves in an atmosphere where no one tells them the boundaries, and hence they are not taught to determine right and wrong.

Children are usually a reflection of their parents. (Eph. 5: 1) Undisciplined children usually come from undisciplined parents.

The True Vine

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. John 15:1 In a “twinkling of an eye” this beautiful world came under a curse. Like Lucifer before him, the man who was created in God’s image and placed over His creation rebelled, being dissatisfied with the position and provisions his Creator God had given him. Everything under Adam was affected by his fall. The woman would bring forth her children in sorrow. The earth came under a curse and thorns and thistles marred the beauty of God’s creation. Man now had to labor for his needed bread. (Gen.3:16-19)

God had designed all things to reproduce after their kind. (Gen. 1:11, 12, 25) This is an important truth which runs through the Bible. Jesus told this to Nicodemus when He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit in spirit.” (John 3:3) All that the herbs and trees produced was the fruit of the cursed earth. All the offspring of Adam would reproduce after His kind, and thus sin would run through the human race. (Rom. 5:12-13) As such, there was nothing produced by man that would be pleasing to God. The best efforts of man would still be the product of a fallen nature, called in the Bible, “the flesh.” No matter how intelligent, no matter how zealous, no matter how religious, all the works of man are from a fallen and polluted nature.

All that which was to bring glory to God was now tarnished and polluted. Man would “become unprofitable” to God. (Rom. 3:12) This was proven in the years to follow. Mankind became so wicked and evil that

God repented that He had made man, and sent the flood to cleanse the earth. In His grace He saved a small remnant of people from the flood to carry on the human race—Noah and his family. (Gen. 6-9) However, since Noah was a descendent of Adam, his offspring was also produced of the flesh. Despite the institution of human government to control the behavior of man, failure once again came in and God once again brought judgement upon mankind, this time by confusing their language. (Gen. 11)

God then took up a special nation. They were to be His people, and He was to be their God. Beginning with Abraham, God formed the nation of Israel. Certainly such an arrangement would result in glory to God! To have the only God of heaven and earth as your God would no doubt stir the people to bring glory to Him!

God made Israel His personal vineyard (Is. 5:7). He brought them as a vine out of Egypt, and prepared a place for them. (Ps. 80: 8-19) He provided everything necessary for this vine to bring forth fruit for Him. He fenced it, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower in its midst, and provided a winepress. (Isa. 5:2) After this He looked for grapes, but it only produced wild grapes. (Isa. 2) Despite all of His work with this nation it brought no glory to Him. In fact, God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the sin of Israel. (Rom. 2:24)

Several times God sent the nation into captivity. Finally, He set them aside and established the Gentile nations as the rulers of the world. (Dan. 2, 7, 8; Rom. 11) This see the stage for the True Vine that would come and bear fruit for God.

What was needed was a new beginning by which the line of fallen humanity from Adam could be broken. A race in which the fallen nature would not be reproduced in the offspring. This new Man and His race would then bring glory to God. This is exactly what was accomplished when God Himself took on humanity in the person of Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, and thus the line from Adam had been broken. (Matt. 1:18-25) Jesus, the Second Man, or Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45,47), was from heaven and was heavenly in character. He pleased God the Father in all that He did. (Matt. 3:17) Of all those who walked on the face of the earth since Adam, Jesus was the only One Who always pleased God. (John 17:4)

When Jesus declared Himself to be the True Vine, He was stating that He was the one that would bring forth fruit unto God. He would bring glory to God here on earth. Like Israel, He too was taken out of Egypt, but unlike Israel He would accomplished the purpose for which He was sent. He glorified God on the earth (John 17:4), and those who abide in Him will likewise bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

The Truth of Headship

(Excerpt from the book by the same title)

God is never the author of confusion or disorder (1 Cor. 14:33). He never establishes a situation, or condition where disorder exists. On the contrary, He always establishes peace, and the government, or order of authority necessary to maintain it. Even within the Divine Godhead there is an order of authority. Scripture speaks of the Father "sending" the Son (John 12:49; 17:23), and of the Father giving the promise of the Holy Spirit to the Son, Who in turn "sent" the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; Acts 2:33). It also speaks of the Son obeying the Father (John 12:49-50; 17:4; Heb. 10:7, 9). The presence of an order of authority does not imply the superiority of the Father, or the inferiority of the Son or the Spirit with regard to their Person, for they are all equally God. Position, not Person, is in view when we speak of government. Now within the Divine Godhead there is the perfect order of government which allows the three distinct, coequal, and divine Persons of the eternal Godhead to function in absolute perfect harmony. This perfect harmony is the result of the presence of loving authority and willing submission. This perfect order of government always produces harmony, and never produces disorder. Never!

Loving Authority + Willing Submission = Peace & Blessing We see this perfect order of government, or authority, practiced perfectly in the triune Godhead. No one Person of the Godhead ever functions independently of the others, or for selfish reasons (John 5:19; 16:13). There is complete satisfaction, and never a thought of

seeking a different position. The Father loves the Son (Matt. 3:17), and the Son willingly submits to the Father's will (Matt. 26:39; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 10:7). The Holy Spirit is willingly submissive to both the Father and the Son (Acts 2:33). This is a "living" harmony, not just a mechanical order. Three living, coequal, divine, and rational Persons, function in the absolutely perfect harmony of loving authority and willing submission. Such Divine harmony is worthy of our meditation and our worship!

This principle of loving authority and willing submission is taught in other portions of Scripture as well. Paul, speaking to husbands says, "love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25), and to wives he says, "submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22; Tit. 2:4). If this order is followed the marriage cannot fail. It is God's perfect plan for order and blessing in a marriage. Men and women, in their own wisdom, have altered this plan, and much disorder and accompanying sorrow has resulted (Prov. 9: 10).

Scripture also says, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture (loving care) and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). To children He writes, "obey your parents in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1) God's Word to those in church leadership is, "Neither be ye lords over them," but rather "feed the flock" (Ezek. 34:4; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). They are to care for the saints with the tender loving care of a shepherd. To the saints He says, "Obey those who have the rule over you (Heb. 13:17). Employers and employees are also to function by this principle (Col. 4:1; 3:22). Loving authority and willing submission working together in harmony always results

in order and blessing. Nowhere is this more evident than in the willing submission of God's Son to the loving authority of His Father (John 17:4, 21, 26).

Now in whatever God creates He establishes an order of authority, or government. Whether it be in the angelic hosts, in the lights of heaven, in the inner man, in marriage, or in the church, God establishes government, or order of authority to maintain order and produce blessing.

Write for a free copy of the 50 page book, The truth of Headship and its symbolic practice.

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There Arose a Murmuring

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring.... Acts 6:1 It seems the bigger the group the greater the chance there will be murmuring. Murmuring almost always is an indication of dissatisfaction. In many cases it also involves ignorance, in that the individual who is murmuring and expressing his dissatisfaction is one who has no knowledge of how to correct the situation, or has little appreciation of the work required to provide the service being complained of. It is not uncommon for one who labors very little to complain about the work of others.

In the assembly at Philippi there was apparently murmuring which led to a lack of unity. (Phil. 2:14) Murmuring is that low, under the breath complaining that is never really vocalized to the oversight or the party being criticized, but has a way of moving throughout the saints like the undetected slow leak that eventually sinks the ship.

Paul exhorts the saints to "do all things without murmuring" in order "that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." The world is filled with murmurers, and Christians will have little, or no testimony when we are no different than the unsaved world.

Perhaps we all should take a personal inventory and see how much murmuring is in our closet, and seek to appreciate the labor of others who serve the Lord and

us. Before we murmur we might ask how much we have done to help the situation. Remember it is a lot easier to complain than it is to labor!

They Heard John and Followed Jesus

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. John 1:6-8 John the Baptist came to bare witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This he did faithfully as he directed those in his hearing away from himself to the Lamb of God.

One day John stood with two of his disciples. "Looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" Then the apostle John writes, "And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." (John 1:36-37) What a wonderful testimony to the ministry of John the Baptist!

We live in a day when many follow the preachers (1 Cor. 1:12), and may even idolize them to the point where their word is considered infallible. Sadly, some preachers, unlike the apostle Paul, desire such followings and minister accordingly. (1 Thess. 2:4-6)

While we should value those who faithfully minister God's Word, let us be on guard that we do not become followers of men.

Too Big for pictures

In May of this year my wife Nancy and I did something we rarely do—we took a vacation! Having some credits with an airline we decided to go somewhere we have never been. We chose to go to Arizona.

We went north from Phoenix into the beautiful red rock area of Sedona. Here huge and unique red rock formations reach high into the deep blue sky. A six mile drive up a very twisty, rough, and muddy mountain road gave us an indescribable view of the area.

We then preceded further north to the Grand Canyon. Approaching the canyon from the east there were barren, yet fascinating jade colored rolling hills. Then we came to the Grand Canyon and got our first look at the Desert View overlook. It was certainly too big for pictures! And for words! A canyon that averages ten miles wide and a mile deep, with its many colors, rugged peaks and deep canyons is beyond description. You are forced to admire sections of it at different overlook points, as the whole is just beyond words and pictures.

It reminded us of our great God. Too big to be described with words, or represented by an image. (Isa. 40:18-26). Thus Scripture beautifully presents different views and aspects of our Lord to us in order that finite creators might be able to appreciate in some measure His indescribable greatness. (Eph. 1:19)

Touchy or Sensitive?

When speaking of Syntyche, one of the two sisters Paul encourages to be of the same mind (Phil. 4:2), it is not uncommon to hear her referred to as “soon touchy.” Sadly, there are many “touchy” saints. They often have severe reactions to the slightest criticism, many times reading more into a statement by a brother or sister than was ever intended. They often misunderstand what is said, or why something is said. They are easily offended, and it is not uncommon for them to threaten to leave the assembly over the slightest matter. In some cases they simply walk off from the assembly without ever saying a word, only to appear in another assembly where the whole scenario is often repeated.

While there are many touchy saints, there are too few sensitive ones. Those who are not concerned about themselves, but rather for other saints. Long before others are aware, they sense when others are discouraged or are drifting away from the Lord’s things. They catch the little deflections in the voice, or the little expressions of pain, while others are too busy to notice. Interestingly, we rarely find sensitive saints who are touchy. They are too concerned about others to be overtaken with self-pity.

Bringing it down to a personal level, what type of saints are we? Are we always complaining and wallowing in self-pity, or are we so sensitive to the needs of others that we are insensitive to those little hurts that may come our way? May we all be less touchy, and more sensitive to the needs of others. (Phil. 2:3-5)

Two Essentials for Shepherds

There can be no doubt that one of the greatest needs among the Lord's people is shepherds raised up by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Some assemblies have a few shepherds, others may have one, and many others have none. Too many have elders who are elders in name only. Hopefully none of these fit the Lord's description of Israel's shepherds. "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." (Ezek. 34:4)

In days such as these there are two essentials for shepherds who feel a responsibility to the Chief Shepherd for the care of His sheep. These two essentials are a heart and a spine.

It is evident from Scripture that a shepherd raised up of the Holy Spirit will have a love for the sheep. This love drives the shepherd to give his life for the sheep. (John 10:11) It also causes him to lead, rather than drive the sheep. It is very easy when dealing with stubborn sheep to become cold and callused, rather than leading out of love. (John 10:4) May the Lord raise up shepherds who have a heart for the Lord and for His sheep. (1 Pet. 5:2)

It is also evident from Scripture that shepherds need a spine. Their love must not become soft and indifferent to sin. Grace must not compromise the truth. In addition to the staff the shepherd had a rod. When necessary the

rod of discipline must be administered for the good of the sheep and the good of the flock. (Heb. 12:6)

Today, there are conditions tolerated in some local churches that are a result of a lack of discipline. Those who have been unfaithful to their marriages, some multiple times, are being accepted as if nothing happened. Some who are living with one to whom they are not married are welcomed, and may even take part in certain church functions. Thankfully this is not the norm, but neither it is an isolated occurrence.

May the Lord raise up shepherds who have both the heart and the spine necessary to do this valuable work.

Two Sides of Grace

John Newton, the author of the well known hymn, Amazing Grace, was born in London in 1725. During his early years his mother filled his mind with the Scriptures; however, his mother died when he was seven and John was taken by distant relatives who had no fear of God.

Later in life, after deserting the British Navy he joined himself with an unscrupulous slave trader in Africa. During the years that followed John had no interest in the things of God, but God miraculously preserved him through many "dangers, toils, and snares." Eventually he came to know Christ as personal Savior, married a devout Christian woman, and became a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The hymn makes it clear that the grace of God reveals to man his true condition before a holy God. John Newton was amazed that God would save a "wretch" like himself. (Sadly, in a day when "self esteem" is so stressed some hymn books remove the word "wretch.") He saw himself as lost, hopeless, and blind. However, by the grace of God he was found and given spiritual sight which allowed him to see his true condition before a holy and righteous God.

In the second verse of this hymn, Newton presents to us one side of God's grace mentioned too infrequently today. "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear." How this is often missing today in those who profess to know Christ. Often there is no real sense of their sin and the awful judgment that awaits the sinner. There is no repentance and a sense of urgency to be saved, such as

seen in the Philippian jailor who cried, "What must I do to be saved?" John Newton feared God's judgment, and he knew that it was the grace of God that taught his heart to fear.

In the epistle to the Romans, which presents the Gospel of God, we do not read of the love of God until the fifth chapter. The apostle Paul first develops the need of man to be saved, and in those early chapters he speaks often of the "judgment of God." We need to present this aspect of the Gospel more often. We need to place before the hearer the black cloth of their sin and God's judgment before placing before them the brilliant diamond of the Gospel of the grace of God. The blackness of man's condition only makes the Gospel of Christ shine more brilliantly.

Newton then gives us the second side of God's grace, as he writes, "And grace my fears relieved." The same grace that taught his heart to fear, relieved him of those fears. The heart that trembled before God was given absolute peace through faith in the finished work of Christ. (Rom. 5:1) A heart tossed and fro by fear is now at perfect peace with God. So it is with those who have experienced God's saving grace.

How wonderful to know that God's grace exceeds all our sins. Another has penned those words, "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt." With this thought in mind the Spirit of God led Paul to write, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Rom. 5:20) Super-abounding grace!

Amazingly, not only is the believer in Christ forgiven of all his sins, but he now "stands in grace." (Rom. 5:2) He

stands before God in all the loveliness of His beloved Son, in Whom is all His delight. (Eph. 1:6)

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

Two Sides to the Story

Too often we hear reports about other saints and we immediately jump to conclusions. Even when the source is reliable we violate a Biblical principle when we assume the report is correct without confirming it.

By way of example, Scripture teaches us, "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." (1 Tim. 5:19) The apostle Paul also writes, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." (2 Cor. 13:1) It is only proper for us to provide the opportunity to the one who is being spoken of, or accused, to provide his side of the story.

Life has demonstrated far too many times that stories and accounts that are passed on from one to another are usually distorted to some degree. It is for this reason that things need to be confirmed in the mouth of two or three "witnesses," not "reporters." Usually the story is distorted in accordance with the physical distance the report has traveled, or by the number of people who have repeated it.

We will save a lot of embarrassment, and possibly damage to an individual or group when we take the time to confirm what we hear. While, at times, this may not always be possible, or needed if two or three witness confirm it, we should be careful in passing on information or taking decisive action without getting the other side of the story

We Faint Not!

The Apostle Paul suffered greatly for the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, but despite being pressed, perplexed and persecuted he did not lose heart - he did not quit! (2 Cor. 4:1; 7-9)

Two great truths of Scripture kept Paul pressing on. The first was that he served a living Saviour. God had raised up the Lord Jesus and would also raise him up with Jesus. (2 Cor. 4:14) The second truth was that eternity is real. That which is seen is temporary, but that which is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18)

May these two great truths encourage our hearts to press on for the Lord today as well.

We Have Lost the Meaning of Words

Writing in 1937, H.A. Ironside said, “One great trouble in this shallow age is that we have lost the meaning of words.” If that was the case sixty years ago, what would brother Ironside say today? Biblical words have been set aside, either simply ignored or replaced by a modern word which carries little of the original meaning.

It is a sad commentary on the condition of the church when saints who have heard sermon after sermon do not know the meaning of Biblical terms such as: redemption, reconciliation, justification, repentance, regeneration, sanctification, faith, inspiration, dispensation, etc.. Of greater concern is the fact that many would consider their meaning to be unimportant.

This lack of understanding often results in a shallow presentation of the Gospel and the truths of Scripture. Subjective sermons concerning one’s feelings and relationships have replaced the teaching of God’s Word. Well known preachers read one verse of Scripture and spend most of their time speaking on psychology. It is no wonder that many have professed faith in Christ, but have little understanding of the Gospel and of the meaning of faith. Others have little or no understanding of the foundational truths of Scripture. It also explains why many who fellowship in an assembly have little understanding of the New Testament principles and truths being practiced.

The apostle Paul told Timothy “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine....” (2 Tim 4:3) “Endure” means to “to hold one’s self erect and firm.” Many will listen to an entertaining sermon, but show little

interest in the teaching of Scripture. The tedious task of studying words and truths is simply too hard for many, and they slide down in their seats, and may even doze off.

It is time to get back to the teaching of the foundational truths of Scripture on a regular basis, including the meaning of words.

What Do Your Clothes Say About You?

Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph.... and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh. Gen. 41:14 Whether we want to admit it or not, the way we dress says something about us to others with whom we come in contact. Joseph's clean face and clean clothes were not only a reflection on Joseph himself, but were also an indication of his respect for Pharaoh.

This is often shown when an individual goes for an interview for employment. A mature individual does not show up in worn out blue jeans, looking like he just crawled out of bed. The mature applicant knows the way he dresses is a reflection of his personal character and of his respect for the firm.

Strangely, professing Christians who would never think of going for such an interview in worn out blue jeans, shorts, or tank tops, do exactly that when they come to the assembly gatherings. Mini-skirts, tight fitting clothes which highlight the anatomy, old blue jeans, shorts, etc., are not uncommon. Brothers and sisters, these things should not be true of mature Christians. These are clear indications of our casualness towards the things of the Lord.

No doubt some will cry, "Legalism," but the Scripture is clear that our dress is to be modest. (1 Tim. 2:9) The word used for "modest" in this reference is the same word translated "of good behavior" when speaking of the qualifications of an elder. (1 Tim. 3:2) It means "well arranged" and comes from the Greek word, komos, which is translated "world." Certainly God's creation is "well arranged," or "orderly."

Perhaps a belief that it is only the inner man, or the heart that is important - and it is true that God does not look upon the outward appearance, as man does, but upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7) - has led to a belief that the external has no importance whatsoever. However, the truth is that which is in the heart comes to the surface. (Matt. 7:21) Thus the external is often a clear reflection of what is in the heart. This is evident when the instructions to sisters concerning what, and what not to wear is followed by the statement, "which becometh women professing godliness." (1 Tim. 2:9-10) In other words, their external appearance was to be in keeping with their profession! Others would read the heart through their external actions, which included among other things, their dress! (This can also be seen in 1 Peter 3:1-6.)

When it is so evident to us in the natural world, why is it so difficult to grasp in the spiritual world. Our dress is a reflection of what we think of the Lord, what we think of the Word of God, what we think of the assembly, what we think of the pulpit, and what we think of others.

There is no excuse for brothers and sisters in the Lord dressing immodestly. Clothing that is revealing and suggestive should have no part among the saints. Such clothing can be a stumbling block to the weak, and a distraction to others. It is not becoming to those who profess godliness. Neither should we dress as if the gathering of the assembly is nothing more than a ball game or a picnic. Sadly, many see this casualness as an advancement, a liberation from meaningless tradition. A comparison of the spiritual condition of the church today and the church fifty years ago would indicate differently.

(Rev. 3:18) It would indicate that so called tradition was in reality "reverence."

Where Things are Headed

"I don't think that anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality, and hence counterproductive to the evangelistic enterprise, than the unchristian, uncouth strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition." Robert Schuller "Promise Keepers is a bridge; and whether there is a denominational label it does not matter, for we will have relations with any denomination." Daniel Erickson, NW Regional Director Promise Keepers, NAE Convention, 1997 "Our vision is to go into every church, whether they like us or not." Bill McCartney, Founder of Promise Keepers, Insight, 3/3/97 Bill McCartney told Our Sunday Visitor (a Catholic weekly) "that full Catholic participation was his intention from the start." Calvary Contender, 8/97 McCartney said, "the most important point in the crusades was that being a good person on earth was the ticket to eternal salvation." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette 7/25/97 "I'm in the camp that says our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church has to be the most important agenda for us. We're the ones who parted company in the 16th century, and we're the one that must get back together again."

Rev. Frank Senn, Ecumenical Offices of Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Christian News, 7/97 Taking a Stand Moses did it. Joshua, Gideon, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul, and many others down through the ages have done it. They all have stood up in times of crisis and in times of departure. They warned the people

of God. They shed tears over them. They also took a stand for the truth of the Word of God. (Acts 20:31-32) We too live in a day of departure. The Word of God is being rationalized away, even in "Evangelical" circles, and sadly, in far too many assemblies. Discernment is rarely exercised, and many simply do what is "right in their own eyes."

Now taking a stand is more than casting traditions in concrete, and refusing to make any changes in the way the assembly functions. It is a conviction that the Word of God is the sole and final authority in the life of the individual saint and in the assembly. It is the conviction that "obedience is better than sacrifice," that truth comes before pragmatism and popularity. It is a conviction that goes beyond family ties and the approval of men. It is conviction that is firm, but gracious--not cold and legalistic. It is living and functioning by faith in the Word of God, regardless of what others may think and do.

Are we so convicted? Will we stand, or will we be swept along with the tide? (Eph. 6:10-18) Will appeasement, expediency, and compromise dictate our course, or will the Word of God?

While He Lingered

These words, "While he lingered," are some of the saddest and most convicting words you will find in Scripture. They are stated in reference to Lot when the city of Sodom was about to come under God's judgment. We read, "then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." (Gen. 19:15) A clearer warning of the impending doom of this city could not be given. The end had come, and all that Lot had labored to possess was about to come to a sudden end.

It is then that we read these words, "And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city." These words pierced deep into the inner man of Lot and expose the real condition of his heart. He lingered because his heart was still in Sodom. Despite "seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds. (2 Pet. 2:8)," he loved this present world and what he could extract from it.

Lot's roots were deep in Sodom. Earlier he had made a choice based on sight, and eventually he not only lived in a city filled with immorality that made him sick, he profited in it, and sat among its leaders. He settled down here. The first use of the word "house" in our English Bible is that of Lot's dwelling. Unlike Abraham who dwelt in a tent, Lot drove his roots deep into the earth in Sodom. So much so that when warned of impending

judgment, he lingered, needing to be snatched out of that city by angels.

One cannot consider Lot's life without thinking of the church and how it too has settled into the world as if it were its finally resting place. It has driven deep foundations for itself. Despite being warned of coming judgment, it would linger. Its affections are here, rather than on things above. Is it any wonder the Church will need to be "raptured?" It will need to be taken by the hand and forcefully removed before judgment comes. May we be looking heavenward where our citizenship is. (Phil. 3:20)

Why Now?

Why now? This question has come to my mind many times in recent years. I have looked back over the life of my Christian parents and the times in which they lived, and the question comes back again and again, "why now?" After all, they lived through two world wars, the great depression, and raised a family of five boys during the forties, fifties and sixties. My father's father died when he was still a teenager and he was forced to leave school and seek employment, which he found in Bethlehem Steel after waiting in line a number of times. (He was employed there a few months short of fifty years.)

I can remember my father working six days a week in the office, and the change to the five-day work week. I can remember buying the margarine packet with the colored dot in the middle that had to be broken and worked into the margarine to make it yellow. I can remember those little red tokens that you needed to buy meat during the war years. They were not easy days to raise a family, and children were just as much children then as today. My parents' sons were not perfect-the writer being one of their great concerns. There were many problems to straighten out and discipline to be administered.

Now despite the wars, the great depression, and the pressures of raising a family, I do not remember anything about "psychology." Certainly psychology was in the world, as Freud and others like him had set forth their ideas on what makes man act the way he does - with no thought of "sin" of course!

The assembly was simpler then. Godly brothers and sisters came together frequently for worship, prayer, ministry of the Word of God, and Bible study. There were no little league baseball teams then. No soccer teams or gymnastics lessons being taken by children. We had our activities, but very few interfered with the assembly schedule. Friday night Bible studies were held for young people in homes and then they went out for a bite to eat after the study. Now despite this simplicity, the human heart was no different then than now, and there were problems. However, I cannot remember the saints turning outside the Word of God for their guidance. This, of course, raises the question, "why now?"

We live in an advanced age. Technology has blossomed. Almost everyone drives an air-conditioned car with an AM/FM radio and a tape or CD player. Computers with more power than corporations had several decades ago are in many homes. Many are connected to the Internet and E-mail. Microwave ovens give us instant food, cars travel at sixty-five miles per hour on interstate highways that span the country, and satellites enable us to see events as they happen around the world.

The world has its advancements in the spiritual realm as well-the New Age movement. A step beyond secular humanism, this movement sees man's next advancement being of a spiritual nature - that of realizing his own deity. And when man comes to this higher level of consciousness the New Age will be introduced on earth. It is, of course, no more than Satan's counterfeit millennium.

Of course Christendom is not without its advancements as well. It too has advanced in recent decays. Such

things as miracles, healing, and tongues have taken the spiritual experience to a higher level. Mega-churches have arisen with their professional orators, and computerized lighting and audio/visual systems. And then there is the advancement of psychology. The combining of the best of men's thinking with the Word of God to create the ideal solution for the many problems this advanced age is experiencing.

Should all this surprise us? Not really. The Word of God has very accurately described it for us when Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the conditions in the last days. "Preach the word:....for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

Man's psychology is so entrenched that many Christians have become blind to its origin, and even think of it as Biblical. To even question its validity causes their teeth to grind and their pulse to increase. Sadly, the loyalty of some to the Christian psychologist may exceed their loyalty to the Word of God, as evident by the fact that they will spend far more time reading his latest book than they will reading their Bible. They may even defend his thinking more than they would defend Biblical doctrines.

Why now? Because the church, in what it sees as an advancement, has gotten away from the simplicity that marked the early church, and away from the Word of God as its sole guide for living. It has been persuaded, often by well-meaning and educated men, that this advanced day requires advanced thinking. Can we

advance beyond the Word of God? "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps. 119:105)

Why now? Perhaps because the Lord's return is near! (Rev. 3:17). Why now? Perhaps because we have lost confidence in the Word of God. (2 Tim. 3:16-17) why now? Perhaps because we are more impressed by man's psychology than we are by the preaching of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2-4) Why now? Perhaps because we prefer to be entertained than convicted (1 Cor. 2:1-5) Regardless of the reason, there must be a renewed emphasis placed upon the preaching of the Word in our local churches today.

Would you refuse help in time of need?

The red cross has been used for many years as a symbol for emergency aid. Military medics wear a red cross on their helmet. Hospitals, first aid stations, dispensaries, and ambulances are often identified by a red cross.

When disaster strikes relief agencies respond and the red cross symbol can often be seen on rescue personnel and emergency vehicles. These agencies are a great help to those suffering personal injury, or great loss due to a flood, fire, or other disaster.

It would be hard to imagine someone who is in such great need refusing help. Could you ever imagine yourself refusing the emergency help of a relief agency if you were injured, or left homeless by a natural disaster or accident? No doubt all of us would be delighted to receive help from a relief organization. It may be humbling to receive such help, but certainly in a time of great crisis we would gladly be humbled in order to be helped.

Remarkably, indifference and pride cause many to refuse the help God freely provides to meet the greatest of all our needs. What is this great need that we all have? It is the forgiveness of our sins. The Bible says, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) However, it also says, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Christ came to die on the cross for our sins so we could know God's forgiveness. If we will humbly confess our

sins before God, against Whom we have sinned, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, God will forgive our sins.

Just as those rendered helpless by a hurricane or earthquake are not asked to buy or earn the relief agency's help, neither is God asking us to buy or earn forgiveness. He tells us in His Word, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Faith is "believing God when He speaks." If we believe God when He speaks about our sinful and helpless condition, and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, God will freely forgive our sins and give us eternal life. Only our indifference or pride will cause us to reject such a wonderful gift.

Read your Bible and see how to receive God's wonderful gift of salvation. The following verses will help you get started. Read the Gospel of John and see how you can freely receive the forgiveness of your sins and God's free gift of eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15)

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18)

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom. 5:6)

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:31)

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24)

Yet Without Sin

The phrase “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15) has been taught to mean that “Christ did not sin.” He had forbidden desires like us, but “He didn’t give in” is the interpretation often given. The word “yet” has been added to the original text. The remaining portion, “without sin,” would be better rendered “sin apart.” The same original Greek words are used in Hebrews 9:28, where it speaks of Christ returning the second time, “sin apart,” or “without reference to sin.” He came the first time to be a propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10). His second coming will not be in reference to that work again. The writer of Hebrews 4:15 is trying to protect against the very thing that many have taught it to mean. He is telling us that Christ was “tried” in every way as we, but, lest we think this includes temptations from inward sin, he adds “sin apart.” Christ had no temptations from “within” as He was without sin.