

Fourteenth Annual
TRUTH IN LOVE
LECTURESHIP

Theme:

**What Can I Do
When...?**



May 12-16, 2004

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

God's Word is powerful (Rom. 1:16), able to save (James 1:21), inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), flawless (Psm. 19:7), can set one free (John 8:32), will last forever (Matt. 24:35), gives us everything needed which pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), completely furnishes us (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible (comprised of 66 books, written over a span of about 1,600 years, by almost 40 writers) will never be destroyed, but will one day face us in judgment (John 12:48; 1 Peter 1:23-25).

The Holy Scriptures are understandable (Eph. 3:3-4). We can know what is right and holy (John 8:32) and we can know what is wrong and evil (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21). Knowledge of God and His Will for all mankind is not obtained miraculously. God has spoken in times past in various ways (Heb. 1:1). In these last days, God has spoken unto us by His Son (Heb. 1:2). The apostles spoke, writers of the Holy Word wrote at the direction of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). Today, we must read, hear, search, study (2 Tim. 2:15), first receiving the milk (1 Peter 2:2) and then the meat of the Word. Our nobility will hinge on searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11), proving what we believe (1 Thess. 5:21).

The Word of God is **the** source for all religious matters. It is the authority! It is the **only** authority! Jesus stated that for one to inherit the kingdom of heaven, he must do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21),



which obviously we find within the pages of the inspired book of God.

Not only does the Word of God tell us what one must do to **be saved** but it further instructs us regarding **remaining saved**. To become a Christian is a necessary and great step in the heavenly direction. Yet, the truth is clearly defined: we must serve Christ, faithfully live for Christ, remain faithful until death (Rev. 2:10), enduring to the end (Matt. 10:22), finish the course (2 Tim. 4:6-8), though at times that way will not be easy, but will be difficult (strait) (Matt. 7:13-14).

Paul, as a servant of Jesus Christ, a Christian, suffered great trial and tribulation. He wrote to Timothy, his son in the faith, about how he had endured "*persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch*" and that "*out of them all the Lord delivered me*" (2 Tim. 3:11). To the Corinthians, he wrote of the many ways and numerous times he had suffered great persecution (2 Cor. 11:23-28). In the following words he informs Christians in the first century, as well as all faithful servants today,

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ
Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

The Lord, in what is frequently called the sermon on the mount, said,

Blessed are they which are persecuted for
righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall
revile you, and persecute you, and shall say
all manner of evil against you falsely, for
my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for

great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).

From the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, man has faced temptations, trials, persecutions, and problems of all types. God's faithful children today (now in the Christian age) will face many trials and problems. Satan is the adversary (1 Peter 5:8), our archenemy! He does not want you to be saved. He wants you to be lost eternally in hell. He is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), the father of lies (John 8:44), the wicked one (Matt. 13:19), the one who seeks to devour and destroy (1 Peter 5:8; Mark 4:15). Satan will guarantee that if you are not serving him, he will be diligently striving to entrap and capture you. He will do so in whatever way he can (lies, deceit, the type of temptation to which you are most likely to yield).

Realizing we will face troubles in life should prompt each one to prepare for whatever happens, to anticipate and thus to adequately equip ourselves to withstand the attacks that will come our way. The storms of life will occur. The end result, our eternal destiny will be determined by how we weather and endure the storms. The key is to be anchored in faith and confidence in Jesus Christ.

The entire twenty-seven lesson series for this lectureship will focus on this theme, *"What can I do when...?"* It is our specific goal to present material, based on the inspired Word of God, that will assist us when we are facing problems and trials (or assist others who are in turmoil). It may be that you are suffering (at this very moment) in a way described by a title of one of the chapters in this book. Or possibly

life for you presently is peaceful and happy, but (as we are well aware) life can change to turmoil and unhappiness in a moment, in less than a blink of the eye. Hopefully, we will have prepared ourselves to weather whatever storm may come our way.

When you obeyed the gospel, after baptism, and after a little time passed, it is possible that you asked, **“What can I do now?”** If you fervently desire to mature, grow and develop spiritually, as God desires of each follower, **“What can I do?”**

When approaching marriage, and you desire to do things right, building a home (paradise on earth) as God desires, **“what can I do”** that will insure happiness? When a home is blessed with children, **“what can we do?”** Sadly, by the time we have learned a few things about child-rearing, our children are grown and have left home. What can we learn from others who have experience in raising precious ones in the *“nurture and admonition of the Lord”*?

Life is not always mountaintop times of joy and happiness. One often finds oneself in a *“valley”* of disease, discouragement, accident, financial despair, betrayal by friends, etc. If the doctor says *“There is nothing else I can do,”* **what can you do?** If you suffer a heart attack, and death is imminently near, **what can you do?** If one of your family members or a dear friend is involved in a tragic automobile accident, **what can you do?** To whom can you turn?

Faith may falter and become weak. If such exists, **what can I do?** If I doubt there is really a heaven or hell, **“what can I do?”** As an elder, teacher or preacher, we may have been attacked sufficient to cause us to be near *“giving up.”* If such exists, **what can one do?**

When your marriage begins to falter, you and your spouse are growing apart, **“what can you do?”** that will salvage a deteriorating relationship that is important to our Father in heaven. When divorce has occurred, shattering your life, **“what can you do?”** Does one just give up and quit? Does God care? What is found within the pages of Scripture that will help, encourage, and sustain during this *“storm”* of life?

Within the pages of this volume, thirteen writers (speakers at the annual lectureship presented at the East Hill Church of Christ) have presented Biblical help for the assigned topics. They have researched their subjects, examined the inerrant Scriptures, and capably encourage and edify us regarding a particular *“valley”* in which we (or our friends) may be struggling. It is our prayer that this book will assist many through years of use, as they endeavor to reach heaven’s glorious home.

May I take this moment to express appreciation to each writer/speaker for the significant time and expertise in this effort. It is no little thing to prepare a manuscript(s) for lecture series. Sacrifice is often required for speakers to be away from home and their local work (with its various responsibilities). Thus, our appreciation is extended to the wives and families of our speakers, to the congregation where they serve on a regular basis, and any who have helped make this volume possible.

For the many workers, supporters, contributors, of the East Hill family – THANKS! You often labor *“behind the scenes,”* giving liberally of your time, energy and talents. You encourage others by your example. You are a source of strength (spiritually) to those who

see your light shining. You are the “*backbone*” of the work force who accomplish the works in which we are involved. Without YOU, the lectureship (or similar good works) would not be possible. THANKS!

And certainly not least in importance, a fervent THANKS to the elders of the East Hill church. This church has been known for her love for the truth, standing for the truth, opposing error and false ways, reaching out to the lost with the saving gospel of Christ, sending help to those less fortunate, and overall striving to “*do the will of the Father*” (Matt. 7:21). The leadership of any church is vitally important. Thanks for your support and making this work possible.

To God be the glory for all that is done which is good in His sight, is our prayer.

~ Paul Sain

DEDICATION

A lectureship is not the product of one man, nor a work of just the eldership. A successful lectureship requires **many** who are willing to do what they can do, participate willingly and give of their time and talents. A phrase that describes the East Hill church is found in the book of Nehemiah, regarding the people who were rebuilding a wall. They *“had a mind to work.”* They saw a need and went to work to accomplish the task. God’s people at East Hill have likewise responded (time and again) to challenges and good works. So many valuable and treasured ones have always been ready, willing and eager to *“do your part.”*

Numerous faithful Christians have worked several hours preparing advertisements for mailing, given money to provide housing for students, provided housing in your home for out of town visitors, cooked and served food for the Saturday lunch, distributed brochures, prayed specifically for the speakers and ones who will listen, spoke encouraging words to the family at East Hill (as well as many others outside the family), inviting others to come and hear the lessons. Some have served in their particular capacity every year (this is our fourteenth lectureship). Whether as a treasurer, worker, cook or advertiser—you have been (and still are) a vital part.

For years East Hill has been blessed in a special way by talented leaders. Long before some of us were even a part of this family, and certainly continuing to this day, there have been those who have helped make our worship acceptable, meaningful, and uplifting. They have been efficient, courteous, professional, while setting a very spiritual tone for the entire worship assembly.

This volume, the **14th Annual Truth In Love Lectureship**, is dedicated to two who have given of themselves for many years, using their special talents to

glorify God, assisting the entire church in their worship to Almighty God. We convey our appreciation, respect and sincere gratitude to **Duane Rost** and **Jack Parks**. They, along with their dear wives, have served in various ways, but especially their ably directing the singing of praise to God.

The Rosts have given of themselves, with Duane directing singing for many years. Duane also ably served as an elder at East Hill in years past. God's faithful, including the Rosts, often serve in special ways "*behind the scenes,*" actions that serve as a great example and loving encouragement to others.



The Parks have coordinated the visitation program for years. Every year, with precision and loving hospitality, Jack and Eunice have organized the Saturday lunch for the entire lectureship crowd. While they have certainly had many who worked long hours (preparing, serving, washing, cleaning), they were the "*spark*" which made it all possible.



Singing is an important part of worship to God. I remember a statement from brother Rost several year ago, "*Singing is the only act of worship where all participate together, vocally.*" Singing can be an excellent aid in our worship, setting the tone for all other acts of praise to God. Selection of hymns, effectively leading (pitch, timing, etc.) are all a part of a song leader who excels at this joyful work. Such accurately describe the two Christian brothers we honor today.

With tender Christian love and sincere gratitude, we dedicate this book to **Duane Rost** and **Jack Parks** (and their special helpmeets).

Paul Sain
Lectureship Director

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***What Can
I Do
When...?***

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Chapter 1

What Can I Do When ...I Become A Christian?

Brandon Britton



Brandon Britton is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching (1999) • Since graduation he has worked with the East Hill church in Pulaski, TN • Weekly radio program • Author of class material for teens • Written for brotherhood publications • Speaker in gospel meetings, lectureships, youth days, etc. in several states • Jade and Brandon have two sons.

It is critical that the new convert understands what has taken place in his life and in heaven, when he obeys the Gospel. There are numerous Bible expressions and words to help the new Christian understand and appreciate his new relationship and standing with God and others. Concerning his relationship with God, the new convert: is a child of God (Rom. 8:16), is a part of God's family (Eph. 2:19), has God as his Father (John 20:17). Concerning his standing with God, the new convert is now: redeemed (1 Peter 1:18; Rev. 5:9), justified (1 Cor. 6:11), sanctified (Heb. 10:10), forgiven (Eph. 4:32), saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2). The new Christian has also enjoyed a change of location: he has been added to the church (Acts 2:47), he is now a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor.

12:27), he has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-15).

I mention these facts to firmly entrench in the mind of the new convert that **things have changed**. Becoming a Christian necessitates that the babe in Christ make changes in his life. He has not simply been baptized or started going to a church. The new convert needs to understand that he is not just "*a member of the church*," but that he is a disciple (learner, pupil) of Christ. Far too many are guilty of obeying the Gospel and then immediately going into spiritual retirement. The attitude that is far too prevalent in the church is, "*I have been baptized. I am a Christian. I go to church. I am going to heaven.*" Concerning this mentality, I once heard a preacher challenge the assembly, "*We weren't called to a padded pew, but to an old rugged cross*" (cf. Matt. 16:24). His point in that sermon, and my point in this chapter, is that the Lord asks far more of us than just being baptized and going to church services. The very least, most basic and fundamental aspect of Christianity is "*just showing up*" (being present in the assemblies). Is it not sad that in most congregations attendance has become the measuring stick for faithfulness? There is a huge difference between being faithful in attendance and being a faithful Christian. Granted, you cannot be a faithful Christian if you are negligent in your attendance, but neither does just showing up mean you are faithful. It is safe to say that the Lord is more interested in having laborers in the vineyard than bodies in the pews.

In Romans 6 Paul tries to embed in the minds of the Christians to whom he is writing, that when you became a Christian you were undergoing a change in your life. He begins by emphasizing that we are supposed to be dead to sin (Rom. 6:1-2). If we have truly died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? In verses three and four Paul gives us what is perhaps one of the most powerful and beautiful symbols in the Bible. By calling their attention to their baptism, Paul shows them how their conversion to Christ and obedience to His Gospel is a symbol of His death, burial and resurrection. Just as Christ died for our sins, was buried and resurrected from the dead, the Christian has died to sin, is buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism, and then is resurrected to walk in newness of life. This is the change of which we speak. Notice that they were raised to walk in newness of life, not the same old way of life. Paul reaffirms,

...our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:6).

His charge is that the Christian must not let, "*sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof*" (Rom. 6:12). It may have been the case that for a long time you lived in, practiced and served sin, but a change has taken place.

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive

from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom. 6:13).

Paul made it clear to the Christians in Rome, and it should also be clear to us, that when you were baptized you did much more than just get wet. In fact, you did much more than just become a member of the church. You underwent a complete change, and having undergone this change, you are now ready to live as a disciple of Christ. You have been converted (turned around; turned back to God).

Until the new convert can understand that changes must take place in his life, he is never going to be prepared to act upon the answer to the question, "*What can I do when I become a Christian?*" However, once this realization occurs, the answer becomes very simple.

GROW

Spiritually, the Christian is either growing or dying; there is no option of staying the same. This principle is laid out in the illustration of the vine and the branches.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John 15:1-2).

The need for growth is also implied in the Great Commission.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,

and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
Teaching them to observe all things
whatsoever I have commanded you (Matt.
28:19-20).

Those who had been taught and were converted, were to be taught further. Now that I am a Christian I am expected to, "*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). The only way I can successfully do that is by spending time studying the Scriptures. While reading the Bible daily is a good start, and something all Christians should do, the true need is for daily Bible study.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God,
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim.
2:15).

Casually and occasionally reading the Bible is not what the babe in Christ needs.

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all
guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all
evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the
sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow
thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord
is gracious (1 Peter 2:1-3).

Notice that the first step for those who have tasted the grace of the Lord, is to lay aside the former sinful ways. The next step is to long for the Scriptures as a newborn yearns for his mother's milk. Similarly, Jesus indicated that we should, "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" (Matt. 5:6).

Again, this growth is directly linked to Bible knowledge.

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Yet again it is pointed out that there is a need to abandon the corruption that is in the world. It was through knowledge that the initial change was made and it is through continued knowledge that growth and further change comes.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (2 Peter 1:5-7).

A new convert might look at this list with intimidation and say, *"This doesn't sound like me."* Obviously this may not be an accurate description of a babe in Christ, but it certainly must be what the new Christian begins striving toward. Peter even goes so far as to say that if a person adds these things and abounds in them, he will, *"neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:8). However, notice

what is said about those who do not add these things.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins (2 Peter 1:9).

Those who fail to grow are described as being blind and ignorant of the fact that they have been purged from their past sins. Being converted from sin to Christ and continuing to grow are inseparable. What can I do when I become a Christian? I can continue to grow as a Christian by studying the Scriptures diligently, and adding to my life the "*Christian graces*" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

SERVE

A song that the new Christian will frequently hear in the worship assembly is, "*I Want To Be A Worker For The Lord.*" I cannot help but wonder how many who sing this song, do so in vain? Consistent throughout the New Testament is the essentiality of the Christian serving his fellow man.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

The word translated "*visit*" does not refer to stopping by to see them, but to "*look after, attend to, care for.*" In fact, greatness in the kingdom of God is measured by service, not status.

And whosoever will be chief among you,
let him be your servant (Matt. 20:27).

But he that is greatest among you shall be
your servant (Matt. 23:11).

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest,
shall be servant of all (Mark 10:44).

Perhaps the most chilling and telling example of this is found in Matthew 25. The description is a picture of the judgment scene. A great division and separation is described where the sheep are put on His right hand and the goats on His left. To the sheep He will say, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25:34). To the goats, the decree will be, "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt. 25:41). What was the distinction between the two groups? Why were some considered sheep and others goats? Why did some enter into eternal life and others eternal damnation? Was it because they had greater faith? Did it have anything to do with how much they gave financially during their lifetime? The Lord makes clear the distinction between the two.

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat:
I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was
a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and
ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited
me: I was in prison, and ye came unto
me...For I was an hungred, and ye gave me
no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no
drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not

in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not (Matt. 25:35-36, 42-43).

When each group protests that they did not serve, nor neglect Him, His response is,

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me...inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matt. 25:40, 45).

In a word, it all came down to service. No student of the Bible can deny the necessity of service in the daily life of a Christian. The example that is set before us by our Master is one of service.

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

Is the servant greater than his Master?

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him (John 13:16).

If the Lord of all was servant of all, then His disciples must be as well.

There is an added benefit to busying yourself in serving others. Those who are preoccupied with serving others, generally are not complaining about not being served. I once listened to a preacher tell a story from his days in local work, in which he recounted a conversation he had with a sister who

was overly concerned about what others were (or more accurately, were not) doing for her. She had a habit of calling him and complaining that she had been sick, missed services, been in the hospital, etc, and few, if any, from the congregation had contacted her. On this particular day he was not as patient as normal, and bluntly replied to her complaints, *"Make a pie and take it to someone who needs it and quit bothering me."* For weeks she was so angry she would not speak to him, but finally she came to him in his office and told him *"thank you."* After she got over being mad at him, she did what he said and realized what a blessing it was to do good to those who need it. While I do not recommend using this tactic to encourage service in the congregation, it does illustrate the teaching of Christ, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). So what can I do when I become a Christian? Get busy and stay busy serving others.

WORSHIP

Perhaps the most intimate, encouraging, uplifting and unique aspect of the Christian life is worship. Worship can accurately be seen as both an obligation and a privilege. The Lord God of Heaven and Earth and all Creation is deserving and worthy of praise and worship.

I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies (Psm. 18:3).

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created

all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:11).

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Rev. 5:12).

Creation itself is said to glorify God.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork (Psm. 19:1).

Much more than an obligation, worshipping God should be seen as a privilege by the Christian.

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord (Psm. 122:1).

Very few will ever have the privilege of appearing before the President of the United States of America, or before some royal family member or head of state. It would certainly be an honor to work for such a person, much less to be able to converse with them in a personal way. Such privileges pale in comparison to what the Christian has when worshipping God. Our finite minds may never fully grasp or appreciate what it means to have an audience with the Almighty. That One so great as He would be interested in what one so small as me has to offer to Him is beyond understanding.

Although worship is directed toward Him, it is equally beneficial to us. However, the new Christian must be careful never to fall into the snare of putting

selfish desires or personal wishes first when worshipping God. First and foremost in the mind of the Christian must be the basic, fundamental principles of worship as described in John 4:23-24.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Simply put, we must come before Him the way He has determined. That being said, true worship will be edifying and uplifting to those who offer it.

When the church joins together in blending their voices in song, they unite as one in lifting up the name of God in the most personal way known to man. It is beautifully and poetically described as being the fruit of our lips in Hebrews 13:15. It is a sound, a melody, music created by our bodies, springing forth from our hearts (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). As we sing the spiritual songs we create music from within ourselves, our hearts, which we offer to God. In essence, when the Christian sings songs of praise to God he is offering the Lord a piece of himself.

Closely akin to singing is the prayer of the saint. When the Christian comes before his Father in prayer he pours out himself to God. What other setting affords us with the attention of Heaven and the ear of God? It should thrill us to imagine that He who upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), would turn His attention from the problems and

management of the universe, just to listen to my pitiable pleas and petitions. Who am I to even address the Father, yet He yearns for my communication. My needs can be so simple, so foolish, so shameful or so insignificant, yet He wants to hear from me. In prayer the child of God makes himself voluntarily vulnerable as he reaches deep into the innermost sanctuary of his soul and brings out these hidden things to lay them bare before God. He will bring forth and publicize his greatest fears, flaws, faults and follies. He will confess every base deed, lustful thought, impure motive, selfish ambition, prideful action and disgraceful behavior willingly and voluntarily. Through prayer the Christian cries out for strength, mercy, patience, help and forgiveness. In his prayer no blessing is too insignificant or small to be exalted, praised and met with thanksgiving. In prayer no problem is too shameful, great or trivial to be addressed. In prayer the Christian opens himself fully and willfully to the eyes of God, voluntarily laying bare every detail and corner of his soul, with confidence that the Lord will be merciful and give help. Few words in the Bible are as tender and touching as those offered to God in prayer by His children. *"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner"* (Luke 18:13).

There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an

heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me....For in thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God....For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin....Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation (Psm. 38:3-10, 15, 18, 21-22).

[To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.] Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest....Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than

snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit (Psm. 51:1-4, 7-12).

If it be the case that through prayer man is able to speak to God, then through the preaching (or reading) of His Word the Lord speaks to His children. Far too many Christians do not take the preaching of the Word of God seriously. Every worship assembly will be occupied by those who are sleeping, passing notes, daydreaming or being distracted from the message in some other way. I once heard a preacher comment on how we emphasize that everyone needs to be quiet and remain still during a prayer (a time when man is talking to God), but so many whisper or go in and out of the assembly during the sermon (a time when God is talking to man). Psalm 119 goes into explicit detail in describing the Word of God, its nature, its benefits, its uses and its impact upon man. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Immediately following this statement, Paul points out that the Word of God makes us complete and fully furnishes us to every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures provide us with all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The Bible is able to build us up and give us an eternal inheritance (Acts 20:32). Although the Lord no

longer audibly speaks to His people, He does still speak to His people, through His written Word. When this Word is being proclaimed it must be respected and given the full attention it is due.

Perhaps the sweetest and most tender part of the worship assembly is the time when all of the family gathers together around the Lord's table to have communion with the Lord while reflecting upon the death of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is truly a powerful event for the Christian, causing him to reflect upon the sacrifice of Jesus at the beginning of each week. The two emblems reminding us of the suffering and shed blood that was necessary to make our redemption possible. It is a time when our lives are put into proper context, as in our minds we are taken up Mount Calvary and kneel at the foot of the cross. As we reflect upon our lives and the need for the death of Jesus, we are reminded that this sacrifice covered the distance that separated us from the Father. Although our sins had separated us from the Father (Isa. 59:1-2), by the cross we were reconciled with Him (Eph. 2:16). When we partake of this supper, we are reminded that the Lord has a place for us at His table. We are invited to sit and break bread with the Bread of Life at His table because we have been justified, redeemed, washed and made holy by the blood of the Lamb.

What is significant about giving? Is this the one aspect of worship where the Christian is not receiving from the Lord, but giving only? The answer is a resounding no. As we come together we have an opportunity to be a part of the greatest work in the world. We are allowed by God to be investors in His

plan to save man. God is given all glory and honor for saving the lost, but He gives us the opportunity to be a part of something special. Make no mistake about it, the will of the Lord will be accomplished, with or without our help. However, God allows us to contribute. The money we contribute in the assembly is used to support mission efforts the world over. Our contributions serve as a means of meeting the needs of those who are in need of assistance. Just as He has shared His blessing with us, He provides us with a means of sharing our blessings with others. Giving is more for us than for the recipients.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

Those who understand this are cheerful givers, giving as they have prospered, rather than grudgingly or of necessity (2 Cor. 9:7). Even in commanding us to give, the Lord is providing His people with an opportunity to be blessed by assisting Him in reaching the lost and caring for the needy.

Is there any doubt that worship should be a major focus of the new convert? It is an area of the Christian life that must not be viewed lightly or entered into without reverence. The new Christian will quickly realize that worshipping the Lord is one of the most inspiring, demanding, challenging and wonderful parts of being a Christian.

Conclusion

God is so good. He allows us, those who have marred, broken and ruined our lives, to be born again (John 3:3-5). The Lord allows us to make a new start. He makes it possible for us to enjoy a second chance. When we obey His will, we are babes in Christ. Much like being a physical baby, being a spiritual babe is not that easy. You will have to depend upon others for help at times. There will be things that you want to do that you are not yet capable of doing. There will be many dangers and fears that you must overcome. In short, being a new convert is not easy. However, you now have blessings that you did not have before. You have God as your Father who is willing to help, strengthen and guide you. You have a family of believers who will stand with you, walk with you and lead you in times of trouble. You now have a purpose in life and meaning for your existence. Now that you are a Christian, what can you do? You can grow into the servant of Christ that the Lord knows you can be and will help you become. You can serve others as Christ served all. You can have a closeness to the Lord through worshipping Him that none outside of the body of Christ will ever enjoy. Ultimately, you can go to heaven.

Chapter 2

What Can I Do When ...I Desire To Grow As A Christian?

Perry Cotham



Perry B. Cotham was born in Murray, KY • He began preaching the Gospel in 1929 • He attended Freed-Hardeman College and then Murray State College where he received a B.A. degree • Full-time local work with congregations in OK and TX • Full-time evangelistic work since 1972 • Has traveled extensively preaching the Gospel • Authored sixteen tracts • He and his wife Teresa (deceased) have three children.

The Scriptures teach that a Christian is to desire to grow spiritually. The Apostle John, in writing to his beloved friend and brother in the Lord, Gaius, wished for him to *“prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth”* (3 John 2). Evidently, Gaius was not in good health physically, but spiritually he was in good prosperity. Soul prosperity is always very important. We should seek the kingdom of God first in our lives (Matt. 6:33). If we were writing to some Christians today, we might need to reverse the words of the sentence and say, *“I wish your soul would grow and prosper even as your body seems to be strong and in good health.”*

The Apostle Peter said: *“As newborn babes, desire*

the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2), and he also closed his second writing to new converts by saying, "*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). Growth is a characteristic of all life.

But what are the means of spiritual growth? Growth in the Christian's life may be fully realized and enjoyed (cf. Eph. 4:15-16). The **first** essential of growth is a **knowledge of Christ and His Word**. The Holy Scriptures make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:14-17). A growing child must have good wholesome food; so must the child of God feed upon the Word of God and grow thereby. I must read and study the Bible daily (Acts 17:11). I must learn to rightly divide the Word. The epistles set forth the duties of the Christian life. Peter said:

Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance [self-control]; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity [love] (2 Peter 1:5-6).

We must have truth in its purity without any mixture of error. This is so very important.

Second, the Scriptures teach that **prayer is one means of spiritual growth**. Christ taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9-15). The apostles taught the churches to pray "*without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17-18). The early members of the church continued steadfastly "*in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). Great saints have all been giants of the closet. As the church prays, the church grows; as

Christians pray, Christians grow. Prayer, in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Spirit, is one of God's indispensable agencies for the upbuilding of the spiritual life of the child of God.

Third, another means of growth is the **public worship of the Lord's people**. God ordained the worship and I should not "*Forsake the assembling*" (Heb. 10:25). The early Christians met "*upon the first day of the week...to break bread*" (Acts 20:7). The Apostle Paul counseled the Corinthians concerning the order of worship when they came together (1 Cor. 11). Adorning a God of love, of mercy, of justice, of righteousness, men become righteous, just, merciful and loving. They grow to be like God (cf. Psm. 115:1-7; 135:15-18).

The Lord's Supper is one of the acts of worship on the Lord's Day for the Lord's people, in addition to the study and teaching of God's Word, prayers, singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and the giving of our money for the work of the church. The Supper of the bread and fruit of the vine is commemorative of the death of Christ. Paul taught the church at Corinth how to properly observe the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-30; cf. Matt. 26:16-28; Luke 22:19-20). In the world, millions perpetuate the memory of Christ on every first day of the week in this simple observance of this institution.

Fourth, another means of growth is to **take proper exercise**. This I can do by helping to visit the sick, teach others how to become saved from sin and to be added to the Lord's church, grade Bible school lessons, invite my friends to attend the public services of the church, etc. There are many things we can do. We are

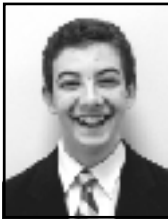
to be "*doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (James 1:22). Exercise helps children to grow. However, it takes several years for a child to reach full maturity. So, let us not be discouraged in our spiritual growth, as we grow each day by following these simple laws in the realm of grace as we do in the physical realm. Growth physically is not miraculous, neither is it in the spiritual realm as a child of God. This is how I know that I can continue to grow as a child of God in the Lord's family.

Finally, **fifth**, spiritual growth **comes from fellowship of saints**. Acts 2:42 says they continued steadfastly in fellowship. In this context, Christians meeting every day in each other's homes and eating together. This must have contributed to their spiritual strength when the church was persecuted later on (Acts 8 and 9). In Proverbs, we read, "*He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise*" (13:20). Christians need Christian companionship (cf. 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Tim. 1:16).

Chapter 3

What Can I Do When ...I Want To Convert My Friends And Family?

Robert Hatfield



Robert Hatfield is a Junior in High School at Giles County High, Pulaski, TN • From a small child, Robert has been trained in the way of the Lord • Faithful parents at East Hill • His grandfather (C. W. Hart) taught and encouraged him to lead singing and preach • Has preached several times at East Hill and nearby congregations • Directed weekly devotionals for training classes • One of many fine young teens in the church today.

Introduction

What a blessing we have in the Bible! God, in His infinite wisdom and exceeding great power, has given us His written Word which may be read, studied, and obeyed. The keys to successfully living life are found within the sacred scrolls, for they can teach man how to get through the trials and temptations and into the glorious gates of heaven eternal. This is a book that provides guidance and strength for daily Christian living.

Each of the topics in this series of lectures has to do with problems that every Christian will face. Notice that each speaker does not go to his own opinion with the topic he has been assigned, he goes to the Bible.

God, the Creator of the universe and life itself, has provided the Bible as a guide book. This is a book that will give the answer to any question in a simple and truthful form. It is to this Book that the writer hopes to turn in answering the question: *"What do I do when I want to convert my friends and family?"*

Is There A Need For Conversion?

Notice Paul's words to the church at Galatia:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

The book of Galatians opens unlike most of Paul's other epistles. Paul begins in verses 1-5 with the normal greeting, that is stating who he is and that he is writing unto them in the name of Jesus Christ. It is then when Paul would normally begin to praise the people to whom he is writing for their good works in the Lord. Such is not the case with the Galatian brethren. Paul, after greeting them, immediately begins to address a significant problem. Paul states in verse 6 his amazement that the people have departed so

quickly from the Saviour's call of salvation. Paul also brings to their attention that they think they have been called unto "*another gospel.*" In verses 7-9, Paul tells the Galatians for what they left Christ's call is not another gospel, but a perverted version of Christ's good news. He boldly states that if he himself or any other person were to teach contradictory to God's Will, let him be accursed (v. 8). Sometimes simple words need to be repeated for emphasis, thus in verse 9 Paul repeats the statement that anyone who teaches contradictory to God's Law, "*let him be accursed.*"

Now notice 2 Timothy 4:1-3:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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 (2 Tim. 4:1-3).

In this passage the apostle Paul is writing (through inspiration) to a young Timothy. As he closes this book, he gives Timothy a "*charge.*" This word used as a verb (as it is here) means to impose a task or responsibility on; to bind by a solemn oath. The charge given to Timothy is to preach the word. Timothy is to preach God's Word anytime he has the opportunity. Paul tells Timothy that the time will come when fleshly minded people of the world will not live by sound

doctrine, but they will listen only to those preachers who have "*itching ears*." A preacher with itching ears will listen to the opinions of the audience and preach what others want to hear, rather than what God has specified.

At that time, Paul was telling Timothy of those who would depart from the faith. They would create what they would claim to be "*other gospels*" (as the people did in Galatians 1). Instead of preaching God's Word as the truth, they would preach what they wanted as the truth. The problems that the Galatians were facing are the same ones that we are facing today! The "*religious*" world seems to add to and take away from God's Word freely when they do not agree with what the Scriptures teach on certain matters. Close friends and family members are being deceived each day with lies and doctrines of men!

It is extremely easy to depart from God's way when times are tough or when the lie is good enough to deceive. In Genesis 3, the sinful serpent only added one word to what God had commanded concerning eating of the forbidden fruit, "*ye shall NOT surely die.*" The lie was deceiving and enticing, it was pleasurable for Eve to think about receiving great knowledge from that fruit, thus she partook and gave to Adam, and he did likewise. The Bible takes us to Exodus 17 when Moses was commanded to strike the rock for water the first time, then to speak to it the second time (Num. 20). It did not seem logical in the mind of Moses to speak to a rock, thus he disobeyed God and struck the rock a second time (Num. 20:11). Satan tempted Moses into thinking that his will was greater than God's.

One could think about the problems that we face in gambling, dancing, drinking, etc. Many of these problems are commonly accepted by the world. The general attitude of those that are not a part of Christ's church see nothing wrong with such. They are ready and willing to teach others that there is nothing wrong with committing these sins. But God has boldly condemned such sinful actions. Brethren, this is the problem that each of us faces today with those of our friends and family to which the world lies, those who are not members of the church that Christ established.

Qualities Of The Christian

One who is successful at converting lost souls is going to demonstrate faithful qualities of the Christian. The New Testament provides many passages describing the faithful child of God.

1. A faithful Christian respects God's Word.

Obviously one who claims to be a child of God will have respect towards the Word of God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). One who has respect for God's holy Word is also going to study and learn the precepts therein. 2 Timothy 2:15 states that God approves of the Christian who studies and rightly divides the word of truth. The Bereans set forth a Christ-like example when they "*received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*" (Acts 17:11). The Christian who truly wants to save lost souls will respect the Word of God and will study the Word, that he may "*be ready always to give an answer*" (1 Peter 3:15).

2. A faithful Christian follows God's teaching.

James 1:22-25 tells Christians to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. Jesus plainly stated in Matthew 7:21 that only those who do the Will of God shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Our Saviour would also make the statement, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). Jesus Christ became the author of eternal salvation unto all that will obey him (Heb. 5:8-9). One who does not live by and follow the principles of God can not teach those principles to others.

3. A faithful Christian worships God. The one caring for lost souls will be sure to attend the assembling together of the saints (Heb. 10:24-25; Matt. 18:20; Psm. 122:1). Attending worship services is important to the Christian as a time to be with fellow labourers in Christ. There are times when Christianity becomes discouraging and the world seems to win the battle. But when all who are in the Lord's army come together on the first day of the week it provides a source of encouragement for everyone present. The concerned Christian will attend worship services for further encouragement and zeal.

4. A faithful Christians prays. Conversion is not possible without God. Talking to God, asking for His help and oversight, will aid the Christian who seeks souls. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "*Pray without ceasing.*" God will answer the prayers of the righteous (1 Peter 3:12). One can not expect to successfully convert a lost soul without the help of Almighty God.

5. A faithful Christian sets a righteous

example. Matthew 5:16 records Jesus admonishing his disciples to provide the proper example, that others may see the good works, and that God may be glorified. Paul's instruction to the church at Ephesus was to "walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8-11). If one is living by the precepts of God's holy Word, assembling with the saints on the first day of the week, and praying to God as commanded, he will provide the right example for others. Giving the proper example will prove beneficial to those outside of Christ, as well as to members of his one true church.

6. A faithful Christian loves the truth.

Christians concerned for the lost are not going to try to teach anything but the truth. The word "*Christian*" means "*a follower of Christ.*" After baptism, the new man wears the name of Christ Jesus, thus he represents Christ. Jesus taught his followers to "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" (Matt. 5:6). John 17:17 emphatically teaches that the truth is the Word of God, the Bible. One becomes sanctified through the truth. The Psalmist said that blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on that law day and night (Psm. 1:1-3). One who does not love the truth is not converting for the right reasons. Christians are commanded to convert the lost to the glory of God, not to glory themselves. The love for the truth will come from a love for God.

7. A faithful Christian opposes error. The Christian is to have "*no fellowship with darkness*" (Eph. 5:11). Paul wrote in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica to "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21). Jesus taught that the vain

worshipper is one who teaches the commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). The last point indicated that the Christian loves the truth. If he truly loves God's holy Word, he will hold fast to that word and oppose anything that contradicts it's sacred instruction.

8. A faithful Christian controls his tongue.

Jesus taught "*that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*" (Matt. 12:36-37). One can not profess to wear the name of Christ if evil things come forth from his mouth. James boldly writes,

If any man among you seem to be religious,
and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth
his own heart, this man's religion is vain.
(James 1:26).

The Christian can not expect to convert lost souls with bad language. What kind of example is set when the Christian fails to bridle his tongue? Christians represent Christ. If Jesus would not say something, neither should his followers!

9. The faithful Christian remains faithful and endures.

Christians are to "*be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 15:58). Jesus taught that those who endure to the end will be saved in heaven eternal (Matt. 10:22). The crown of life is reserved for the faithful and for those who endure (Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:8). Being a Christian is not just a one time deal. Once that old man of sin is put away through baptism, the new Christian should never return to that old, sinful state. 1 Corinthians

16:13 tells the Christian to watch, stand fast in the faith, and be strong. Paul exhorted Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 2:1).

10. The faithful Christian cares for the lost. The purpose of life is to "*fear God and keep his commandments*" (Eccl. 12:13). Respecting God and keeping His law is our chief purpose upon this earth. The purpose of the faithful follower of Christ is to live his life in a way that he can receive heaven, AND to teach others to live that way also. There are many in the world who have not yet heard the good news, the gospel, of Christ. Many on foreign soils have never heard Christ preached. Yet, there are likewise lost souls in America and places very close to home. The Bible teaches those who know the truth are to help souls lacking God's Word. Galatians 6:1 states that "*if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.*" As was the fervent desire of the apostle Paul, so should our heart's desire be to save lost souls.

"Be Ye Doers"

In James 1:22, the inspired writer admonishes Christians to "*be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.*" Up to this point in this study, the need has been recognized. There are definitely lost souls that are close to home which need a faithful Christian to break unto them the bread of life. It was mentioned in the second point that the qualities of the Christian are those of reaching the lost and caring for ones who are not members of the Lord's body. With these facts being

before your mind, what will be the next move, dear reader?

Jesus said in Mark 16:15 to “*go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*” When Jesus commanded Christians with these words, he intended that we start in our home states and towns! Sometimes it would be easier for one to go farther away, than to try to convert those that he may know and love from their denominational doctrine, yet God has spoken and we must follow. In Matthew 28:18-20, our Saviour is closing out what we know as the Great Commission. In verse 19 he tells his listeners,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Can you imagine the difference in the state of the earth today if those listening to that sermon had not gone and preached? Many Christians aren't willing to go and teach all nations. Faithful, New Testament Christians are not ashamed of God's message, for it has the power of salvation to every soul that will believe and obey it's holy truths (Rom. 1:16)! In 2 Timothy 1:7-8, Paul wrote:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear;
but of power, and of love, and of a sound
mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the
testimony of our Lord, nor of me his
prisoner: but be thou partaker of the
afflictions of the gospel according to the
power of God (2 Tim. 1:7-8).

The Christian is to "*hold fast the form of sound words*" (2 Tim. 1:13). The faithful Christian is concerned for the souls of others and is willing to carry the gospel of Christ to the wayward. In Acts 2:41-42, the 3,000 souls had received and obeyed God's Will and were added to Christ's church. After they had become Christians, the text indicates that they "*continued steadfastly*" in the work which God had commanded. Notice that they did not try to quit after becoming a Christian, but they got right to work in spreading the good news of Christ Jesus to everyone else they knew. Christians today must follow the example of those in Acts 2 and others in the New Testament, and begin to evangelize our lost friends and family members.

How many people are baptized during worship services as opposed to those baptized "*after hours*" (not during a worship service or on Sunday or Wednesday)? Notice that most baptisms are a result of one-to-one efforts rather than during worship assemblies and sermons from the pulpit. While this writer is NOT claiming that the pulpit can not influence one to become a Christian or return to Christ, much study must be done first on the part of the lost one. Converting the lost is not something that is going to happen inside our church buildings in most cases. Evangelism is that which works outside of the church building. In Luke 19:10 we read that Jesus CAME to seek and to save. He didn't wait for the lost to come to him, he went out and searched for them! Christians must do the same. It's easy to simply say, "*This needs to be done,*" and then wait on the elders, deacons, or preachers to do the work. Brethren, if we care enough

for our lost loved ones, we will see the need, and immediately go to them!

Conclusion

Dear reader, please take just a moment to reflect on the person that cared enough for you when you were lost. For some it was their faithful parents who cared enough to raise their children in a Christian home. For others, it was a close friend or family member who came to them and wanted to show them Christ and how he suffered on the cruel cross for their sins. Each Christian that will read these words is a Christian today because of the care shown by someone else. Will each Christian now show the same compassion and love that was shown to them in times past?

Our home congregations are depending on us to help spread the Word. Jesus Christ is depending on us to represent him and spread his good news of salvation and remission of sins to the lost. In conclusion, please notice the words of the song written by Wilkin (Chief) Bacon:

Jesus the Savior came down from above,
Came to bring mercy and love;
'Crucify Him' the mob scornfully cried,
So he on Calvary died;
While on the cross He prayed, 'Father, forgive,
For they know not what they do;'
For us He died that for Him we might live,
Can He depend on you?

He is preparing in heaven a home,
For all His faithful and own;
Are you preparing to stand by His side,
Or in that day be denied?
Have you told others the story of love,
Showing them what they should do?
These are the precepts that come from above,
Can he depend on you?

Fellow Christian, can Jesus depend on you to spread his Word to the lost? He died so that we might one day eternally live with him in heaven. Heaven is going to be a beautiful place, one beyond human description! Think of how much better heaven could be to have loved ones there with us! Who will get to our loved ones the quickest: the people of God or the false teachers who teach commandments of men? If God's children aren't willing to preach the Word, there are many people in man-made religions who are waiting to work on one more soul.

Given by God through inspiration, the Bible has the answers for any trial or trouble that might face the Christian. The only thing one must do in one of these situations is look to God's Word. In order to convert friends and family, one must recognize the need for conversion, realize the qualities and commands of the Christian, and then become a doer of the word, not only a hearer.

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Chapter 4

What Can I Do When Opportunities Of Work And Service Arise?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



Robert Taylor has been preaching the gospel for over fifty years. He is appreciated and loved by the faithful brotherhood for holding to the “*old paths*,” his thorough and exhaustive study of any subject; his excellent writings in journals, books and magazines. He continues his work with the good church at Ripley, TN (now thirty years). Robert and Irene have two children and four grandchildren.

It is always a joy supreme and deep delight to come to East Hill for this annual spring lectureship. Abounding appreciation is expressed to Paul, Brandon, the elders and all the precious people here at East Hill for the invitation to speak and pen a chapter for the lectureship volume. I regard East Hill as a beacon on a hill shining forth the radiant light of Jesus Christ and His glorious gospel.

INTRODUCTORY SCRIPTURES

Jesus stated,

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven...Even as the Son

of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work...My Father worketh hitherto, and I work...I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work...Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of these works do ye stone me?...I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do (Matt. 5:16; 20:28; John 4:34; 5:17; 9:4; 10:32; 17:4).

Paul stated,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord...As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith...For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all...Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father...Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of

truth...Put them in mind to be...ready to every good work...that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men...And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful...For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12, 17; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 3:1, 8, 14; Heb. 6:10).

James states,

Ye see then how that by works, a man is justified, and not by faith only...Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin (2:24; 4:17).

The foregoing verses are a saintly sampling of works and service when opportunity presents itself. Each one is a rousing refutation of Calvinism that denies any condition of conversion or stipulations of sanctification. They also are a rousing refutation of Protestant propaganda that salvation is by faith only. This leaves no room at all for works and yet Christ said that to believe on Him was/is the work of God (John 6:28-29). They also are a rousing refutation of dispositions often seen among us of desiring to do little or nothing subsequent to baptism. Ask any elder or preacher among us if we do not have **far** too many members with this spirit of lethargy or outright

laziness. We can work endlessly for secular, school and social concerns but are always too busy to do God's work. "Let George do it" has left many good works without proper manpower.

It will help us immensely if we can gain some helpful insights into what Biblical people did when opportunity knocked and they responded favorably to God's demands for their lives. Therefore, in this study I plan first to provide portraits of worthy workers and submissive servants who knew what to do when opportunity knocked on their doors challenging them to rise in the power of manhood and womanhood to put their hands to the plow and render service to God above and man below.

WHAT OLD TESTAMENT WORTHIES DID WITH OPPORTUNE WORKS AND SERVICE

These will be some of His faithful workers and committed servants in attitude and action, in motive and mission and in language and life when opportunity's door opened for their entrance and enter it they did.

Abel hearkened to God's clearcut instructions relative to worship/service in Genesis 4. God was pleased with the worship/service he rendered in this early morning of time. Hebrews 11:4 styles him a faithful and obedient worshipper while John says his works were righteous (1 John 3:12). Jesus also called him righteous in Matthew 23:35. This is what he did when opportunity knocked on his door.

Enoch learned of God's will for his life and for

three or more centuries he walked with God (Gen. 5:21-24). He agreed with God and thus they could walk together (cf. Amos 3:3). His precious portrait lines the corridors of Inspiration's Hall of Faith and Fame (Heb. 11:5). He worked and served God as a faithful, fervent prophet (Jude 14-15). God translated him that he should not experience physical death. This is what he did when opportunity of work and service arrived for him.

Noah, tenth from Adam and ten generations prior to Abraham, was perfect in his generation, a just or righteous man and one who walked with God (Gen. 6:9). The previous verse tells us how he "*found grace in the eyes of the Lord*" (Gen. 6:8). He combined family faithfulness, ark construction, and preaching righteousness to his scoffing contemporaries (Gen. 6:22; 7:5; Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5). All these verses show us that what he did when the door of opportunity for work and service opened. He did not shirk his responsibility. There was none of this "*let another do it*" in his obedient approach to what Jehovah commanded of him.

Abraham and Sarah listened when God said move and move from Ur, to Haran and to Canaan they did (Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 7:3-4). He obeyed going out and yet was not in the know about where he was going (Heb. 11:8). In one of the greatest exhibitions of faith ever witnessed among all human beings he took Isaac, his beloved son, and had every intention of offering him upon the erected altar in the land of Moriah (Gen. 22:1-18). Faithful were Abraham and

Sarah in their work, worship, and service to the God of heaven. They lived and died in faith as per Hebrews 11:10-16. This is what they did when the door of opportunity of work and service opened beckoning them an entrance. They are portrayed in Hebrews 11 in faithful fashion, in admirable action.

Isaac and Jacob answered God's call of service and work. It took Jacob longer to come around to God's way than it did his peace-loving and faith-practicing father but come around in fine fashion he did ultimately. They, too, are enshrined in Hebrews 11 as ancient workers and servants of Jehovah God—the Sovereign of the whole universe. This is what they did when opportunity's door for work and service opened wide for them.

Joseph rendered faithful service as a willing worker in his father's house, Potiphar's house, the prison house, and then in the Governor's house. Dying in the faith, as he surely did in the Land of the Nile, he will one day inhabit God's heavenly house of many mansions (cf. John 14:1-3). This is what he did when the door of opportunity opened for work and service. And enter it he surely did! He enhanced manhood as few men in all of human history have done.

In Exodus through Joshua we observe what Amram, Jochebed, Moses, Caleb, and Joshua did in the way of work and service. Amram and Jochebed took seriously child-rearing obligations by saving Moses when the law of the land said kill him. The Moses they saved became a national deliverer and a lawgiver. Caleb and Joshua were faithful spies. They

constituted the minority but they stood tall with no tinge of compromise about them. Joshua led the people into Canaan, conquered the land through God's help and parceled out the land to various tribes. This is what these five did when the door of opportunity opened for work and service.

Samuel was faithful and fervent all his days as prophet, priest and judge. His ear was always opened to God's Word and his heart and hands responded when opportunity knocked for his work and service.

David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah were kings who served Jehovah and worked for His Cause on earth. This is what they did in the work/service department.

Elijah, Micaiah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the minor prophets were God's mouthpieces. Jonah was reluctant but the rest were quick to hear and hearken to Jehovah's call for workers and servants. They gave a new dimension to worthy work and steadfast service. No wonder Paul wrote Romans 15:4 about what can be derived from the Old Testament with its messengers, their messages and the work and service they rendered.

Can we afford to do less, as per our ability, than did these Old Testament worthies who answered so well and wisely the opportune call for work and service? Surely not!

WHAT NEW TESTAMENT WORTHIES DID WITH OPPORTUNE WORK AND SERVICE

From conception and birth onward John's work and service were cut out for him. Even prior to his

conception Gabriel said he would be the Lord's Harbinger going before the Lord's face to turn people toward the God of heaven (Luke 1:16-17). When opportunity for work and service emerged for this young man, he was equal to the occasion. He was ready to preach. He was ready to baptize. He was ready to introduce Jesus as God's Lamb designed to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36). He was ready to confront Pharisees and Sadducees as they came to his baptism (Matt. 3:7-8; Luke 3:7-9). He was ready to bear witness to the true light coming into the world (John 1:6-9). He was ready to rebuke a king and queen for their adulterous marriage (Matt. 14:1-11; Mark 6:14-28). This led to his martyrdom for truth's cause. All this, and even more, he did when opportunity for work and service emerged. Jesus gave him the highest compliment in Matthew 11:11—none born greater than John.

Long before He came into this world of woe and sphere of sin it was decided in Heaven's court that one of the Godhead Three would come to earth to redeem man. The willing choice lay upon the Eternal Word who came to earth as a virgin-conceived, virgin-born and only begotten Son of God. He came as a doer. He came as a worker. He came as a teacher/preacher. He came to do God's will as He Himself stated in John 4:34; 6:38; 17:4; Matthew 26:36-42; Hebrews 10:5-9. He came to give Himself a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:6). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to die, be buried, be raised from the dead and ascend back to the Palace of the Universe

He had vacated so willingly and wonderfully one-third of a century before. He came to leave us footsteps worthy of our persistent pursuit (1 Peter 2:21). This is what Jesus, the Christ, did when opportunity for work and service arrived at His doorstep.

Those later becoming apostles knew what they ought to do when He opened for them the door of opportunity to work and serve a Cause greater and larger than anything they had ever known. Peter, Andrew, James and John left boats, fishing nets and even the very basis of making a living to follow Him. From catching fish in the Galilean Sea they became fishers of men casting the gospel net into the broad sea of lost humanity (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20). James and John, in particular, left Zebedee, their father, and the hired servants behind in order to follow the new Teacher/Master. Matthew, or Levi, left his toll booth for tax collecting to follow the Lord of heaven and earth (Luke 5:27-32). Truth, by far, was more important than Roman taxation collections ever could be. Peter, spokesman for the other eleven, said they had left all to follow the Man from Nazareth (Mark 10:28-30). They followed Jesus even when His face was toward impending dangers as per His final trip to Jerusalem. Dangers were theirs nearly all the way through the book of Acts. This is what the original twelve did when there was work to be done and service to be rendered. Only one of them, Judas Iscariot, became an apostate. The others remained faithful in a faithless world, a world largely hostile to Christianity.

Paul is surely a courageous case in point. In Acts 7, 8 and the early part of Acts 9 he felt no magnetic tug on his heartstrings for any work or service to be done toward the Galilean Prophet. But all that changed on his way to Damascus and three days later when he was immersed in Syrian waters for proffered pardon. Then work for the Lord and service in the Messianic Kingdom became his passion, his pressing priority. He went to work for Jesus in Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, Tarsus, Antioch, the various places he evangelized on three Missionary Journeys, Jerusalem again, Caesarea, Rome, and places he visited and evangelized between the first Roman imprisonment and his final incarceration in the Imperial City. In his own words he labored "*more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*" (1 Cor. 15:10). Again and again his salutations contain portraits of his being a servant (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:1). He had this to say in 2 Corinthians 4:5, "*For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*" This is what Paul did when the door of opportunity for work and service opened and bade him an entrance. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-10 he wrote,

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries. Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear; for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do.

James and Jude, half brothers of our Lord in the

flesh and His full brothers in the faith, both began their mighty missives with allusions to being servants to the glorious Godhead (James 1:1; Jude 1). This is how this dedicated duet answered the opportune call for work and service in the Messianic Cause.

Can we afford to do less, as per our ability, than did these New Testament worthies of the first century?

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

The foregoing portions of our study should have provided helpful insights into what we can do, should do and must do when the opportune days of work and service arrive. Eight serious challenges will be numbered and noted.

(1) We can study and learn. This is foundational to all areas of action and spheres of service. Ignorance was destructive to God's people in the Old Testament (Isa. 1:3-4; 5:12; Hosea 4:6). Biblical ignorance took a heavy toll in the New Testament as well (Matt. 22:29; Luke 19:44; 1 Cor. 15:34-35). Brother Gus Nichols said that Biblical ignorance is the most damnable sin among us. He was right. He knew, and so should we, that it is a taproot from which springs transgressions in multitude and sins in numerous fashion. We should take seriously such powerful passages as Acts 17:11; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:15 and Revelation 1:3 which state,

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were true...Till I come, give attendance to reading,

to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee...Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth...Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand.

The Bible is our powerful and precious textbook of truth.

(2) We can obey what we have learned. Such is essential for our going home to heaven in the sweet by and by (Matt. 7:21-27; Luke 6:46; Rom. 6:17-18; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:22; James 1:25; 2:14-26; Rev. 22:14). It would be a wise investment of time to read and meditate upon these good, great, and grand passages.

(3) We can live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Paul inculcated such in Titus 2:11-12. Soberly means to live right with self; righteously means to live right with others; godly means to live right before the Godhead. Here we have inward living, outward living and upward living. Colossians 3 and Titus 2 major in such material and motivation.

(4) We can be faithful and fervent in our worship. Jesus was (Luke 4:16). Early saints in Jerusalem were (Acts 2:42). So were Troas saints (Acts 20:7). It was no credit to the fickle Hebrews that dereliction had set in with serious consequences already occurring (Heb. 10:25-31). Worship can be a marvelous motivation to do work and service for the Lord. Sermons and Bible Classes can give us much needed help about what working and serving God and Christ entail.

(5) We can be benevolent. The Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31 so inculcates with force and finality. Survey Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to see our lovely Lord helping people who were in physical need and especially spiritual need. Early saints in Jerusalem were (Acts 2, 4, 6). Antiochian saints in Syria walked the same benevolent route (Acts 11:27-30). Macedonian poverty translated itself into beautiful benevolence (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Philemon was commended because of his beautiful brand of benevolence (vs. 5-7). The precious people at Philippi were generous to an amazing degree (Phil. 1:4). The well-beloved Gaius in 3 John was generosity personified. This made glad the magnanimous heart of the aged John.

(6) Each of us can be a modern Barnabas and encourage people in that which is good and right. Such is needed in the home. It helps marital mates to be an encouragement to each other. Children need a large dosage of such as they grow to maturity. Sadly, many of them never receive any encouragement or

real expressions of parental love. The encouraging spirit of the beautiful Barnabas is needed in the family of God. Elders, deacons, Bible teachers, preachers and all members need such. Do we appreciate a word of thanks rendered to us for a job well done? On the other side of the coin do we reciprocate this to others for the good works they do? If not, why not? A woman worked for a family in cleaning, washing, cooking, etc. She never received a word of commendation for anything she did. One day she got on the phone and disguised her voice as she contacted the landlady of the family. She said, *"I hear you are looking to hire someone to help in cleaning, washing, cooking, etc."* The lady of the house said, *"No, I am not looking for anyone. I have the best lady working for me that money could employ."* Why had no thanks been given previously to the faithful helper who longed to hear words of appreciation? Sometime back I had the opportunity of speaking to a group of young preachers about what they might expect in their future work as gospel preachers. I dealt with both negatives and positives. On the negative side, I told them that perhaps 70% of the people for whom they do service will never express a single word of appreciation. Jesus found the percentage to be 90% in Luke 17:11ff. Expressions of appreciation cost so little on our part and are so very meaningful on the part of grateful recipients.

(7) We can win souls. Proverbs 11:30 says such is a mark of wisdom and it is. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Our mission is an extension of His. We are His hands, feet, mouths, hearts, etc., in

getting His message into human hearts. John 4 is a great chapter of soul winning on the part of our sensitive Savior. Soul winning is the heart and spirit of Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; and Acts 1:8.

(8) We can help produce a congregation filled with peace and unity. Talebearers cannot do this. Slanderers cannot do this. Whisperers cannot do this. People who gossip cannot do this. Sowers of discord cannot do this. Cantankerous attitudes and actions cannot do this. Selfishness cannot do this. But peacemakers can do this (Matt. 5:9). Those who view unity as both good and pleasant can do this (Psa. 133:1). Those who endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace can do this (Eph. 4:3). Those who speak truth in love, hear truth in love, defend truth in love and practice truth in love can do this. *“And be at peace among yourselves...If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”* are great passages inculcating peaceful unity (1 Thess. 5:14; Rom. 12:18). For thirty years now I have preached for the Ripley, Tennessee congregation. It is a sound and solid congregation, a good and great congregation. We pray regularly and fervently to be peaceful and united and our precious people practice it to an amazing degree. Such has made my work enjoyable and enabled me to do far more than I could have had we had thirty years of feuding, fussing, contentions, and backbiting, etc. The Ripley congregation is a Philippiian congregation to me (Phil. 1:3).

CONCLUSION

Working and serving members are not going to be fighting and fussing. They will be too busy for these undesirable fruits of devilish worldliness.

Doors of opportunity for work and service are opening around us at all times. Let us be prompt and diligent in eager entrances into the same.

What Can I Do When...

***As A Christian
And
Servant Of Christ***

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Chapter 5

What Can I Do When ...My Faith Is Weak And Faltering?

Tom Holland



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Faith is a dynamic of the mind and heart. This present, powerful force means that our minds have accepted God's testimony in Scripture (Rom. 10:17), and our hearts are fully trusting the precious promises of God (Prov. 3:5). Faith is like a delicate, valuable plant in that it needs constant attention, care and nourishment.

In this presentation we will consider: one, various degrees of faith; two, why faith may become weak and faltering; three, what we can do when we sense that our faith is faltering.

If you do not need this lesson now, please hold it in your mind and heart, because you will probably need it sometime in life. (Perhaps you are reading

this material because you already sense that your faith is not that vibrant force that motivated you to faithfully attend worship assemblies, that urged you to share your excitement of your salvation with others, that gave you peace, joy and hope. If so, I pray that this lesson will bless your life).

A REVELATION

The Bible reveals varying degrees of faith. Some of the Lord's disciples were hindered by a "little" faith. A storm seemed far more threatening than it actually was, even when Jesus was with them. When the disciples awoke the sleeping Jesus and said, "Lord, save us; we perish," Jesus reponded: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith" (Matt. 8:25-26). Little faith underestimates the power of a present Lord. Little faith attributes too much power to opposing forces. Little faith may acknowledge Jesus as Lord, did not the disciples say, "Lord, save us?" (Matt. 8:25). However, little faith may have a problem of trusting this Lord as a caring Savior.

The apostle Paul identified another degree of faith when he was discussing matters of opinion and Christian liberty. He declared,

Him that is **weak** in the faith receive ye,
but not to doubtful disputations (emp. mine,
TH) (Rom. 14:1).

One who has a weak faith may attempt to bind opinion as law. He may become a judge of his brethren. However, the apostle said:

Let us not therefore judge one another any more... (Rom. 14:13).

The person with a weak faith may not appreciate the fact that if he tries to bind as law matters which the Lord has left in the realm of human opinion and judgment; the binding of "law" in matters of opinion is just as serious as disregarding God's law.

From a negative viewpoint, the ultimate degree of faith is a "dead" faith. James, by inspiration, wrote of faith that is dead. He presented some interesting explanations in revealing the ineffective nature of dead faith. Abraham, the "*Father of the faithful*" had a working, active, responsive, obedient faith. Rahab was justified by an active faith (James 2:21-25).

James illustrated a faith that does not obey. It is like a body without a spirit (James 2:26). It is lifeless, inactive, and ineffective.

But turning to a positive degree of faith, we may observe that Abraham's faith was **strong**. He believed that he and his aged wife, Sarah, would indeed become parents of a child because God had promised them that they would have a son. Abraham "*staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*" (Rom. 4:20).

The word translated "*strong*" is, in the original, a compound word, and literally means, "*in power,*" or, "*to be strengthened.*"

A strong faith takes God at His Word. A strong faith trusts God completely. God's promises make what He has promised a reality. A strong faith gives a type of knowledge that inspires hope, confidence

and assurance (1 John 5:13).

The Bible also reveals a degree of faith that is **great**. When a centurion servant was sick and "*ready to die*," the centurion requested, through the elders of the Jews, that Jesus would come and heal his servant. However, when Jesus drew near the house of the centurion he sent word to Jesus that he was unworthy for Jesus to come "*under my [his] roof*" and that if Jesus said the word the servant would be healed. When Jesus heard these words he turned to the people that followed and declared, "*I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel*" (Luke 7:9).

There are degrees of faith: little, weak, dead, strong, and great. Weak faith may become strong faith. Dead faith may come to life through obedience. However, strong and even great faith may become weak and faltering.

REASONS

A knowledge of why faith becomes weak and faltering may put one on guard to protect his/her faith. Faith is "*precious*" (2 Peter 1:1), and the loss of faith is indeed the loss of a precious, priceless possession.

As mentioned already, you may not need this lesson now, however, for some this may be needed presently. We sing the hymn of the late Tillit S. Teddlie, "*Hear Me When I Call*," and this hymn certainly acknowledges to the Lord that our faith is sometimes weak and small and doubts do arise in our hearts. The second stanza says,

Hear my cry, O God,
 attend unto my prayer,
More and more I need
 Thy mercy and Thy care;
Clouds of doubt arise
 and faith grows weak and small...

What causes our faith to become weak and faltering? One thing that can adversely impact faith is neglect. Faith, like a delicate plant, needs proper nourishment to become strong. There is food for faith, namely, the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). John, in stating the thesis of his record of our Lord's life, said,

...these things are written that you might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

The Word of God that produces faith is the Word that protects faith and also provides spiritual food that helps faith grow and become strong. God's Word must be read, reflected on and internalized if faith remains strong. Neglecting faith can result in faith becoming weak and faltering.

Faith may be weakened by trials, troubles, and difficulties of life. These problems may indeed test faith if we react properly to them. However, the same sun that melts wax may harden clay.

The apostle Peter discussed trials of life testing faith. He affirmed that the trials which test our faith may be a blessing if we react properly. Peter wrote:

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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7).

Trials that try our faith come in different ways. Peter used the word "*manifold*" to describe the trials. He later used the word "*manifold*" to describe the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10). The word means "*various, different kinds.*"

The trial of faith may come from the loss of health. A personal loss or some family member's loss of health. The trial may come from the death of a precious loved one. An economic disaster such as the loss of a job or a business can be a trial of faith. Rejection by a husband or wife or children can be a trial of faith. Verbal abuse from brethren in the church can be a trial of faith.

If we react to trials in a positive way then we look to be made stronger spiritually by the trials. Paul, who had a "*thorn in the flesh*" declared: "*when I am weak, then am I strong*" (2 Cor. 12:10). Paul also could "*glory in tribulations*" because he knew that the blessings of patience, of steadfastness, and experience, and hope were made stronger as he reacted to the trials in a positive manner (Rom. 5:1-4).

Faith may be weakened by exposure to false doctrine. People would "*depart from the faith*" as they gave heed to "*seducing spirits*" (1 Tim. 4:1-4).

How many people have experienced a weakening of their faith as they were exposed in a college or university to the assertions of an unbelieving professor and/or his efforts to intimidate those in his class who had faith. Some of us have been called "*religious*

fanatics" and efforts were made to convince us that once we were educated "*we could cast off faith in the Bible and other superstitions.*"

Faith may be weakened by denominational preachers and people in these religious organizations who declare their man-made doctrines of "*grace only,*" "*faith only,*" and/or the assertions that the church of Christ is nothing but another denomination.

Faith may be weakened by some who had determined to change the Lord's church into another denomination. It is interesting, but sad, that in some congregations where these people have divided the church, some members have gone into denominational churches.

The practice of sin can weaken faith (Heb. 3:12-13). Sin is deceitful. Sin leads one to think that he/she can practice sin and still have a strong faith. The truth is that faith connects us to God, but sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). One who continues in sin, any sin, "*hath not seen him, neither known him*" (1 John 3:6). The person who practices sin is of the devil (1 John 3:8).

Paul urged Timothy to "*hold faith and a good conscience*" (1 Tim. 1:19-20). Some people who have a "*faith problem*" may have a moral problem which contributes to the faith problem.

Unrepented sin can cause faith to be weak and to falter.

These are some of the reasons why faith can become weak and faltering.

RESPONDING

It is not enough to explain some of the causes of

a weak and faltering faith. The person who senses that his faith is "*growing weak and small*" may and should take action because faith is too precious to lose. The loss of faith means the loss of hope (Heb. 11:1). The loss of hope results in misery (1 Cor. 15:19).

But what can be done to preserve or strengthen a weak faith? One thing that can strengthen faith is the exhortation from a believer (Heb. 3:13-14). Exhortations that come from worship assemblies are most important (Heb. 10:24-25). Encouragement from a friend can be very helpful.

Involvement in doing good may contribute to a strengthening of one's faith. "*Good works*" (Heb. 10:24) may be faith builders.

Prayerfully pleading with the Lord for help in dealing with doubt can be helpful. When a father brought his son to Jesus so the Lord could cast out an evil spirit which, from childhood, had tormented the son, "*casting him into the fire, and into the waters,*" Jesus said to the father, "*all things are possible to him that believeth.*" The father said, while weeping, "*Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*" (Mark 9:23-24).

We may cope with a weak and faltering faith by learning to doubt. Some may have difficulty developing faith because they have been exposed to unbelief in classes, books, pamphlets, and/or personal contact with a skeptic, atheist, infidel, or an agnostic. Unbelievers sometimes do a successful work in creating doubt in people. Unbelievers can be effective in the use of propaganda. "*All scientists believe in evolution.*" "*The Bible is a collection of Jewish folklore.*" "*The Bible is full of contradictions.*" "*The Catholic church*

gave us the Bible." "There are books missing from the Bible."

But doubt has its problems. Is it really an intelligent explanation to assert that something as complex as the universe, or something as marvelous as a human body and human psychology was brought into existence by non-intelligence. Someone observed,

He who studies the eye of a housefly, the camouflage of a moth, or the movement of the index finger of man and conclude that it all happened by chance believes in a greater miracle than that recorded in the Bible.

Doubt has its problems relative to the Bible. Is it reasonable to believe that a book written by some forty different authors over a period of several hundred years could be brought together and constitute "*The Book, The Bible*"?

What about the adaptability of the Bible to any culture at any time, ancient or modern?

Furthermore, what about the moral tone, demand, of the Bible? Why have not intelligent people been able to produce a book that has the potential for making better people and building better societies?

There are problems with doubt and learning to doubt doubt is one way of strengthening a weak and faltering faith.

Faith may be strengthened through reminders of the blessings of believing. The apostle declared:

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound

in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:13).

There is joy in believing. Unbelief is basically pessimistic. Years ago a president of Harvard said, "*The world is looking for a creed to believe and for a song to sing.*" What was the first thing heaven declared when Jesus was born?

Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (Luke 2:10).

Another blessing of faith is peace. Peace cannot be bought with money. Peace cannot be obtained from chemicals. But when people know salvation; when they enjoy God's justification, then they have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), and they experience the "*peace of God, which passes all understanding*" (Phil. 4:7).

Hope is another blessing of believing (Rom. 15:13). Hope can anchor our souls in the storms of life (Heb. 6:19-20). Hope is so strong that it can stare death in the face and not flinch.

Faith can be strengthened by a believer staying "*near the cross of Christ.*" How many times have we sung:

When my love to Christ grows weak,
When for deeper faith I seek,
Hill of Calvary I go
To its scenes of fear and woe.

We can stay near the cross by faithfully and sincerely partaking of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:26). We can stay close to the cross of Christ by

singing songs such as, "*Jesus, keep me near the cross.*" We can also stay near the cross by reading the Biblical records of Jesus' death.

There may be moments of doubt; times when our faith seems feeble; days when we wonder if prayer to God accomplishes anything. But in these situations we need not be unduly alarmed, even the apostles who had been personally associated with Jesus needed to be "*upbraided*" for their unbelief (Mark 16:14). People have struggled with unbelief; they have experienced a weak and faltering faith. When we have similar experience with our own faith we can know that we are not alone in the struggle. Our faith may be renewed and increased to our own good and to the glory of God.

Faith is not only the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), faith is the victory over doubt, distrust and fear.

Weak And Faltering Faith?

Where are the blessings I once knew
When faith was alive and strong?
Where are the peace and joy and hope,
That filled my life with song?

When my faith is weak and faltering,
God's skies are not nearly so blue;
His stars at night do not shine as bright;
There is doubt that His promises are true.

There is a longing for vibrant faith again,
So I turn to God's Word, faith's treasures galore,

I'll embrace His promises with grateful heart,
He'll fill my heart with peace

then I'll sing once more.

~ Tom Holland

4-19-04

Chapter 6

What Can I Do When ...I Am Tempted To Return To My Old Sinful Ways

Cliff Goodwin



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It has been said that local congregations of the Lord's church would double in attendance "*overnight*," if only the erring members were restored to faithful service. Take a moment and think about that statement. Think about it in light of the congregation of which you are a member. Is not the statement true, or at least *very close* to being true? Think about the various souls baptized over the last five or ten years. How many are still faithful members of your home congregation? Are not there many faces that come to mind—faces you haven't seen at services in a long time?

I once thought the difficult work in a local

congregation was converting alien sinners. My experiences over the last seven or so years, however, have caused me to change my mind. I am now convinced that the difficult part of church growth is *keeping* the souls whom you baptize. It seems so easy for babes in Christ to wane in their devotion and to drift back into the ways of the world. So many things can happen; so many things can get in the way. In some cases new members are **not** going to be retained, despite what scriptural efforts are taken to do so. There is a reason for this.

Nobody can keep a person faithful, but that person himself. Though the careful shepherding of elders, the encouragement of seasoned, more mature brethren, and solid preaching from the pulpit are all crucial to babes in Christ, none of these will be successful in keeping a new member faithful apart from his own determination and dedication. As we sometimes say colloquially, "*You can't do it for them!*" In the ultimate sense, salvation is an individual matter. Each person determines his own personal destiny by the choices he makes. The apostle Paul wrote, "*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*" (Rom. 14:12).¹

In light of these facts, the question before us is vitally important. What can I do when I am tempted to return to sinful ways? Each of us must make this matter personal—because it is. Realizing that our individual souls are our most prized possessions (Matt. 16:26), it would behoove us to take apostasy seriously. Each one must save himself from this untoward generation (cf. Acts 2:40), both *in* and *after* conversion!

RECOGNIZE The Significance Of Your Conversion

The day of ones' conversion is a most important day, indeed. That was the day ones' spiritual state changed before God, and with it the outlook of his eternal destiny. Surely one has forgotten the significance of such changes when he decides to return to sinful living. Does he no longer appreciate what was afforded him by God's grace? Has he lost sight of his purpose for existing as a child of God? One must continue to recognize the importance of these matters so long as he continues to live upon this earth. *Conversion denotes the change of spiritual parentage.* When one becomes a Christian, he becomes a child of God. Please don't read the prior sentence too casually. He becomes *a child of God*. Think of the magnitude of what is being said in those words! When a person obeys the gospel, the eternal God of the universe adopts him as His own child (cf. Rom. 8:14-16)! John put it in these inspired words,

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not (1 John 3:1).

How great God's love must be, that He would condescend in receiving human beings as His own sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18)!

This adoption, or new birth (1 John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23), carries with it very solemn responsibilities. Peter addressed this fact.

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

When God, out of His goodness and grace, has made one His own child, that child is then expected to be obedient (cf. Matt. 7:21). This means that he cannot go on living the way he has always lived. That lifestyle consisted of the *former* lusts; he lived that way when he was spiritually *ignorant*. Now he is God's child. He has come out of the darkness of sin and ignorance and into the light of righteousness and truth (Eph. 5:8-9). One would do well to remember these things before returning to sinful ways.

The Christian's responsibility to be obedient is heightened in light of the fact that children represent their Father. Our heavenly Father is holy. If we then are to be with Him in heaven, we must be holy as well (cf. Matt. 5:8). Members of the church who continue in sinful ways convey an inaccurate representation of their supposed Father. In fact, many may profess to be children of God, but in conduct, they are seen to be servants of the devil. Such hypocrisy is a "*black-eye*" on the church and an abomination before God. Such are the fruits of backsliding and apostasy.

Conversion should produce a new perspective. At conversion, we were given "*a new lease on life,*" so to speak. We were made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), having been raised from the waters of baptism to walk

in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5). All of our past sins were washed away, as we repented and turned from them (cf. Luke 24:47). From that time forward, then, we should have been living with a new perspective on life. Our attitude should have been, *"I've been given a second chance. I'm going to make good on this one. I'm going to do right and help others to do right."* Every Christian needs to realize that he wasted enough of his life *before* conversion. That is exactly what one is doing so long as he lives in sin—he is wasting time that could have been used for the cause of Christ (cf. Matt. 12:30). Conversion changes that, however. Conversion is the proverbial *"U-turn"* in life. From that time forward we should redeem the time (Eph. 5:16), taking every opportunity to do good as we walk in the light of God's word. Peter likewise touches upon this concept.

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles (1 Peter 4:2-3).

If we were to paraphrase Peter's words of verse three into more modern vernacular, they might read, *"We wasted enough time living like the world and in world **before** our conversions."* In other words, there is no reason whatsoever for Christians to continue squandering time in sinful living.

*Conversion is possible because of a **paid price**.* The very reason Jesus left heaven was so that men *could* and *would* be converted. He said, *"For the Son of man*

is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Man cannot be saved without being converted, for Peter taught, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). When man's sins are forgiven in conversion, such forgiveness is accomplished by the shed blood of Christ (Col. 1:14). Peter also treats this subject in his first general epistle.

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 Peter 1:18-19).

First-century slaves had their liberty redeemed by a monetary sum—silver or gold. Such a price could never ransom a soul from sin, however (cf. John 8:32-34). It took the precious blood of Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29), to wash away the sins of man (Rev. 1:5; cf. 1 John 2:2). The day one is baptized into Christ, he appropriates the cleansing effects of Christ's shed blood (Acts 22:16). Any child of God who returns to sinful ways has surely forgotten the beauty and profundity of these concepts! He has also forgotten the inspired words of Paul, "*Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men*" (1 Cor. 7:23).

Conversion gives one's life new purpose. The alien sinner is a slave to sin, and if unconverted, his final end will be death (Rom. 6:16). When he responds obediently to the gospel, however, he is called out of

the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of Christianity (cf. 2 Thess. 2:14). Peter once again penned,

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

The four metaphors employed by Peter describe a changed people—a people delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13). Peter further describes this change in the following verse,

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:10).

God has saved these people, intending that they glorify Him (cf. Eph. 3:21). This gives new purpose to the life of every convert. They are now to live in such a way so as to reflect God's greatness and goodness before the world. Their lives now have meaning—the highest and noblest meaning that can be attached to human life—to bring glory to the true God (cf. Rev. 4:11).

REFLECT Upon The Plight Of Being Lost

Members of the church who return to sinful ways must not remember what it was like to be lost. Life is difficult, full of trouble (Job 14:1), but life without God can sometimes seem unbearable. At least for the faithful Christian there is the assurance that God is

with him no matter the trial or circumstance (Heb. 13:5). Why any member of the Lord's church would carelessly forfeit such assurance is beyond me. The words of the song come to mind, "*O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear.*" It is the height of folly and spiritual shortsightedness for a Christian to forsake his Lord.

Some of the darkest words in scripture occur in Ephesians 2:12,

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

These words were used to describe the lost state of the Ephesians prior to their obeying the gospel. They were without God and Christ in the world, and were consequently without hope. What kind of life is that? It is the antithesis of the abundant life promised by Christ (John 10:10). Yet the backslider forsakes the abundant life in order to return to sinful ways. How unimaginable!

*The backslider is under the **domination** of sin.* The scriptures describe sin as a taskmaster of sorts (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 6:16). In Christ, one has liberty over sin as he walks faithfully in the light of God's word (1 John 1:7; cf. Gal. 5:1). Those who err from Christ, however, become enslaved once again to the devil's devices. They are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:26), as he sifts their spiritual lives like wheat (cf. Luke 22:31). They had been able to say before, "*I can do all*

things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13), but now they have forsaken the very *source* of their strength.

The backslider suffers damage to his prayer life. Most faithful Christians cannot imagine what it would be like to be unable to talk to God in prayer. Prayer is a great source of strength, for therein we approach God asking for mercy and grace to help us in our times of need (Heb. 4:16). In prayer, the faithful are able to make their requests known unto God (Phil. 4:6) with the confidence that He hears us as we ask things according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). When a child of God backslides, however, his prayers are hindered by sin (cf. 1 Peter 3:7). To put it in human terms, a person living in sin is not "*on speaking terms*" with God. Peter wrote,

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

The principle involved in this verse has applications to erring members as well as alien sinners. Simply put, sin hinders prayer. The backslider finds himself separated from the fellowship of God, with the lines of communication cut because of his willful sin.

The backslider sees only doom on the horizon. It seems that the apostate has nowhere to turn. He cannot look backward, for there will be the sting of remembrance—remembering how good he had it as a faithful Christian. He shudders to look forward also, however, for he sees his impending doom. The

Hebrews author expressed this idea in graphic and quite frightening language.

For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries (Heb. 10:26-27).

So long as the backslider remains intent on spurning Christ, there is **absolutely nothing** to which he can look forward. There is reserved for him only the wrath of God (Col. 3:6; Rom. 2:5) and the "*blackness of darkness forever*" (Jude 13).

All of these troubles were known once before to the backslider, even before he became the "*backslider.*" Before his conversion he had been under the domination of sin, he had no privilege of prayer, and he had the dreariest of futures. How could he now go back to such sorrows, seeing that he has experienced the abundant life?

RE-EVALUATE your Priorities and Values

What causes a child of God to return to "*his old ways?*" Often the apostasy does not occur "*overnight.*" Instead, the devil often seems to work patiently, gradually eroding away the proper attitudes in the person's heart. The child of God may slowly begin to change his priorities. Whereas, he had never worked on weekends just after his conversion, somewhere along the way he may begin to pick up overtime here and there, occasionally missing the Lord's Day

assemblies. Perhaps he will find himself emphasizing things that once mattered so little in his life as a new Christian. If the heart is left unguarded, the devil will be able to gradually affect one's values and priorities. As go these, so goes the Christian, "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matt. 6:21).

Some wander off, seeking the past. Believe it or not, some converts may never grow to properly appreciate what they are given in Christ. Instead of maintaining a spiritual focus, being grateful for the "*victory in Jesus*" (1 Cor. 15:57), some cannot stop wishing for "*the way things were.*" They pine and yearn for their old lives. Many of these never genuinely repented prior to baptism; thus, they were never really converted (cf. Acts 2:38; 17:30). Those who begin to follow Jesus, only to choose the former life instead, are not worthy of the Lord or His kingdom. Jesus said, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:62). There is no hope for one who refuses to discern the "*true riches*" (cf. Luke 16:11).

Some wander off, seeking illicit pleasure. The Bible's message on this subject is clear: there *is* pleasure associated with many, if not all, sins. It was written of Moses,

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," (Heb. 11:25).

Unlike the devil's message, however, God's Word tells us "*the rest of the story.*" Whatever illicit pleasures are offered by sinful conduct, they certainly are not worth

their spiritual and eternal consequences! God inspired the wise man to write "*the way of transgressors is hard*" (Prov. 13:15b). Before returning to sin for the pleasure it affords, one should ask himself, "Is this really worth going to hell over?"

Some wander off, seeking prosperity. The allure of riches is a snare that casts down many souls. For those who emphasize the monetary and material, they often learn that many of the most lucrative lifestyles are incongruent to New Testament Christianity. Thus, they have a difficult choice to make: live the Christian life in Christian contentment or forsake the true paths for a way bearing more "*profit.*" Jesus warned,

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).

There are just some things that are worth more than any amount of money. Salvation is one of those things.

God cautions His children **not** to envy the prosperity of the wicked. We all might admit that it is easy to envy the rich at times. Nonetheless, those who are rich only toward themselves, and not toward God (cf. Luke 12:21), actually deserve our pity. The psalmist wrote,

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Psm. 73:3, 12).

But the psalmist went on to write of the sober realization he had concerning this matter. When he considered the ultimate end of the godless rich, he realized how pitiable they really are (Psm. 73:16ff). We today must remember the simple facts: while the rich may have a life of ease upon this earth, those who die without God will know only misery in eternity (cf. Luke 16:19-31). Money cannot buy everything.

REMEMBER How Repulsive Apostasy Is Before God

Spiritually speaking, one of the ugliest things to behold is an apostate child of God. To see someone receive and enjoy the salvation that is in Christ, only then to turn and utterly forsake it, is truly a disappointing sight, indeed. Peter described such a state with these inspired words.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:20-22).

The two illustrations employed by Peter to depict apostasy are graphic indeed. A dog will often return to the very substance that made him sick initially, and a sow thinks no more of her washing than to return to the filthy mire. These depictions do not cast the backslider in a favorable light. He returns to his original bane, sin, and having been washed by the blood of the Lamb, he makes himself filthy once more.

Surely the repulsiveness of apostasy will prevent us from returning to old, sinful ways. I close with the words of the Hebrews author, praying that all who read this manuscript will love their first love to the end (cf. Rev. 2:4-5).

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:28-29)?

Endnotes

1 **The Holy Bible, King James Version**, (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, n.d.). All references are to this version unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 7

What Can I Do When ...I Fall Away (From Faithful Service)?

Brandon Britton



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There are few conditions of man as deplorable and miserable as that of the unfaithful child of God. Peter minces no words when giving a quite vivid description of the Christian who has fallen away.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit

again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:20-22).

The reader will take note that Peter says, "*the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*" This is an interesting statement when you consider their condition in the beginning. Before they had, "*escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" they were lost. They were defiled, in sin, filthy, and therefore condemned to an eternity in hell. What could be worse than being lost in sin? Is it possible to be more lost? They are worse off now than before because at least they were ignorant before. Can you imagine a more terrifying and tragic condition than being an unfaithful Christian in torment for eternity? You will have a never ending time to remember and recall every invitation song that you ignored. You will have eternity to contemplate every brother in Christ who pleaded with you to repent and make your life right with God. The longsuffering of God that was once such a comfort will become a haunting curse.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved,

what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness (2 Peter 3:9-11).

So tragic is the condition of the unfaithful Christian that Peter declares,

it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

The illustration the apostle uses to describe the erring Christian paints a graphic and nauseating picture of how God views His prodigal children.

The dog is turned again to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

While the dog may be man's best friend, it certainly is not his most hygienic. Any dog owner is familiar with the eating habits of the canine. They will eat virtually anything. The image described in this text is that of a dog being offered the finest delicacies, only to turn from it to eat his own vomit. As offensive as this illustration may be, remember, the Lord gave it to show how despicable it is for a child of God to turn his back on the Lord who saved him.

The second illustration that the apostle uses is that of a, "*sow that was washed*" which returns to wallow in the mire. When I read these words I picture the pigs at the 4-H expo at the county fair. The participants go to great lengths to thoroughly wash the sow from head to hoof. They clean their snouts, their hooves, curl their hair, spray them with perfume

and put bows on their tails. They make a typically dirty and disgusting animal clean and cute. However, what will happen when they get back on the farm and turn them loose? In a matter of minutes the pig will return to the mud and muck and manure and roll in it. This is how the Lord sees the erring Christian. He has gone to great lengths to wash the sinner clean. It was through much time, effort, planning, pain, suffering, blood, sweat and tears that Jesus made it possible for all of our most vile and disgusting sins to be washed white as snow; yet some will return to the cesspool of sin and wallow in it the first chance they get.

While all of this gives us an understanding of the condition of the erring Christian, the question we are seeking to answer is, "What can I do when I fall away?" If a person finds himself in this condition, and wants to get out of it, what can he do? This is a question that is very near and dear to my heart, having once realized I was in the place of the one described so vividly by the apostle Peter. The conclusion I reached then, and still hold to today, is that there are only two options. These two options are personified by two brothers spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 21.

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not (Matthew 21:28-30).

While He was not addressing our specific question, in principle, the Lord makes it clear that there are two answers to this question. What can I do when I fall away? Rebel or repent. The two brothers in this brief parable represent the two options available to the erring Christian. One brother, though he initially rebelled against the will of his father, repented and obeyed. The second brother, though promising to be faithful, rebelled against the command of his father. This is precisely the condition in which so many Christians find themselves. Having realized they have fallen away, they are faced with two choices: rebel or repent.

REBEL

Since man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), he was created with free will. Freedom of choice has baggage that comes with it. Free will and the consequences of our choices are a package deal. God allows man the freedom to reject Him, His will and His ways, but the Lord also warns us that there is a great price to pay. This is the great lesson for us in the parable of the prodigal son and the lesson learned by the son.

And he said, A certain man had two sons:
And the younger of them said to his father,
Father, give me the portion of goods that
falleth to me. And he divided unto them his
living. And not many days after the younger
son gathered all together, and took his
journey into a far country, and there wasted
his substance with riotous living (Luke 15:11-
13).

The young man in this parable decides to abandon his father, his family, his home and all that is good in his life. You will note that his father allows him to leave (freedom of choice). Like so many in the church, the prodigal son yielded to the temptations of this world (1 John 2:15-16). While in his father's house he enjoyed fellowship with his father, his brethren and all the blessings that accompanied being in this house. When he leaves, he chooses to abandon all of these blessings, as do we if we choose to separate ourselves from our Father. Like the prodigal son, the erring Christian has no one to blame but self. In both cases the decision to leave the Father is made partly because the wayward child is seeking to engage in sinful activity which he does not want to do in the presence of the Father. It is no coincidence that the prodigal son, "*took his journey into a far country*" in order to waste, "*his substance with riotous living.*"

Although the father in the parable, and our Father, allows the child to go astray, this departure is not without consequences. Perhaps the most notable consequence is the loss of fellowship with the Father. The relationship between parent and child is a special and unique one that cannot be duplicated. There is just no way that someone can take the place of a parent. Satan is a god (the god of this world, 2 Cor. 4:4) and he is a father (the father of lies, John 8:44), but he cannot take the place of the Lord; yet so many buy into the lie that he can offer us everything Jehovah can, and more. Losing fellowship with our heavenly Father should not be taken lightly, as though it were some trivial or insignificant thing. Job felt the

helplessness and hopelessness associated with being separated from God. *"I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not"* (Job 30:20). Likewise, David pleaded with God for help when he felt as though he had been left alone. *"Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me"* (Psm. 27:7). When Israel was absorbed with sin and obsessed with idolatry, Jeremiah was warned by the Lord,

Therefore pray not thou for this people,
neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for
I will not hear them in the time that they
cry unto me for their trouble" (Jer. 11:14).

Is there a more heartbreaking situation in life, than for a child to be out of fellowship with a parent? What could be so bad that the Lord would *"disown"* His child?

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy,
that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have
separated between you and your God, and
your sins have hid his face from you, that
he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

We must not be tempted to blame or question God. It is not that God is not capable of reaching you (*the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save*). It is not the case that God is deaf or hard of hearing and cannot hear you (*neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear*). When man and God are not in fellowship it is strictly the result of man choosing to turn away from God (*your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear*).

The wayward son not only finds himself estranged from the father, but also from the entire family. He has a brother, and though no other immediate family is mentioned specifically, it would be fair to assume there were other family members present. There were also servants in his father's house from whom he was separated. They were not going to come to him because of where he was. He went away into a far country. He was in a place where there was riotous living.

Similarly, when a Christian is out of fellowship with God, he is out of fellowship with God's people, the church. A Christian cannot have spiritual fellowship with one whom the Lord has withdrawn His fellowship.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 1:10-11).

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them (Eph. 5:11).

In writing to the church of Christ in the city of Corinth, Paul instructed the brethren to withdraw their fellowship from one whom God had withdrawn His fellowship.

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's

wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? (1 Cor. 5:1-6).

The rebellious child of God chooses to lose his standing with the Father and his entire Christian family. This is not because the family is unwilling to forgive or receive the erring one back. In fact, the family is to do everything within its power to reach the wayward brother.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

Each Christian must decide for himself whether he will have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness or walk in the light.

The erring child of God will also realize that he is without help and hope. In the parable the young man takes his leave into a far country, loaded with his inheritance, yet he quickly discovers that he is on his own. Due in part to his reckless and foolish lifestyle (*wasted his substance with riotous living...he had spent all*), he finds himself broke and in need. When a famine arose in the land he found himself in want (Luke 15:14). He becomes so destitute that he is on the verge of starving yet, "*no man gave unto him*" (Luke 15:16).

The Christian who decides to turn away from his Father and family will find himself as spiritually destitute as this young man is physically. To the Christian, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (Psm. 46:1). These words can comfort the suffering saint, but to the unfaithful they only serve as a reminder of what they have forsaken. In leaving God you also leave His help. "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination*" (Prov. 28:9). We are reminded that, "*God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth*" (John 9:31). Since God is all knowing and everywhere present, we know that He audibly hears all, even sinners, but He will not listen to or harken to the prayers of those who live in rebellion. The wandering Christian should be mindful of the fact that Satan will gladly lead you astray, but if you find yourself in need of help, you will find that you are on your own. If you have fallen away from faithful service to God, the worst thing you can do is to continue further down the road of rebellion.

REPENT

We can rejoice that the parable of the prodigal son does not end with the wayward son dying in the squalor of sin. Although he made the foolish mistake of rebelling against the will of his father, he had the wisdom, courage and humility to recognize his need to repent. Perhaps one of the most profound statements in all of the Bible is found in this parable. Jesus tells us that the young man "*came to himself*" (Luke 15:17). In our modern slang we would say he, "*woke up.*" He was finally able to see the condition he was in. Having realized what he had lost and the condition he was in, he made the decision to go back home. However, when a child of God has gone astray, he cannot simply "*slip in the back door*" and pretend like nothing has happened and everything is normal. I once heard a preacher give this illustration, and I certainly think it would apply to this situation. Imagine if a husband went out to the store to get some milk, but then he never returned. Without explanation or warning he simply walks away and stays gone for two years. During his two years astray he never contacts his wife and family or gives them any idea where he might be. Finally, one day he walks back in the door, sits at the kitchen table and says "*Honey, what's for dinner?*", as if nothing had happened. Like Desi Arnez used to say to Lucy, "*You got some explainin' to do.*" Similarly, how foolish it is to think that a child of God can walk away from Him for any length of time, and then slip back into the church building one day and act as if nothing had happened. In this parable, as in the previous illustration, the Lord makes

it clear that there are some requirements for an unfaithful child of God to repent.

Like the son in the parable, the erring child of God must be humble enough to realize his condition and that he is in need of the help of others. The son says,

How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants (Luke 15:17-19).

Humility is not thinking little of yourself or that you are worthless, but knowing your place, your weaknesses, flaws and limits and functioning within them. His attitude was not, *"My father is a great man and because I am his son I am a person of privilege. The rules don't apply to me."* His attitude was one of humility. He would be thankful just to be allowed to be a servant of his father. While this sounds easy enough, sadly, pride has kept many an unfaithful Christian from repenting and confessing his sins. The erring Christian who lacks humility would be wise to harken to the words of Solomon. *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov. 16:18). Being a Christian does not exempt one from having to admit his wrongs and take the necessary steps to make things right. Being a Christian is not a free pass to live however you choose, without regard to the consequences.

Like the son from the parable, the Christian must have the courage to do something about his deplorable condition. The boy from the parable was not just practicing wishful thinking. He was not just crying over his condition and wishing things could be better; he had the courage to do something about it and make a change. The prodigal was willing to go back to his father and *"face the music."* Luke 15:20 says, *"And he arose, and came to his father."* While he was still in the pig pen, having already decided that he would return and make things right, he had not yet made things right with his father. Likewise, the erring Christian is not restored to a right relationship with God when he decides that he is going to change. It is not enough to be sorry for the wrong you have done and want to make it right, you must also take the necessary steps to reconcile with God. Since the son was the one who went astray, it was the son who had to come back home. The story was told of an older man and woman who had been married for over forty years. One day while riding down the road in their truck she asked her husband, *"Why don't we sit beside one another in the truck anymore? When we were young we always rode side by side."* To which the husband bluntly replied, *"Who moved?"* If a Christian finds himself estranged from the Lord it is because he went astray, not God. Since the Christian is the one who went away, he must also be the one to have the courage to come back.

The prodigal son was willing to finish what he had started. Having realized the condition he was in, being courageous enough to face the consequences of his actions, he was now ready to confess that he was

wrong. *"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son"* (Luke 15:21). The erring child did not try to hide what he had done or blame someone else for what he did. It was not his intention to come home and *"water down"* the seriousness of his sins. While he was not proud of what he had done, he was not too proud to acknowledge what he had done. He was man enough to do the wrong and he was man enough to admit his wrong. This is the attitude that the unfaithful Christian must have if he is ever to be right with God again.

I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin (Psm. 32:5).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Perhaps it would be most appropriate to close this study by briefly examining the father in the parable. All of the attention thus far has been devoted to the prodigal son and how he symbolizes the erring Christian. However, this should not overshadow the compassion, love and mercy of the Father. As soon as the son made the first step toward returning home, the Father immediately covered the distance between them.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father

saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

When the son confessed his wrongs, the Father prepared a celebration and restored His son to his original standing.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:22-24).

The forgiveness of the Father and restoration of the son was not reluctantly and half-heartedly given, nor was it a second rate acceptance. The Father called for the best robe, a ring, shoes and had his servants kill, not just a calf, but the fatted (best) calf. Similarly, when God forgives His penitent child, it is a complete forgiveness. One of the most telling and descriptive examples of the forgiveness and mercy of the Lord is found in the Psalms.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father

pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them (Psm. 103:8-18).

While the question is profound and deserves serious deliberation, the answer is really quite simple to understand, although sometimes difficult to obey. What can I do when I fall away? **Rebel or repent.**

Chapter 8

What Can I Do When ...I Doubt There Is A Heaven And Hell?

Robert Hatfield



Robert Hatfield is a Junior in High School at Giles County High, Pulaski, TN • From a small child, Robert has been trained in the way of the Lord • Faithful parents at East Hill • His grandfather (C. W. Hart) taught and encouraged him to lead singing and preach • Has preached several times at East Hill and nearby congregations • Directed weekly devotionals for training classes • One of many fine young teens in the church today.

Can one be sure that Heaven really exists? It is hard for the feeble mind of man to grasp the thought of an eternal paradise that Almighty God has prepared for His faithful followers. The suggestion of a place with no tears, pain, death, and sorrow seems like a fairy tale, rather than something that is real.

Paul (through inspiration) wrote of the hope of eternal life, "*which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*" God cannot lie. He inspired each word of the Bible, which is described in James 1:25 as the "*perfect law of liberty.*" This means that anything contained within the pages of the holy Scriptures is true. John was inspired by God to write: "*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*" The Psalmist wrote

that *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."* There are no contradictions or errors in the Bible. The Bible is right, it is the authority.

The Scriptures Prove Heaven's Existence

Notice the words of Jesus Christ as recorded in John 14:1-6:

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. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6).

In this part of the gospel according to John, Jesus is preparing for His death. He is aware that the time soon comes for Him to be crucified and depart this earth. The apostles have now learned this also. Jesus tells His disciples not to worry (*"Let not your heart be troubled"*). Obviously, up to this point Jesus had been the leader of the apostles for a while, and they were worrying about what they would do and what would become of them after He was crucified and left this earth. Knowing this, Jesus begins to comfort them by telling them not to worry because He is going to

prepare a place for them, and after that place is prepared, He will come again and get them to go with Him forever. If this lesson only covered verses 1-3, one could know assuredly that heaven is a real place. The point was brought out in the introduction that the Bible is perfect, there are no flaws in it. That being the case, when Jesus said *"I go to prepare a place for you,"* He meant it! That place that Jesus has gone to prepare is REAL!

Notice next verses 4 through 6. Jesus says, *"whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."* Thomas is a little confused by that statement, and would essentially say, *"We don't know where you are going, and how can we know the way?"* Jesus responds to Thomas by saying that HE is the way to heaven. Jesus says, *"no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* Only those members of Christ's body will be granted heaven as their eternal reward.

In answering the question of the reality of heaven, please allow our study to pause and look to the very purpose of Jesus Christ coming to this earth. Notice first that Christ gave up the glory of heaven to come and live among sinful men on a temporary and imperfect earth. The reason for his coming was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came so that He could die for the sins of every sinful being that has walked this earth. Why do we need remission of sins? Because we can not enter into heaven with unforgiven sins. If heaven is not real, there would have been no need for Jesus Christ to come! If heaven is not real, then God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are not real, because they reside in heaven.

The truth of the matter is that heaven is a real place! The faithful people of the past saw, were persuaded, and embraced the promise of eternal life (Heb. 11:13-16). The Psalmist said, "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*" (Psm. 23:6). John 5:28-29 teaches that all the graves shall rise up and come forth. Critics and scientists may deny its existence, but the Scriptures boldly teach the reality of heaven eternal!

Biblical Description Of Heaven

Man can not fully understand how beautiful heaven will be. The Bible teaches that it will be like no place on this earth. Notice how John (writing through inspiration) describes heaven:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:1-4).

Verse 4 is the most appealing to those who have

been laboring for the cause of Christ. God shall wipe away all tears – There will be no tears. There shall be no more death or parting in Heaven. John says that sorrow and crying will be no more, and pain will be gone. Faithful Christians can look forward to the day of judgment! This will be a chance to be with God and Jesus, our Savior! Heaven will be a time to reunite with faithful loved ones that have gone on before. This will be a time when the one that has toiled and labored for Christ can now rest and enjoy his wonderful mansion!

Paul, the inspired apostle, wrote concerning his home:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of
my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot
not. For I am in a strait betwixt two,
having a desire to depart, and to be with
Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:21-23).

In Philippians 1:22, Paul is looking at life and death. He notices that to live is to have the opportunity to serve God and produce fruit to further the boundaries of the church. Then, in verse 23, Paul makes mention of how much better things will be with Christ. Paul wanted to depart from this earth and the sufferings and hardships that come with living here. Paul had endured alot, and was continuing to do so. His desire was to die and be with his Lord. His advantages were all on the other side of eternity. In verse 24, Paul would go on to add that if God's Will was for him to remain alive, he would do so. His

remaining on earth would result in the conversion of lost souls and helping those who were already Christians. Paul was looking forward to a time when the burdens would be lifted and he would be able to see his Savior.

The Bible describes heaven as a place that will be filled with the righteous followers of God. Matthew 10:22 states that those who endure to the end shall be saved in heaven. Revelation 2:10 admonishes the Christian to be faithful unto death to receive the crown of life. Heaven will be a place where all those that have endured will be together. John would write in Revelation 22:14:

Blessed are they that do his commandments,
that they may have right to the tree of life,
and may enter in through the gates into the
city (Rev. 22:14).

Hebrews 5:8-9 states that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him. 2 Peter 3:13 teaches that righteousness dwells in heaven. Heaven is a place of glory, it is rest for the weary. Heaven is going to be a homecoming, a grand time of reunion, when all of God's faithful followers can be together. There will be no sin in heaven. With sin comes pain, sorrow, and tears - Such things can not enter through heaven's gates. *"How beautiful heaven must be!"*

How Long Will Heaven Last?

The lives that humans live on the earth are those of beginnings and endings. Such will not be the case with heaven. Matthew 25:46 describes heaven as *"life*

eternal." Romans 6:23 teaches that the gift of God is eternal life. The Scriptures teach that the faithful shall be caught up in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air and then shall they ever be with the Lord. The minds of men can not grasp the thought of eternity. The Christian's reward will never end!

Is Hell A Real Place?

The Bible has much to say about hell, just as it does about heaven. The Scriptures teach that the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone wherein also dwells false prophets. Those in the lake of fire and brimstone will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Rev. 20:10). John penned the book of Revelation (through the inspiration of God), and in verses 14-15 of chapter 20, he pictures the final judgment. John says that whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Jesus stated that those who are not saved in the time of judgment will hear, "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt. 25:41). We read our Savior likewise saying that the fire of hell is never quenched (Mark 9:47-48). Those that do not accept the word of God will suffer in "*flaming fire*" (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

The Scriptures speak! Hell is a real place. This is not something that a man dreamed up inside his head to scare people into living right, this is the truth as is given from Jehovah God.

Will God Really Send Someone To Hell?

There are skeptics today who would argue, "A loving God will not send anyone to hell." Obviously, such is not taught in Scripture. The verses that were just examined in the last point prove that hell exists, and that it is reserved for the devil and his followers, those "that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:8). Those that do not believe in hell or believe that no one will go there will many times use the argument, "Humans are created in the image of God, so He won't send us to hell." There is not a single verse in the entire Bible that supports such a statement! Genesis 1:26-27 states that God created man in His image, but that doesn't mean that man is exactly like Him. Human beings are very far away from being exactly like God. Our bodies are temporary and will not last, yet God is forever. When the Bible says that all were created in God's image, that doesn't mean that every man is exactly like God in all ways. God can work miracles, can a human? Obviously not. The image of God is one of love and free will. God can do anything! He gave humans the power to make their own choices, as well.

Human beings are free moral agents. Man can choose how he lives. He can choose to serve and obey God and be saved, or to reject God's commands and be eternally lost. One **CHOOSSES** his eternal destiny. It's not a matter of predestination (as some doctrines of men would teach). Man has the power to obey or not to obey the holy Scriptures. God wants all to be saved. 1 Timothy 2:4 speaks of our God, "Who will

have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." God wants all to be able to enter into heaven. Yet, God hates sin (not the sinner, but the sin in which that sinner partakes), and those that are in a sinful state can not enter into God's kingdom. If man rejects the Word of God, this is his choice. There is no one making him reject it. When one chooses to go to hell, by the life that he lives, it is not God that sends him there, but HIS OWN CHOICE. The one that chooses to live the life of sin likewise chooses the punishment that comes with sin.

Biblical Description Of Hell

The Bible describes hell, just as it describes heaven. Revelation 20:14-15 describes this place as *"the lake of fire."* In Matthew 25:30, Jesus would describe hell as a place of outer darkness. Hell will be a place of eternal destruction for the unfaithful (Matt. 10:28). In hell there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12).

Heaven is described as a place of rest, whereas hell is just the opposite. Revelation 14:11 describes hell as a place of torment forever...*"no rest day nor night."* The eternal fire is never quenched (Mark 9:47-48). Jesus described hell as a place of everlasting fire (Matthew 18:8).

Think of who will be in hell: the devil and his angels, all those who have committed crimes and sinned without receiving forgiveness since the beginning of time. Hell will only have those who chose to be disobedient to the Word of God (Rom. 2:8-12).

Hell will contain those who never obeyed God's commands (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), as well as those erring members of the body of Christ (2 Peter 2:20-22). Hell will be a place filled with murderers, liars, convicted criminals, as well as those who chose not to listen to God's holy Word.

How Long Will Hell Last?

Like heaven, hell will last forever. Hell will not be for a short time until everyone there has learned the lesson and is sorry for what they did. Hell will be a place that will last forever. The verses have already been mentioned where the Bible speaks of the "*everlasting punishment*" and "*everlasting destruction.*" The judgment that is made on judgment day will be final. Once God has spoken, there will never be another chance to repent of sins and be forgiven.

Conclusion

The Bible proves the existence of heaven and hell. We know that the Bible is always right. It never contradicts itself and is never wrong. Man's opinions may conflict with God's Word, but the Word will always prove correct.

When there is a question in life, the Bible is where we must turn. God has given us His Word, so that we might know what to do for salvation, and to tell the Christian of his eternal reward. If ever there is a doubt in our mind, the Bible has the answer. God has given it to us as an instruction book, and a guide. We must open it's sacred pages, study, and obey the information contained therein.

Chapter 9

What Can I Do When ...I “Burn Out” (Elder, Preacher, Teacher)?

Tom Holland



Director of the Nashville School of Preaching • Graduate of Athens Bible School, Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, Abilene Christian University, and Southern Illinois University Well-known author of over sixty books • Preaches for the Riggs church when not in numerous gospel meetings, weekend seminars • Tom proudly speaks of his five children and XX grandchildren.

Professional people sometimes “*burn out.*” Doctors, lawyers, professors, sometimes get so tired of doing basically the same things that the mind tends to rebel, the initial excitement of the called has waned, one thinks of other things he might be doing.

God knew that His people could “*burn out*” in His service so His Holy Spirit put the following words into God’s revelation to us:

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:9).

The word “*weary*” is a very interesting and informative word. The word means, “*to lack courage, lose heart, be fainthearted.*” (W.E. Vine, **Expository**

Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 70).

In this brief study we will emphasize the following:

- (1) The meaning of "Burn Out."
- (2) Manifestations of "Burn Out."
- (3) The means of coping with this problem.

MEANING

"Burn Out" means extreme discouragement. It means that one has lost the motivation to do and to be one's best. Duties may be performed because of one's professionalism, however, the personal satisfaction of rendering a service is no longer experienced.

The Bible has a verbal picture of people who have "burned out" in living the Christian life. "Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:12). Haven't we seen dejected people use the hands to emphasize their statement, "I give up."

God's people can be discouraged by problems with family members, loss of a job, unfaithfulness of members of the church, personal illness and/or illness of family members, apostasy of a congregation, or the problem of age.

MANIFESTATIONS

One can know that he/she is burning out when there is a loss of heart in and/or for the Lord's work. The loss of heart is a contrast to the devotion, excitement, and the satisfaction in the Lord's service that one initially experienced.

Another indication of "*Burn Out*": the negatives become so apparent and dominate in one's thinking that the positive aspects of the work or service seem unimportant. There are no utopian jobs, that is, jobs with no negatives. The Lord's work is a demanding life. It calls for sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). However, there are so many positives: joy, peace, hope, fellowship with the Lord in His Word (2 Cor. 6:1), fellowship with the Lord's people, the knowledge that no service for the Lord goes unnoticed by the Lord (Matt. 25:34-40, especially verse 40).

Regret may be another indication that one is burning out. He and she regrets that they made the decision to become a preacher, an elder, a deacon, a teacher, a wife or mother.

Constantly thinking of another vocation and imagining that the new career will always be personally rewarding and satisfying is a sign that one is burning out with the present job or profession.

Preachers may know that they are burning out when there is no longer a joy in studying and preparing sermons; when the sermon preparation is delayed until Sunday approaches and something has to be done. There is much difference in having to say something from the pulpit and having something to say that one believes will bless the lives of those who hear it.

MEANS OF COPING

One is not at the mercy of "*Burn Out*." A person may take action to prevent burning out, or if they

sense that they are burning out there are things that can be done. One does not have to merely react, he/she may take action in dealing with "Burn Out."

We can apply the counsel that Jesus gave the apostles when they were so involved in serving the needs of others that they "*had no leisure so much as to eat*" (Mark 6:31). Jesus said, "*Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while*" (Mark 6:31). There are times we need to get away from the demands of the people. Our "*desert place*" may be the golf course, the river or lake, a shopping trip to another city, a vacation, even a mini-vacation.

Another thing we can do is develop an interest in a satisfying hobby. The hobby is a mental diversion. The mind, like the body, can grow tired. The mind needs rest too.

We may cope with burning out by connecting our work to some rewarding or personally satisfying dimension of the work. My work is connected to writing books. The anticipation of producing a book challenges me to keep working.

We may also cope with "Burn Out" by following God's exhortation:

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Let us look to the spiritual and/or physical needs of people and visit, write, call, and if occasion demands provide what we can to help them meet their needs.

Finally, we can keep the goal of the service before us and we may be assured that *“in due season we shall reap if we faint not.”*

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Chapter 10

What Can I Do When ...Church Division Wrecks A Congregation?

Dave Miller



A native of Arizona, Dave is the Chairman of the Department of New Testament Studies at Apologetics Press • The host of the nationally televised TV program “The Truth In Love.” His formal education includes 3 masters degrees and a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. His book, *Piloting the Strait*, deals with the changes affecting churches of Christ. Deborah and Dave have 4 grown children, 3 grandchildren and reside in Montgomery, Alabama.

New Testament Christians in America are witnessing firsthand the spiritual and moral destruction of their country. We are literally being bashed and bombarded with daily manifestations of hostility toward God and the Bible. If we do not trust deeply in God and stay calm, the present social turbulence will cause us to become cynical, negative, depressed, suspicious, panicked, and irritable.

Is **unity** in the body of Christ something for which we ought to strive? God wants every Christian to be united and at peace with every other Christian (Phil. 2:1-4). He wants us to be knit together cohesively in love and fellowship (Eph. 4:1-3,16; 1 John 1:5-7).

He wants us working together harmoniously to accomplish the same objectives (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Satan knows that if he can disrupt the local congregation from within or without, he can thwart the good work that that congregation is doing to advance the cause of Christ. Division and discord due to petty jealousy, immaturity, prideful self-assertiveness, and unjustified disagreement have racked far too many congregations of the Lord's people over matters of opinion.

What is the faithful Christian to do when he or she is in a congregation where internal conflict arises? The Bible provides many principles to assist us in how to behave. **In the first place, we ought to examine ourselves frequently in order to make certain that we maintain pure motives.** Genuine, deep soul-searching is necessary, since we are masters of convincing ourselves that our motives are pure when, in fact, they are not. We find it easy to think the best about ourselves while thinking ill of our brothers. You remember how Miriam and Aaron **said** their beef with Moses was over their authority as leaders, when it was actually over whom Moses married (Num. 12:1-2). We tend to beat around the bush and camouflage our real motives. But God knows our hearts and will bring our hidden motives out into the open on the Day of Judgment. We would do well to be honest with ourselves this side of eternity.

Second, it is imperative that we maintain focus on the real issue—not side issues that inevitably surface after the fact and divert attention away from the central concern. When turmoil develops in a

congregation, as time goes on it becomes extremely difficult for an outsider to ascertain the real issues. A thicket of confusion develops as the division and conflict escalates, so much so that even those in the middle of the turmoil can lose sight of the original and actual issues. Satan will, in fact, attempt to blur the issue and divert people away from the crux of the matter. He does not want a direct confrontation between truth and error, since error will be exposed in the eyes of the faithful. So he tries to bury the central issue with several side issues. When one is personally embroiled in the conflict, it is easy to lose one's own focus—especially when insult and injury comes your way—rather than remaining centered on how God views the matter and how He would have it to be resolved.

Third, tremendous self-control, patience, and humility is essential. When one sees wolves reeking havoc on the body of Christ, preying upon the innocent, craftily sowing discord and implementing a subversive agenda, it is easy to panic and become reckless or irrational. Jesus is the supreme example of One who kept His cool under fire. Even in those events leading to His death, He maintained His dignity and calm repose (1 Peter 2:19-23). A Christian must return good for evil at all times (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17,28). It is easy to submit to self-pity when one is being treated unjustly, or the cause of truth and right is being trampled underfoot (1 Kings 19:4ff.). But God wants us to see the bigger picture from His vantage point, recognizing that He is in control and will set all things straight sooner or later (Rom. 12:19). In the meantime,

setting a good example of how to endure affliction, persecution, and hardship while remaining faithful is invaluable and indispensable.

Fourth, in one's desire to help the situation as effectively (and scripturally) as possible, **it is necessary to rally the faithful**. People often need assistance in recognizing what is happening, what issues are at stake, and the dynamics/politics that are in play. Jesus urged the Twelve to be "*wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (Matt. 10:16). Paul said to "*walk circumspectly*" (Eph. 5:15). Evil men who wish to destroy the local church will resort to subterfuge, deceitful tactics, and underhanded ploys. We must be open, honest, and "*above board.*" But we must also be shrewd in our dealing with the "*enemies of the cross*" (Phil. 3:18), attempting to anticipate their strategies and intentions.

Fifth, whether you are on the inside of a congregation undergoing division, or you are on the outside attempting to make sense of what is happening, **it is absolutely imperative that you investigate and get your facts straight**. You do not want to be guilty of misassessing the situation and siding with the evil element. The Bible has much to say on this point.

In Deuteronomy 19:15-20, God underscored the fact that a **single** witness was insufficient to convict a person of sin. **Two** or **three** were necessary to confirm the factuality of a matter. By "*witnesses,*" God meant **independent** witnesses – not **one** who then relates his observations to two or three others who, in turn, take his word for it and become official members of a group of putative "*witnesses.*" Rather, each of the witnesses

must be an independent, firsthand observer. God wanted thorough investigation—not hearsay—before any action was to be taken against a person. Have you noticed how easily we believe what we’re told—especially when it is reported to us by someone whom we know and trust. “*Well, if so and so said it, it must be true.*” Folks, are we so naive as to think that even otherwise “good” Christians can misrepresent the truth? Some can and will lie outright. We can also unconsciously misrepresent a situation because we are human, emotional, and have our own prejudices and blind spots.

If an accusing brother’s charges were found to be false, the false witness was to receive the punishment that he hoped to inflict on his brother. If every person who accused another person had to verify and substantiate his claims or suffer severe consequences, far less gossip and innuendo would be generated and perpetuated. If a person had to **prove** a clear-cut, solid charge against a brother, or else be punished himself, he likely would keep his suspicions to himself until he could prove his point conclusively. **That is precisely what God desires!**

Yet someone retorts: “*But if you wait to remove all doubt, it may be too late to prevent damage!*” This mindset is not only an indefensible perspective, but also betrays an attitude of presumptuousness in questioning the wisdom of God’s own directives. Indeed, the human tendency is to spread one’s premature assessment of a situation and, when pressed to be more specific and to verify the assessment, to magnify, amplify, embellish, and “*beef up*” the charges so that they will

sound more credible than they actually are.

In Deuteronomy 13:12-14, God made provision for the eradication of "*liberalism*" among the Israelites. But He enjoined a threefold prerequisite to such purging: "*investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly*" (NASB). How easy it is to pride oneself in the ability to sniff out supposed "*error*" and to color one's perceptions to see what one is predisposed to see, and then to compound this sin of the heart by going public with one's half-baked conjurings. What motivates a person who seems to **want** to find error? If he fails to "*investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly,*" the evidence suggests his motives are, at best, questionable, and at worst, impure.

In Joshua 22, the Israelites heard that the two-and-a-half trans-Jordanic tribal groups were apostatizing—going "*liberal*" (i.e., loosing where God had bound). The whole nation was so upset that they prepared to go to war. One cannot question their zeal for faithfulness to God. But, according to the Bible, enthusiasm for adherence to doctrinal purity must be tempered with a love for truth, justice, and fellowman—lest one's zest for conformity cause one also to disobey. Fortunately, some within the western tribes had enough sense, discretion, and wisdom not to "*jump the gun,*" but first to send a delegation headed by Phinehas to investigate and ascertain the facts.

Some members of the church seem to have been born into the kingdom in an "*attack mode.*" Their propensity for running roughshod over others, under the pious guise of loyalty to Truth, is painfully evident

in the host of congregations that have been rent asunder without genuine justification. They seem disinterested in acquiring **all** the facts or making certain they have not embraced a slanted, inaccurate perspective. Rather, they seem more interested in simply "*striking while the iron is hot.*" They are actually situation ethicists who believe "*the end justifies the means,*" as long as the "*end*" is purported to be doctrinal purity. They seem to think that as long as they are upholding Bible doctrines, they can be as brutal, unscrupulous, and careless as they choose. Do they believe their obvious **lack of love** for their neighbor is hidden from view? Are they honestly convinced that such behavior is excusable on the basis of their self-righteous love for straining gnats (Matt. 23:24)?

How ironic that those who think they are dedicated to righteousness and doctrinal purity are, in fact, conducting themselves in an unChristlike manner. Jesus wants every fact confirmed (Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). Christians are **not even to consider** a charge made against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). These passages are attempting to head off the very thing that occurs so frequently among Christians. The passages are not intended to shield the guilty. But they do demonstrate that it is extremely important to God that fellow Christians not be prematurely accused or condemned. God wants every individual Christian to possess a genuine love for fellowman (Rom. 12:9-21). If we had that kind of devotion for each other, we still would oppose error, still covet doctrinal purity, and still

ardently defend the faith. But we would engage in all of these actions with a kind and gentle spirit, giving each other every benefit of the doubt, approaching each other out of an attitude of humility and lowliness, harboring no animosity or envy in our hearts. We would patiently hope, think, and believe the best about one another (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Such a mental posture would put an end to the “shoot first, ask questions later” temperament with which some seem to be obsessed. It would replace the panic and hysteria being generated in our perilous times with a sensible, rational, mature appraisal of each individual—in or out of the church—on his own merits. We would couple that appraisal with genuine attempts to assist him in coming to a correct understanding of God’s will—**before** we go public. While Jesus was on Earth, His strongest denunciations and severest criticisms were leveled against those who were guilty of this accusing mentality. If anyone in the church today deserves to receive similar condemnation, it is those who manifest this attitude. On the other hand, it is easy to allow one’s heart to be infected with feelings of resentment, animosity, and contempt for such individuals. Satan is constantly on the alert to lure a person into a heart condition that places his soul in jeopardy. Therefore, each one must rise above and transcend the personalities, the pettiness, and the inflamed emotions that only serve to sidetrack one from the single-sighted commitment to God’s will for people. Neither emotional attachment nor detachment must be allowed to derail one from the course of clear thinking that God expects in light

of His written revelation.

Are there “*liberals*” in the church? Absolutely. One need not rely on hearsay or what someone thought they overheard. Books, tapes, and articles that promote doctrinal laxity within our ranks are abundant. We must not allow the over-reaction of some to cause us to under-react to a very real problem. However, we must learn from God’s Book and from history. We must be “*swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (James 1:19). We must be certain that our own consciences are clear, unmotivated by pride, popularity, or pettiness (James 3:13-18; 4:1-12). We must not allow ourselves to be swept into the whirlpool of hysteria and thereby neutralize our ability to wage war with Satan intelligently and effectively. We must not be guilty of prematurely accusing our brothers, or lacking substance in verifying our viewpoint. The cause of Christ is not helped by such erratic, reckless displays of zeal. In fact, such tactics aid Satan’s assault on the church. They “*cloud the water*” and obscure the true issues, making Satan’s ploys more difficult to identify and address.

Sixth, pray, pray, pray. We ought to be people who pray everyday (1 Thess. 5:17)—but especially when we are facing trying times that require us to muster all of the self-control and savvy we can possibly muster. We desperately need God’s guidance and providential assistance. We need His help so that we do not misstep and do damage to His cause. Souls are at stake! We will give account for our involvement, input, and actions. We had better beg Him to aid us in our quest to please Him and do His will on all

occasion.

Seventh, be willing to endure hardship (2 Tim. 2:3). It is much easier and far more tempting to “*cut and run*” when one encounters heavy fire (1 Kings 19:3; Mark 14:50-52). The emotional stress of congregational strife can be overwhelming—even taking a toll on one’s physical health. But we must be willing to “*endure afflictions*” (2 Tim. 4:5), to “*share in the sufferings for the gospel*” (2 Tim. 1:8), and to “*partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy*” (1 Peter 4:13).

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, **of which all have become partakers**, then you are illegitimate and not sons (Heb. 12:7-8, emp. added).

The faithful Christian is one who is willing to sacrifice self in the midst of hardship, rather than bailing prematurely. Again, souls are at stake!

Conclusion

May God help us to be humble people—to be on guard constantly for the pride of life rearing its ugliness in our own souls. Humility will cause us to go slow, to consider other people’s feelings, even as we attempt to defend the faith and stand for the truth. We will hope for the best and believe the best about one another (1 Cor. 13:4-7). We will not be rude or store up grievances against each other. We will be longsuffering, i.e., suffer long with each other. God

resists the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Prov. 6:17). The more we pour over the Bible, inculcating its precepts deep within our spirits, the more we will have the necessary insight and skill to size up the circumstances that we encounter in life. In order to prepare ourselves for the conflicts that face the church in our generation, we need a healthy dose of Peter's inspired instruction:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22).

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Chapter 11

What Can I Do When ...I Don't Want To Do What God Says?

Curtis A. Cates



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God is the Creator of the universe and of mankind; we are His offspring and are subject to His will. He has authority over all people and all things. Man has always been responsible to

...fear Jehovah thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments....Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deut. 6:2-4).

Christ stated this to be "*the first and great commandment*" (Matt. 22:37-38). He also stated

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

In the Christian dispensation, Christ has been given all authority in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18); *"he is Lord of all"* (Acts 10:36), having *"been made both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). God and Christ, His only begotten Son, are to be obeyed, else one cannot be saved from sin (Heb. 5:8-9). You see dear reader, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), and *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). Transgression of God's law (lawlessness) separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2), and the eternal consequences of sin is death; that is its wages (Rom. 6:23; Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9).

We need to see the seriousness of refusing to listen to God.

Behold then the goodness and severity of God; toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou shalt be cut off (Rom. 11:22).

Paul warned the Hebrews,

For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:30-31).

"Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men," Paul wrote the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:11). Why? Notice the preceding verse:

For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (5:10).

The subject under discussion is, *“What can I do when I don’t want to do what God says?”* This is a question of great, extreme seriousness that has present and eternal consequences. When I have *“bowed up my back”* and refuse to listen to my Maker, that is serious! I need to look very closely at what happens when I have such an attitude. There are great lessons that I need urgently to learn from when sin first entered this world, for its implications are among the most profound that I have contemplated. They are found in Genesis chapter three; I can learn great, soul-searching truth from the book of beginnings—in this case, the beginning of refusing to listen to God. I can realize the following things when I decide I do not want to do what God says.

I WILL LISTEN TO THE WRONG VOICES

Adam and Eve were placed into the beautiful Garden of Eden. They were in beautiful communion with the Father, and they busied themselves in dressing and keeping the Garden, in being in sweet, blessed communion with God, and in enjoying the fruits of a blessed homelife and marriage together. They participated in eating of the tree of life, and they ate of the fruits of the trees of the Garden. This amazing paradise, surely, could never end—and yet it did!

Because they were created with free will, being the offspring of God and made in His image, they had to be creatures of choice; they had to love and obey the Father out of the wishes and desires of their hearts, not out of instinct and control of their Creator (as the mere animals). They had to have alternatives, and those commands and restrictions were:

And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

That was absolute, objective law, and they were responsible to obey God. The consequences were severe—separation from God, death.

Every life has priorities. The law of God governing those priorities is based upon His very nature. As His nature cannot change (Heb. 13:8); therefore, His law is inviolable. He who snuffs at it shall not be unpunished, because of God's very nature of holiness and justice. Eve knew that; and yet, she did not take it seriously to heart. It was not top priority in her life;

Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:10).

Eve could have made the same choice as did Christ in the wilderness, but she did not.

Moses records by inspiration of God,

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field, which Jehovah had made.

And he said to the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? (Gen. 3:1).

There are always other voices (in addition to God's voice) which clamor for our ears. And, like Eve, when listening to God and doing His will is not priority number one (Matt. 6:33), we will give heed to the wrong voices. She listened to the archenemy of God and man! She listened not to the voice of love but of hate, not to the voice of protection but of destruction, not to the voice of eternal life and joy but of death and misery, not of truth and right but of lies and falsehood, not of blessed unity and fellowship but of diversity and strife, not of innocence but of guilt!

I WILL BE OPEN TO DEADLY DECEPTION

It is only the truth that will make us free (John 8:32). God had spoken truth to Eve, and she very well knew and understood that truth spoken by her Creator. (The lie of modernism and liberalism, even propagated by some in the Lord's church, that man cannot understand God is straight from the devil and is designed to deceive.) In fact, she knew the regulations of God so well that she repeated it. When asked by Satan,

Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die (3:2-3).

Indeed, God knew (and knows) how to communicate with His offspring, and Eve understood Him. It was so vitally important that she not eat, the implication is that God explicitly or implicitly assured her not even to touch it. One does not “*play*” with fire; we truly are not to “*play*” with sin!

But, Satan is smooth; he is cunning; he is subtle (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3). Sometimes, he even appears as an angel of light, as do his ministers (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Yes indeed, she had left herself vulnerable for deception (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9-12); it leads to believing a lie and being damned for those “*who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (2:11-12). Why? “*...because they received not the love of the truth*” (2:11).

Satan completely negated the warning of God: “*Ye shall **not** surely die!*” And she fell for it; just imagine that. And, dear reader, with the attitude not to do what God says, we are completely vulnerable to Satan’s lies. He convinced Eve that God was trying to deprive her of happiness. Many today have fallen for that deceit; and, reality is that I can too. He asked whether God had forbidden her to partake of even one tree in the Garden, and Eve answered, “*yes.*” Do you see his ploy? He suggests that God was trying to restrict her to keep her from “*having any fun.*” How handy it was to “*forget*” all of the other trees which God **did permit** them to eat! My mind harkens back to my childhood when my father would prohibit me from participation in something not good for me or sinful in God’s eyes. He just “*didn’t want to have any fun.*” I, at that moment, would not remember all of

the other great things I was permitted to do. Man does not want to be "*deprived*." We want to make our own decisions. And that, dear reader, is deadly! It was for Eve. And then, Satan stated that God did not want Eve to be as He, "*knowing good and evil*." But, what Eve would have given (had she been able) not to have been deceived and not to have learned and experienced sin's vicious and deadly consequences! I must tell myself that sin flies under false colors, that it promises what it cannot deliver. Whoever is deceived by sin "*is not wise*" (Prov. 20:1; et al.).

I WILL BE LIFTED UP WITH PRIDE AND DEVELOP THE ATTITUDE OF SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE AND INDEPENDENCE

How true it is that "*Pride goeth before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall*" (Prov. 16:18). Eve should have told herself that "*fools hate knowledge*" (1:22). God is the very epitome of wisdom:

God understandeth the way thereof, And he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, And seeth under the whole heaven....Then did he see it and declare it; He established it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:23-28).

Eve was so deceived by Satan and self-deceived that she reached the conclusion that she knew better than God; her wisdom about whom to follow and

about the forbidden fruit was superior to that of the infinite Creator, the One who spoke the universe into existence, the One who knew man, for He created man. Can you possibly imagine the folly of thinking that the creature knows more than the omniscient Being? We can often see the foolishness of little children thinking and acting like and rebelling against their parents because they “*know more*” than their parents. Imagine the powerful deception of Satan when he convinces me that I know more than God! I need to preach to myself about that, lest I act upon such rebellious thoughts and destroy myself, as did Eve! If I, on the other hand, preach to myself that there is no God to be heeded in my life, I am termed by God foolish (Psm. 14:1). As a result, I will be “*corrupt*,” do “*abominable works*,” and not do “*good*” (14:2).

I WILL MAKE DECISIONS BASED UPON THE APPEAL AND LUSTS OF THE FLESH

When Eve failed to listen to God and to do what He said, it was the flesh that made the decision.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat (Gen. 3:6).

Man has a choice, either to sow unto his own flesh or unto the Spirit (Gal. 6:8). We must never think that the choice we make is inconsequential; “*God is not*

mocked" (6:7). To refuse to obey God is to turn one's life over to the flesh, to be controlled by the evil one. Notice the antithesis of doing the will of the Father (1 John 2:15-17). Paul warned,

But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary thee one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:15-17).

Paul then details the works of the flesh, the practicing of which keeps one from inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:16-21). Paul also described those who had walked after the flesh thus:

...among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desire of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph. 2:3).

They had been led by "*the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience,*" Satan (Eph. 2:2).

What a contrast to Eve's refusal to listen to God and being controlled by the flesh were the refusal of Joseph to succumb to the temptations of Potiphar's wife and the refusal of Daniel to eat the king's unclean meats and drink his fermented wine (Gen. 39:1-12; Dan. 1:8)! And when they were determined to obey God rather than the flesh, "*Jehovah was with Joseph*" (Gen. 39:2), and "*God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of the prince of the eunuchs*" (Dan. 1:9). Eve had no such blessing and protection from

God. Solomon learned the hard way that

This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13).

To live a life of fulfilling the desires of the flesh is folly; it is to neglect one's own soul. The rich farmer's life was wrapped up in things; he preached to himself that things (his grain and his goods, eating, drinking, and being merry) were his most valuable possessions.

But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:20-21).

He should have preached to himself, "*My soul is my most valuable possession,*" for our Lord stated,

Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (12:15).

When I refuse to do what God says, the flesh is ruling my life and making decisions which have eternal implications. The rich man prepared all his life to go to torments (Luke 16:19-31); Judas went "*to his own place*" (Acts 1:25), and Felix put off obedience to the Lord until he had a "*convenient season*" – which never came (Acts 24:25).

Also, we must be beware of the progressive nature of temptation and sin. When Achan "*committed a trespass in the devoted thing*" [the city of Jericho and all therein was devoted to Jehovah, Josh. 7:1; 6:17], *Achan said I saw the mantle, the silver, and the gold, then I coveted them, and took them; and behold, they are hid in the earth*" (7:21). He could not dig deeply enough to hide this sin; his flesh made the decision. He had troubled Israel (7:25). "*the anger of the Lord was kindled*" (7:1), and Achan paid the severe price of sin. Our decisions determine our destinies.

I WILL EXCUSE MY WRONGS AND OFTEN BLAME OTHER PEOPLE

When Adam and Eve had transgressed the law of God by eating the forbidden fruit and "*knew they were naked*" and tried to cover themselves with the inadequate fig leaves, they heard God's voice walking in the Garden; their sin had changed things, and they tried to hide from God's presence. But, no one can hide their actions from God. He asked, "*Where art thou?*" God never asks questions for information but for contemplation. Adam acknowledged that they were naked and were trying to hide.

Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast
thou eaten of the tree, whereof I com-
manded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

Each of them tried to make excuse and blame others. Adam blamed God and his wife, Eve said the devil made her do it, and I take it the devil did not have anyone to blame. That was hardly the type confession

God wanted; sin tries to shift the blame, in order to appear innocent. We can deceive some people some of the time, but we cannot deceive God any of the time.

As long as we try to deny guilt and use the blame game, we will never reform our lives. We live in a generation which blames everyone or everything but the guilty party. But, when I attempt to blame others for my sins and attempt to cover them and sweep them under the rug, may I remember and give heed to inspiration's words,

He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy (Prov. 28:13).

Blaming others took away neither the shame, the guilt, nor the penalty of sin in the eyes of God.

I WILL SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Sin separates from God (Isa. 59:1-2), for God is *"of purer eyes than to behold evil, and thou canst not look on perverseness"* (Hab. 1:13). He is omnijust, and all transgressions must be punished; *"Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means clear the guilty"* (Nah. 1:3). Therefore, Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, *"lest he take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever"* (Gen. 3:23). Because man has not been able to get back to the tree of life (the veritable fountain of youth), pain and sickness and death have passed upon all. That, dear reader, should make us hate sin with a passion and

to flee from the destructive influence of the evil one, Satan, the archenemy of God and man! Brother Rex A. Turner, Sr. repeatedly stated, "*Never underestimate your enemy.*" That is **especially** true of Satan, our vicious adversary. He rules our lives when God does not! And the rule is the same as always:

For he that soweth to his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption (Gal. 6:8).

I WILL CAUSE OTHERS AROUND ME TO SUFFER

My actions have consequences not only in my life but also in the lives of others. When Eve gave in to temptation and ate of the forbidden fruit, "*she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat*" (Gen. 3:6). Thus, both were separated from God, and pain, suffering, and death were the result. But, think of the influence upon the children; Cain killed his brother Abel and was driven from God's presence. Grievous sins followed.

When my attitude is that "*I don't want to do what God says,*" I desperately need to ask myself the question, "*What kind of legacy am I leaving for my children, my grandchildren, and for my future generations yet unborn?*" Am I prepared flippantly and irresponsibly before God to make decisions which may very well mean eternal destruction for my descendants? I must contemplate seriously influencing others to be lost. And, it is the case that the better person I am without being a Christian, the more people I am going to influence to disregard what God

says. Most people are not going to look up to and follow the person in the gutter, but they will imitate the "*good moral man.*"

I WILL MISS OUT ON THE BEST AND GREATEST BLESSINGS GOD HAS TO OFFER

God wants me to be as truly happy as possible. Think of the tremendous joys and benefits of being in fellowship with her Creator and of being in the beautiful Garden of Eden, yet Eve forfeited and gave them all up in refusing to do what God said. God's plans and provisions for Adam and Eve rejected for a moment of sensual pleasures, which lasted only "*for a season*" (Heb. 11:25). Was it worth it? Was losing the indescribable joy and blessings worth it? All sin has its pay day, sooner or later. With Eve, part of it came sooner than later. With us it may come later than sooner, and consequently,

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil... but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Eccl. 8:11-13).

CONCLUSION

Thanks be to God, though, there is hope! When Adam and Eve sinned, God began moving toward the cross and redemption from sin. God told Satan

that the seed of the woman (Christ, the only begotten Son of God, virgin-born) would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), which promise Adam and Eve accepted by faith (3:20; 4:1) and to which the shedding of the blood of innocent animals in order adequately to clothe Adam and Eve pointed (as did all of the bloody sacrifices in the Old Testament) (3:21; John 1:29; Luke 19:10; Col. 3:14-17; Heb. 10:1-14; 2:6-10; et al.).

What do I do when I do not want to do what God says? I think about my tremendous loss; I think about the tragic influence on those I love; I think about the goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance (Rom. 2:4); I think about the brutal and vicious mistreatment of the Christ—*“for even me”*; I think about the prayers of those who love me deeply; and I think of the merciful Father who awaits *“with compassion,”* looking for the opportunity to run, fall, upon my neck, kiss me, and give me shoes, a royal robe and a golden signet ring, as with the prodigal son (Luke 15:20-24). The Spirit through His Word and the beautiful bride of Christ, the people of God, plead with me to come (Rev. 22:17). I have no guarantee of tomorrow!

There is but one way to overcome sin and to overcome all of the siren voices which cry out for my destruction. *“The way of the cross leads home.”* Genesis 3 is a chapter of indescribable tragedy but also of glorious triumph!

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What Can I Do When...

***In The Home
Children
And
Parents***

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Chapter 12

What Can I Do When ...I Am Approaching Marriage

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Received his formal education at Cleveland State University, University of Louisville, and Memphis School of Preaching, Southern Christian University, Harding Graduate School of Religion • Dean of Academics at the Memphis School of Preaching • Author of **The Book God Breathed, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, A Study of the Book of Romans** • Keith and Dorothy have three children and four grandchildren.

An author once asked a friend which of the writer's many books was the best. The friend said that the answer was easy, "*the next one.*" Having written several hundred manuscripts for lectureships and periodicals I am no longer able to judge which is "*best.*" I do know that the "*next one*" is always hardest to write simply because I try to approach each subject with fresh material. However, in this instance some of the material for this subject of pre-marriage is taken from my manuscript for the 2003 Power Lectureship edited by B. J. Clarke.¹

I have tried, in this brief essay, to incorporate the spiritual and practical in terms of choosing a life partner. Theological considerations as to the

appropriateness of marrying a non-Christian are included, but only as such apply to the ramifications of a sound marriage. No scripture, known to me, forbids marrying an eligible person of whatever faith although there **are** dangers in uniting with the worldly.

Every marriage requires hard work and any writing on the subject becomes suggestion in most instances because of the complexities of human beings. My gratitude goes to the great East Hill congregation in Pulaski, Tennessee for hosting this lectureship and to Paul Sain for challenging me with this "*next one*" to write.

INTRODUCTION

There are important decisions to make in life, but most Christians would likely choose their decisions to obey the Christ as number one. The next most important are their choices of life partners to marry.

In the western world today marriage no longer has the sacred character that was common even just fifty years ago. For example, Thomas wrote that a "*U. S. airways contest invites children to write an essay about their father or 'father figure' for Father's Day.*"²

The divorced Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, tells a young girl in a TV commercial about "*Prince Charming*" and the ideal marriage. "*Of course, if it doesn't work out,*" she says, the child will have to become familiar with stocks and bonds to secure her own future. This image of marriage, parenthood, conditional love, and the modern family reflects reality. According to new Census Bureau figures, the American nuclear family has exploded and the

traditional families of the past are becoming more difficult to locate in the debris. While slightly more than 51% of us live in married couple households (down from 55% a decade ago), the number of single-parent households has jumped 21% to 7.5 million. There was a 72% increase in the number of cohabiting couples - from 3.1 million in 1990 to 5.4 million in 2000. Most troubling of all, the statistics show that nearly 30 percent of children do not live with any two parents, including stepparents.³

Obviously, from the above 2000 Census Bureau findings the careful choice of a life-long mate and the Christian commitment to stay together for "*better or worse*" are shockingly missing in today's society. What is evident is self-centeredness and the view that living together is an arrangement to be terminated at the whims of either partner.

Therefore, this study will attempt to prove first of all that God has dictated some guidelines for choosing a mate. Second some practical suggestions will be made and, third, some causes will be given as to good and poor mate selections.

BIBLICALLY CHOOSING A MATE

The biblical wisdom is that "whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favor of the Lord" (Prov. 18:22).⁴ The foregoing verse harmonizes with, "For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD" (Prov. 8:35). From the foregoing edicts from God one can easily deduce that it is a wise and good thing to be married, for "A *good* (emphasis mine, K.M.) *man obtaineth favour of the*

LORD: *but a man of wicked devices will he condemn*" (Prov. 12:2).

One informed psychologist has written however that:

All too often, people marry before acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to take care of their mates: to meet their emotional, mental, and physical needs. One of the ironies in our society is that a person has to have four years of training to receive a plumber's license, but absolutely no training is required for a marriage license.⁵

The problem, then, of finding a mate should not be left to chance for, biblically, one is seeking a "*good thing*" and societally one needs some ability and some skill emotionally, financially, and mentally to maintain a lasting marriage.⁶ Biblically, the **good** man as he **ought** to be, will seek a **good** woman as she **ought** to be. "*House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent (well-favored, shecal)*⁷ *wife is from the Lord*" (Prov. 19:14). "*Shecal,*" translated **prudent** in the latter verse indicates the qualities of modesty and virtue as in "*who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies*" (Prov. 31:10).⁸

From the above verses one can conclude that no truly godly and blessed home can be built on anything other than the wisdom that originates in the all-wise mind of Jehovah for

through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with

all precious and pleasant riches (Prov. 24:3-4).

Solomon, speaking for God, added:

Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands (Prov. 14:1).

Truly, when dating and preparing for marriage the **good** man who finds a **good** woman is following the wisdom that is rooted in godly wisdom (Prov. 1:7). Wilmeth, in discussing God's way, wrote:

Why marry? is a good question. We could give reasons such as these; married people, both men and women, live longer than people who do not marry and the suicide rate is considerably lower among married persons than among those who are not married. But such reasons, though proven facts, seem rather silly to present as reasons why we should marry. . . Marriage is the relationship wherein two people can come to know each other so fully that they come to be a unit rather than two individuals going their own separate ways while living together.⁹

Finding the right mate, according to God's wisdom, is the route to becoming **one** (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:2-5).

Mate selection according to godliness is then, a biblical concept; but actually finding the right one is not outlined in Holy Writ. Such silence probably stems from the fact that in biblical times choosing a mate was not the responsibility of the persons involved.

Consider, for example, the account of the choice of a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24). Isaac's father, Abraham, sent his servant on a rather long trek to find a suitable candidate (Gen. 24:1-9). The servant had to find one of Abraham's kindred for Isaac and no Canaanitish woman would be chosen (Gen. 24:3). Rebekah was chosen, her parents were consulted, and Rebekah was asked if she were willing to leave home and to marry a man she had never met (Gen. 24:10-67). One can assure that God guided the choice (Gen. 24:48) of Rebekah for Isaac, but "*love*," personality, compatibility or the wishes of the bride and groom had little to do with the decision.

In Jacob's case, however, he "*fell in love*" with Rachel and, in the absence of his parents, he dealt directly with Rachel's father (Gen. 29). However, Jacob did **not** deal directly with Rachel nor did he ever "*date*" her. Yet, God's wisdom is to find a good mate (Prov. 18:22), so at least **four** biblical guidelines are suggested here.

1. A baptized believer in Christ will want to seek another believer to marry (Matt. 6:33). There are some very miserable people whose mates are not Christians. A non-Christian married to a Christian is a union recognized by God, but the Bible writers saw special dangers in such (c.f. 1 Cor. 7:12-16).

2. One should seek God's guidance in selecting a mate. Abraham's servant expected God to guide in finding a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:27). That servant received such guidance from God and those anticipating marriage should expect (and wait for) God's help (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17). The providence of God

will not fail even though no direct leading occurs today (cf. James 1:5).

3. God instructs, also, that **children** should **not** marry and that only self-sufficient adults are ready to tread the wedding aisle. *“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother...”* (Matt. 19:5a). Modern sociological studies are indicating that children are now remaining in **adolescence** even into their early twenties (which fact may largely account for the nearly eighty-percent divorce rate among teenagers) and adolescents are not emotionally ready to leave father and mother.¹⁰ A young man must be ready to be a spiritual, financial, and emotional guide before marrying. The young lady, as noted above concerning Rebekah, must be willing to leave home and go wherever her husband goes. One humorous psychologist suggested that when marrying there should be three bridges between the couple and the in-laws. He then added that two of the bridges should be burned! It must be noted here that in order to marry an adult Christian one must date an adult Christian! Two who date, then marry, will eventually be mothers and fathers and will affectionately provide comfort, love, shelter, food, warmth, and training for any children. Such efforts as the latter require adult teamwork.

4. Right attitudes must be taken into the marriage and such mental processes will have a great deal to do with the success or failure of the union. Some take marriage very lightly and have a *“we will try it, and if it doesn’t work out, we will divorce”* attitude. (God wants one man and one woman to stay together

for life - Matthew 19:4-12.) Others may have a "*what is in marriage for me*" attitude and will selfishly expect all of their needs to be met. (God insists that one who is married belongs completely to the other - 1 Corinthians 7:1-6.) Still others may be so naive as to think that being married "*does something wonderful and changes everyone's habits, lifestyles, attitudes, and actions.*" (God knows that marriage only changes where one lives - Matt. 19:5). And, there are those who are actually running away from their parents and think that their mates will be like Mom and Dad and "care for and protect" them. (God insists that one be able to understand that marriage is **work** and that service - love must be the attitude of **both** partners - 1 Cor. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 3:1-7.)

When the spiritually and emotionally mature enter the covenant of marriage, they fully understand the lifetime commitment. Efforts are made at all times to work together and to serve God together. Communication is maintained and failure is avoided. In fact, failure is not even considered.

BASIC SUGGESTIONS FOR FINDING A MATE

A check-list or personality adjustment list is included in the endnotes section of this manuscript to be read by those who date so that by use of the list some serious problems might be avoided. Most severe marriage problems occur because one or both partners have "*long-standing problematic personality characteristics.*"¹¹

The number one characteristic in the one to marry should be a willingness to face one's needs and to

grow to be a better person.¹² It is certainly enjoyable, when dating, to be with that spontaneous, emotionally exuberant, “*fun*” girl or guy who does not seem to have a care in the world. But, the other side of such a personality can be that **after** marriage and the budget needs planning, work responsibilities arise, and parenting is the issue, the spontaneous “fun one” may now be seen as irresponsible and impulsive. Resentment soon replaces the joy that once was had for that worldly, “*devil may care*” girlfriend or boy friend. (Many couples are now seeking pre-marriage counseling and taking personality tests in order to take a more objective view of their prospective mates.)

A second suggestion is that couples seeking to be married should discuss and agree on life goals.

Having compatible goals and understanding each other’s plans for the future is vital for a happy marriage.”¹³

Christians, whose common goal is to reach heaven, start marriage with a great basis for success because such a goal of getting to heaven, as all goals, affects every area of life. Dating couples should discuss having children (and how many), education desires, where to live, spiritual interests, financial goals, and a host of other things. When a couple knows where they are going, it is somewhat easier to get there.

In the third place, dating couples must realize that “*marriage won’t solve (their) potential problems and hoping won’t make them go away.*”¹⁴ Dating couples must discuss how compatible they are in terms of their cultural and intellectual interests. Shared recreational

interests, for example, enrich a marriage. The "hunter" married to the "art lover" has a very difficult time building togetherness. Couples with differing interests can make it, but sharing in vocational, recreational, and spiritual interests makes life's path a lot more enjoyable.

In the fourth place, a major consideration in getting married, is education because "*the impact of education on marriage goes far beyond jobs and finances.*"¹⁵ When two people desire to learn and grow they can challenge and enrich one another. Christians learn (or should learn) this lesson very early about "*growing in grace and knowledge*" (2 Peter 3:18). But even secular education, encouraged for both partners, increases economic status, sharpens the wit, and opens a multitude of doors. One should seek to marry another who is willing to be taught even if neither ever go to college in some formal way. How many mates complain about the other who will not be involved in church; does not care about politics; will not spend time with mutual friends; and just sits around watching television and sleeping. There are just too many marriages without adequate motivation to grow and learn.

In the fifth place, because most people grow as they age, dating and marrying that relaxed, contented individual may not be so wonderful later. That one who just liked to drive around and listen to music may not be so exciting when life's real challenges come calling. Does one want to spend the rest of one's life with an "*idealist*" who has no desire to accumulate even a house in which to live? One's job and one's

spouse's job will determine stability in the marriage. But someone will say, "*I'm marrying him, not his job,*" not realizing that in a very real sense one does marry one's mate's daily work! A job occupies one-third of one's life and two-career marriages that much more time. Dating couples must discuss such things as financial goals and working when the children arrive. And, jobs can involve moving, separations, and social obligations. It is also true that those unhappy at work are often very grouchy at home.

Sixth, and not often discussed by dating couples, is that fact that when one marries, one has **three** families: the boy's, the girl's, and each other. One **must** develop good relationships and working together habits with each other's families. (This writer knows one man who has to eat **five** Thanksgiving dinners because he and his wife do not want to offend any of their close relatives. Such communication problems need solving even while dating.) Families have traditions, holidays, traveling habits, etcetera. Dating couples should discuss, pre-marriage, with whom and when such activities will occur.

Seventh, before marriage there needs to be an understanding about each other's friends. Friends do not change because a couple exchanges vows! If one is continually frustrated by the other's friends before marriage, how much more after? And, one can tell something about another person by the friends one has. Too, does the one dated have friends? Perhaps loneliness also says something about the other.

Finally, one thing dating couples should never

discuss nor desire is cohabitation. God wants a man and woman sexually together only **after** marriage (Heb. 13:4). In fact, statistics now show that cohabitation before marriage increases one's chances of getting divorced later.

According to 1997 data, 14.5 percent of first marriages of women who had never cohabited ended in separation, divorce, or annulment in the first five years, compared to 22.6 percent of first marriages of women who had cohabited (with anyone) before their marriage.¹⁶

Why are the chances of divorce increased? (1) People willing to be promiscuous are less committed to a God-ordained marriage. (2) Promiscuous persons value independence more than those who abstain from pre-marital sex. (3) People who cohabit do so, generally, because they have negative views about marriage. (4) A pattern of "serial cohabitation" is being established. If one or both partners has previously lived with another and dissolved that relationship, then the next one, even if the couple marries, is easier to dissolve.

Dating couples have a lot about which to think and to discuss. That which makes commitment best is a primary attachment to Christ (Matt. 16:24).

BASIC CAUSES OF GOOD OR BAD MATE SELECTION

Most people realize that being married to the "wrong" person can make life miserable.¹⁷ Because of the foregoing thought, many are afraid to take the

risk of choosing a mate and building a marriage. Five important questions can help when choosing a life-long partner.¹⁸

1. Why do most people choose a mate? It is generally accepted that people marry because they are "*in love*." However, the English term love in the foregoing expression of "*in love*" really describes an emotional exhilaration which **never** lasts forever. True love must grow and serve (1 Cor. 13:4-7) and such love as biblically described grows **after** one is married. Therefore, a **feeling** of being "*in love*" is **not**, by itself, a solid basis for marriage and neither is the idea that "*we do not love anymore*" a basis for divorce (c.f. Matt. 19:9). [Note that almost all biblical marriages were based on issues **other** than feelings.]

Other reasons persons choose a mate center on the needs of companionship, security, support, intimacy, and service to others. Then there are pregnancy (pre-marital) causes, desires to escape dysfunctional homes, or compulsion to "*rescue*" some unfortunate one, are other reasons some marry. It is obvious that some of the foregoing "*reasons*" are immature, self-centered, and unstable.

2. Why do some people not choose a mate? The same God who ordained marriage also anticipated that some would remain single (Gen. 2:18-24; cf. 1 Cor. 7:8-9). There are those who believe that being single is a way to serve God, and there are those who have no right to marry (Matt. 19:9-12). But there are several other reasons folks do not marry. (1) Some never meet an eligible prospect. (See above for dating procedures.) There are more women than men in the world. (2)

Some get too busy to find time to date. A career or other activity has intervened. (3) Some people are unattractive to the opposite sex. Whether physiologically, mentally, timid, or obsessive; some cannot find a potential mate. (4) Some people can never attain emotional *independence*. Marriage is a risk, and some stay "in the nest." (5) Too many today are cohabiting. (See above on pre-marital sex.) (6) Some do not want to marry, which group used to include homosexuals.

3. Where do people find mates? Several decades of psychological, sociological, and anthropological research have shown that people select mates from similar social classes, economic and educational levels, occupations, age groups, race, **religious backgrounds**, and areas of residence.¹⁹ Some cross the afore-mentioned barriers but such traversing puts strain on marriage and makes adjustments more difficult. Christians will always do better by dating a church member or one willing to be taught. All who wish to date will keep in mind all cultural and social backgrounds for mutual interests can spark a relationship.

4. Why do some people choose unwisely? Well, who chooses a mate in a logical, analytical manner? Subtle influences (such as parental pressure) can and do push people together. And, many have unrealistic expectations (noted earlier) about what marriage "does." When people expect to **receive** without **giving** disappointment **will** follow and when a single person chooses a mate simply on the basis of what one can get from the other, that one is headed for real marital

tension. Receiving without giving is not only immature, it can be a neurosis. Desires to “*prove one is an adult*” or to “*rebel against parents*” are no reasons at all to marry. (Some want sex, money, self-esteem, substitutes for previously wrong relationships, etcetera. All, by themselves, are poor reasons to marry.)

5. Why do people choose wisely? Christian conviction is the number one reason for choosing the right mate (Matt. 6:33). Christians pray about their selections and Christians never choose one who would hinder them from getting to heaven. People also choose wisely who understand similar backgrounds and complementary needs. A marriage will not be stable just because the two are Christians, but combining Christianity and similar backgrounds, with one who meets the other’s needs is a great foundation for marriage.

Still, even Christians ask, “*How can I know if the right one comes along?*” Often people respond by saying, “*You will just know!*” Well, that “*spark*” needs to be present. Marrying someone just based on feeling is extreme and dangerous, but marrying some without emotional resonance is also ill-advised. Look for one who is flexible, sensitive, and willing to work through problems. Look for one who is emotionally stable, able to discuss a wide range of subjects, and who is willing to commit. Marriage is a venture through joy and sorrow, light and darkness, and hills and valleys. No ultra-smooth relationship ever existed just because folks were “*in love.*”

CONCLUSION

God ordained marriage and said that such an arrangement was **good** (Gen. 2:18-24). However, premarital matters are not specifically outlined in Holy Writ, but God's wisdom is that a good man as he ought to be who finds a good woman as she ought to be is the best wisdom of all (Prov. 18:22).

Dating is a time to know and to objectively work through ideas about jobs, finances, family, and friends. People do not always choose a mate wisely. Perhaps this brief essay will be some food for thought for those contemplating marriage.

ENDNOTES

1 Keith A. Mosher, Sr. "Husband/Wife Relationship," in **The Sayings of Solomon: Pearls from the Proverbs** (Southaven, MS: Power, 2003), pp. 179-182.

2 Cal Thomas, "American Families are out of Focus" (Centerville, GA: The Daily Tribune, May 21, 2001.)

3 Ibid.

4 **The Holy Bible, King James Version** (World Bible Publishers). All references are to this version.

5 Gary Smalley with Steve Stott, "For Better or Best," revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 14-15.

6 The phrase "a good thing" (Prov. 18:22) in reference to a wife is most likely Hebrew for "well favored." See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "Proverbs," in **Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes** Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 15.

7 Ibid., p. 28.

8 Ibid.

9 P. D. Wilmeth, **Love, Courtship, and Marriage** (Nashville, TN: 20th Century Christian, 1956), p. 31.

10 Mirnith, Newman, and Hemfild, **Passages of Marriage** (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1991).

11 From "A Pre-Marriage Checklist" http://www.gospelcom.net/narramore/bk_105_pre-marriage2.htm.

Your partner is:

1. Composed rather than highly anxious or nervous.
2. Happy rather than depressed.
3. Optimistic rather than negative and pessimistic.
4. Realistic rather than unrealistic.
5. Respectful rather than disrespectful.
6. Able to communicate rather than hidden.
7. Sympathetic and caring rather than unsympathetic.
8. Sensitive to others rather than insensitive.
9. Self aware and open rather than defensive.
10. Objective rather than insensitive.
11. Flexible rather than rigid and controlled.
12. Patient rather than impatient.
13. Amiable rather than hostile.
14. Humble rather than proud.
15. Thoughtful rather than impulsive.
16. Good self-esteem rather than low self-esteem.
17. Honest and direct rather than manipulative.
18. Open to others rather than closed and hidden.
19. Secure rather than insecure.
20. Assertive without being domineering or controlling.

The authors of the above checklist insist that "Even the positive dimensions of each of these pairs can become a weakness if they are carried to an extreme. Take optimism, for example. This is a great trait, but it needs to be balanced with realism or it becomes denial. Or consider objectivity. While it is generally preferred to subjectivity, it must be balanced with emotional sensitivity, or it results in an

impersonal, computerized approach to life. And patience is a great virtue, but some people are so “patient” they refuse to take a stand on anything.”

12 Ibid., p. 2.

13 Ibid., p. 3.

14 Ibid., p. 4.

15 Ibid.

16 David Popenoe and Barbara Defoe Whitehead, **Should We Live Together?** (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 1999), p. 4.

17 **All** marriages can be enhanced. But such a discussion is outside the realm of this essay.

18 These are adapted from Gary R. Collins, **Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide** (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), pp. 145-148.

19 William J. Lederer and Don D. Jackson, **The Mirages of Marriage** (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), pp. 247-251.

Chapter 13

What Can I Do When ...God Blesses My Home With Children?

Dave Miller



A native of Arizona, Dave is the Chairman of the Department of New Testament Studies at Apologetics Press • The host of the nationally televised TV program “The Truth In Love.” His formal education includes 3 masters degrees and a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. His book, *Piloting the Strait*, deals with the changes affecting churches of Christ. Deborah and Dave have 4 grown children, 3 grandchildren and reside in Montgomery, Alabama.

The Bible provides insight into how to conduct ourselves in every aspect of life wherein God will hold us accountable. The best “*adolescent psychology*” book on the planet that addresses what to do when God gives us children is the Bible.

What a blessing when God makes it possible for us to experience the birth of children in our families!

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them (Psm. 127:3-5).

The Bible gives several principles to aid us when children come into our homes. First, and maybe most important, the man—the father—must be an active participant in child rearing. Many men think raising children is women’s work. But God says otherwise. Being the head of the home includes the awesome responsibility of making certain that children are properly trained, that spiritual principles are instilled within them, and that they achieve emotional stability (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

God expected Abraham to understand this point:

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19).

Job possessed the same concern for his children, and attended to their sanctification on a regular basis (Job 1:5). Joshua saw to it that his own family was committed to serving the Lord (Josh. 24:15). The law of Moses required the same thing (Deut. 4:9-10; 6:2,7; 11:19; 32:46).

It is absolutely imperative for the father to set the tone in the home for his children by being a spiritual, godly man who sets the example. Listen to Solomon’s correlation between the father and the well-being of his children:

The righteous man walks in his integrity;
His children are blessed after him (Prov. 20:7).

In the fear of the Lord there is strong

confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge (Prov. 14:26).

Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father (Prov. 17:6).

David also spoke to this point:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them (Psm. 103:17-18).

God wants fathers to impart Bible teaching to his children:

For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments (Psm. 78:5-7).

A man is not to be appointed to be an elder in the Lord's church unless he has seen to this responsibility (1 Tim. 3:4-5). When Eli failed to be the head of his family in this regard, disastrous consequences followed (1 Sam. 2:29; 3:13). The man who becomes so busy in his chosen profession that he neglects this responsibility or tries to push it off on

his wife is guilty of sin and shirking his manhood and headship.

Second, the wife should actively promote the well-being of her children. The Bible nowhere teaches that a woman must "*stay at home.*" "*Keepers at home*" in Titus 2:5 (KJV) is a Greek word that means "*homeworker.*" That is to say, she has work pertaining to the home for which she is responsible. Whatever else she may do with her time, she must not neglect her domestic responsibilities (just as the man must not neglect his domestic responsibilities). Of all people who pass through her life, she should want her husband and children to make it to heaven. Therefore, she will give her foremost attention to this goal (Titus 2:4).

The best overall description of the many activities of an effective mother and wife is Proverbs 31:10-31. Here was an industrious woman who devoted her time and attention to advancing the best interests of her family. As a result, "*her children rise up and call her blessed*" (vs. 28). Whatever a woman thinks the world has to offer her by means of the corporate ladder and the business world, she will never find a more satisfying, fulfilling, and meaningful pursuit in life than serving her family in preparation for eternity. It is indeed true that "*the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*"

Third, much needs to be said about the relationship between the children and the parents in the effort to raise God-fearing children. The Bible has a great deal to say about children as they relate to the family (e.g., Deut. 4:9-10,40; 5:29; 6:2-7; 11:2,5,19-21;

12:28; 30:19; 31:12-13; 32:46; et al.). Children are to respect their parents and all authority (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3; Prov. 17:6). The tremendous swing to the left in society's understanding of the discipline of children that took place in the fifties and sixties continues to dominate. Yet the Bible speaks decisively on this matter (Deut. 21:18-21; Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14; 29:15,17).

Good literature exists to assist parents in the training of their children. Perhaps the following principles will provide a starting point for those who wish to explore this area further.¹

1. Demand Respect. A child must be trained to develop respect for parents. Failure to instill respect for parents will result in the child's lack of respect for authority in its other forms—school, societal, and divine. The disrespectful child will also typically reject the religion and value system of the parents. Defiant, stubborn, rebellious behavior (“*sassiness*,” backtalk, telling a parent “*no*”) on the part of the child must be dealt with firmly and consistently. A battle of the wills is inevitable, and the parent must win. Corporal punishment is appropriate, and should have as its objective to change the defiant attitude of the child. Until the attitude changes, discipline is incomplete and respect is still lacking.

2. Communicate Before and After Punishment. Of course, this insistence upon respect for parental authority must be accompanied by genuine expressions and demonstrations of positive reinforcement—perhaps in the ratio of three to one. The parent must explain the administration of

discipline to the child so that the child fully understands the purpose of the punishment. Forgiveness and physical warmth are essential after the discipline elicits genuine repentance and humility from the child. The child learns that the parent is rejecting the child's inappropriate behavior, not the child himself.

3. Do Not Nag or Give Constant Verbal Control.

We parents tend to fall into the habit of verbally directing our child's every move. We are especially inclined to load the child down with a multiplicity of daily directives that have nothing to do with Christianity and responsible human behavior (e.g., *"keep your room free of clutter everyday," "don't sit on the living room furniture," "turn the lights off when not in the room,"* etc.). We then tend to elevate these directives to the status of Scripture—making the child feel as if this multitude of matters is as important and critical as the stipulations of God's word. We can so overburden our children with a thicket of eternally unimportant matters that they are desensitized to what is truly important in life. They then tend to categorize even our spiritual admonitions as simply additional verbosity and frivolous control.

We parents also tend to issue threats and warnings—especially to small children—on which we then fail to follow through. We should issue instructions only on matters we genuinely intend on enforcing. When children receive constant verbal monitoring which they discover the parent is not willing to back, they stop listening. They have learned the parent does not really mean what he/she says.

We should limit our verbal reprimands to the more important directives, and then we should overcome our laziness and inconvenience by following through with enforcement of those directives.

4. Do Not Indulge Materialistic Appetites.

Spoiling children is probably the norm of current American society. Children today do not understand what it means to sacrifice and do without. They have had it too easy. They are soft. They do not understand the value of money and possessions. They have been conditioned to think they must be entertained and provided with all the latest clothes, toys, games, and amusements. Parents simply must limit their children's access to luxuries and niceties if they expect to instill in their children an appreciation for the true values of life.

5. Avoid Disciplinary Extremes. A parent must not be overbearing, intolerant, or oppressive. He must not be harsh, mean, or uncaring. A child needs to feel that the parent genuinely cares for him. He needs to understand that parental input is not rejection. "*As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him*" (Psam. 103:13). Physical displays of affection for the child – as well as between parents – is healthy and encouraging to the child. On the other hand, a parent must avoid being permissive. The child must not be made to feel that the world revolves around him. The parent must not dote or hover over the child, smothering the child's independence and need to grow, expand, and mature.

Conclusion

Listen to these closing admonitions from the psalmist regarding parents and children:

Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you out of Zion, And may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children (Psm. 128).

May the Lord give you increase more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, Who made heaven and earth (Psm. 115:14-15).

ENDNOTES

1 These principles are summarized and embellished from James Dobson, **Dare To Discipline** (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), pp. 25-49.

Chapter 14

What Can I Do When ...Atheism Attacks My Family?

Brad Harrub



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It has happened slowly. We did not wake up one morning and suddenly realize the change. Instead, month by month, year by year, atheists have quietly but affectively removed any acknowledgment of God. There was never an official declaration of war. The battle cry was not sounded. And as such, most Christian homes never even realized they were under attack. (Sadly, many still do not realize it.)

But make no doubt about it: your family and friends **are** under attack. For over 150 years, American culture was friendly toward Christianity. In fact, this land of the “*free and brave*” was considered by most as a “*Christian nation.*” But for the last 50 years, the forces of humanism, atheism, hedonism, liberalism, and

skepticism have silently, but aggressively, forged an assault on Christian religion. As we have slowly awakened to this Godless culture, it is obvious that not only did our opponents wage war—but they also have won several key battles. Atheists have gradually dismantled many of the religious, moral, and spiritual principles upon which this nation was founded, and have successfully begun to eradicate any and all references to God and Christianity.

The time has come for Christians to finally rise up and take a stand. The Bible and God are under attack. Hear the battle call. The land in which you are living is no longer *“one nation under God,”* but rather is a nation divided. We are now *“one nation under Mohammed, Buddha, homosexual rights, atheism, humanism, materialism...and, oh yeah, maybe God.”* This great *“melting pot”* that we so dearly love has embraced the ingredients of polytheism, idolatry, and immorality—all the while *“cooking out”* the existence of the one true living God. Make no doubt about it; your family lies directly in the crosshairs.

ATHEISTS HAVE TAKEN AIM

Just as a frog does not realize incremental changes in temperature as he sits in a pot of water, we, too, have remained complacent—only to suddenly realize that the water is boiling all around us. The attack on God is coming from many different directions and many different groups. But they all have one thing in common. They want, more than anything in the world, to excise God (and all references to Him) from our society. In discussing the agenda of

abolishing God, geneticist Richard Lewontin noted: Our willingness to accept scientific claims against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science **in spite** of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, **in spite** of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, **in spite** of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to naturalism... We **are forced to our adherence to materialism** ...no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, **that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door** (1997).

That mantra—that we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door—is being stridently echoed in the halls of academia and among the news media. Atheists have “*taken aim*” at God, religion, the supernatural, and the Gospel message, and intend to “*shoot to kill*.” Consider, for example, this statement from Kai Nielsen, humanist philosopher and former editor of *The Humanist* magazine.

In cultures such as ours, religion is very often an alien form of life to intellectuals. Living as we do in a post-enlightenment era, it is difficult for us to take religion seriously. The very concept seems fantastic to us.... That people in our age can believe that they have had a personal encounter with God, that they could believe that they have experienced conversion through a “*mystical experience of*

God" so that they are born again in the Holy Spirit, is something that attests to human irrationality and a lack of sense of reality (1977, p. 46).

The message is clear. Those people who accept God, His Son, His Word, and His salvation are "*out of touch with reality,*" "*irrational,*" and "*unreasonable.*" There is no misunderstanding the new humanistic/atheistic message, what it teaches, or what it hopes to accomplish. The *Humanist Manifesto II* is quite specific on a number of important points. Consider, for example, their comments on religion.

We believe, however, that traditional or dogmatic or authoritarian religions **that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species.** Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so.... We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race.... Promises of salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices. Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the "ghost in the machine" and the "separable soul." Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary

forces. As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body (1973, pp. 15- 17).

Consider also these comments on the subject of ethics.

...We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is **autonomous** and **situational**, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human needs and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces.... **Reason and intelligence** are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. (1973, pp. 17-18; emp. in orig.).

Lastly, consider these comments on "*sexual freedom.*"

In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit,

by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil." Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity, a civilized society should be a **tolerant** one. Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire. (1973, pp. 18-19; emp. in orig.).

The message is unmistakable. Religion is useless, and we should be tolerant of everything. In fact, the only sin that one can commit, given society's current mindset, is the sin of intolerance.

THE FALLACY OF "SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE"

Almost weekly we are faced with the latest lawsuit from individuals suing to eradicate a public reference to God. The foundation of their suit rests on one principle: separation of church and state. Their contention is that the Founding Fathers did not want references to God or the Christian religion in public settings that are associated with the government, the community, or public schools. But the reality of the matter is that the phrase "*separation of church and state*" is not even found in the Constitution! In fact, no reference to separation of church and state appears in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, or any of our country's other official

documents. However, it can be found in another prominent document, the constitution of the former Soviet Union: "*The church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the state and the school from the church.*" (Article 52)

The First Amendment of the United States records: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*" This was not an attempt to keep God, Christ, and the Bible out of public life; rather, it prohibited the government from interfering with the free exercise of the Christian religion. Where, then, did we get this idea of a "*wall of separation between Church and State?*" The concept is believed to have originated from a private letter written in 1802 by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists in Connecticut, thirteen years after the First Amendment was signed. Jefferson gave a speech to a Baptist association during his presidency. Because he wanted to establish common ground with them in his message, he borrowed a phrase from one of their theologians. The context in which he used the phrase "*wall of separation*" was to reassure them that the national government would not establish a government-supported denomination to be superior to all other denominations. This "*wall of separation*" phrase was meant as an allusion to a wall around a church to keep the government from interfering. Again, realize that even as Jefferson used it, it meant protecting religions from government intrusion, not keeping God out of society.

Interestingly, in the first 150 years of the federal court system, Jefferson and his phrase appear less than

a dozen times. But in the last 50 years of the federal court system, Thomas Jefferson and his phrase appear in over 6,000 cases. The reason the earlier generations did not use the phrase was based on the fact that Jefferson had absolutely nothing to do with writing the First Amendment. Jefferson was not a delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, he was not a signer of the Constitution, and he was not a member of Congress in 1789. However, in the last 50 years, more judges have been lenient to this phrase, allowing a precedent to be set that is used vigorously today.

CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE

As battle lines are drawn, men continue to assert that the federal government prohibits the expression of God and the Christian religion. However, when we look at the principles upon which this country was originally founded, we see an entirely different picture. The Declaration of Independence contains the phrases: (1) "Nature's God;" (2) "endowed by their Creator;" (3) "Supreme Judge of the World;" and (4) "Divine Providence." Obviously, the framers of the Declaration acknowledged the God of the Bible. Consider, also, that in 1864 a two-cent coin was approved that contained the phrase "*In God We Trust.*" Since that time, almost all American currency has contained this phrase.

Other historical landmarks remind us of our Almighty Creator. For instance, the highest court in our land—the Supreme Court—has a pair of oak doors separating the courtroom from the central hallway of the Supreme Court building. Those doors contain an

engraving with two tablets bearing the Roman numerals 1-10 on them—an obvious reference to Moses and the ten commandments. Also, the prominent sculpture located on the East entrance to the court building has a picture of Moses holding blank tablets. Additionally, in the House Chamber there are twenty-three marble relief portraits over the gallery doors that depict historical figures noted for their work in establishing the principles that underlie American law. Yet twenty-two of those images are side profiles, all looking down the hall. All twenty-two look toward the center of the north wall where there is a full-face relief of Moses.

In 1751, the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered a new bell for the State House. He asked that a Bible verse be placed on the bell—*“Proclaim liberty throughout all the Land unto all the inhabitants thereof”* (Leviticus 25:10). The *“Liberty Bell”* rang on July 8, 1776, to announce the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. The rotunda doors in our nation’s capital were cast in 1860, and yet the panel reveals a cross in the background. The rotunda itself has pictures of the baptism of Pocahontas; it also shows William Brewster holding a Bible, while preacher John Robinson leads Governor Carver, William Bradford, Miles Standish, and their families in prayer. It also shows crosses in the scenes with explorer Hernando DeSoto and Christopher Columbus.

The Washington National Monument Society was organized in September 1833. Construction of the monument began in 1848, but was not completed until

1884. The 100-ounce aluminum capstone was set in place December 6, 1884. On the north, west, and south faces of this crowning apex are names of dignitaries and details pertaining to construction. However, on the east face of the capstone, facing toward heaven, are two lone Latin words: *Laus Deo*, which mean praise be to God. Or consider how many of our nation's songs contain a reference to God (e.g., *God Bless America*). There is a veritable plethora of evidence showing that men who recognized God and the Bible founded this nation, and that they recognized Christianity as the accepted religion approved by God.

A BRAVE NEW DAY

As faithful parents and grandparents, we need to recognize that our children and grandchildren are growing up in a landscape that is totally foreign to the one in which we grew up. Prayers in school are no longer legal, but abortion is. You cannot bring a Bible into the classroom, but books on weapons, drugs, Buddha, or Muslim are accepted. Our children watch as we kill our unborn young through abortion. They watch as we kill our elderly through euthanasia. They listen to news reports of gunfire being exchanged over something as trivial as a pair of tennis shoes. Add to this the fact that our young people are receiving a steady diet of evolution, and you quickly realize why we are losing the war. Sadly, our children are often the casualties.

What has happened? Have we become too intellectual for our own good? Are we too smug to

consider our own actions? Do you remember Moses' warning to the people of Israel prior to their entering that land of milk and honey?

When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 8:10-14).

Have we, in our own land of *"milk and honey,"* forgotten God? We are surrounded by individuals with houses bigger than the kings' of ancient days. Boats and new cars fill the multiple garages. Children watch as we collect this mountain of *"things."* Yet because both parents feel the need to work outside the home, their children watch from the windows of a day-care center. **How can we honestly expect to protect our own families when atheism attacks, if we are never home with our families in the first place?!**

In times past, children came home after school to a house that was clean, brightly lit, and filled with

the aroma of hot, chocolate-chip cookies fresh from the oven. They opened the kitchen door and were met by a mother who was clad in an apron, and who had flour on her cheeks. Yet she never was too busy to sit and talk, even though her children usually had little of importance to say. As they ate those homemade cookies, and as they looked into that flour-sprinkled face, they were making memories that would last a lifetime. They also were receiving instruction and supervision that would see them through both the good times and the bad. Moms used those opportunities to talk to children about God, His will and way in the world, and His plans for their lives. Most youngsters never even knew what their moms were doing, but **the moms** knew. They were ensuring that their son or daughter was not the "*child left unto himself.*"

My, how things have changed! In my generation, we had to come up with a totally new term for it. We call them "*latch-key*" kids—children who would come home, not to a brightly lit house or to the smell of freshly baked cookies, but to a dark, dank home where their only company is the television, and where store-bought cookies are to be found in the kitchen. There is no apron-clad mother waiting to hear about the day's activities, or to impart instructions to the waiting, sponge-like mind of a child. And an opportunity to mold the mind of one so young has been missed yet another day. In Proverbs 29:15, the writer observed that "*a child left to himself bringeth shame to his mother.*" Have we not seen the truthfulness of that adage played out again and again in this day and age? And yet for the life of us, we can't figure out what is wrong with our society,

and why the atheists are so successful in "*silencing God.*"

A CALL TO BATTLE

The statistics are chilling. Even by conservative estimates, those of us in the churches of Christ are losing between 60% and 90% of our young people after they graduate from high school. "*Little Johnny*" doesn't just leave the home—he also walks out the doors of the church building, never to darken them again. He becomes another casualty in a silent war. But it does not have to end this way. Christians can make a difference. We have "*turned the world upside down*" in the past, and we should be doing so right now. The solution is simple. We must return to God's Word, and we must be prepared to defend it. In a day in which people are seeking most of their counsel from self-help books and talk shows, we need to return to the words of our Creator. But here is the cold, hard truth. Studying God's Word takes time and effort—something more than sitting on a sofa mindlessly absorbing whatever comes across a video screen. We are going to have to rise up and answer the battle call, or else the next casualty of war may be one of our own beloved children.

We need to go back and teach our children that, in fact, God does exist. We need to provide the proof for His existence so that our own faith can be strengthened, and so our children will fully comprehend that faith is not simply a "*blind leap.*" There are even some congregations of the Lord's Church that need to go back and reestablish this fundamental truth. We need to fully comprehend the

cosmological, teleological, and anthropological arguments for the existence of God.

But it does not stop there. Using the acrostic **R-E-A-D**, there are four additional things that can help us when atheism attacks our family.

R = Read the Bible for yourself, and with your children.

In the time that I have been a Christian, I have been amazed at how little time people spend actually reading God's Word. We live in a world today where everyone is looking for the easy way out. We want things quick and simple. We know we can lose weight by cutting back on food and by exercising, but we would rather pop a couple of pills or buy some lotion and hope that works. I am afraid people are treating their spirituality the same way. They know the Bible is God's Word, and that it holds the key to their eternal salvation. But rather than reading and studying this book, people look for an easier way out. Maybe it's just accepting whatever they hear each week from the pulpit, or maybe it's the latest devotional book. But the fact is that many people are not reading God's Word, and our children and grandchildren realize it. And yet we have the nerve to be surprised when they toss aside God's Word and pledge their allegiance to something found in a science textbook.

Not long ago, I had a conversation with someone who made the comment: *"I just wish I could have been around when God spoke to men directly. Think about how powerful that would be to have been Moses or Abraham and heard from God directly."* Have we forgotten that the Bible is God's Word? It is His way of speaking

directly to us today. **But we must read it in order to hear what He is saying to us!**

E = Educate yourself

Several years ago, Guy N. Woods, the late, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, carried out an extensive survey among churches of Christ nationwide. The results were not very flattering. According to the survey: 40% of those surveyed admitted that they attended only one worship service a week; 50% indicated that they did not know why churches of Christ do not use instrumental music in worship; 10% believed that one church is as good as another; 90% did not subscribe to a religious publication; 75% could not find the plan of salvation in the Bible.

How much time, energy, and money do we spend learning? I am afraid that within the church we have reared a generation of people that knows one must hear, believe, confess, repent, and be baptized. They may even know some of the scriptural reasons for things like the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week, or why we baptize by immersion. But that is pretty much the extent of their knowledge base. The Hebrew writer put it this way:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe (Heb. 5:12-13).

Sadly, we have too many babes in the church today!

Men and women who have been Christians for decades are still babes in Christ, and the atheists are rapidly killing them on the battlefield.

When we think about how we can better educate ourselves, we should ask:

1. Can I prove the Bible is God's inspired Word?
2. Can I point out secular historical and archaeological evidence to help demonstrate the existence and deity of Christ?
3. What are some ways that I can prove the existence of God, without just saying, "The Bible says so?"

Questions like these are easily answered—with diligence and study.

A = Anticipate questions

This one is crucially important. As faithful Christians, we need to understand that we will be challenged and questioned about our beliefs. Those questions should be looked upon as opportunities to strengthen our faith, not time-consuming ordeals that make us uncomfortable or take us away from our Saturday afternoon football game. These are teaching opportunities that can be effectively used for evangelism, as long as we are prepared.

We need to learn to anticipate questions and be ready to answer them when they deal with such matters as: (a) the existence of God; (b) whether or not evolution is a proven fact; (c) the inspiration of the Bible; (d) the problem of evil, pain, and suffering; (e) the error of theistic evolution; (f) dinosaurs and the age of the Earth, etc. We must be proactive—not

reactive. By doing so, we can rear a generation of children who are able to adequately defend their faith in a world that boldly proclaims there is no God.

D = Don't rely on others

A great deal of time could be spent discussing how parents have turned over to others the responsibility of rearing their children. Parents look to day-care centers, teachers, Bible class teachers, and preachers to educate and train their children. The Bible is very clear on who is to teach the children—their parents! If your child is going to learn the will of God, such instruction needs to come from those parents (and grandparents). The world has been trying to undercut and discredit the authenticity and authority of the Bible for decades. It is past time that we, as Christians, fought back.

For generations, people have railed against God and the Bible. You may recall, in Jeremiah 36 King Jehoiakim took his penknife, slashed the Old Testament Scriptures to pieces, and tossed them into a fire (Jer. 36:22-23). During the Middle Ages, those caught translating or distributing the Scriptures often were subjected to imprisonment, torture, and even death. Religionists of that day did not want the average man on the street to know what the Bible said. Centuries later, the French skeptic Voltaire boasted: *"Within fifty years, the Bible no longer will be discussed among educated people."* The Bible still is being discussed among educated people, while the name of Voltaire languishes in relative obscurity. Like the blacksmith's anvil—which wears out many hammers but itself remains unaffected—the Bible continues to

wear out the skeptics' innocuous charges, all the while remaining unscathed. Governments come and go. Nations rise and fall. People live and die. Jesus warned that *"heaven and earth shall pass away"* (Matt. 24:35), but went on to note, *"My words shall not pass away."* Isaiah wrote: *"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever"* (40:8). The question remains, will we faithfully teach it to our children and grandchildren?

CONCLUSION

Why do we find the world in the state it is today? Tim LaHaye, in his book, *The Battle for the Mind*, suggested:

Our present society is in a state of moral decay, not because the majority of Americans love degeneracy, but because the influence of humanism has been greater on our culture than the influence of the church (1980, p. 189).

The time has come to reverse that trend! Christ said:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works,

and glorify your Father who is in heaven
(Matt. 5:13-16).

God's people are to uphold that which is right, and oppose that which is wrong. In so doing, we set an example for all around us. We must oppose atheism/humanism because its teachings are contrary to the teachings of God's Word. We must come to understand, and help others to understand, the folly of human "wisdom" such as is found in societies current philosophies.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and discernment of the discerning will I bring to naught. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of the world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:19-21).

Human wisdom leads away from God if not founded on, guarded by, and subject to biblical revelation. Human wisdom is at war with God (Rom. 8:7), and is foolishness as far as God is concerned (1 Cor. 3:19-20). Christians must reject atheism, and help others to do the same

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Chapter 15

What Can I Do When ...My Children's Faith Is Threatened?

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Introduction

At 3:00 p.m., mom stops folding laundry and begins contemplating what to fix for dinner. Suddenly, she hears the unmistakable sound of little feet running down the sidewalk. Within seconds, the front door bangs open and little Johnny comes running down the hallway into a brightly lit kitchen. As mom frantically tries to keep the mud tracks off the floor, little Johnny circles round and round, shouting: “*Guess what video we watched today at school!*” With a dustpan in one hand, and an old wooden broom in the other, mom looks up and replies, “*What Johnny?*” Johnny lets out an ear-piercing scream and yells, “*Dinosaurs!*” And without taking another breath he begins rattling

off the names of dinosaurs: "We saw a *Brachiosaurus*, *Apatosaurus*, *Deinonychus*, *Triceratops*, *Stegosaurus*, *Spinosaurus*, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, and a *Velociraptor*! Oh, mom you should have seen them. They were so cool. I want to get some books about them. Can we please? Can we mom?"

And so, without any advance notice, Mom is thrown into the realm of the dinosaurs. Only minutes ago she was folding laundry, wishing she were elsewhere. Now she would be content to wind back the hands of time and fold those clothes. No one warned her that motherhood included needing advanced degrees in dinosaur trivia. For the next several days the questions continue. "*When were the dinosaurs around? Why did they become extinct? Were they cold-blooded or warm-blooded?*" Poor mom—she can cook dinner, wash clothes, clean the kitchen, watch the children, and talk on the phone all at the same time...but dinosaurs? All mom knows about dinosaurs can be summed up like this: They were big, and they were green. Aside from that, mom has to rely on books to provide Little Johnny with the answers that he so desperately seeks.

Within a week, their house has been turned into a virtual dinosaur hall of fame. Dinosaur books, puzzles, games, and action figures can be found in just about every room. Every dime Little Johnny had saved up has been spent on dinosaur books. You know the ones—the books with big colorful pictures on slick glossy paper. The same ones that usually somewhere around page one, paragraph one, say something like,

All life on our planet changes and develops over many millions of years. This is called evolution. Millions of years ago the dinosaurs roamed the Earth, long before man ever existed.

Even those “*harmless*” sticker books that she bought Little Johnny mention that dinosaurs roamed the Earth 225 million years ago. And so, within just a few weeks Little Johnny has filled his brain with dinosaur trivia; but he has also laid down the planks on which the evolutionary theory will one day be built in his belief system.

HARMONIZE IT...

Ask yourself what normally is the first introduction most young people have into the humanistic, atheistic, Godless world of organic evolution? Dinosaurs! Once the stage has been set that the Earth is billions of years old, then it becomes easy to slip in evolutionary rationale for human existence. What better way to build a foundation than to get our children hooked on dinosaurs—something that is rarely dealt with in a religious setting, and something with which most parents are not all that familiar. First and foremost, we need to understand that this is a fight. It is a fight that most parents are losing—and that many do not even realize is taking place. We carry our children and grandchildren to Bible class and worship. We tuck them in at night, and one day we wake up, only to realize that they have lost their souls because someone out there did their job better than and before we did ours!

Ask an average 10-year-old child when the dinosaurs existed, and see what response you get. Then ask them about the men who lived with the dinosaurs. Chances are, those excited faces that were all ready to tell you every single fact you ever wanted to know about dinosaurs will immediately change into wrinkled brows and puzzling frowns. For, you see, we live in a world that has taught our children that dinosaurs existed many millions of years ago, prior to the existence of man. What happens, then, when our children try to reconcile this with the Genesis account of Creation? They begin to question the Bible, simply because the two cannot be harmonized, and most do not possess the evidence they need to defend God's Word.

The word "*creation*" is never mentioned in biology classes in reference to the origin of life, and the Genesis account of creation is only mentioned sarcastically (if it is mentioned at all). By the time many individuals graduate from college, the Bible they grew up believing has been so ridiculed that it quickly becomes relegated to the bottom of a dusty old bookshelf—never to be opened again. Yet in Peter's first epistle, he instructed:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:
and be ready always to give an answer to
every man that asketh you a reason of the
hope that is in you, with meekness and fear
(1 Peter 3:15).

Statistics indicate that our young people are not properly prepared to give an answer or defense when

their instructors begin to tear away at their faith. Professors categorize God's Word as little more than a poorly written history book. These "highly educated" men no longer treat it as "God-breathed," because to do so would be admitting there is a higher power. By declaring that "*the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork*" (Psm. 19:1), we are paying homage to Someone capable of more than mortal men—and that Someone rightly deserves our obedience and respect. Unfortunately many of our children are casting their Bibles aside in favor of science and the theories of men.

In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, Moses details for us the specific events that occurred during the six days of Creation. Exodus 20:11 states:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Question: What does that leave out? Answer: Nothing! It is totally comprehensive, and yet our children have been fed a steady diet of the early evolutionary appearance of dinosaurs and reptiles, with mammals and humans appearing millions of years later. We must **wake up and get busy** teaching our children the Truth. Most of us have seen the horrifying statistics—nationwide the churches of Christ are losing somewhere between 60-90% of our young people after we send them away from the home. How is it that Joseph at the age of 17, already had enough strength, courage, and conviction to get him through the rough

trials that were to come (see Gen. 37,39-40)? It is because his parents instilled in him at a very young age the importance of God in such a way that he never forgot God – even during his darkest trials. Why is it we think that it is only after our children have grown up and started a family of their own that they can find the strength they need for their convictions?

WHY DID JOHNNY FALL AWAY?

Why did Johnny fall away? What caused him to leave the Lord and His church, and instead turn his attention to worldly matters? Likely, of course, there are many possible answers. However, I would like to concentrate on only one answer. **Something undermined Johnny's commitment, and caused him to give up the ideals he once held dear.** What persuaded this youngster to abandon his faith in God, his trust in Jesus, and his reliance upon the Bible? Perhaps Johnny lost his faith because he never knew the evidences upon which his faith should have rested in the first place. In other words, Johnny "*believed,*" but he did not know **why** he believed. He was living an "*inherited*" religion. Having, therefore, no good reason to keep on believing, when faced with the temptation to be free, he fell headlong into the trap set for him by the "*roaring lion*" – our adversary, the devil (1 Peter 5:8). **Satan was successful in his task because we failed in ours.** Unfortunately Johnny, and many others like him, have been told that faith is a "*blind leap.*" We did not train Johnny "*in the way he should go*" (Prov. 22:6), because we did not show him the evidences upon which his faith should have been

based. His faith was threatened, but he was not ready for battle, and so he surrendered.

WE ARE GOD'S ARCHERS OUR CHILDREN ARE GOD'S ARROWS

The inspired writer of Psalm 127 made this observation in verse 4—*“Children are like arrows in the hand of a mighty man.”* Why do you think the writer chose this particular analogy? Do you think the inspired writer’s choice of words happened merely by chance? Or do you think that the writer realized what you and I know today—that long before the archer ever places an arrow between his fingers, and long before he ever pulls that bowstring taut, he already has sighted his target. He knows long before he ever releases that arrow where he wants it to go. There is forethought and planning involved in launching that arrow. It doesn’t occur haphazardly. We are God’s archers! Our children are God’s arrows! We must remember the goal on which we have our sights targeted, and then launch our children on their way with much forethought and planning toward that goal. Each step that we take in guiding and directing our children should be done with that target in mind—that big, red bulls-eye that we know as heaven.

The problem lies in the fact that many parents today lack the proper biblical knowledge and understanding to firmly send their children toward a heavenly goal. Sure, we know the steps of salvation, but what happens when our children ask us questions outside the realm of *“hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized?”* How can we accurately and firmly launch

our children toward the goal of heaven if we ourselves are deficient in knowledge? When our children come to us with questions (and they will!) about the age of the Earth or about the dinosaurs, they expect answers. And rightly so! It is up to us to educate ourselves in such a way that those questions get answered. The answers (and evidence) that we give our children and grandchildren should only further propel them toward that heavenly target. We must realize that if we don't have an answer for our child or grandchild, someone out there does. And sooner or later, that person is going to teach our child "*their*" version of how the Universe came about or how humans evolved from ape-like creatures. Then they will show beautifully illustrated pictures printed on glossy paper to impress our child. And before we know it, our child has lost his or her soul, and we have lost our child. Thanks to the unbelievers who were willing to answer his question, "*little Johnny*" no longer holds the Bible as being the inspired Word of God. It has become just an antiquated history book—one not deserving his commitment and loyalty. And then Johnny joins the workforce and does what he's watched his parents do for years and years—strive for prosperity. But in doing so, he forgets about God. Recall what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 4:

And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart

from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons; Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children (8-10).

We are God's archers! Our children are God's arrows. We must take our responsibility seriously and stop allowing other people to launch our children in any direction that they please. Our children should be sent on their way with such force and such strength that by the time they turn 17 or leave home, they possess strong convictions about their religious beliefs. Otherwise, the "*church of tomorrow*," as so many like to call it, will continue walking out the doors of our church buildings, never to darken those doors again. But be forewarned: this kind of direction and guidance requires quantity (as well as quality) time and a Christian example.

STRENGTHENING OUR CHILDREN'S FAITH

Oftentimes, we watch little children sing the song about the wise and the foolish builders. But sadly, some of those very children will one day find their own belief systems built on a sandy foundation. If we are going to protect our children's faith when it is threatened, we must be ready to strengthen it through

study. We are commanded to "*contend earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3). With an increasing number of people doubting God's existence, Jesus' deity, and the inspiration of the Bible, Christian parents will find an increased demand upon them to be able to defend these things. Paul stressed that we should "prove all things," and then having done so, "*hold fast to that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21). It was Paul's custom to teach the Gospel by presenting the evidences documenting the truthfulness of Christianity (see Acts 17:2-3; 19:8). That is, in fact, how Peter preached the first Gospel sermon – by presenting the evidence in a defense of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2). We, too, can use evidences to strengthen our children's faith.

Through a study of the evidences upon which Christianity is based, our children can come to see that Christianity is not a "*pie in the sky*" or an "*I hope so by and by*" kind of religion. On the contrary, Christianity is grounded in historical fact. Its roots are deep, and its precepts are provable. We must teach our young people that they can: (a) **know** God exists, (b) **know** Jesus is God's Son; and (c) **know** the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word. In so doing, we can give young people a clear view of their God, His Son, His church, and their future home of heaven.

Additionally, a study of the many evidences upon which Christianity is based demonstrates the validity of the Christian system. Truth does not shrink from exhaustive examination, for it has nothing to fear. Rather, truth welcomes the searchlight of the severest

scrutiny—unfailingly confident that it cannot be disproved. A religion that discourages logical examination of its claims is tacitly admitting the doubtfulness of its position. Christianity has no fear of submitting its beliefs to the critical examination of skeptics. Nor does Christianity fear to have its proponents study the claims of other religions (or no religion at all). Truth will not bend or break beneath the onslaught. A faith that cannot withstand a terse, critical examination is a faith not worth having in the first place. As young people are shown the manifold evidences that prove God's existence, Jesus' Sonship, and the Bible's inspiration—and as they examine other claims (atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, denominationalism, etc.) under the dissecting microscope of God's Word—eventually they will come to accept, and be able to defend, the one true religion of the one true God.

Likewise, we must prepare our children and grandchildren so that they can properly defend Christianity against the attacks made upon it by its enemies. From the philosopher who claims it is impossible to know anything at all, to the scientist who claims that we are little more than "*naked apes*," attacks upon Christianity are never-ending. The atheist says he **knows** God doesn't exist, the agnostic says neither he nor anyone else **can know** God exists, the skeptic says he **doubts** that God exists, the infidel says that **if** God exists, it is **not** the God of the Bible, and so on. Various forms of these false philosophies have crept into the church in some places, and have caused the untaught and the unstable to fall away. Children

are especially vulnerable to such false teachings, as often they are required to study under teachers or professors who openly are antagonistic to Christianity. A young person's plastic, impressionable mind is a prime target for the devil's ungodly schemes. It is our responsibility to fill the minds of our children with truth (and evidence for that truth) so they will be able to withstand the "*fiery darts of the evil one*" (Eph. 6:16). It has been said that a child's mind is like Jell-O®—and that our job is to fill with all the—"good stuff" before it "*sets.*" A study of the evidences supporting Christianity is a fine step in the right direction toward protecting both our children and the future of the church.

One thing is certain: we cannot teach what we do not know (Heb. 5:12). Our goal is heaven (Heb. 11:13-16). Our mission is not only to get there ourselves, but to take others with us as well (Matt. 28:18-20). It is our task to learn God's Word (Psm. 119:11), and then to convey that Word to others for their ultimate salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16). Our society today is a questioning one. Rightly so! Religion cannot and must not rest on presumptive grounds or traditional heritage. People must investigate the claims of Christianity, and then see for themselves that those claims are both legitimate, factual, and above all, true. Lastly, we must teach our children and grandchildren that God's Word is more than just a "*good book.*" All too often, Christians relegate the early books of the Bible (i.e., Genesis) as mythological rather than historical. But consider what that is telling our children. We need to provide them with evidence that

completely demonstrates the authority of the Bible as the only inspired book. This can be accomplished by studying the scientific foreknowledge found in Scripture, the prophetic accuracy of the Bible, the factual accuracy and overall unity of the Bible, etc. Such a study will impress on youngsters the importance and special nature of God's Word.

CONCLUSION

All of this must start at home—in homes like yours and mine. Every book that enters our homes should be examined for evolutionary falsehoods. We do not allow pornography into our homes, so why would we allow scientific foolishness that teaches our children to believe there is no God. Every television show that mentions those "*million-year-old-fossils*" should immediately be discussed with our children. If we do not have the answers to their questions, then we must, as God's archers, seek diligently to find the answers. It is our responsibility—not the preacher's, not the elders', and not the Sunday school teacher's. We must seize every opportunity to guide, train, direct, strengthen, and lead our children (and grandchildren) so that once those arrows leave our hands, we have absolutely no doubt as to where they will land.

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Chapter 16

What Can I Do When ...Children Rebel, Become Unfaithful?

Curtis A. Cates



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The theme for the 14th **Annual Truth In Love Lectureship** is truly outstanding, *“What Can I Do When...?”* No subject can be more timely than studying what we can do when our *“children rebel and become unfaithful”* to the Lord.

GOD’S SACRED PATTERN

The words *“rebel”* and *“become unfaithful”* presuppose that there is a Divine pattern for our lives, including in the home. During every age of mankind, beginning in the Garden of Eden, man has been under law to God. For Adam and Eve, it was to eat of every tree in the Garden and of the tree of life, to dress and keep the Garden, to fill the earth—and not to eat of

the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:9,16-17; et al.). In the patriarchy, they were to obey the law spoken to the fathers, and under the Mosaic law they were, as Ezra,

to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it,
and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances
(Ezra 7:10).

When they obeyed by faith, they were saved through God's grace (Rom. 9:30-33). In the Christian dispensation, we are "*under law to Christ*" (1 Cor. 9:21; cf. Rom. 8:1-4; Isa. 2:2-3; Titus 2:11-15; James 1:25; 2:8; et al.), obedience to which by faith enables God's grace to flow (Rom. 4:16). Our Lord came to do God's will, as must we (Matt. 4:4). He "*went about doing good*" (Acts 10:38). It is he who **doeth** the will of the Father who shall be blessed (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; James 1:22; 1 John 2:17; Mark 3:35; John 9:31; Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Gal. 6:2), but he who transgresses the law of Christ sins (1 John 3:4). Very sadly, "*all have sinned*" (Rom. 5:12), and "*the wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23). All accountable persons have violated God's will (1 John 1:8-10); therefore, the will of God, the gospel of Christ, constitutes God's law (to which all people are amenable)—including God's law on marriage and the home.

GOD'S SACRED PATTERN FOR THE HOME

The Word of God is an absolute, infallible standard (Jude 3). It constitutes the absolute pattern for the church, for our lives, and for the home as God

would have it.

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works... (Titus 2:7).

Just as the tabernacle was to be erected completely by the "*pattern, which hath been showed thee in the mount*" (Exod. 25:40), so must the antitype (the church) be made, governed according to the sacred pattern (Heb. 8:5). Paul commanded Timothy,

Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:13).

The sacred pattern, the message of truth, can be understood. Eve very clearly understood God's regulations regarding not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; God **can** communicate with His offspring in understandable language, and we are responsible to take heed how – and what – we hear (Luke 8:18; Mark 4:24).

...and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32; cf. 17:17).

Mankind is responsible for knowing the truth (1 John 2:21) **and** for walking in the truth (2 John 1,2,4; 3 John 3-4). Otherwise, we have not God (2 John 9).

GOD'S AUTHORITY IN THE HOME

God created male and female (Gen. 1:26-27), and He instituted marriage and the home. The home is the oldest of God's three sacred institutions. True married love emanates from God Himself (Song of Solomon 8:6). God's moral, universal law on marriage

has existed from the beginning (Mark 10:6-9); He determined the purposes, the participants, and the pattern for the home. When Christ was asked about divorce, He went all the way back to the Garden of Eden for God's timeless blueprint (Matt. 19:4-9) — one man, one woman, for life (cf. Matt. 5:32; Rom. 7:1-4). To violate one's marriage vows makes him or her a spiritual criminal in God's sight (Job 31:9-12); and, God said,

For I hate putting away ... therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously (Mal. 2:16).

Because God is our Creator and because He instituted marriage and the home, then, He has the sole authority to govern the home.

The apostle Paul, speaking of the order of role, function, and authority (not superiority, inferiority), stated,

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3).

In the home, he commanded,

Wives, be in subjection unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved

the church, and gave himself up for it... Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies.... Nevertheless, do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she fear her husband (Eph. 5:22-33).

Our attitude in the home must be to respect God's ordinances:

Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

Only by so-doing will our homes be truly happy and fulfill the purpose and function which God intended. Further, only thereby can the home function as God designed it as the foundation of society and as critically important to the church of Christ.

CHILDREN IN THE HOME

Enormous Blessing From God

Job, the richest man in all the East, counted his children as his most precious possession (Job 1:2-5); and they were his greatest responsibility. He truly treasured the time when his children were about him, and the loss of them by death was a grievous tragedy (Job 29:5). He was sustained by the fact that he had reared them in the right ways of the Lord and that they were faithful. Though he was immensely successful as a farmer, he would have failed had he not brought up his sons and daughters to fear the Lord.

Lo, children are a heritage of Jehovah; And the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, So are the children of youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: They shall not be put to shame, When they speak with their enemies in the gate (Psm. 127:3-5).

Wise, good, righteous children make both mother and father very glad and delighted (Prov. 10:1; 23:24-25; 29:17). By God's design, we as parents pass on the physical life; the Creator gives them their immortal natures, their souls—thus, their being a heritage from the Lord.

The Dependence Of The Children Upon The Relationship Of Parents To One Another.

First, the welfare of children in the home depends upon the maturity of the husband and the wife. Marriage is not for children; each partner must realize that they are grown up, with adult roles, decisions, and responsibilities. Paul stated the principle well:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things (1 Cor. 13:11).

The husband and wife become responsible for each other, and both for the children!

Second, the welfare of children in the home depends upon the deep and demonstrated love and devotion of the parents for one another. Love is that which is taught (Titus 2:4). The husband deeply loves

his wife, and she reciprocates. He loves her as Christ loved the church; he would die for his wife if circumstances warranted. Love is unselfish; it meets the needs of one's mate. This love even loves the unlovely and sacrifices for the mate. Love does not act in such a way as to cause doubts and suspicions, and each mate builds the self-worth of the other. This builds a sense of security and stability in the hearts of the children, so critically lacking in the lives of countless children today.

Third, the welfare of the children in the home depends upon the husband's providing for his wife. This has been true in every age (Gen. 3:19; Exod. 21:10; Rom. 12:17; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10-12).

But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8).

This responsibility, of course, includes providing for the children; the husband and father is responsible for providing for the necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing, etc. "*Show thyself a man!*" And, the husband and wife must resolve and learn to live within their income, learning to be content (if need be) with "*food and covering*" (1 Tim. 6:6-8). (Of course, it is understood that the wife needs at times—or may choose—to work outside the home to assist in providing for the needs of her family, for example, when the husband and father is incapacitated by some debilitating illness.) The children's homes can at times be devastated by financial matters, which can put a great strain on the

overall homelife, especially in an age and environment of high standard of living and rampant materialism.

Fourth, the welfare of children depends upon the tenderness of the parents for each other. The husband is to honor the wife as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Each is responsible to live the golden rule (Matt. 7:12). They are not to ridicule, talk down to, belittle each other; neither husband nor wife must cause the other to lose face in the eyes of the children. The children must have a high degree of respect for **both** parents. Paul described the love that each of us is to have:

Love suffereth long, and is kind (1 Cor. 13:4).

Do all things without murmurings and disputings [quarreling] (Phil. 2:14, KJV).

...be tenderly affectioned one to another, in honor preferring one another (Rom. 12:10).

Each should accept his or her mate as she or he is; none of us has sprouted any wings. Not one of us is perfect. Acceptance is one of the innate needs of mankind, including our children. When we were dating and wooing our mates, we deemphasized the negative qualities and emphasized the positive ones.

...love covereth a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

...be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32).

Fifth, the welfare of children depends upon the husband's assuming his God-given leadership role and

the wife's fulfilling her God-given role. Each has different areas of responsibility and leadership. The husband humbles himself before Christ, and the wife readily responds and submits to his leadership. This is what is best for both the wife and the children. He must realize keenly that this leadership does not end with providing for the physical; it also is absolutely necessary in the area of the spiritual. **He** must not abdicate his spiritual responsibility and role of leadership and by default place it upon his wife (as shall be noted further). The eternal welfare of his wife and children depends upon his being a man (1 Cor. 16:13).

Sixth, the welfare of children depends upon communication being maintained between husband and wife. Communication and time spent together are a must! Walking in love does not allow even a busy lifestyle and added responsibilities to interfere and work disaster to the marriage. To refuse to be bitter toward or to mistreat one's mate is not enough; not to be together and not to speak to one another is destructive. Someone has observed that merely to keep weeds out of a garden is not enough; it must be filled with beautiful flowers. Problems in marriage grow where communication is lacking; they dissipate where togetherness abounds. Marriages flourish and happiness abounds when the wives are in the planning of family activities and pursuits; they have much to contribute to those plans and ideas. When the husband takes the wife into his deliberations and concerns, she is encouraged and her dignity and self-respect are enhanced. Thereby, he is made stronger for the tasks

at hand, fortified for life's challenges. He knows he has strong backing, a sympathetic ear, and a place of refuge at home. There, he is as a king, and she a queen. She wants to share his joys and triumphs; she enjoys rejoicing also. And, she wants to help bear and shield her husband from the burden of life; she can cushion him from much of the pain. She wants to be and is the righteous husband's inspiration to accomplish great things. The truism is, "*Behind every great man there is a great woman.*"

The husband is likewise to be very supportive, encouraging, and communicative of/to his wife, also. She has a great God-given role, also. His inspiration to his wife helps her to accomplish great things and feel fulfilled, also. He is not jealous of her accomplishments; they are on the same team. Neither is a child; both face great challenges, discouragements, and responsibilities. Neither husband nor wife should allow oneself to be crushed (or nearly so) beneath the burdens of life, grievous to be borne, when his or her loving companion can help in bearing up under them. Did not we vow "*for better or for worse*"?

Dear reader, there are notable implications as to laying this vital foundation relating to "*What can I do when children rebel, become unfaithful?*" are there not? But, there is more.

The Dependence Of The Children Upon The Parents' Relationship To The Children.

One, child-rearing is a tremendous responsibility and privilege from God. These souls that are the heritage from God are to be fitted for heaven. The

souls of our children have "*eternity in their heart*" (Eccl. 3:11); eventually and ultimately, each of our precious children "*goeth to his everlasting home*" (Eccl. 12:5), heaven or hell. The role of each parent is awesome, therefore (cf. Matt. 16:26). Indeed, arrows go the way they are pointed. God expects the souls of our children back pure and white, fitted for heaven. We must fulfill this stewardship (one entrusted with the possessions of another) to the very best of our ability; no one is a perfect parent, but we should be as prepared and as diligent in parenting as possible, faithful in fulfilling the task. Every person should think about this before having children; for, every child deserves a good home—and that is the Master's will!

Two, child-rearing has as its major purpose, consequently, to bring the children up "*in the chastening and admonition of the Lord*" (Eph. 6:4). No person is equipped thus to do without knowing the truth (John 8:32). The home must be characterized by and permeated with placing God first; truth is to be revered and practiced in the home (Luke 2:52; Acts 1:1). How can it be consistently taught without first being practiced?

Take heed to thyself and to thy teaching.
Continue in these things; for in doing this
thou shalt save both thyself and them [your
children] that hear thee (1 Tim. 4:16).

What a blessed child was Timothy, whose unfeigned faith "*dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice*"—and, therefore, in Timothy also (2 Tim. 1:5)! The home is designed by God to be the child's first

and most influential and powerful school in his or her life!

Three, child-rearing depends upon the realization that parents have authority delegated by God. God is over all, and Christ has been, by Him, given all authority (Matt. 28:18). The father has authority over the home (Eph. 5:22-24). The mother also has authority over her children. "*Honor thy father and thy mother*" (Deut. 5:16; cf. Eph. 6:1-3).

Children, obey your parents in all things,
for this is well-pleasing in the Lord (Col.
3:20).

Parents are in the place of God, similarly to Christ being over the church. When we heed the commands of Christ, we are submitting to God; when children submit to the right commands and rules of the parents in the home, they are under God and being brought up in His will.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

We are responsible to teach our children moral, social, religious, business, etc., decisions; that gives them the foundation for making valid, mature, scriptural decisions in their lives. We give them more and more ability to make reasoned, rational decisions until we "*cut the apron strings.*" That is a gradual process in the home; it does not—nor can it—happen overnight.

Four, child-rearing must instill within the children the proper respect for authority. This will influence their lives from the cradle to the grave—and beyond! A child must learn that the world does not revolve merely around him; there is order and responsibility in the home and in society, and he must respect it. He does not run the home, nor does he command his parents. **They** are in authority. In learning to respect the authority of his father and his mother, he will learn to respect those in authority at school, the rule of law and the police, those in the civil government, the elders in the Lord's church, and God Himself! What does it say often about a person's homelife when he rebels against and demonstrates a lack of respect for authority in social, business, governmental, and/or spiritual areas? Does that not bring our study to the next vital matter?

Five, child-rearing must include discipline in the home. As noted above, there must be instructive discipline; however, it also has to include corrective discipline. From the root word "*disciple*," "*discipline*" entails the fact that the child is learning; he is a student being trained in the home. This is inherent in the command to the fathers,

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture [disciple] them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

It is God's will that children have "*fathers of our flesh to chasten us*," and the scriptural reaction is to give them "*reverence*." It is likened to the chastening that

God's children receive from Him; chastening though it seems grievous at the time, is for our profit—it yields *“the fruit of righteousness”* (Heb. 12:5-11). When I reached adulthood, I more fully came to realize that my mother and father were striving to the best of their ability to fit me for my own role as a productive citizen, as a parent, as a fruit-bearing Christian, and as a soul fit for heaven. And, I more fully came to realize what my dear departed father meant when he said, *“Now son, this hurts me more than it hurts you.”* I love and respect him so deeply because he **helped save my soul!** God was working through him and he took his responsibility seriously.

Six, child-rearing constitutes a tension between the parents; on one hand seeking to teach, train, and control the child and to do what is best for the child and, on the other hand, the need or desire on the part of the child (especially a teenager) to gain more autonomy. It involves control versus freedom, letting out the leash and giving increased levels of responsibility to the child as he or she is able to assume it.

Physical discipline when children are young is helpful and necessary. God inspired Solomon to write,

He that spareth his rod hateth his son; But
he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes
(Prov. 13:24).

Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope; And
set not thy heart on his destruction (19:18).

Withhold not correction from the child; For
if thou beat him with the rod, he will not

die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, And shalt deliver his soul from Sheol (23:13-14).

The wise parent, while using the corrective discipline of spanking, should keep in mind Paul's admonition not to exasperate the child (Eph. 6:4). (1) It must always be accompanied by unconditional love. (2) Physical discipline should be used to get the child's attention. (3) It should be followed by moral instruction, which is the more important and vital purpose of discipline. (4) The parent(s) should relate the child's actions to other people. For example, ask the child how she would feel if the other child were to bite her on the leg; how would he feel if someone else did not share that child's toys with him? This helps build empathy toward others, as well as helping the child not to be self-centered. (5) Relate also that such violations of the rules, such sins caused Christ to give His life on the cross, but that God and Christ love the child and all mankind, that Christ always did what pleased His Father, and that we should always do what pleases God. (Of course, we realize that a little child is sinless, being unaccountable.)

Studies have found that physical discipline tends to be encoded in short-term memory, whereas moral instruction is encoded in long-term memory. But, if physical discipline is too harsh, it is rendered ineffective; we can over-discipline, Paul says. The opposite is also true. If we fail to practice discipline, then the problems are exasperated later in life; it is harder to reach them then. We failed to exercise discipline when we could get their attention. Too harsh

discipline, however, brings resentment and even rebellion. The ultimate goal of training up a child and of discipline is for the child to internalize what is right and acceptable behavior in the sight of the Lord in the heart—this is what we seek as parents.

There comes a time when the child moves from being under the parents' authority into adulthood; the child himself or herself is responsible before God. The child is beyond the age when we as parents can or should try to control his or her life; we have to let them go, as our parents did (or should have done) us. We have endeavored to the best of our ability to instill the right values within them, and we begin assuming the role of advisors (if requested). Our roles have changed to support and encouragement, if they desire it. They, of course, do not have to seek our advice or listen to it; they are certainly free-will beings and may not give in to our advice. However, at the same time, their not seeking or listening to it may come at a cost to them. My mother always said, "*Every pig has to burn its own snout.*" And, God did say,

Therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

As a wedding present to each of our sons, Annette wrapped and presented a package containing an apron whose strings had been cut from the apron itself, indicating that we had striven to prepare them for that beautiful occasion and that they would now have households and responsibilities of and on their own.

In the matter of discipline, each parent must also

back up the other; otherwise, the authority of one of the parents is being undermined. Notice the folly, resentment, and jealousy produced in the families of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph when parents demonstrated partiality. This is not God-like (Acts 10:34-35) and is condemned (James 2; et al.). The father of the prodigal son and of the elder brother had treated them equally (Luke 15:12,31).

Discipline also has to involve trust. Some have a tendency never to allow their children to grow up, to assume more and more part in decision-making, in launching out increasingly on their own. But, that is a vital part of the motivation process. You trained them, did you not? Then, believe in them! My first automobile was a 1930 Model A Ford coupe with a rumble seat, pretty car. However, when I would go on a date, I would wish and request of my dad to take his new 1958 Bel Aire Chevrolet. He would allow me to use it, for he trusted me. And, believe me, I took far better care of his automobile than I did my own. When we show trust in our children, we teach them by example that God (unlike the false charge of God by Eliphaz [Job 4:18]) trusts His servants, His children. The Lord trains/trained us by our dearly beloved parents; now He trusts us to do what is right!

In addition, discipline expresses appreciation to and for our children. We praise them when they succeed, when they make right decisions, when they demonstrate levels of maturity. We give positive reinforcement; we realize that success breeds success. We do not seek to reinforce failure; we seek to correct

it. The parents' unconditional agape love helps them in the maturation process. Our children are the "*apple of the eye*" to us, a vital part of our very souls. They deserve to know that, by words of assurance, demonstrations, and sacrifice.

Seven, child-rearing requires teaching that life is a serious matter, and that we are to live for Christ and for others. Pleasing God is priority number one, for He created us. Each of us is an immortal soul, and our foremost aim in life is to prepare for heaven and to take as many others to the eternal home of the righteous soul as possible.

We live to serve. Life is not made up of things (Luke 12:15); we lay up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-20; Col. 3:1-3). Mother and Dad demonstrate this motivation in their lives. The kingdom is first (Matt. 6:33), and they love their neighbors as themselves. Their lives are characterized by visiting the hospital, carrying food to the sick, being hospitable, putting in a good word for Jesus wherever they go, and engaging in every good and wholesome work. They demonstrate to their children what it means to make a life, not just a living; the happy life, the children see, in the serving life. That is, the true success; the parents model service to God and others so that it can be seen by children—that is child-rearing! The children learn what it means to have compassion; that is their parents' legacy, and it should be their own.

Eight, child-rearing has as a vital component that the child must learn to have a great influence upon this world—not the world have a great influence upon the child. The child must be trained never to be

fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind... (Rom. 12:1-2).

Joseph, Daniel, and other ancient worthies refused to be influenced by the temptations of their environment; they had the courage to say **"No!"**

...neither be partakers of other men's sins: keep thyself pure (1 Tim. 5:22).

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

We teach our children that sin wounds the huge, loving heart of God, separates us from Him, and brings indescribable misery in this life and in the world to come. Therefore, we seek to change the world and rescue the lost rather than being dictated to and shaped by the world. Our children **can** make a difference!

Nine, child-rearing must let the children see the marvelous wisdom of God in His church and cultivate a deep love for the church (Eph. 3:10). It should be an extension of our own families; we are brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a tremendous support group to the teaching, training and guiding of our children. The church is training a mate for our child; it is helping to educate; it is teaching to serve; it is weeping when we weep, and rejoicing when we rejoice. It is composed of dearly beloved people who are struggling with life's temptations and persecutions, also. It is composed of others who share the like-precious faith.

Let your children grow in love and appreciation for the church, dear reader. Please do not engage in the faith-threatening and faith-destroying criticism and crucifying of the elders, the preacher, the song leader, the teachers, and others who are seeking to give their time and devote their talents and energies to the Savior. This sends, to say the least, a mixed signal to your children. Of course they are not perfect, but who is? They are trying, and they seek to serve. They deserve a *“pat on the back”* and a *“job well done”* and an *“I’m proud of you”* and a *“Thanks for watching for my soul”* and a *“God bless you for teaching my child”*! Let your children see you do this. And, by the way, are our children seeing us seeking to serve in such ways as our talents permit and dictate? It is easy to criticize the coach and players, sitting in the stands. Who among us wants to train his children to be carping critics—if they make even a pretense of service to God?

WHEN CHILDREN REBEL, BECOME UNFAITHFUL

To Realize That Children Are Free-Moral Beings.

Human beings were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), thus possessing free-will. There are some things that even God cannot do, one of which is to impinge upon man’s free will. He could not violate Eve’s freedom of will by prohibiting the serpent from tempting her (Gen. 3). Christ could not smash in the door and enter their will of the heart of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-22). And, the father (representing God) of the younger brother could not keep him from becoming the prodigal, from leaving home (Luke

15:11-13). Neither can we, as parents, violate the free will of our children when they come of age and choose to depart from us and from God. The prodigal son chose to depart from all of the moral, ethical, and spiritual instruction which had been encoded into his mind. He chose to "*sow his wild oats*"; he chose to leave a loving, caring, generous father and the security of a happy, fulfilling home. "*The grass was greener on the other side of the fence.*" He insisted that the father divide with him his part of the inheritance. He had become an adult; he could "*do what he wished.*" The father divided the inheritance and had to let him go. He knew the values instilled into his mind by his father, but he went against him; he went into the far country of degradation, rebellion, and sin. The father was deeply grieved, for he had lost a part of his own nature—his own offspring, his own flesh and blood, his own child. (When man departs from God, God loses a part of His own nature, His own being, His own offspring [Acts 17:28-29; Heb. 12:9]). The prodigal was his righteous father's son, the one who had instilled in him principles of right; that should have determined his actions when his father was not present. In his rebellion, these principles did not guide his steps. The father was no longer in control; it was time to let his son go; the father had done his duty in rearing the boy. He would not experience a "*guilt trip.*" (The writer does not hold that Proverbs 22:6 teaches the impossibility of apostasy, or that the errant children will "*inevitably*" return to their righteous rearing, or that Godly parents should torment themselves wondering "*what we did wrong.*" What did

the father of the prodigal do wrong? The writer holds that inspiration, which urges "*Train up a child in the way he should go, And even when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Prov. 22:6) is saying, as the ASV margin, to train up a child "*according to his way,*" his "*bent,*" his temperament and idiosyncrasy, his faculties and natural inclination. Every child is different and unique, and that will characterize him all of his life. Thus, take **that** into consideration with each child in his or her teaching and training, and the effectiveness will be greatly enhanced. Incidentally, the last thing a righteous parent with an erring child needs is some "*holier than thou*" attitude in someone else trying to cause such a good, faithful parent to feel guilty and unworthy. If a child properly taught and trained cannot leave the faith (or will inevitably return to it), then how can a person not properly trained become a Christian? And, if he does become Godly in life, does that mean that later in his life he will revert back to a life of rebellion?

The Child In Rebellion While Still At Home And Accountable To The Parents

It is possible that children will rebel while still at home. This is certainly implied with the qualification of a prospective elder that rule

well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

In that case, that husband and wife should seek seriously to learn (since they did not know) the basic and fundamental principles involved in having the home as God would have it, learning "how to rule" their own house and train their children and implementing the same. Those who have not built and established such a Godly, righteous, conducive learning environment for the children should teach the children where they have fallen short of their duty and assure them that they are going to seek to put the Lord first and do their duty toward them, getting their lives right with God. Hopefully, the parents have not waited too late. Sometimes, regretfully, the parents journey into the far country and the children follow them into the far country; later, the parents return, but the children stay in the far country. David and his son Absalom are a sad example of that.

Children are resilient and they can grow, develop, and mature in the face of change (and even adversity). When parents change to being what God would have them be, very often children respond. It may not be easy; in fact, it may be trying for both parents and children. But, Paul states that tribulations produce character (steadfastness), character produces "approvedness; and approvedness hope: and hope putteth not to shame" (Rom. 5:3-5). It is amazing how children are capable of responding when they realize that they have a loving, sympathetic, caring support group, such as especially their parents, who have their interest at heart and in whom they can trust. However, it is vital that the parents be optimistic.

See the potential in the child, and "stay the course."

With the Lord's help, we can make it through this together, in the loving relationship of the Godly home.

The Child In Rebellion, Unfaithful Out On His Own.

What do we do? The child is no longer a part of our household and under our control. We bemoan that he or she is vulnerable physically, morally, spiritually; in fact, our son or daughter is no longer a faithful child of God (like the prodigal son). It may be that the child is following the wrong crowd and is listening to the wrong voices. Instead of saying "No" to sin when everybody else is saying "Yes," he or she is saying "Yes" to the temptations of sin. The child has been deceived by the subtle serpent (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3). Sin will be pleasurable, but only for a season (Heb. 11:25); *"the way of the transgressors is hard"* (Prov. 13:15). In the far country, the prodigal *"wasted his substance with riotous living...and began to be in want"*; living with the harlots did not continue to satisfy (Luke 15:13-14,30), and he soon hit rock bottom. What to do, what to do?

In the first place, if we as parents reared our children in the Lord, then realize that we did the best we knew how. They were brought up right, they know the right ways of the Lord, and they had the right examples set before them. That situation, as sad as it may be, must not become so debilitating as to keep us from serving the Lord as we have in the past. God is still in His heaven, and we are precious in His sight. **They** are the ones who must now give account for their rebellion, departure from God, and violation of

their upright rearing and knowledge of the truth. (If on the other hand, we did not rear them to love and respect the Lord and His will, let us make that right with the Lord and endeavor to instruct the children in righteousness.)

In the second place, to the best of our ability keep the lines of communication open, as we did in our home when they were yet children. If they will continue to allow us to talk about the Lord and His will for their lives, that can be of possible great advantage. Our prayer should be that they will sooner or later give heed; *"He that hath an ear, let him hear..."* (Rev. 2:7). Our words may be having more of an effect than we might realize. If they refuse to hear us, Peter's advice to the wives with unbelieving husbands might be appropriate:

...even if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by the behavior of their [parents]; beholding your chaste behavior coupled with fear (1 Peter 3:1-2).

In other words, live as a Christian example before them—which preaches a powerful sermon (Matt. 5:13-16); they know the truth, for you taught them.

In the third place, do not bolt the door closed. As the old saying, *"Leave the latch string hanging on the outside."* As the father of the prodigal son, always be watching, longing, hoping, and praying for their return. And, as the father of the prodigal, make it as conducive and as easy as possible. They are not heathens, as it were; they are your children. They have a special place of honor reserved for them, if they

will come back home; they need to know that.

In the fourth place, the blame for sin is to be placed upon the one who committed it; one must come to realize that everyone is responsible for his own actions, else it will not be corrected. We live in a time when everything or everyone else is blamed for sins except the sinner. It is the government's fault, or it is the environment's fault, or the culture's fault, or the family's fault, or the older generation's fault. When Adam and Eve sinned, it was not God's fault or the devil's fault; it was Adam and Eve's fault. Job refused to try to hide his sin, as did Adam (Job 31:33-34); else, he would not have corrected it. Under the patriarchal age and the Mosaic age, the rebellious children were held responsible for their transgressions; they could not blame it on their righteous parents. Now, when did God change that principle, dear reader? Did the prodigal blame his father? It would not have worked; he of his own free will "*took his journey into a far country.*" It was not his brother's fault, his father's fault, or his environment's fault; it was **HIS** fault. And until he owned up to that fact, he did not repent and return home! He finally "*came to himself*"; blaming others would not have caused him to come to his right mind, nor would a guilt-ridden father have brought it about; he left in spite of a wholesome, righteous homelife. What would the father have changed about home, had the blame been placed upon him? Let us face it; sometimes children leave home because they rebel against truth and right! The devil is subtle, the world is alluring, and all have free will. Yet, this is not to take away from the responsibility of the parents

(cf. Ezek 14:12-20). And, we do not help our children to face up to their responsibility, own up to their sins, repent of them, and return to the Lord when we make excuses for them! As my dearly cherished friend, the late Rex A. Turner, Sr., used to say, *"Every tub shall sit on its own bottom, Ezekiel 18:20."*

In the fifth place, pray that the child has not so hardened his heart that the truth of the Lord can never touch and penetrate and change his heart. Much emphasis is placed upon

holding faith and a good conscience; which some having thrust from them have made shipwreck concerning the faith (1 Tim. 1:19).

Our consciences can be defiled (Titus 1:15), and they can become *"seared"* or *"branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron"* (1 Tim. 4:2). Paul had guarded his conscience, even while persecuting the church in ignorance (Acts 23:1). The conscience is seared and hardened when one repeatedly in rebellion hardens his will against the precepts of God and the pleadings of those who love him. Thanks be to God when our consciences can still be penetrated by the Word and lead us in obedience to the truth (1 Peter 3:21) and to return home to the Lord (Heb. 9:14). Woe to them in whose heart the *"gospel is veiled"*;

it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

It is a serious thing to willfully go against the knowledge and consciousness of truth in our hearts. It was cause of rejoicing and of great potential that the prodigal son had not so hardened his conscience that he could not come to himself.

In the sixth place, realize that some who rebel have to hit "*rock bottom*" before they will recover themselves! It seems that anything and everything short of that will not get their undivided attention and renew in their mind those spiritual and eternal verities and responsibilities. (Of course, some do not live to reach that point, or are not shocked into submission to God even at that point, very regretfully. That is the grave seriousness of leaving home, of leaving the Lord.) The prodigal son realized that the hog pen was no place for him; he sought the better life. That was beneath his dignity, beneath his rearing, and it was not right.

In the seventh place, there should be the realization that the prodigal has the memory of home. While his money and "*pleasure*" still lasted, that was not uppermost in his mind. But, when he was flat on his back in degradation, sin, mistreatment, and neglect ("*and no man gave unto him*" in that selfish, "*dog eat dog*" world, but rather even pushed him deeper into the gutter), the prodigal son thought of home. The father had not changed from being compassionate and merciful; why, even the servants back home had great food to eat. He was starving. What was the attitude of God as seen in his admonitions to Corinth when the child of God who had his father's wife repented and came back home to the Lord?

Sufficient to such a one is this punishment [withdrawal of fellowship, I Cor. 5] which was inflicted by the many; so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you to confirm your love toward him (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

Dear friend, when children rebel and depart, they never forget that marvelous, loving, supportive homelife which they once experienced; it is a great beacon calling them back home. There is a yellow ribbon hanging on every tree awaiting their return, at which time they will be embraced in loving arms and will be fully restored to their former place of honor. It is as though they never departed. Out of adversity and pain has now come celebration and rejoicing. The prayerful desire and diligent seeking for the prodigal to return has now become realization and reality. Thanks be to God for His lovingkindness, mercy, and constant pleading; what blessings and fellowship await the returning child of God; the same must characterize our homes.

CONCLUSION

When children rebel and become unfaithful, there is hope. First, we should build our homes into loving, tender, supportive bastions of righteousness and truth in a world of degradation and misery. Second, if and when our children depart, the Lord and His Word gives us optimism that they can recover themselves from the entanglements of sin, with the compassion,

loving support group of family and brethren in Christ. May this study assist us in our efforts to walk hand-in-hand with each other and with God into that eternal home of the soul which awaits the faithful.

Chapter 17

What Can I Do When ...My Marriage Is Faltering, Failing, Or When Divorce Occurs

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INTRODUCTION

According to recent statistics, forty to fifty percent of marriages in the United States of America will end in divorce. The number of divorced males in the US in 2000 was 8,572,000, or 8.3% of the population. The number of divorced females was 11,309,000, or 10.2%. Those separated in 2000 were 1,818,000 males (1.8%), and 2,661,000 females (2.4%). More are divorcing, or separating, and fewer are married. In 1970, 72% of the population was married, but in 2002, that number had dropped to 58%. Divorce takes a terrible toll on the home, but especially on children. The number of children under 18 years of age who were living with

just one parent in 1998 was 20 million (28%). From fatherless homes come 63% of youth suicides, 90% of homeless/runaway children, 85% of children with behavior problems, 71% of high school dropouts, 85% of youths in prison, and over 50% of teen mothers. Children of divorce were 50% more likely than children from intact families to divorce according to 1996 statistics.¹

The sanctity of marriage has been denigrated and those who uphold it condemned while fornication has become a national pastime, exalted, applauded, and commended. Even in the church, it is no longer surprising to hear of preachers, elders, or their wives, committing adultery. More and more the church has to deal with sexual impurity, crumbling, debilitated, or destroyed marriages, and the consequent pain, hardships, and losses to individuals and families. While it is hard to know the true number of those (from the general population) who cheat on their spouses, *“those in the know put the number between 26 and 50 percent of men and 21 and 38 percent of women.”*² Amazingly, if we average these numbers, about one-third of spouses can reasonably expect their mates to be unfaithful to them; that is, to commit adultery. To make that plainer: about 1 out of 3 married people will cheat. We should be shocked into action when we consider the awful, eternal consequences for those who so sin and the burdens they put upon others.

The reality of the situation is this: we live in a country whose moral standard has declined almost unbelievably rapidly in the last generation. This

downward spiral has affected us all by touching the lives of those we love—and our own lives, by influencing us negatively, by assuring us wrong is right and good is evil, by calling to us, our friends, and our loved ones with the siren call of sexual seduction. It permeates the media and encroaches upon almost every aspect of daily living. Even some in the church have agreed some sins, upon which we universally agreed in the past to be sins, are not really sins any more. The NIV and other mistranslations have taught us we have a—“*sinful nature*” and are born sinners (cf. Romans and Psalm 51); thus, many view sin as an acceptable part of normal life thinking since God knows we have a “*sinful nature*,” God can only expect us to sin.

From pulpits across the nation, preachers (?) soothe their listeners, tickling their ears (2 Tim. 4:3-4), telling them, among other things, that adulterous marriage breakers can remarry with God’s blessing; that baptism purifies adultery; that one cannot “live” in adultery; that staying in an adulterous “marriage” may be necessary for the children’s sake, that God’s law does not apply to those outside of Christ, and a number of other erroneous, unscriptural fallacies about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Truly, our work is cut out for us. What can we do to stem the tide, to divorce proof our marriages, and, more than that, to have marriages as God would have them to be? What can we do, when divorce does take place, to be sure of our salvation, and of our doing what is right and best for all touched by the cold hand of divorce?

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN MY MARRIAGE IS FALTERING OR FAILING?

Take immediate action to learn why your marriage is faltering, and to put it back on course! There is no time to waste.

First, Fortify Yourself

If you have not already done so, fortify yourself with the Word of God (Psm. 119:11; John 8:32; 17:17; 1 Tim. 2:4; John 14:15). Know what the Creator says about marriage for His creation. God designed and instituted marriage (Gen. 1:26-2:25). He alone has the right to determine and declare what marriage is and is not. According to the Heavenly Father, marriage is for one man and one woman (Mark 10:6-9; Gen. 1:27; 5:2), both of whom are eligible (as specified in God's written, revealed will) to marry, and who mutually agree to commit themselves to each other for life, meeting the requirements of the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1ff; 1 Peter 2:13-17; but note Acts 5:29), and the Law of God (cf. Matt. 14:3-4).

The inspired apostle Paul declared

“Marriage is honorable... and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4). Marriage, as God designed, provides a home (Gen. 1:28; Eph. 5:23-6:4), is a basic building block of ordered society, and fulfills the needs of both man and woman (cf. Gen. 2:18), including the need for physical intimacy (1 Cor. 7:2-5). One point that is key to our study is this: God has placed sexual intercourse within the boundaries of marriage, and there alone. God will judge whoremongers and adulterers (Heb. 13:4).

Tragically, many marriages in our country are in trouble because we have rejected God and His Word as outdated and not applicable to modern times (cf. Hosea 4:6). As an *"enlightened society,"* we think we have grown beyond any need for a God, and that we know better than to listen to some book "full of myths and fairy tales," or to some out of touch preachers trying to scare us with threats of fiery punishment (in order to control us and get our money). While we may expect little better than the sorry state of modern marriages from those who reject the counsel of God, Christians should so live as to be examples in every aspect of life including marriage (Matt. 5:13-16).

As we must know what God says about marriage, we must also be aware of what He says about fornication. Fornication is a sin which will keep one from Heaven if he does not repent and seek forgiveness (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). From fornication, we must flee (1 Cor. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:22). We must "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; cf. Acts 15:20, 29). Fornication should *"not be once named among you, as becometh saints"* (Eph. 5:3). Fornicators will find their eternal abode to be the *"lake which burneth with fire and brimstone"* (Rev. 21:8). Thus, we must always be on guard, never allowing ourselves to think we will not be tempted, nor putting ourselves in danger of committing fornication (Matt. 6:13).

Serious About Those Vows

What are some *"do's"* and *"don'ts"* about avoiding sexual temptations?

Do keep visual reminders of your marriage contract. Always wear your wedding ring when in public. Keep pictures of your spouse in your wallet, as a desktop screensaver, or in your workspace. Frame your marriage certificate and keep on a prominent wall. Remember the contract you made with God, your parents, friends, church, and nation to be faithful to your partner. When you placed that ring on your mate's finger, you promised your heart, affections, loyalty, and faithfulness *"until death do you part."*

Don't be overconfident (1 Cor. 10:12). Recognize your weak points. One study showed that one is vulnerable after a major letdown, or a major success. Those who are depressed or are having marital trouble can easily fall into illicit relationships.

Do avoid flirty people. If a flirtatious woman is in the break room, go outside to drink your coffee. If a man tries to flirt with you at a ballgame, find another seat. A wise person sees evil coming, and avoids it (Prov. 22:3).

Don't send mixed messages to those around you. Avoid prolonged stares, lingering touches, and any joking that might be construed as flirting.

Do be on guard when out of your normal routine (1 Peter 5:8). Business trips, vacations, a new job, new membership at a gym or sports team, and similar changes are

times of vulnerability. When away overnight, call home and talk to your spouse and children at least every night—and if you feel tempted, call home immediately.

Do take their pictures and put them in your motel room. Don't hang out in the lobby or bar. Block out the TV sex channels—or just leave it off altogether (there are sexual images on most channels).

Don't let friendships cross the line. Never do anything when your mate is absent that you would not do in his/her presence. Most affairs begin by "just being friends." One study shows that "*friends*" are those most likely to be adulterous companions (followed by "*co-workers*"). If things are heading toward adultery, it is important to put some emotional distance between you and this person right now! It is also important to keep the right kind of friends. Those who tell you dirty stories or flirt with you are not really your friends. Avoid them! This is not because you are too good for them but because you are not good enough for them.

Do be aware of the power immodest dress has on you and others. Don't pick up the magazine; don't click on the web link; sit with your back toward an indecently dressed female in a restaurant or at the office. Don't wear a garment that sends a message you don't want received.

Don't let a person of the opposite sex confide in you about marriage problems.

Do take drastic action if a line has been crossed: quit a hobby/sport, change jobs, break friendship, change congregations, move to a new city (completely avoid the place you see this person).

When you reach your silver and golden anniversaries, you'll be glad you kept your vows.

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?.... But whoso committeth adultery...lacketh understanding; he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul (Prov. 6:27, 32).³

The problem of fornication (adultery) is not the only problem to assail our marriages. We must also know what we must do to fulfill our roles as husband, wives, and parents. On this subject also, God has spoken, and we must heed His Word. Many marriages falter, or fail to be all they should be, even though both mates keep themselves sexually pure, because they fail in other areas.

Second, Examine Yourself

While many marriages falter and fail because of fornication, this is not the only wedge to be driven between husband and wife. As Paul instructed, "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith*" (2 Cor. 13:5), so we should examine ourselves to see whether

we have faithfully maintained our responsibilities in marriage.

Let us ask, and answer honestly, *"Is there something I have done I should not, or is there something I should have done, which I have not?"* This does not mean that one must assume guilt when troubles arise, for they may come solely from the other marriage partner, but it does mean we must *honestly* look at ourselves to see if we are the problem, or a part of the problem. There are some key areas to consider. Have I become self-centered, thinking of my wants and needs, putting myself first, instead of, by love, putting my mate before me (Eph. 5:28-29, 33)? Such an attitude and such actions say to the mate, *"I love me more than I love you,"* or, *"I love me, and I don't love you."*

Have I withheld affection or simply failed to give affection (1 Cor. 7:3-4)? Many take their first steps toward divorce because of frustration in the bedroom. Parents need to do a better job of preparing young people for marriage including instructing them in the differences of men and women. Most men desire the physical relationship of marriage more often than do women, and this can cause tension when husbands and wives do not understand and accommodate for this difference. Likewise, too many men do not understand the needs of their wives, which needs God designed to be fulfilled in the physical relationship.

Along with sex, money is a major problem area in marriage. Have I misused our money, causing financial difficulties? Have I worked together with my mate to come to a mutually agreeable decision regarding how we will use our money? True love will

cause us to give, to forego getting for ourselves what we might want, in order to provide for our mates. Such selflessness will usually (and should always) be met with a reciprocal response. While the husband is the head of the house, both spouses should discuss and agree upon how the household's finances should be handled, what are the priorities financially, what can and cannot be done, and if and when large purchases should be made. Marriage is for those who are mature enough to act wisely with money.

Have I quit courting my mate? Read the Song of Solomon, the greatest work on marital love, and see how Solomon and his bride courted. When a problem arose, they went back to the place where they had courted. The sights, sounds, and smells of that place reminded them of their love at the first, and renewed their love at the last. If you will put forth the same effort to stay married as you did to get married, you should reap the rich reward of mutual love. Try dating your spouse as you did before you married.

Have I let myself go? Have I taken the other for granted? Have I assumed my mate does not care that I no longer seek to look my best for him/her? Your mate wants to be proud of you, and you must want that also. Never let yourself get to the point where you do not care about your appearance. Solomon's bride feared she was not pretty because she was sunburned (black from the sun), but note how lovingly he reassured her. She said:

Look not upon me, because I am black,
because the sun hath looked upon me: my
mother's children were angry with me; they

made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? (Song of Solomon 1:6-7).

Solomon replied with words of kindness and affection:

If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.... Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes (Song of Solomon 1:8-11, 15).

Have I allowed small things, which are not really important, to accumulate, fester, and grow into almost insurmountable obstacles? So, she burns the toast. You walk mud into the house. So, he leaves his clothes on the floor. You write checks and forget to note them in the register. None of us is perfect, and we all have a lot of room for improvement, but if we love one another, we will overcome these little things, laugh about them, and go on loving each other. They can become reminders of how much we love each other!

Have I failed to praise my mate, to commend

and compliment as I should? Again, note how Solomon and his bride praised each other.

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love (Song of Solomon 2:2-4).

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely (2:13-14).

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the

mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed (4:1-12).

Instead of being self-willed, refusing to cooperate, failing to communicate, ugly, hateful, uncaring, or determined to have one's way even if it wrecks the marriage, let us be considerate and kind, tender and loving, and work to make the marriage all it can be—before it is too late to save it.

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN DIVORCE OCCURS WITH FORNICATION INVOLVED?

Fornication refers to any illicit sexual intercourse. It includes pre-marital sexual intercourse, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest. Fornication is against one's own body (1 Cor. 6:18). Adultery is fornication, but means more specifically illicit sexual

activity where at least one of the participants is married to someone else (Exod. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Heb. 13:4. Gal. 6:7ff).

When divorce occurs because of fornication on the part of one of the marriage partners (the "*guilty party*"), the faithful mate (the "*innocent party*") has the right to divorce and remarry (Matt. 19:9). However, God does not require that he do so. It would be far better if the guilty party would repent (and he must for his salvation), and the innocent party forgive him (Luke 17:3-4), and receive him again. This would keep the marriage intact, spare the home and children the tragedy of divorce, and help to prevent further sin (such as the put away guilty party's entering into an "*adulterous marriage*").

The question asks what to do when divorce occurs with fornication involved. There are two parties to the marriage union; thus, there are two parties to consider. The innocent party must conduct himself as a Christian in all actions taken for, during, and after divorce. Wrong is always wrong, and never right, regardless of how badly one has been hurt (Rom. 12:17). Vengeance belongs to the Lord (Rom. 12:19). We still must treat the other as we would be treated (Mat. 7:12), for we will give account of what we do (2 Cor. 5:10).

If you are the innocent party, you will go through several stages of grief—which are normal reactions; however, you must be careful to keep yourself from sin (Eph. 4:26). The deep hurt you feel because of your mate's betrayal of the sacred vows of marriage which you exchanged needs healing, but healing does not

come from doing wrong, or from hating. These feelings may be greatly intensified if your marriage has continued for many years, and you feel you have given the best years of your life to someone who now rejects you and seeks another perhaps younger and more attractive. Remember, God did not cause this problem. Satan and sin did. So, do not get mad at God, or doubt His love for you. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16) and condemns one who would put away the wife of his youth (Mal. 2:14).

If you are the innocent party, God has given you the right, not only to put away the fornicator, but also to remarry. Be careful not to enter hastily into another marriage. The same guidelines which should be followed for first marriages apply to second marriages. Date only those whom you would want to marry. Marry only one who will help you get to heaven. Marrying for financial security, companionship, or to escape a bad situation means marrying for the wrong reason. Marry someone you love, and who loves you, but who loves God more than you (Matt. 6:33). You do not have to remarry, and some choose not to do so, but you have the right to do so as the innocent one.

Be fair and conduct yourself as a Christian should (Rom. 12:17) in all legal proceedings. Seek what is best for the children when it comes to custody and visitation arrangements, not what is worst for your former mate. You do have legal rights which you can exercise as a Christian in order to protect yourself and your children. Seek competent advice from a Christian lawyer if possible, from the elders, the preacher, or

other respected Christian counselors. Do not let Satan take this moment of distress and weakness to rob you of your soul (cf. Matt. 4:1-11). Even if your guilty mate deceives you and the law, manipulates the courts, robs and cheats you, and gets away with it in spite of all you try to do, do not allow yourself to become bitter and filled with hate. Such a course leads to more problems, and harms you more than anyone else (cf. Matt. 5:39-42).

If you are the guilty party put away by your mate, you have forfeited the right to remarry. Do not let lust take your soul (James 1:13-16). Physical pleasure for a season (Heb. 11:25) is not worth your eternal, immortal soul (Matt. 16:26). You must repent of the sin you committed, and go forward with your life. You can still serve God and be saved if you will do so. Do not shop around for a church or a preacher who will tell you that you can remarry. Do not put yourself in danger of losing your soul by entering a relationship that will result in getting as close to getting married as you can—without doing so. Do accept the responsibility of your actions, and conduct yourself as you should in relationship to your former spouse and children.

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN DIVORCE OCCURS WITHOUT FORNICATION INVOLVED?

Divorce on grounds other than fornication does not allow either party to remarry (Matt. 19:9; 5:32). (Note that some states make it virtually impossible to obtain a divorce paper which *states* the divorce is on the grounds of fornication even though it is, but what

is written on the paper does not determine one's eligibility to remarry, rather what has actually happened as God has specified for divorce and remarriage.)

According to these passages (Mat. 5 and 19, BL), if a divorce takes place for any other reason than fornication, a remarriage by either party would begin a state of adultery. If a putting away is on the grounds of adultery, the guilty party could not remarry without there being a state of adultery. The only person involved who could consider remarriage is the innocent partner of an unfaithful mate, and all factors involved should be seriously considered even then. The innocent party in such cases should try to be forgiving and work to overcome the difficulty if at all possible. If one has contributed to or encouraged unfaithfulness by failing to be a loving husband or wife, it is dangerous to conclude that person is innocent. To overlook or forgive unfaithfulness at one point in life and then use it as a smokescreen for some other problem at a later date does not fit the possible case for remarriage in these verses. There must be the putting away on the grounds of fornication, at least in the sight of God, before there can be any scriptural consideration for remarriage. When one of the parties involved in a marriage has a living mate of a previous marriage, except that person be the innocent victim of a fornicator, the union is a state of adultery.⁴

Can one divorce without the cause of fornication? Yes, but neither party of such a divorce can remarry. Paul wrote of just such a situation.

And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife (1 Cor. 7:10-11).

God, through Paul, gives two options in such a case: (1) remain unmarried, or (2) be reconciled to the former mate. Note the word "depart" is a legal term for divorce. Every divorce involves sin, and divorce without fornication does too. The sin may be the abuse of one by the other, or it may be the mutual neglect of both to be the mates God would have them to be, but whatever is the catalyst, sin is involved. Thus, be sure you are not the reason for the divorce.

What should one do? Perhaps, you did not want the divorce, but you could not legally prevent it? You can still serve God. Paul was not married (he was not divorced, but single, 1 Cor. 9:5), yet he could still rejoice in life, serving God, living for Christ (read Phil. 4 and 1:21). You can live without a mate, and must do so rather than live with someone in disobedience to God. Some are eunuchs for the kingdom's sake (Matt. 19:12), and, as such, are not second-class citizens in the kingdom (Phil. 3:20).

You must not feel sorry for yourself, doubt God's love, or quit the Lord (Rev. 2:10). You may well face increased difficulties and hardships, but you must

not get discouraged (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-9). You must remember there are many far worse things that can happen in life—although it may not seem so at the time. So, you can go on with life, be happy in spite of divorce, be a good parent, be a Christian, and go to heaven after this life on earth. And, friend, heaven will surely be worth it all.

CONCLUSION

Let us do all we can to fulfill our responsibilities in marriage that none could ever truthfully blame us for a faltering marriage or divorce. Yet, if faced with the difficulties of a failing marriage or divorce, let us remember to do all we do as Christians, trusting in God and obeying Him in all things.

God has given ONE exception that allows divorce of the fornicating spouse and remarriage of the innocent spouse (Matt. 19:9), but even then God does not require divorce—He allows it. It would be far better for the two to be reconciled by the guilty ones' repentance and the innocent ones' forgiving him.

If divorce takes place because of fornication, and if one party were truly innocent, that one may remarry if he desires to do so. The guilty party may not remarry. If divorce takes place without the reason of fornication, neither party may remarry. However, in all cases, one may still be saved and go to heaven, whether he may remarry or not, if he will turn from sin and seek forgiveness according to God's will.

ENDNOTES

1 **US Divorce Statistics**, <http://www.divorcemag.com/statistics/statsUS.shtml>, accessed April 14, 2004.

2 Pamela Johnson, "Are You Cheating," **Essence**, January 2001, http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m1264/9_31/68761280/p1/article.jhtml, accessed April 14, 2004.

3 "Serious About Those Vows," **Skyline Messenger**, ed. Troy E. McNutt (Tupelo, MS: Skyline Church of Christ, March 7, 2004).

4 Ben S. Flatt, "Adultery," **Living Soberly, Righteously, and Godly** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1977), pp. 47-48.

Chapter 18

What Can I Do When I Am Tempted To Yield To Sexual Temptation?

Danny Douglas



Danny has proven himself faithful in the kingdom of God as a preacher of the gospel of Christ for several years • He has served in local work in Kentucky, Tennessee and now Alabama • Has worked extensively in mission work (Ukraine, Great Britian) • Presently working in Ardmore, Alabama • The Douglas' have one precious child.

Let me express my sincere appreciation to brother Sain and the elders of the East Hill church of Christ for the invitation to be with you. It is an honor and privilege to be a part of this sound Bible lectureship, and to be affiliated with this great congregation of the Lord's people, with her faithful preachers, elders, deacons, and membership.

The theme this year is very practical and useful in everyday Christian living. This is something which should be beneficial to all of us, and it will be if we avail ourselves of the opportunity to study the material which is presented. The topic which I have been asked to deal with is: *"What Can I Do When I Am Tempted To Yield To Sexual Temptation?"* Let

us go to the Word of God for the solution to this question.

BE PREPARED AGAINST SEXUAL TEMPTATION

In order to resist the powerful temptations of the flesh man must prepare himself spiritually beforehand. We are dealing with a cunning, crafty, and vicious foe who must not be taken lightly, and who knows how to whet the appetite for unlawful sexual activity. Therefore we must fortify ourselves against this and all other temptations that the father of lies may hurl at us. We are to *"put on the whole armour of God"* that *"we may stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph. 6:11; cf. Eph. 6:10-18).

Spiritual strength is required in order to resist temptations. The word of God has the power to strengthen us, but we must apply ourselves to it if we would be built up in the faith. Paul stated to the Ephesian elders:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

The ever powerful and penetrating word of God is able to sustain us at Satan's most opportune moment:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and

is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

The child of God who is negligent in regard to daily Bible study, the work of the Lord, and to the assembling of the saints will find himself at a great disadvantage when faced with the powerful seductions of the wicked one (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 3:1; Heb. 10:25). It is easy to do evil when we are unprepared, like Rehoboam who *"did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord"* (2 Chron. 12:14).

Utmost then in the victory over sexual temptation is purity of heart. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* (Matt. 5:8). We understand the "heart" of this context to include the processes of the thoughts and mind. It is not difficult to see how than an individual who exposes himself to a steady diet of the modern media and entertainment world may readily be overcome with impure thinking, which will result in unholy conduct. Christ Jesus taught that sin originates within the heart of man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

Solomon also declared that the kind of life one lives is the result of the kind of heart he has: *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life"* (Prov. 4:23).

Moreover, it is much easier to stand our ground against sin when we are “*stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 15:58). The allurements of temptation are greatly diminished when our affections are set on “*things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*” (Col. 3:1). When we are continuing “*stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,*” and when we are engaged in the hot pursuit of those things which are pleasing to the Lord, it will hinder Satan in his effort to “*get advantage of us*” (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 2 Cor. 2:11).

The Lord Jesus recognized the great temptation which His apostles were about to face when He instructed them on the eve of His death:

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41).

Self-control, sobriety, constant vigilance and continuance in prayer are an absolute must in facing our adversary the devil, who “*as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8; cf. Col. 4:2; 1 Cor. 9:27).

KEEP THYSELF PURE

“*Keep thyself pure*” (1 Tim. 5:22b). These words of the apostle Paul to his son in the gospel indicate that anyone of us, no matter who we are, has the potential of losing his purity. Indeed, it is much easier to keep one’s purity than to lose it and get it back. It is very difficult for one, when once he embarks on the path

of sexual immorality, to break this pattern. The temptation for him becomes much greater once he has tasted of the forbidden fruit. Yet, one can be purified and saved from sin through the *"blood of Jesus Christ his Son which cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Heb. 9:14). Forgiveness is possible for the alien sinner by obedience to the gospel plan of salvation (Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 22:16; Heb. 5:9; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rom. 1:16). The child of God who so sins may also be cleansed, and that by repentance, confession and prayer (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22-24; James 5:16). Oh, how thankful we should be to God, Who *"giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:58)!

When one is in Christ he is able to overcome any sin. Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Phil. 4:13). We can be victorious over the sexual temptation because Christ, Who is in the Christian, is greater than Satan, who is in the world (cf. 1 John 4:4). Moreover, we know that there is no temptation which is impossible to escape, if we are willing to take the escape *"route."* In 1 Corinthians chapter ten and verse thirteen, Paul informs us that God will always provide a way of escape:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

The avoidance of tempting situations is imperative if one is going to keep himself pure and "*unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27). Initially man encounters sexual temptation, not in the immediate opportunity to climb into the bed of defilement in most cases, but in those things which lead up to the very act of fornication or adultery. By absorbing the filth and immorality of literature, music, music videos, movies, magazines, television programming, pornography, or internet sites, which are illicit in nature, one sets himself on the path of disobedience and moral degradation. It is impossible for one to think on those things which a true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, while feeding upon the filth and darkness of the world (cf. Phil. 4:8; 1 John 2:15; James 1:21)!

Perhaps nothing will lead to the corruption of good morals more quickly or effectively than involvement with evil companionships (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3; Prov. 13:20). We are to shun evil, evil companions, and the very appearance of evil, as inspiration states:

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good (Rom. 12:9).

Abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim. 6:11).

Ye that love the Lord, hate evil... (Psm. 97:10).

When we are caught up with people who have lust and fornication on their minds, sooner or later their influence upon us will be inevitable.

There are many ways that Satan may allure man into sexual sin. For example, the individual who participates in dancing, mixed swimming, "parking" and/or "petting" has involved himself/herself in that which the Scriptures describe as "lasciviousness," a work of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:19-21). "Lasciviousness" is translated from the Greek word, **aselgeia**, which Thayer defines as: "unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence." He further cites Fritzsche in his comment on Romans 13:13 where lasciviousness is translated "wantonness," and he defines it as: "*wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.*"¹ Vine says that "lasciviousness" denotes: "*excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness.*"²

Any situation or activity which incites lust, and involves vulgarity, immodesty, and indecency, including unlawful touching and bodily movements, may be classed as lascivious. The person who places himself into a compromising situation with one of the opposite sex in these and other ways has opened himself up to the enticements of Satan.

When Eve was close enough to the forbidden tree to observe its fruit and to touch it, she put herself into a situation where she could readily give in to the temptation to eat thereof (cf. Gen. 3:6). How much easier it would have been for her to resist the

temptation had she not gone near that which God had forbidden her and Adam to partake of, namely the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (cf. Gen. 2:17)! In like manner, when man "*flirts*" with sin he is giving Satan the upper hand in the realm of temptation, which, will result in sin, if yielded to (cf. James 1:13-15). The consequence of sin is death. This means separation from God! How horrible! "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). How can one sincerely pray as Jesus taught, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (cf. Matt. 6:13), and at the same time "*flirt*" with sin? When one plays with fire sooner or later he will get burned! "*Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned*" (Prov. 6:27)?

THE ENCOUNTER WITH SEXUAL TEMPTATION

Even when we have done our best to avoid sexual temptation there may come a time when, through no fault of our own, we meet face to face with it. What can we do then?

Let us follow the example of our Savior and Lord. When He was faced with temptation He unsheathed the "*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Eph. 6:17). In each of the temptations which Satan hurled at him in the wilderness, He answered with Scripture, saying, "*It is written...*," and each time He successfully resisted (cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). The Scriptures are all-sufficient in enabling us to face any situation and overcome every obstacle (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

A specific example of a godly man who faced sexual temptation was Joseph. No doubt this is "*written for our learning*" that we also might overcome (cf. Rom. 15:4). His exemplary attitude and action is such, which if followed, will result in victory over any temptation we may face. He realized that sin is against God, and that if he sinned then he would be in opposition to God. In his refusal to lie with Potiphar's wicked wife, he answered her, "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God*" (Gen. 39:9)? The basis for this refusal was his love for God. Also under consideration was his loyalty to Potiphar, when he refused to lie with his wife (cf. Gen. 39:8-9). Hence, Joseph's example proves that obedience to the first and second commandments, as stated by Jesus, will enable man to conquer any temptation.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Matt. 22:37-39).

We understand why Jesus said, "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matt. 22:40). Love for God first, and secondly, love for our fellowman, will bring about obedience to God, and cause us to vehemently oppose that which necessitated the death of Christ, and which will destroy the precious soul of our fellow man, namely sin.

There is another aspect related to the incident involving Joseph and Potiphar's wife which is worthy

of our consideration, and that is the fact that Joseph “fled, and got him out” (Gen. 39:12). Inspiration’s word to us when we are faced with sexual temptation is FLEE. When we are being solicited to do evil we are not to hesitate and think over the situation, and ponder as to whether or not we should commit the act. There is only one right answer to temptation and that is – NO! Our response should be swift and sure, because there is more at stake than if we were surrounded by the raging flames of a burning house. One’s eternal soul is at stake, and the soul is more valuable than the precious physical body (Matt. 10:28). Jesus said, “*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul*” (Mark 8:36)? Therefore, like Joseph, flee and get out!

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). There is something about the act of fornication which deeply involves the total man. The sin of fornication is especially devastating and enduring. For example, its effects are overwhelming to man’s emotional make-up. Sexual impurity is spiritually destructive: “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*” (Heb. 13:4). Let us therefore, “*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*” (1 Peter 2:11).

The story is related about a farmer who took his son out to the barn one day to teach him a valuable lesson. He took a nail and drove it into the barn door. Then he pulled the nail out. While referring to the hole left by the nail, he told his son that sin is like

this. One can be forgiven of the sin, but it always leaves a scar.

The darkest chapter in the story of a great man's life begins to unfold as King David, one night upon the housetop fixed his gaze upon a beautiful woman as she bathed herself. The look of lust eventually led to the act of adultery (2 Sam. 11:2-4). This, in turn, led to other evils. When David learned that Bathsheba had become expectant with his child, he sought to cover up his adulterous action by deceit, causing her husband to become drunken, and finally conspiring his murder. The guilt and misery which he came to know was unspeakable (cf. 2 Sam. 11-12). Later, he even suffered horrible consequences which involved his son Absalom because of this one night of shame and sinful indulgence (cf. 2 Sam. 13-18). Truly, "*the ways of transgressors is hard*" (Prov. 13:15).

David's action well illustrates the principle which Jesus taught, and which is, that the thought is the prelude to the act. Jesus spoke about this when He warned against unlawful desire and causes of stumbling in Matthew 5:27-30:

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. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast in hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut

it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

According to Jesus then, we must be willing to pay any price, regardless of the severity, in order to escape the clutches of sin. Severing one's hand is preferable to using that hand to indulge in a lascivious act involving oneself, or using it to handle another human being in an unlawful manner. Indeed, plucking out the eyeball is much to be desired over using the eye to lust and thereby to lose one's eternal soul. Indeed, it would be better to sever one's foot than to let our feet carry us to places of forbidden pleasure (cf. Mark 9:43-48). The obvious import of our Lord's words are not to induce one to mutilate his own physical body, but to help man to realize that the salvation of his soul is worth any sacrifice or pain he must undergo in order to "*lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us*" (Heb. 12:1).

No doubt, at the very root of every temptation is lust. The inspired James states:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:13-15).

According to the beloved apostle, the proper course of action in regard to lust and our encounter

with it is to flee: *"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (2 Tim. 2:22). David repented of his sin and was forgiven (2 Sam. 12:13; Psm. 32:51). Yet, how much better it would have been for him and many others had he fled from the lust with which he was confronted in the first place on that dreadful night.

When facing sexual temptation, let us remember that whatever momentary gratification we may receive from the pleasure of sexual indulgence, it can in no way compensate for the heartbreak we will bring to the God Who loves us, for the painful guilt which we will inflict upon ourselves, nor the monumental misery which it will likely bring to another soul either now or in the future. Like Moses, let us esteem the *"reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures"* of this world, and regard the reward of God as more to be desired than the *"pleasures of sin for a season"* (cf. Heb. 11:24-26). Like the Lord Jesus Christ, Who *"loved righteousness and hated iniquity,"* let us ever stand courageously against everything that stands in defiance of Almighty God, and unwaveringly uphold the sober, righteous and godly living which depicts the truly Christ-like life (Heb. 1:9; Titus 2:12).

CONCLUSION

Being spiritually armed with the mind of Christ will fortify us against the temptations of this world:

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in

the flesh hath ceased from sin (1 Peter 4:1; cf. Phil. 2:5).

Keeping ourselves close to God and all that is good, and far away from evil, will weaken the allurements of sin, and lessen Satan's opportunity to overthrow us.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded (James 4:7-8).

Then, when we face sexual temptation, let us never forget that it would be better to enter into heaven without a hand, foot, or eye, than to go into the unquenchable fire of hell with all of our members (cf. Mark 9:43-48). Also, let us always be mindful of the joy which we bring to God when we love Him more than we love the pleasures of sin. The consequence of such loyalty and love will result in a life pleasing to Him on this earth, and a home in heaven with our Lord for eternity! *"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son"* (Rev. 21:7).

ENDNOTES

1 Joseph H. Thayer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 766-767.

2 W. E. Vine, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), p. 310.

Chapter 13

What Can I Do When ...I Become A Caregiver (Parent, Spouse)?

Dave Miller



A native of Arizona, Dave is the Chairman of the Department of New Testament Studies at Apologetics Press • The host of the nationally televised TV program “The Truth In Love.” His formal education includes 3 masters degrees and a Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. His book, *Piloting the Strait*, deals with the changes affecting churches of Christ. Deborah and Dave have 4 grown children, 3 grandchildren and reside in Montgomery, Alabama.

What can we do when we become a caregiver to a parent or spouse? Consider the following three guidelines:

1. Remember that we are Christians who possess the compassion that the Bible enjoins above all other peoples. Dr. Brad Harrub (of Apologetics Press) made the following insightful observation:

I spent several years working in an Alzheimer’s facility while I was finishing up my undergraduate degree. It always amazed me the vast difference in how the families treated the residents in that facility – some of which were so ravaged by the disease that they didn’t even recognize their own family. You could almost place everyone

into one of two distinct groups. There were those that came on a daily or at least weekly basis, often feeding, grooming, or reading to them in an effort to show their love and devotion. The other group rarely came. They would come around holidays, drop off their tin of cookies, give a few quick hugs and be gone. Often times the car would be left running outside as sons and daughters quickly eased their conscience with that quick hug and gift. Is it any wonder then that in the United States we have 18 elderly people every day that choose to take their own lives. Why? Why would our grandparents and great-grandparents ever think about doing such a horrible thing? Maybe it's because, as one recent poll indicated, they have stopped feeling loved, and instead feel like a burden.

2. We should reassure our relative that he or she is loved and that the extra effort needed to see them through this difficult period of their life is not resented or resisted. What happens when the elderly members of society no longer feel loved and begin to think of themselves as a "*burden*"? Consider the eighty-year-old grandmother with multiple medical complications who does not want to be a bother to her children. Society sometimes places very little value on the disabled and elderly, and therefore many are taking their own lives prematurely either through euthanasia or suicide.

Diane Coleman, founder of Not Dead Yet, stated:

There is a great revulsion against disabled people that is visceral. This disdain is masked as compassion but many people believe that in an ideal world, disabled people wouldn't be there (as quoted in Smith, p. 28).

An Oregon report on assisted suicide for the year 2000 showed that more patients than ever before took their lives because they felt they had become a burden to friends, family, and caregivers. On average, eighteen elderly Americans take their own lives each day, with the highest rate coming from white American males who are 65 years old or older (see the United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

3. Provide the necessary care to sustain them.

Disabled seniors who do not take their own lives often inadvertently cause their families to have to wrestle with an entirely different moral dilemma. Consider the following paradox. We imprison individuals for not feeding or taking care of animals, and yet our society now deems receiving nutrients through a feeding tube and/or IV in the case of humans a "*medical procedure*" that can be withheld, depending on what the patient's power of attorney says. Is it "*humane*" to withhold food from a horse? The courts say "*no*," and will send you to prison for doing so. Yet that same judicial system will allow you to withhold life-saving nutrients and water from the elderly.

In short, if and when we become caregivers to incapacitated relatives, let us practice the golden rule: treat them the way we would want to be treated.

Listen carefully to the plea of the psalmist: “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails” (Psm. 71:9).

REFERENCES

Smith, Wesley J. (2000), *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books).

United States Department of Health and Human Services (1999), *The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent Suicide*.

What Can I Do When...

***Temptations,
Trials
And Realities***

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Chapter 20

What Can I Do When ...Tragedy Strikes (Accident, Physical, Etc.)

Paul Sain



Born in Tennessee • Began preaching in 1961 • Worked with churches in Missouri, Alabama, and Tennessee • Presently with the East Hill Church in Pulaski, TN (since 1987) • Author of **Ready Reference For Growing Christians**, and other volumes • Coordinator of **Studying Through The Bible** class material • Owns Sain Publications • Married LaDon Vick (of Hardin, KY) • Four children and six grandchildren.

Satan bombards us in many ways. He is a cunning, sdevious, evil adversary. He is aggressive and militant. He never ceases to tempt, striving to entrap, ensnare, and ultimately to destroy us spiritually.

Our lives on earth have been described as times on the mountain, as well as times in the valley. We appreciate the mountain-top experiences and times because of the times in the valley. Often when life seems to be most enjoyable, blessings abound, joys abundant, then tragedy strikes. Such calamity may appear in various forms (which we will discuss briefly in this chapter).

Our primary goal in this brief overview is to place before our minds a course of action that is sensible, beneficial and according to Scripture after

tragedy comes into our lives.

First, let us understand that whatever comes our way, almost certainly, we are not the first to face this particular tragedy. Others have suffered heart attacks. Many have traumatically heard the word "*cancer*" or "*I'm sorry, there is nothing that can be done!*" Thousands have been forced to rebuild after a tragic fire, horrific accident, tornado, hurricane, etc.

Second, things could always be worse. Look around and likely you will find someone who is struggling with even greater problems and trials. Even if our tragedy includes death for ourself or another, the fact remains that even death of the physical body is not to be feared (Matt. 10:28) in comparison to the soul being destroyed.

Until You Have Experienced A Tragedy, You Really Do Not "Know"

I have lied when speaking to others about the circumstances they faced at that time. I really did not intend to lie, but I actually was guilty nevertheless. I have said, "*I understand*" in conversation with them. The truth was, I did NOT understand. (We should be careful what we say to anyone, especially during times of tragedy.)

I do understand more, now that years of experiences have been endured. My precious wife of almost forty years and I have walked through numerous valleys. We have experienced the death of a child (six week old Steffany Mischell, in 1966). We lived through a tornado (Memphis, TN, 22 large trees

were destroyed in our yard alone). We were shaken when our house burned (Jackson, MO, 1975). We had to rebuild again, when our house was flooded, not once, but twice (Jackson, MO, 1976, over six feet deep, a few weeks between the two occurrences). Reference to these occurrences are not intended for sympathy, pity, nor anything other than *we know a little about tragedy in one's life*.

Do Not Blame God

God does not directly bring tragedy upon us. God does not send a tornado to a particular location. God is not the cause of an automobile accident. God does not give someone a fatal disease.

Our Almighty Father created the world, the universe, everything. At creation, the world began, with its cycles regarding weather, seasons, tides, etc. Decisions that man makes determines where they live, at the time and place when explosive weather occurs. God did not directly send such tragedy upon His children, but neither does He suspend natural laws because faithful Christians may be involved.

Draw Strength From Friends, Doctors, Preachers, Elders, Etc.

True friends can help during time of distress and need. Be careful and cautious with ones who "*claim*" to be a friend, but prove otherwise. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar claimed to be Job's friend, but they were not! The disciples claimed to be the friend of the Saviour, but then "*followed afar off*" when put to the

test. Peter was so outspoken declaring he would not deny the Lord, but did so three times! At that time, he was not a true friend.

A true friend will be emphatic and understanding. A true friend will know when to remain silent and just listen and when to talk. A true friend will walk with you, stand beside you, offer help when needed, and words of comfort when possible.

A doctor is a trained professional, who can often be the one needed to provide great strength and help. Elders, preachers, or respected faithful Christians are spiritual, caring and loving fellow-travelers and will sacrificially give of themselves to assist you. Frequently, it is found that others have walked down the same road of tragedy and thus can be of great help. They know what it is like. They can empathize in ways unknown to others.

Do What You Can Do, Pick Up The Pieces And Move On

In Acts 27, those in a ship, with the immediate danger of shipwreck, did what they could do. The 276 aboard undergirded the ship (v. 17), lightened the ship (v. 18), threw away the tackling of the ship (v. 19), cast the wheat overboard to lighten the ship (v. 38). As Paul, "*believe God*" in taking care of you, whatever may come, giving "*thanks to God*" (v. 35).

When calamities occur, catch your breath, then begin to pick up the pieces and move on. Consider, there are a few options open to you. (1) You could sit around and have a "*pity party*," thinking how terrible

it is that such happened to you, when you are trying to do good and right. But feeling pity for yourself will not change anything. The problem will still exist after the party is over. (2) You can play the "blame-game." Attempting to blame someone, whether God, another, or yourself, will not solve one thing. If an automobile accident, pointing the finger of blame to even one who is guilty of blame does not take away the pain, relieve the hurt, or return things to the way they were before the accident. (3) You can pause and consider that circumstances could be even worse. Why not express your appreciation in prayer to your Heavenly Father, asking for strength to do what needs to be done for that moment, and then start picking up the pieces? If a tornado or hurricane, the utter chaos must be cleaned up before even the consideration of rebuilding. If you have received tragic physical news, there are decisions that must be made (after adequate information is secured) regarding treatment. If death has abruptly taken a loved one, nothing immediately will relieve the pain. Yet there are arrangements and necessary decisions that must be made.

So, regardless of the "tragedy" try to step back, assess the situation, count your blessings, know that God is near, and move cautiously forward.

Above All Else, Trust And Have Faith In God

Our relationship with our Father in heaven should be most treasured in our lives. We know He cares. He has demonstrated His love and concern for

all mankind. He sent His Son to make redemption possible (to all who will fully submit to His will, coming to Him on His terms). God knows and cares!

The Son of God is our High Priest, One who can be touched by our infirmities (Heb. 4:15). He knows what it is to be abandoned, all alone, forsaken, down-trodden, rejected, hurting, understanding the need for help. Our Lord has made it possible for us to cast our cares upon Him, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

God in heaven is all powerful. He is able (Eph. 3:20). He can be our sustainer, our friend in time of need, our refuge. We may not be able to make it on our own, but with the help of our Father we can survive. The story is told of a small boy trying to move a heavy piece of wood in their yard. He tugged, grunted, strained, and worked diligently, but to no avail. Finally in aggravation, he said to his dad (who was closeby), *"I just can't move it. I have tried everything, and I just can't do it."* The dad asked, *"Son, have you tried everything that you can?"* *"Yes, dad, I have tried everything!"* The dad answered, *"But you haven't asked me to help."* Our heavenly Father is ready to help also.

Conclusion

As we summarize, let us briefly note a few individuals found in the pages of inspired Scripture which serve as examples to us. These serve as lessons from which we can learn (Rom. 15:4).

Job. He was a just and righteous man. Greatly afflicted with indescribable losses in such a brief span of time. His friends charged him with sin that brought

such tragedy. His wife wanted him to just curse God and die. But Job persevered and remained true to Almighty God. Even in pain, with circumstances about as bad as possible, he did not deny God.

Paul. The persecutor turned proclaimer of Jesus Christ found himself undergoing great persecution. Beaten, given stripes, in prison, great difficulty from every direction (2 Cor. 11:23-28). He endured far more than our minds can grasp, but this valiant soldier and faithful servant refused to look back, never gave up (Gal. 6:9), faithfully pushed onward toward the heavenly goal (Phil. 3:12-14).

May we, like Job and Paul, keep our eyes focused intently upon our Saviour. Let us understand that trials and distress will come to the faithful (2 Tim. 3:12). May we always remember that one day, we can rest (Rev. 14:13), receive the mansion prepared for the people of God (John 14:1-3), never again to carry the burdens of earthly life (Rev. 21:1-4). What a grand and glorious home that will be!

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Chapter 21

What Can I Do When ...Faced With Materialistic Desires?

Cliff Goodwin



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The question before us is a most pertinent question, indeed. As human beings, we all have desires, wishes and wants. Desires can be either good and wholesome, or they can be unholy and impure. As free moral agents, accountable before God for our thoughts, words and deeds, we must be careful to maintain pure hearts and wholesome desires (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 5:8). This, however, as with all facets of the Christian life, is at times easier *said* than *done*. We live in a world that constantly bombards us with both materialistic and carnal pressures. This is why Paul warned by inspiration, “*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...*” (Rom. 12:2).¹ Though we live *in* this world,

God's people are not to be *of* this world. Therefore, our desires as New Testament Christians should be molded, influenced and governed by God's word—not by the external pressures exerted on us by the world (cf. Psm. 119:11, 104).

Our desires, if left unguarded, unchecked and unbridled, can certainly get us into spiritual trouble. James wrote the following.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: **But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.** Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren (James 1:13-16; emp. mine, CG).

Lusts, or unholy desires, entice men to sin. For this reason, we must know what to do when faced with such desires. If we are not careful, all of us can have such desires creep into our hearts and ultimately into our lives.

Let us look at materialistic and covetous desires, in particular. Materialism may be defined as "*an infatuation or preoccupation with earthly (physical) things, as opposed to spiritual.*" We need to remember the term "*matter*" when we think of "*materialism.*" A materialistic person places the emphasis, or focus, of his life on things composed of physical *matter*. Things, possessions, and money *matter* most to a materialistic person.

Covetousness might be described as the “*half-brother*” to materialism. It is the,

inordinate, unhealthy desire for gain; the desire for more and more, even to the point of wanting that which rightfully belongs to another.

Another word that readily describes covetousness is the “*old-fashioned*” term, *greed*.

Jesus linked both of these concepts together when He said,

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the **abundance** of the **things** which he **possesseth**, (Luke 12:15; emp. mine, CG).

He was warning those who focused their lives in terms of *things* they could *possess*. After mentioning covetousness explicitly, Jesus goes on to use the term *abundance*—covetous people are preoccupied with having abundance, or more and more. So often when one of these ugly monsters raises its ugly head, the other is sure to follow. This is because there is a natural relationship between these two unholy attitudes. The materialistic mind is described by Solomon,

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity, (Eccl. 5:10).

The materialistic mind has little choice but to be covetous, for it is infatuated with that which can never satisfy! Material and monetary things do **not** bring

lasting happiness, contentment and fulfillment. Hence, when a person's life is fixated on these things, he naturally wants more and more, thinking that satisfaction can surely be found in abundance. "Not so!" says the Holy Spirit through the words of Solomon.

To point out the vanity and folly of materialism and covetousness is **not** to say that such desires are absent from among God's people today. To the contrary, God's present people are so often hampered by materialistic greed, especially in our nation. Many members of the Lord's church are just as preoccupied with material things as are people in the world, and this spiritual infection is wreaking havoc within the precious bride of Christ in many ways. Many members cannot assemble with the saints in any fashion that would be termed "*regularly*," for they are enslaved to their jobs—working more and more to possess more and more! Local budgets are suppressed and stifled in many congregations because of members who are too greedy to have any concept of—*faithful stewardship*. Truly, "*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Tim. 6:10, ASV),² and its disastrous effects are all too often felt throughout the Lord's church.

So what are we to do? Living in this day and time, we are certain to face materialistic, covetous desires at some point in our lives. It is likely that many of us have already faced this problem in times past; many of us may be struggling with it even now. What are we to do, so as to overcome this device of the devil and save our own souls? The answer is simple: we must *get in* the Book and *stay in* the Book! God's

word is the spiritual antidote to temptation and sin, as Jesus exemplified in Matthew 4:1-11. The psalmist declared by inspiration, "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psm. 119:11). God's word in our hearts will fortify us against materialistic and covetous desires. It will direct our steps in the paths of truth and righteousness (cf. Psm. 119:30). Hence, let us always remember what the Bible teaches concerning riches and our attitude toward them, especially when we are confronted by materialistic desires. Consider the following.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

Obviously, material riches consist of inanimate possessions and are, therefore, not *literally* capable of deceiving anyone. Nonetheless, there is a spiritual sense in which many who possess earthly riches have a tendency to become deceived. Jesus brought out this point in describing the thorny soil,

And the cares of this world, and **the deceitfulness of riches**, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful (Mark 4:19; emp. mine, CG).

Speaking anthropomorphically, riches have a tendency to lull their owner into a sense of self-sufficiency and even complacency. The attitude of many is that if they had more money, everything would be alright! To the contrary, however, there are many, many problems that cannot be fixed simply by the possession of more money. For example, riches are rendered totally

powerless when it comes to the restoration of one's good health. While it is true that money may be able to acquire the finest doctors, the most powerful medicine and the latest of medical technology, there are still illnesses and conditions which no doctor, medicine or procedure can cure.

The Bible provides us with a wonderful example of one who allowed his riches to deceive him. We commonly refer to him as the rich fool.

And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).

Here was a man who had the proverbial "*bumper crop.*" His harvest was so plenteous that he planned to live off of it for the rest of his life. In his eyes, his wealth brought ease and security. Nevertheless, his riches would be able to save neither his life nor his soul! In the very night he schemed and planned so selfishly for the future, he passed from the walks of this life

into eternity. Riches had not been able to preserve his physical life—he would die at the pinnacle of his material success. The real tragedy of this story, however, is the fate of the man's soul. Though not stated explicitly, the obvious conclusion is clear: the rich man died a spiritual pauper (v. 21).

Physical health and spiritual welfare too seldom come under the consideration of those contemplating material wealth. Many ruin their medical health, working tirelessly to make more money. They stress over jobs and bottom-lines, and their blood pressure rises to dangerous levels. Many develop stomach ulcers from stress and worry surrounding money. It is sad to say, but many work themselves to death, only to have a luxurious and elaborate funeral! Even further, the spiritual damage suffered by those *"who desire to be rich"* (1 Tim. 6:9 NKJV)³ cannot be ignored. They needlessly spurn the assemblies of the saints in order to work or enterprise. They often allow their jobs to consume their time to the extent that their children are neglected and their families wrecked. Many become so self-sufficient as to effectively forget about God, no longer understanding how *desperately* they need Him. The apostle John penned inspired words that treat these subjects beautifully, *"Beloved, I wish [pray, ASV] above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,"* (3 John 2). John prayed for Gaius that he might have material prosperity coupled **with** health, not at the price **of** health. Further, both of these prayers were connected with the spiritual prosperity of Gaius. The lesson

should be clear: there is nothing wrong with health and prosperity, so long as they are not detriments to one's spiritual well-being.

THE DIFFICULTY ASSOCIATED WITH RICHES

As mentioned earlier, we often think that life would be "*Easy Street*," if only we had more money. However, the Bible shows us a starkly different picture. The rich often face spiritual difficulties, as well as earthly. Regarding the latter Solomon wrote these inspired words,

When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep (Eccl. 5:11-12).

The rich have worries, concerns and stresses that most of us know nothing about. It has been said that it takes money to make money, but it is often true that it takes money to *keep* money. Wealth comes with its attendant necessities. People often must be hired in order to keep the wealth-producing business running as it should. With employees come the added concerns of health insurance, payroll taxes, etc. It sometimes seems that any added money coming in is paid out just as quickly. Wealth often consists of a vicious machine, engulfing the life of its owner. This is why many rich people cannot sleep well.

Our Lord touched upon the spiritual difficulties associated with riches.

And Jesus said unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, (Matt. 19:23 ASV).

According to Mark's account, Christ expounded further upon this statement,

And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! (Mark 10:24).

Thus we see *trusting* in riches to be the real problem. What many fail to realize, however, is how easy it is for this to happen to the affluent. This point goes back to the deceitfulness of riches treated earlier. There is a tendency in human beings to love wealth and to trust in it once it has come their way. The psalmist warned, "...if riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psm. 62:10). Obviously, the entrance of wealth into one's life brings many changes. One enjoys food, luxury and possessions he once was unable to enjoy. The danger is that such enjoyment may turn his heart. He might begin looking at his wealth as the source of his sustenance and happiness. When this occurs, the deceitfulness of riches has claimed another victim.

Before we aspire to be wealthy, we really ought to take these things into consideration. Being rich is not all "*it's cracked up to be,*" especially in light of the

spiritual hazards it can pose. Paul warned Timothy of the pitfalls associated with covetousness.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10 NKJV).

Clarke commented on the former of these verses, *"Those who have a consuming desire to be rich are setting themselves up for great heartache and pain."*⁴ If the **emphasis** of one's life is to be materially rich, then such an attitude is certainly sinful and unbecoming of a Christian. Indeed, there is a natural desire in all of us to prosper and to do well, and nothing is wrong with this aspiration in healthy proportions. But when money becomes the object of our love and the basis of our trust, we have become greedy and materialistic. A faithful Christian loves and trusts in God. He can learn to be content with little or much (Phil. 4:11-13), so long as he has God in his life (Heb. 13:5).

THE DISTRIBUTION OF RICHES

It has been said that every blessing comes with its own responsibility. This is certainly true in light of the Bible's teaching relative to stewardship. In actuality, we own nothing upon this earth. God spoke through the psalmist,

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof (Psm. 50:10-12).

Everything in this world was created by God (John 1:3) and belongs to God. We then, as God's created beings, are only stewards of the things we possess. That which we "*own*" is actually entrusted to us by God; He is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift (James 1:17). Hence, the more we "*own*," the more responsibility we bear before God. We had better be sure that we are using our possessions to His glory and the furtherance of His Son's kingdom! Paul gave a very sobering statement about stewards, "*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*" (1 Cor. 4:2; emp. mine, CG).

The rich have much more in which to be faithful than do the poor, materially speaking. Hence, their responsibility before God in this area is also greater. Paul gave Divine instructions to the rich.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Depending on how one dissected the foregoing verses, he would find up to seven admonitions given the rich by God. Let us look briefly at each of these.

One, the rich are charged not to be high-minded. This tendency often surfaces in the affluent, the tendency to “*look down their noses*” at other people. In God’s eyes, however, it matters not how much money one has or doesn’t have; what matters to God is how that person uses his money! Two, they are charged not to trust in uncertain riches. We’ve already touched upon how easy it is for the wealthy to do this. Many times they look at money as being the source of their blessing—when the money itself was actually a blessing from God! In this way, covetousness is a form of idolatry, indeed (Col. 3:5). The third admonition might be viewed as a companion or corollary to the second: the rich must trust in the living God. Essential to such trust is the understanding that all good gifts come from God; He gives them that we might *enjoy* them, not *adore* them! Remember the rich fool in Luke 12. It is written that his ground “*brought forth plentifully*” (v. 16). Who was it that caused such to occur? Our Savior taught that even the sunshine and rain are gifts from God Himself (Matt. 5:45). Instead of being drawn closer to God, however, the rich fool simply doted upon his riches and became self-sufficient. He trusted in something that could not save him.

The fourth inspired admonition to the rich is that they do good. Elsewhere Paul wrote,

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them

who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Riches multiply both the ability and opportunities for one to do good; sadly however, the rich often neglect this duty, being focused solely on themselves. Fifth, Paul wrote, "*that they be rich in good works.*" Once again the rich fool of Luke 12 comes to mind. It's interesting to note that this man was rich *before* his "*bumper crop*" came in (v. 16). Thus, he was only richer after his copious harvest! He apparently had enough goods to sustain him the rest of his life (cf. v. 19), and those were exactly his plans. Instead, he could have used great portions of his harvest to feed the hungry, to help the less fortunate – thereby becoming rich in good works as well as in possessions. Sadly, however, he elected not to follow the example of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus was rich, but he also gave half his goods to the poor.

Let's look at the sixth and seventh admonitions together: "*ready to distribute, willing to communicate.*" The New King James Version reads "*ready to give, willing to share.*" At this point we come specifically to the *distribution* of riches. God has not given the general command for all rich Christians to relinquish their riches. He has simply commanded that they be ready to give of their riches and share them with others. Think of this principle in light of our Lord's words.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for

my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Upon obedience to the gospel, many have been disowned by their families—only to find sundry “*brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children*” within the church! Similarly, some have been kicked out of their homes, only to be welcomed into the home of a brother in Christ. Those who make great sacrifices in order to serve Christ should be aided by those who are able to relieve or lessen their distress. The rich have special *ability* and *responsibility* in this area.

By putting into practice the seven foregoing admonitions, the rich accomplish what Paul wrote in verse nineteen, “*Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come...*” There are two basic ways to use wealth. One, a person may lay it up for himself. This does nobody any good in the present, nor him any good in the hereafter (cf. Luke 12:16-21). Two, he may use it in God's service, distributing to those in need and thereby laying a good foundation on which to stand before God in judgment. This is not to say the rich can “*buy their way into heaven*” with good works, but it is to say they will certainly be lost without them!

THE DETERMINATION RICHES HELP MAKE

In Luke 16:1-8 Jesus taught what we commonly refer to as the parable of the unjust steward. Many

critics have misunderstood and misconstrued the parable to condone dishonesty and improper business dealings. Such is certainly not the case! When studying a parable as given by our Lord, we always do well to examine that immediately preceding the parable and that immediately following the parable. In this case it is the latter that is especially helpful, for therein Jesus gives the Divine interpretation and application of the parable of the unjust steward. He elaborated the following.

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:9-13).

Jesus used the parable to teach concerning man's use of money. In verse nine He pointed out that man may use money in such a way upon this earth so as to be received into heaven after death and judgment. The converse implication of this principle should be

equally clear: man may also use money in such a way upon this earth so as to be eternally lost (cf. vs. 11-12)! In verse ten our Savior dealt directly with stewardship, pointing out that those with little money have just as much responsibility to manage properly their possessions, as the rich have to manage their great wealth. Once again, God's concern is not with the possession of money or the amount of money, but the **use** of that money.

The way we use money in this life will help determine our eternal destinies. The unjust steward dealt with money in such a way so as to ensure he would have other households to which he could go in the event he was fired (cf. Luke 16:4). Likewise, we need to use our money in such a way so as to ensure we have reservations awaiting us in heaven (cf. 1 Peter 1:4). Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount,

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, (Matt. 6:19-21).

It has been said that the only way we can take riches with us after death, is to have sent them on ahead. The wise man of old concurred by inspiration, "*There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches,*" (Prov. 13:7).

CONCLUSION

Money is neither inherently good nor evil, but our attitude toward money and material things will be one of these two. If we see material possessions for what they are—temporal blessings from God to be used in His service—then we can maintain a proper and healthy attitude toward such things. On the other hand, if we allow wealth and prosperity to deceive our hearts and steal away our allegiance, we will certainly stand before God condemned. Let us always look to the Bible and remember these practical truths about riches and our attitudes toward them.

ENDNOTES

1 **The Holy Bible, King James Version**, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, n.d.). All other references are to this version unless otherwise noted.

2 **The Holy Bible, American Standard Version**, (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible, 1984).

3 **The Holy Bible, New King James Version**, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

4 B.J. Clarke, "Warnings about Riches and a Final Charge," in **Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus**_ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 2001), 213-214.

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Chapter 22

What Can I Do When ...Faced With Financial Collapse (Bankruptcy)

Paul Sain



Born in Tennessee • Began preaching in 1961 • Worked with churches in Missouri, Alabama, and Tennessee • Presently with the East Hill Church in Pulaski, TN (since 1987) • Author of **Ready Reference For Growing Christians**, and other volumes • Coordinator of **Studying Through The Bible** class material • Owns Sain Publications • Married LaDon Vick (of Hardin, KY) • Four children and six grandchildren.

We are wealthy people! Americans enjoy a vast portion of the world's wealth, though we are a mere 6% of the world's population. Our animals (dogs, cats) eat much better than the majority of the children throughout the world. Recreation (sports of all kinds, boating, golf, hunting, etc.) takes a giant slice of the money in our life (billions of dollars).

As discussed in another chapter in this volume, materialism is a major problem in the lives of everyone today. We are far more interested in laying up treasures on the earth, than in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). Brother Andrew Connally stated (1985):

We have spawned a generation of greedy, covetous, lascivious, materialistically-

minded children that have nothing better to do than to buy or lust after some new thing that takes money that belongs to God, that requires time we don't have to satisfy lusts we don't need!

More and more are guilty of loving money, though we are informed in 1 Timothy 6:10 that *"the love of money is the root of all evil."*

Let us acknowledge those who have their sights set on heaven, who are living godly and righteous lives (as best as possible), and are successful in the business world. They possess a portion of this world's goods, and are wisely giving to the Lord's work, liberally. Sacrifice even at times will describe their giving. It is not sinful to be wealthy. It is sinful when money or things (small or great) becomes one's god.

THE UNDENIABLE FACTS

None can deny the following truths, *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out"* (1 Tim. 6:7). *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein"* (Psm. 24:1). Whatever portion we may have of this world's goods, it is in our hands ever so briefly; we are mere stewards of these things, and *"it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* (1 Cor. 4:2); *"good stewards"* (1 Peter 4:10).

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Most everyone has made mistakes (some more significant than others) of which they regret. Likely

the majority have made bad financial decisions. Through our publishing business, Sain Publications, we have occasion to deal with hundreds of churches and individuals on a regular basis. How utterly tragic, spiritually discouraging, to see how some handle their obligations. A few churches have failed to pay their bills (even after months and years). Several individuals (who are brethren in Christ) try every way possible to escape from paying the just debt they incurred.

Live within your means. Do not try to keep up with everyone else. Our world seeks to program us to "*have it all, right now.*" We desire "*instant*" everything. The words of the inspired Paul should set the tone for our lives:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

Pay as you go, and you may not go as far, but your life will be better. Consider walking in the shoes of others, the ones to whom you owe a debt.

Communicate. If circumstances exist, changes have altered what is possible regarding a debt, be open, fair and communicate with the one to whom the debt is owed. Explain, ask for suggestions and do the best you can do.

If you find yourself facing financial ruin and possibly bankruptcy is the only course of action, may I offer these thoughts. It is not a sin to declare bankruptcy. It is a sin if you ultimately do not pay

what you owe another. The court may offer relief from the debt, but it is a debt that must be paid, in order to *"provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom. 12:17), doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matt. 7:12). I know personally of those who made so many mistakes, found themselves in debt so drastically that bankruptcy was necessary. Some time was required, but every penny was paid that was due to each one. It was the right thing to do.

LOSING IT ALL – ABRUPTLY!

Job lost it all, in a single day! Ten precious children, all of his earthly possessions, and then physical tragedy, but this just and righteous man refused to blame God, deny God, nor accept the charges of his so-called friends. He was ultimately blessed, even more than before this great tragedy.

We may face financial collapse; near or total ruin financially. Such tragedy comes in many shapes and sizes. To the one who has little, complete collapse can be the loss of a few hundred dollars. Others may have great wealth, millions of dollars, and disaster comes at the losing of it all. In either case, it is often earth shattering, a feeling of devastation and ruin. *What can one do when faced with such tragedy?*

TAKE INVENTORY

First, we must recognize that **where** a person is in regard to their money determines what we can do, say, or how we can assist. If their money has become their *"god"* and they lose it all, what is needed is far

different than one who has been acceptably serving Jehovah, and they lose it all. The **attitude toward money** reveals if their treasures are on earth or being laid up in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21).

Second, taking inventory will help greatly. While it would be appropriate to do so, I am not speaking of a financial statement, a balance sheet. If one has suffered a financial collapse, small or great, to pause and see what you have with which to work, examine the possibilities that lie ahead.

Third, understand that circumstances could actually be even worse. While the "loss" may seem great, consider the loss of life, the loss of eyesight, an accident involving a child and the physical condition that might exist. Regardless of the condition in which we find ourselves, there are always others who have a greater burden, suffer more, have less. The plaque that hung on the wall of my parent's house most of my childhood, which now is found in my office, stated, *"I grumbled and complained because I had no shoes, until I met a man that had no feet."* So undeniably true!

Fourth, gently accept that things fade away, or can disappear in a moment. Even friends may only be around when the going is good (cf. the so-called friends of the prodigal son, Luke 15). Power, prestige, honor, and the like may disappate when money is gone. But these things we can know are true and will always be true: The Godhead cares. God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son cares about you. They will always be interested in you. They will never fail you, nor forsake you (Deut. 31:6). The indescribable manifestations of

the love of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are proof of their care and love.

LESSONS FROM BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Rich Young Ruler (Matt 10:24-25). The Lord was able to look at the heart of this powerful, wealthy one. The requirement to receive eternal life was give up all material possessions. He was unwilling to pay the price, and thus went away sorrowful.

Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). Because of his love for the world he forsook the Lord.

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Their land was their own. They had control over it. They were not required to sell it, but when they did, they chose to give a portion of the money to the Lord, but claimed to give it all. Was it love for money? Was it a desire for honor for righteous deeds?

Achan (Josh. 7:21). The command was clear. He understood the command. Utterly destroy did not mean he was at liberty to keep anything, which he did. The lure of material things brought death to Achan and his family.

Lot (Gen. 13-19). Because of his desire for the well-watered land, which was close geographically to godless Sodom, tragedy developed. The improper attitude toward things of the world.

Solomon wisely asked for wisdom of God. He was also given riches and honor, but from the summation of his life, he reflected upon thing and wealth, stating "*all is vanity*" (Eccl. 1:2).

Zacchaeus gave half his goods to the poor and

he dealt honestly with all (Luke 19:8). He had a righteous view of material goods.

The Poor Widow gave all she had, a mere two mites (Luke 21:1-4), but it was such a great sacrifice that our Lord gave significant emphasis to the gift.

In Proverbs 30:8-9, we have these excellent thoughts,

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

The inspired Word abounds in instructions that wise and faithful children of God will hear and heed.

GETTING ONE'S PRIORITIES IN ORDER

Your soul is the most valuable possession you have (Matt. 16:26). The Lord said your soul is worth more than ALL the world! The natural body (1 Cor. 15) will soon fail and ultimately return to the dust of the ground (Gen. 3:19). The spiritual body (soul) will live forever. Our soul will exist forever, in either heaven (a prepared mansion, John 14:1-3) or hell (a lake of fire and brimstone, Rev. 20:14-15; prepared for the devil and his servants, Matt. 25:41).

Life is brief and fragile. James says life is as "*a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (4:14). Man that is born of woman is of a few days (Job 14). The way of all men is death (Heb. 9:27). We are a mere heartbeat away from departing from

this earthly existence; a few inches separate vehicles (and possible fatal consequences) as they pass on the highways; a blood clot can quickly close the very life blood from flowing through our veins. There are realities that we “*know*” but possibly do not consider how suddenly they can come into our lives.

Realize that things of this earth are temporary. The earth and all things therein shall one day melt with fervent heat, be dissolved (2 Peter 3:9-10). The words of brother Tillit S. Teddlie convey wisdom:

Earth holds no treasures but perish with
using,

 However precious they be;
Yet there’s a country to which I am going;
 Heaven holds all to me.

Why should I long for the world with its
sorrows,

 When in that home o’er the sea,
Millions are singing the wonderful story?
 Heaven holds all to me.

Death is certain and uncertain. While we do not know when death will occur in our lives (2 Peter 3:10), we certainly know that death is coming (Heb. 9:27) to each one of us (unless the Lord returns before death overtakes us). When dramatically faced with death, at the moment of an accident or heart attack, financial matters will absolutely be nothing of importance to you.

Our affections (interests, cares, desires) should be set on “*things above*” (Col. 3:1-15). The words of the Lord in Matthew 6:19-21 exhort us to lay up

treasures in heaven, and He summarizes, "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (v. 21). When our heart is set on things above (Col. 3:1-7), then our priorities will follow. As the words of the song suggest:

I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold,
I'd rather be His than have riches
untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced
hand.

Than to be the king of a vast domain,
Or be held in sin's dread sway;
I'd rather have Jesus than anything,
This world affords today.

CONCLUSION

Things of the earth (gold, silver, money, all things) will soon pass. Either the world will come to an end and everything will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:9-10), or soon we will depart from this earth in death, and we will pass all possessions on to others. We cannot take any material possessions with us. The only thing that will matter when either of these two events occur will be your relationship with our Lord and Saviour. Whether we are children of God and faithfully serving Him is the only consideration worth our all-consuming interests.

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Chapter 23

***What Can I Do When
...A Close One
Is Involved
In Drugs, Alcohol, Etc.?***

Bobby Liddell



Dean of Admissions at the Memphis School of Preaching (since 1994) • Received his education from Walker College, University of Alabama, and Southern Christian University • Local work, director of lectureships, editor of various publications, gospel meetings, camp work, radio and television, and mission work • Joan and Bobby have three children and one grandchild.

INTRODUCTION

The brothers and sisters of the East Hill Church of Christ in Pulaski have been a light shining forth, doing good works, and glorifying God (Matt. 5:13-16) for decades. One of their many good works is the annual **Truth In Love Lectureship**, overseen by the faithful elders, and directed by East Hill's very capable, diligent, zealous preacher, Paul Sain. It is always a blessing and a privilege to have an opportunity to work with these sound brethren, whose labors we commend, and whom we love and appreciate so very much.

Surely, no sane person would disagree that the

misuse and abuse of drugs and alcohol are the reasons for many woes (cf. Prov. 23:29ff). These problems affect not only the user, but, in a very personal way, the ones close to him, as well as, in a more indirect way, many others. How many have known the pain, sorrow, and loss caused by drugs – not because of their using them – but because someone whom they love has become enslaved to them? Note: when we consider drugs, in this manuscript, we include alcohol which is a drug by definition.¹

The plan followed in writing this chapter was to provide sensible, scripturally sound material in answering “*What Can I Do?*” concerning the use of drugs and alcohol by one close to me. It is not the purpose, of this chapter, to present medical expertise or to provide medical advice, to record a plethora of current statistics proving the costs and consequences of drug use (which are readily available from a great number of sources and are indisputable), or to present dozens of Scriptures, with proper contextual exegesis, to prove drug use is sinful. These comprise another study, in and of itself, beyond the scope of this chapter. Thus, we continue with this approach that our readers are average men and women, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, friends and family, not trained counselors, but who already understand the abuse of drugs is wrong because of medical and social facts and because the Bible plainly so teaches, and are interested, now, in learning **what to do** in addressing this disturbing problem before us.

Let us consider, then, what we can do, for surely love compels us to act, but we want to be sure we do

what is right and best from motives that are pure. Thus, we shall examine these areas of need: educating ourselves, encouraging our loved ones caught up in the drug habit, and enduring for the long haul.

EDUCATING OURSELVES

If we would be of help, we must take the time and put forth the effort to educate ourselves so we can understand the nature of the problem, the reasons behind one's using drugs, and effective ways to help one overcome his abuse or addiction. If we care *enough*, we will do this to the best of our ability. Surely, our loved one's physical and, more importantly, spiritual welfare (Matt. 16:26) are worth all our efforts to learn more about why he takes drugs, what it does to him, and how we can be of real help.

Many different sources offer helpful information from secular, social, and medical viewpoints. There are now a great number of societies and associations which offer information and help in this area. One does not have to have advanced degrees in medicine and psychology to benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of those who do. Neither does one have to be experienced in dealing with and caring for drug users, from a social standpoint, to gain help from those who are. There is a wealth of information, most of it good and useable, readily available by both the internet and the printed page. Brothers have written on this subject, and their works are available. Some brethren have prepared themselves through advanced education to be able better to address just such problems, and are ready and willing to be of service.

Educating ourselves means we understand some basic facts about drugs, and their seductive, addictive nature, in order to understand why they have such a hold on people. Some key words are these: drugs, dependency, addiction, and withdrawal.

What Are Drugs?

Drugs, as considered in our study, are chemical substances, either natural or manmade, which when put into the body, whether ingested, inhaled, through contact with the skin, or injected, affect the body as narcotics, stimulants, depressants, or hallucinogens. Generally speaking, drugs are "any chemical substance that affects the central nervous system causing changes in behavior and often addiction."²

There are tremendous advantages and impressive, much needed benefits to the proper prescribed use of legal drugs. Yet, even legal or prescription drugs can be abused, misused, overused, mixed, or concentrated to produce an effect not intended. One can abuse drug use by the kinds of drugs he takes, the quantity he takes, or the frequency of his taking them. In addition, illegal drugs are often compounded in their deadliness by improper manufacturing, dosage, and distribution procedures, and present their own unique life threatening dangers.

People may come into initial contact with drugs in a variety of ways. Some, lamentably, enter life with their little bodies dependent on drugs because of use by their mothers while pregnant. Others may become addicted to prescribed medication without even realizing it. Many begin drug use by seeking a thrill,

a high, a new experience, or a way of escape from reality. Too many start their way down this path because of peer pressure because they seek acceptance and shun being different. After all, "*Everybody else is doing it.*"

Our beloved, late brother, Danny Box, faithful, talented preacher and caregiver in the medical field wrote the following about drug abuse.

It has been reported that the drugs most often abused were alcohol, marijuana, stimulants, PCP, LSD, glue, paint, codeine, morphine, opium, Seconal, Ativan, Valium, cocaine and "*crack.*"

Use of any drug for purposes other than those for which it is normally intended, or in a manner or in quantities other than directed, or by someone other than for whom it was ordered is considered drug abuse.³

Paul D. Lininger explained drug abuse in this way.

A drug of abuse is any substance (note that alcohol is a drug) taken through any route of administration that alters the mood, the level of perception, or brain functioning. Such drugs include substances ranging from prescribed medications to alcohol to solvents. All these substances are capable of producing changes in mood and altered states of learning.

Drug abuse is the use of a mind-altering substance in a way that differs from

generally approved medical and social practices. When the continued use of a mind-altering substance means more to the user than the problems caused by such use, the person can be said to be abusing the drug.⁴

Why Do People Become Dependent?

Dependency occurs when one must take drugs into his body because he feels better physically or psychologically only when he does and he feels worse (maybe unbearably so) when he does not. Using drugs can change the way the body functions, especially affecting the brain, and can result in the body's becoming dependent upon the drug(s). Physically, the body comes to the point where it NEEDS the drugs to function without pain or unpleasant symptoms. Psychologically, the dependency may be much greater than physically, resulting in an inability to cope without drugs.

Dependence, also called *habituation* or *compulsive use*, connotes a psychological and/or physical need for the drug. Psychological dependence is an attribute of all drugs of abuse and centers on the user needing the drug in order to reach a maximum level of functioning or feeling of well-being. Physical dependence indicates that the body has adapted physiologically to chronic use of the substance, with the development of symptoms when the drug is stopped or withdrawn. There are two important aspects to physical dependence: a) *tolerance* is the toleration of higher and higher doses of the drug or

the need for higher and higher doses to achieve the same effects; b) *withdrawal* or an *abstinence syndrome* is the appearance of physiological symptoms when the drug is stopped too quickly (Schuckit 1990).⁵

Dependency means when one has taken drugs, he must KEEP taking drugs in order to feel good or better, but most importantly, he must keep taking drugs in order not to feel bad or terrible. Drugs make him feel GOOD; that is, by defining good to mean not feeling bad. Once he experiences this good feeling, he wants to keep feeling good, and whenever he feels bad, drugs bring relief or escape.

What Is Addiction?

Addiction is a consequence of dependency taken another step, and means that one has become a slave to drugs, and has lost control of his life. Thus, when one's body calls for the drug, it becomes a desire so strong that one will do almost anything to supply the drugs to his body and stop the pain or illness of withdrawal. This tragic condition is not what he wanted, or what he intended. Most believe, at the start, they can control their usage, and they will be able to avoid the pitfalls which have entrapped others. The idea of invincibility and the desire for thrills, or for just being able to cope with the stresses, problems, and pains of life, make an often deadly combination. Addiction takes people to places they do not want to go, and would not otherwise. The addict will spend his paycheck for drugs instead of for rent, food, or other necessities of life. He will sell his possessions to buy drugs. When the paychecks and the goods are

gone, the addiction is still there. The monster he has created demands to be fed. His whole life becomes focused on obtaining and using drugs. Nothing else matters – not family, not job, not his reputation, not his health, nor his soul. Thus, the addict will give up all that is dear to him (except drugs), live on the street, steal from others, sell his body, or even kill to keep the drugs coming.

Countless lives have been ruined because of addiction to drugs. Drug addiction has taken years of usefulness from users, has plagued our country with crime, has stolen our children, wrecked our marriages and homes, and filled our cemeteries. It has enriched the drug lords and dealers, has burdened our police forces, and has cost billions of our tax dollars to try to fight it. It is not an easy thing to overcome.

What Are The Difficulties And Dangers Of Withdrawal?

Withdrawal is the word which describes the symptoms which the body has when drug use stops. The dependency/addiction of the body for drugs results in its going through withdrawal when the drugs are not used. Symptoms of withdrawal can be severe, physically and psychologically – even requiring hospitalization to cope with them. Withdrawal can bring on dangerous activity such as rage or suicide, and can result in physical complications leading to death. Thus, one who has become dependent upon drugs should seek *proper medical care* to overcome his dependency, to help with the problems of withdrawal, and to prevent relapse. He may need qualified

counseling as well. Regardless of the most noble of motives, one should never attempt to put himself in the place of qualified medical personnel. The sudden removal of some drugs, without proper medical supervision and attention, can be dangerous, even life threatening.

As we consider what we can do, we need to be aware of some of the fundamental reasons for drug use, and of the potential problems associated with it. Then, we can understand better what our loved one faces, be more sympathetic, and more effective with our help. Just saying, "*Drug use is a sin, and you must stop,*" is something we can and should do, but it is *not all* we can do or should do.

ENCOURAGING OUR LOVED ONES CAUGHT UP IN THE DRUG HABIT

When Jesus came into this world, He offered men a better way of life; He helped and healed; He pointed out the error and cost of sin, but also taught the good and blessings of righteousness. He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). We must be followers of Christ in all things, and this includes our dealing with the lamentable condition of one's being involved with drugs.

Often, drug use springs from one's inability to cope with the stress or pain of living. We, more than others, have insight into the strengths and weaknesses of our loved one. Having observed his actions and reactions to the challenges of daily life, we can, at least with some degree of accuracy, predict what will

trouble him to the point he seeks escape by other than acceptable, scriptural means. The immediate need is to help him avoid reaching that point now; the long term need is to help him find the right way to handle difficulties so he does not feel the need to use drugs.

What can we do? We can become his friend and the doorway to a new set of friends; thus, helping him to avoid old habits, bad influences, and the availability of drugs from the old crowd (1 Cor. 15:33). We can encourage and influence him to cultivate a new life, a new way of thinking, a new set of associates/friends, a new way of handling stress and problems, a new set of places to go, and new things to do (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). We can be an influence for good, that by our godly living, we can show (not just tell) him a better way, a way of abundant living (John 10:10; cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9).

We can help him to come to himself, to recognize the dangerous, deadly reality of drug use. The one we call the prodigal had to come to himself before he came back from the far country to which sin had taken him (Luke 15). What took our loved one to this place so far removed from reality and right? What perpetuated his problem? What is the real answer—not just a temporary fix, but a permanent solution? What can we do to help him come home?

We can lovingly present him with the facts of reality—he must leave where he is to come to where he needs to be; that is, he must repent and return. We must extend our hand to help lift him up from the

depths of the pig pen into which he has gotten himself. We must be looking for him, and run to meet him, embrace him, and welcome him back when he does return—because we love him and we have waited a long time for him to come home. We must *not* be like the elder brother who neither loved him, cared that he was lost, sought him, nor rejoiced when he returned.

Illegal, abusive drug taking is absolutely, without a doubt, wrong, but condemnation is not all one should offer (John 3:17). Regardless of the sin, compassion demands a line of thought and a course of action designed to help. After all, we are seeking to restore him (Gal. 6:1-2); to save his soul from death (James 5:19-20; Luke 19:10); to show love for him knowing the love of God for us (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8-9); and, to help him to put his problem in the past (1 Cor. 6:9-11, note especially v. 11).

To be of real help, we must avoid: (1) jumping to unfounded conclusions or making false assumptions—let us have all the facts before we speak or act; (2) making angry accusations—although we are hurt and angry at what has happened to the one we love; or, (3) pretending his drug use is not a problem—we love him too much to just sweep it under the rug. While the tendency may be to talk about his problem (as our own way of coping with it, seeking advice, or needing reassurance), we must be careful to avoid tale bearing and gossip; that is, talking too much or to those who will run to tell this “*news*” to all who will listen. After all, we are seeking the welfare of our loved

one. Why tell others of his problem, and advertise sin, even though it is true? This may do irreparable harm and work against all that we want to accomplish by bringing unnecessary notoriety and shame which our loved one may think he cannot overcome.

ENDURING FOR THE LONG HAUL

Not surprisingly, the battle for the health and souls of our loved ones, dependent or addicted to drugs, is long and may be costly. Thus, we must prepare him and ourselves to endure patiently. The nature of drug addiction is such that when one has made the break and left that life behind, he must never, ever, even begin to entertain thoughts of return. One pill, one shot, one dose, or one drink poses the great and immediate danger of taking him back to the depths of his former undone condition.

Relapses are, regrettably, all too common, but that does not mean they have to happen. There are ways to prevent future falls, but the price is "*eternal vigilance.*" So, we have to make a commitment to be watchful without being worrisome, to be concerned without being critical, to be supportive without being smothering, to be available without being a nuisance. We can do this if we really care, and our sincerity of compassion will not go unnoticed. He will know, if not immediately, at least one day, how much we love him.

We, too, need support in order to avoid overwhelming discouragement when there seems to be no progress or it comes too slowly; when our very best efforts seem to fall short; when our fervent prayers

seem ineffectual (James 5:16); when we begin to doubt and lose hope. Remember, God still loves you, even when you are tired, sad, alone, down, and broken-hearted. He is still there, and His Word is still true. He will not leave you nor forsake you, and, yes, He is listening to your prayers, and will answer them (Heb. 13:5-6; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:14).

In spite of all we do, we must realize that we cannot do for our loved one what he alone can and must do for himself. This may be the hardest of all reality to accept. Usually listed as the first step to take in helping one involved with drugs is this: get him to admit he needs help.⁶ If he refuses help or denies he needs help, we are certainly hindered and limited in what we can do against his will. Yet, we must seek every opportunity and continue, without ceasing, to work and pray for the day when he realizes the deadly seriousness of his problem, and when he is ready to accept help so he can make a positive change in his life.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

It may seem that sometimes there is nothing we can do, but we must never quit trying. We love this one too much to fail to put forth every possible effort to save him from the awful and eternal consequences of drug use. From a practical standpoint, we must be careful not to act upon misinformation, but to look at this problem with an understanding of the physical and psychological facets of drug use, combined with a biblical perspective.

The biggest mistake we can make is to do nothing. We must remember that drug use is not a victimless crime. It affects morals, health, and society. Drug use is not harmless. Drug use is not acceptable. Drug use is not a disease—though it may result in disease. The drug user either made a decision to begin abuse, or he made a decision to continue. Drug use (as we have considered in this chapter) is a sin. It is a sin into which one has gone whether by ignorance or intent, and it is a sin of which one must repent and from which one must reform his life. Remember, repentance is a change of one's mind, brought about by godly sorrow, which results in a reform of one's life. More important than physical life, or temporal happiness, the very immortal soul of the drug user is at stake.

We must remember that each person is accountable for what he does in his body (2 Cor. 5:10). If our loved one persists in drug use, regardless of all we do to help him leave this horrible lifestyle, we must not blame ourselves or God. After all, a preacher can work hour after hour to prepare the very best sermon possible; can pray for himself as the preacher and for those who will hear—fervent, frequent, and specific prayers of faith; can practice delivering his sermon until he can hardly wait to present it; and can with all the courage, faith, and love possible for man to exhibit, combined with the very best use of his voice, gestures, and style of delivery, preach it. All the while, he knows the powerful gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16), and all his efforts as God's man to preach

it to the very best of his ability (2 Tim. 4:1ff), will avail nothing at all unless the hearer receives the message gladly, with all readiness of mind, and obeys it (Acts 2:41; 17:11). He does not quit preaching, nor does he blame God because some do not respond positively, but he trusts in the power of the gospel message, and he keeps on keeping on (cf. Ezek. 2:1-3:11). So must we keep on keeping on in our battle to save the one we love.

We must be aware of biblical principles that show drug use is wrong. God condemns doing harm to our bodies or misusing them (2 Cor. 6:16-18), and commands using them to serve God with purity (Rom. 6:12; 12:1-2; cf. Eph. 5:18). We must not allow ourselves to be enslaved by anything other than Christ (1 Cor. 9:27). One under the influence of drugs can hardly with good judgment and soberness of mind conduct himself, or be the example he should be (1 Tim. 4:12). Drug abuse brings loss of control, reduces inhibitions, increases dysfunction, damages the mind, destroys relationships, and becomes the center of obsession; thus, the hub of a life filled with trouble.⁷ Drug abuse usually involves lawbreaking, and we must be diligent to obey the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1ff; 1 Peter 2:13-17; cf. Acts 5:29). Drug abuse is a sin, and sin brings death (Rom. 6:23).

For those who have not yet faced this problem, let us work on preparation and prevention. "*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*" Education about the dangers of drug abuse can go a long way to prevent it. "*Just Say No*" still works. Likewise, happy,

healthy, spiritual people are much less likely to begin drug abuse.⁸ Watch for changes in behavior, friends, and relationship with the family. Know where your loved one goes and with whom. Let us help those whom we love to know they are loved—by us and by God. Let us seek to help them fill their lives with good things, their minds with good thoughts, and their hands with good deeds so they will never want or need a drug to fill the hollow emptiness of a loveless, godless, hopeless life.

CONCLUSION

What can we do? We must educate ourselves, encourage our loved one, and endure. Concerning specific, ordered steps, let us do the following. First, help our loved one to see—and admit—he needs help. Second, help him to remove himself from the drug life and withdraw from drug use (seek proper medical help to do so). Third, help him change his approach to life (and its problems), and to change his lifestyle to God's standard (as discussed above). Fourth, do not give up or let him give up when he takes a step backward, but help him go forward again. Fifth, be there for him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, without fail. Finally, be sure both he and you trust and obey God and faithfully follow God's way to a better life now and eternally.

ENDNOTES

1 See the very fine comments of our late and lamented brother, Danny Box, in "Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use," **Worldliness**, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pensacola:

Bellview Church of Christ, 1999), pp. 287-300. Brother Box writes concerning alcohol (p. 288).

Alcohol is a drug, though many people neither realize it nor accept it. In a survey conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, an estimated 111 million Americans 12 years of age and older were current alcohol users, which was about 52% of the total population in that age group.² In a similar survey conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, it was reported that the most commonly abused illicit drug was alcohol, especially among teenagers and young adults.³

When we talk about the use of alcohol as an illicit drug, we must first understand what we mean by *illicit* and *drugs*. When we use *illicit*, we mean anything that is "not allowed by law; prohibited; unauthorized; improper."⁴ In the state of Alabama, and most other states, to legally (according to man's law) obtain and drink alcohol, a person must be at least 21 years of age. Anyone under age, who buys and drinks alcohol, does so in violation of state law, hence the use of *illicit*. When we use *drug*, we are referring to "any chemical substance that affects the central nervous system causing changes in behavior and often addiction."⁵ When people drink alcohol, they are taking a substance into their bodies that will affect their behavior, and also cause physical problems and possible addiction that will be with them for the rest of their lives.

2 **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language** (Houghton Mifflin Co., 3rd ed., 1992), electronic version, as quoted in Box, p. 288.

3 Box, p. 293.

4 Paul D. Lininger, "Pastoral Counseling and Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders," **Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling**, Vol. 2, eds. Robert J.

Wicks and Richard D. Parsons (New York: Integration Books, 1993), p. 552.

5 Ibid.

6 For example, see Gary R. Collins, **Christian Counseling** (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), p. 497.

7 See Bill Flatt, **Personal Counseling** (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 1991), pp. 107-111.

8 Collins, p. 502.

Chapter 24

What Can I Do When ...A Child (Or Loved One) Dies?

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It was a most wonderful feeling to be told by my son that he and his wife were expecting their first child. Dorothy, my wife, and I had really looked forward to grandchildren, and the chance to spoil them unendingly and send them back “rotten” to their parents in retribution for all those troubles our children had been; or so the joke goes. James was born in March of 1989. He died in August of that same year. The pain for me and Dorothy was twofold. We had to watch our children suffer and also feel the pain of the loss of that beautiful boy. And, just two weeks after James’ death our first granddaughter, Caiti, was born and the juxtapositions of joy and sorrow were overwhelming. When Paul Sain asked me to write on

the subject, "*What do you do when a child dies?*" I felt the rush of pain and memory once again and almost wanted to say, "*No, I will not pen such!*" But, perhaps if one person is helped by this message, then James' life will have even greater meaning than it already has had. For, the suffering of that little boy (bepneumonia and chronic lung damage) has already inspired his daddy to be a better doctor and his grandfather to be a more compassionate preacher.

I am, therefore, thankful to brother Sain, more than he knows, for allowing me to relive those sad and joyful memories and to write this essay. May God truly bless the good brethren at East Hill who have endured their own tragedies and have pressed forward the cause of Christ. And may all the readers of this manuscript know that God has never forsaken us.

INTRODUCTION

To write about "*what to do when a child dies*" is also to pen material about all grief at the loss of any loved one. In fact thanatologists (the students of death and dying) now have pinpointed details of the grieving process for "*All significant loss results in grief.*"¹ Loss is the **key** term, for misplacing one's car keys initiates similar, though not as intense feelings, as when one "*loses*" a grandparent, a pet, or a home. There is an associated stress that occurs that is "*normal*" and each person has a **unique** mechanism for enduring. **No** one **knows** what another is really going through when there is a loss.

It is now known, also, that when extraordinary stress occurs, a person's normal, unique way of

enduring loss is not enough.² As a result, those suffering grief beyond the normal begin to search (subconsciously) through various "coping mechanisms" trying to find one that works better.³ The person, **logically**, thinks he should "*get over*" his grief, not realizing that half the process of dealing with sorrow and loss is recognizing his mind's recycling process which will occur again *and* again. (Just as this writer again experienced the pain of James' death while penning this material.) The other half of the grief process is **enduring** pain, for there is no way to "*manage*" grief.

The shock of grief and the recycling of pain is labeled "*incapacity*" by psychologists and this mental process is described as in addition to and caused by loss:

In addition to being painful, severe loss is incapacitating. For example, the period of substantial incapacity normally lasts one to three years when a child dies, nine to fifteen months for a miscarriage. Often losing a job results in substantial incapacity for three to twelve months. Because a substantial portion of incapacity is the loss of mental function, a person who has lost a child often is not able to properly gauge the depth of level of his incapacity. Many people report that immediately following their loss, they lost the ability to stand, talk and think at the same time. The mental effort required to keep their balance took more than they had. At the same time, they were unaware of suffering from any incapacity, only

looking back did they realize just how impaired they had been.⁴

To benefit somewhat from such a brief overview of the subject of grief, the topics of (1) What is death? (2) Biblical illustrations of loss, and (3) Some suggestions for what to do will be discussed here. Too, it would benefit all to remember that:

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).⁵

WHAT IS DEATH?

Life ends in death (Heb. 9:27). But, what is death? The question as to whether one is dead or not and exactly when such occurs has answers from the medical field, philosophical speculation, and even from the poets. Medical experts seem to think that "*irreversible destruction of brain matter*" is death while other medics opt for defining death as the time when the heart has stopped and cannot be restarted. The philosophy of Mary Baker Eddy defined death as an illusion while Jehovah's Witnesses and others see death as dreamless, non-existence. A poet once wrote:

What is Death?

What is death? Oh, what is death?
'Tis the snapping of the chain-
'Tis the breaking of the bowl-
'Tis relief from ev'ry pain-
'Tis freedom of the soul-

'Tis the setting of the sun
To rise again tomorrow,
A brighter course to run,
Nor sink again to sorrow.
Such is death! Yes, such is death!

What is death? Oh, what is death!
'Tis slumber to the weary-
'Tis rest to the forlorn-
'Tis shelter to the dreary-
'Tis peace amid the storm-
'Tis the entrance to our home-
'Tis passage to that God
Who bids his children come,
When their weary course is trod.
Such is death! Yes, such is death!

(Author Unknown)

Biblical death is a separation of the soul from the body. *"And it came to pass as her soul was in departing (for she died)"* was said of Rachel who expired after giving birth to her second son, Benjamin (Gen. 35:18). James wrote: *"For the body without the spirit is dead"* (James 2:26a). (Note that James did not say that the spirit without the body is dead.) Solomon noted that at death, *"The spirit shall return unto God who gave it"* (Eccl. 12:7).

When the beggar Lazarus died a most beautiful event occurred. Angels came and carried that poor soul to Paradise or Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). (It should also be remembered here that **no** angels came for the rich man's soul — Luke 16:23.) The author was once asked by his brother-in-law what it was like to die. Bobby, my sister's husband, was a beautiful

soul, even though somewhat limited mentally. He had obeyed Christ, but faced dangerous heart surgery and had been told he might not survive. Bobby did die on the operating table, but his question about death and dying still lingers. The explanation of death Bobby liked best after he understood about the angels coming to take Lazarus to Paradise was about **sleeping**.

I asked Bobby if he could ever remember a time when, as a little boy, he had been visiting somewhere with his parents and had fallen asleep at the home of the ones being visited. He replied in the affirmative. I then asked him if he had ever fallen asleep there and then awakened at home in his own bed. Bobby said, "Yes!" I asked Bobby how he had arrived in his own room. He said, "My Dad must have carried me." I looked at Bobby a long while and he finally got the point. "You mean I fall asleep here and wake up there and someone carries me?" he asked. I nodded yes! Bobby seemed comforted and I then quoted a very familiar verse to him: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psm. 23:4).

Bobby is still missed, but what great comfort he took in the Bible's description of death. Paul wrote:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and

remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Not only does the Bible contain the idea of one's being separated from the body and carried to Paradise, but death is also a **rest** from the body for the righteous (Heb. 4:9; Rev. 14:13). Longfellow wrote that "*Life is real; life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal; Dust thou art, to dust returneth, was not spoken of the soul.*" The body rests, but will one day be raised and changed in a moment and reunited with the soul (1 Cor. 15:42ff.). The soul is eternal (Eccl. 12:7). Martin Wedge wrote:

Can This Be Death?

Can this be death-

To be released from fear and sorrow,
From sickness, weariness and pain?
To be removed from sin's enslavement,
From Satan's influence and domain?

Can this be death-

To be set free from my sin,
From evil bent to do the wrong?
To be set free from inclinations
That would rob me of my song?

Can this be death-

To be presented in His presence,
The one who loves me evermore?
To be accepted in the fullness
Of Christ whom I adore?

Can this be death-

To be escorted by the angels
To my home prepared above?
To be established in the dwelling
That is furnished by His love?

Can this be death-

To know complete fulfillment
As I look upon His face?
To feast upon the glories
And the riches of His grace?

No, this is life-

With all that it can offer,
It is joy that overflows!
It is peace that knows no measure,
It is vict'ry o'er my foes!

BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS OF LOSS

Cain slew Abel (Gen 4:8). What effect the death of Adam's and Eve's son had on the first parents is not recorded. All the Patriarchs, of course, died. One, Abraham, was even requested, at a godly trial, to slay his own son; which sacrifice was stopped by God (Gen. 22:11-13). The first-born sons of a multitude of Egyptians died (Exod. 12:29) which deaths caused great anger in Pharaoh (Exod. 12:30-31; 14:5-12). But perhaps the best known illustration of loss in the Old Testament is the record of the loss of an infant son. King David was the father, but he had slain the

husband of the mother of the baby.

And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead? But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead. Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious

to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (2 Sam. 12:15-23).

It is very enlightening to note from the above account that David prayed and fasted **while** the child was sick (vv. 15-17). But, when the infant died, David cleansed himself, worshipped God, and ate (vs. 18-20). David's servants were astounded at the seeming lack of grief on David's part, for the loss of a child is devastating to most (v. 21). David explained that he understood that he was to blame for the child's illness and so he fasted hoping that "*God will be gracious to me*" (v. 22; emphasis mine, K.M.). David also understood that he could eventually go to the child (v. 22). David's guilt over his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent killing of Uriah her husband evidently transcended David's grief (c.f. 2 Sam. 11:2-27).

However, David would experience great grief when another, rebellious son, died at the hands of Joab and his men during battle (2 Sam. 18:9-17). When David heard of that death, of a son close to his heart, yet a son who desired David's throne; David cried so loud, his words still echo in the ears of all who hear: "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son*" (2 Sam. 18:33). All who have lost a child can relate to David's great grief; a grief so huge that the joy of victory in battle was turned to a national day of mourning (2 Sam. 19:2).

Grief knows **no** boundaries. It strikes kings and

paupers, parents and children, Christians and non-Christians. No one is exempt, not even the Son of God who wept at the tomb of His friend and cried aloud to God from the Cross (John 11:35; Mark 15:34). Everyone needs help when grieving.

SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT TO DO

1. Psychologists list at least nine methods people use in "coping" with problems.⁶ (1) Some people will **attack** by a show of anger when any challenge arises. (2) Others react to difficulties by **fleeing** because their emotional state is fear. (3) There are those who ignore the problem and are said to be in **denial**. (4) Some folks become so confused that their reaction is called **dithering** or **distraction**. (5) Others, when obstacles arise, **co-opt** or seek the help of others. (6) There are a few who will attempt to **analyze** and (7) the opposite are those who must perform some **action** no matter what it is. (8) Some will try to **appease** (as did King David toward God in the Bible illustration above) when faced with distress because their emotional state is guilt. (9) Those who give up are in anguish or **despair**.

Why are there so many reactions to grief, pain, and difficulty? Because, *"Whenever there is a catastrophic change and pain, the mind treats the pain as a signal that the current methods of coping need to be changed."*⁷ Therefore, when faced with a great loss, one should **expect** to grieve, get angry, deny, analyze, despair, appease, and/or go into action and not be discouraged about such **normal** feelings. For, persons who suffer

tremendous loss will “*experience all or some of the above nine states over and over again during life, almost randomly, until the pain decreases and something ‘works.’*”⁸ (It is a matter of fact that those who suffer the loss of a child can go through these pain cycles for at least five years and some go through them for life. One of the **worst** things outsiders can do is to pressure grieving parents “*to get over it.*”)⁹

Collins adds that:

Most grieving begins with a period of shock, numbness, denial, intense crying, and sometimes collapse. It moves into a prolonged period of sorrow, restlessness, apathy, memories, loneliness, and sleep disturbances. Then there emerge a slow waning of grief symptoms and a resumption of normal life activities. Pathological grief reactions occur where this normal grief process is denied, delayed, or distorted.¹⁰

One can deduce from the above thoughts that grief is to be allowed, is normal, and is a process. A person who has lost a dear one has the right to anguish or any other emotion that occurs—even anger.¹¹

2. Those who are **not** grieving should learn to beware of offensive behavior; that is, saying things to mourners that actually harm them. Some will intone that, “*It could have been worse.*” The latter statement is always true, but it is never comforting. The author heard a woman say to her daughter who had just had a miscarriage: “*Well, you can always have another!*”

Others say, “*Well your child is in a better place.*” True, but the one grieving is only feeling the pain

and the trouble with grief is not the permanency of the loss but the **continuing** pain!

Other, out of place advice often offered to the grieving is, "*You will just have to work harder and take your mind off of it.*" The problem is that parents who have lost a child only operate at ten to fifteen percent capacity for the first six months. Suggesting that they work harder or "*do more*" is only satisfying to the one saying it and may damage an already listless soul.

Often overheard at funeral homes are comments such as, "*I know just what you are feeling.*" (All grief is unique not general.) Or, "*I understand, I had a broken leg once;*" or, "*If you need anything, call me.*" The best thing to say is probably nothing except that one is there and supportive. "*You are in my thoughts and prayers*" is a very good statement. People who are grieving do **not** remember much of what is said. They will remember that someone was present.

3. Those who intend to be supportive of grieving family or friends can do a number of things. The expression of sympathy **and** the anticipation of the variety of emotions associated with grief are helpful. When a person acts differently because of stress, it certainly does no good to increase the stress by admonishing the mourner for what seems to be an inappropriate behavior under normal circumstances. Do not ignore all references to the dead child. Their child is dead, not erased from memory. (The author has always desired to talk about his dead grandson.) Letting those who grieve discuss the one departed, at their own time and pace, is always helpful.¹²

4. Grieving family members can rely on compassionate friends and there are existing support groups. (Being with others who have experienced deep grief has a known ameliorative effect and can make all the difference in recovery.)

5. One in grief should also "*keep moving.*"¹³ The sooner one returns to a semblance of work or activity, the sooner one begins to focus on healing. This is obviously a hard step to take.

6. Some who grieve find it helpful to express their emotions of rage, fear, pain, rejection, and confusion by keeping a journal or even exercising. (The author's daughter-in-law rode an exercise bike while she imagined running over all the doctors who could not save her son!) Others find a "*safe*" place to unleash all the rage and it is good to help other grieving family members find such a place. (Some psychologists suggest that a person roll up a newspaper and beat a table with it until the strong emotion of pain subsides.)

7. Grieving persons often turn away from those they love, but the effort should be to get closer. And, this getting closer is the key for relationships to survive significant loss. Often parents and whole families need to consult a therapist to work through all the negatives produced by the loss. The one who can control whether he or she maintains other relationships is the mourner. Turning inward rather than outward is a danger signal and may indicate pathological grief. Collins insists that: There are no symptoms unique to pathological grief, but some behavior is seen

frequently. This includes a delay in grieving, hyperactivity, a “*giving-up*” attitude of helplessness and hopelessness, intense guilt, a strong self-condemnation, extreme social withdrawal or moodiness, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, excessive drinking, and veiled threats of self-destruction. Such people seem unable to emancipate themselves from the deceased. Each of these signals may be present in normal grief, but the symptoms are more intense and of longer duration when the grief is pathological.¹⁴ It is of no little interest to realize that one’s beliefs can be the difference between normal and pathological grief (1 Thess. 4:18; Phil. 4:13).

8. Realizing the effects of grief is helpful to those who mourn. Collins describes these as “*crying, restlessness, and depression.*”¹⁵ There are even physical symptoms such as exhaustion, weakness, headaches, shortness of breath, indigestion, loss of appetite or sometimes an increase in eating. No two people react alike.

9. Those who grieve should also keep in mind that there may well be “*anniversary*” reactions. The first birthday, Easter, Christmas, or wedding anniversary after a loss can be an especially painful reminder. Collins adds that “*often these anniversary reactions continue for a number of years.*”¹⁶

10. To those who would counsel the grieving is added this thought from the “*Compassionate Friends*” website:

One of the saddest things in the world is to see some poor grieving mother being

badgered by a church leader or counselor who expects a few platitudes to heal all of her pain immediately (and thus rest the church leader's mind as to any further duties or care) and who will not let the poor woman go until she admits that she is completely healed of all her pain—and generally this abuse occurs within days of the death—years before any meaningful healing can occur.¹⁷

It is possible that some may be so hurt by insensitive would-be helpers among fellow Christians that those grievors actually leave the church. Note the following from a parent who lost **two** children as he writes to others who grieve:

First let me say that I cry with you for the loss of your children. I can empathize in truth because I myself have recently (March 16, 1995) lost two of my children in a sudden and unexpected tragedy. My son Patrick aged 15 and my daughter Roxann aged 13 were killed in a car wreck. From out of a normal day came frightening news, and I rushed to gain information. Only to find earth shattering unendurable facts. I know the emptiness and pain you feel. It is beyond description. The closest I can say is that it is like someone cut your heart out, and along with it all your hope and dashed it on the floor before your eyes. But it is even worse than that, because you would gladly trade for that over what you really face; for yourself you would sacrifice in favor of

safety for that precious child. If only you could make that trade. I know you have prayed for that trade, as I did when my children died. Now you are desolate, nothing matters, and the disbelief is so overwhelming that you expect someone to just say "*April Fool*" and it will all be back to normal. Despite your wishes and prayers, this terrible thing will not just go away. Now you must face the unrelenting fact of that lifeless little one. This last year since the tragedy has been the hardest of my life, and I feel deeply for you and the pain that lies before you as well as what lies behind. The loss seems total.¹⁸

One preacher, pondering the death of his wife, wrote that,

whoever thinks he has the ways of God conveniently tabulated, analyzed, and correlated with convenient glib answers to ease every question from aching hearts has not been far in this maze of mystery we call life and death."¹⁹

11. Another suggestion here is that discussions about death should be encouraged **before** such occurs. The author was present in a hospital room as a brother-in-Christ was dying. He and his wife had often discussed these matters prior to his death. He even attempted to explain to her what was happening to him and his last words to her, after many expressions of love, were: "*It is so beautiful.*" Such discussions anticipating grief tend to make the actual grieving

more normal after the loss occurs.

12. Last but not least on this list of what to do when there is a death, especially of a child is to remember the solid fact that there is a way to **gain back** the loved one! David said that he **could** go to his lost son one day (2 Sam. 12:22). This gift of being reunited with loved ones was purchased by Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23). A child not of the age of accountability **is** in Paradise and parents and family can go there as baptized believers in Christ (Mark 16:16). Good parents seek to protect their children and when one dies, parents tend to want to "protect" them in the next world too. The young child is safe and all Christian children are saved. Let every parent and loved one strive to unite the family in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Death, biblically, is a separation of the soul from the body. Death, however, is always painful to those who remain behind. No two persons react in some "normal" way when a loved one dies. Grief is unique to each one and grief manifests itself in numbers of ways. When a child dies, unanswered questions abound because it is extremely difficult to accept that the young one was on earth for such a short time. A question for parents that might help is: *"Would I want my child for just a few months or years, or not at all?"*

The soul of my grandson is in Paradise. I can go where he is and I **will** know him there, for I spent nearly every day in the hospital room where and when he lived. His soul is **ageless** and I know him perhaps

even better than I do my other grandchildren because of having had the privilege of being with him for nearly six hours every day for five months. He is now safe.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Surviving Loss after the Death of a Child," <http://www.com/living/sloss.htm>.
- 2 Ibid., p.1.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., p.2.
- 5 **The Holy Bible, King James Version** (World Bible Publishers). All scripture references are to this version unless otherwise noted.
- 6 <http://www.com/living/sloss.htm>, pp.2-3.
- 7 Ibid., p.3.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Gary R. Collins, **Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide** (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), p. 418.
- 11 The author has counseled people who were afraid to admit they were actually angry at the deceased for leaving and even at God for "taking" him. The anger is normal and must be seen by the one grieving as normal. The mourner usually senses that the anger is subsiding as he feels free and safe to express it.
- 12 <http://www.com/living/sloss.htm>, p.4.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Gary R. Collins, **Christian Counseling**, p. 414.
- 15 Ibid., p. 417.
- 16 Ibid. p. 418.
- 17 <http://www.com/compassionate> Friends, p. 9 of 12. Preachers who are seeking advice on how to deal with those who grieve may find this website very helpful.

18 <http://members.aol.com/havenetjp/child>: Death of a child website.

19 Vance Havner, **Though I Walk Through the Valley** (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1974), p. 67.

Chapter 25

What Can I Do When ...I Am All Alone In Life?

Perry Cotham



Perry B. Cotham was born in Murray, KY • He began preaching the Gospel in 1929 • He attended Freed-Hardeman College and then Murray State College where he received a B.A. degree • Full-time local work with congregations in OK and TX • Full-time evangelistic work since 1972 • Has traveled extensively preaching the Gospel • Authored sixteen tracts • He and his wife Teresa (deceased) have three children.

The time often comes to many of the Lord's people when, due to many adverse circumstances, they are all alone in life. The question is often asked what they should do while in this condition. This is our study at this hour.

When Joseph and Mary took the young child Jesus to the temple to fulfill the law concerning Mary's purification there, an aged saint, Anna, got to see them and give thanks to God. Luke records that Simeon also saw the Child and made statements about Him (Luke 2:25-35). Then he added these words concerning Anna, who evidently was living alone and was prayerfully waiting for the coming of the Messiah:

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an hundred seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38).

This prophetess in Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's presentation in the temple offers some valuable suggestions for us who may be alone into later years of our life. Anna had married in her young maidenhood, and had lived with her husband only seven years. After her husband's death, she had lived eighty-four years, making all ninety-one years since her marriage. So at this time, she was at least well over one hundred years old. She was regular in her worship to the true and living God for she *"departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."*

She never married again, but continued a widow evidently to her dying day. She may have had lodging in one of the courts of the temple. But she gave herself, although alone, wholly to her devotions. This is something that Christians, who are alone, ought to be constant in always, especially aged Christians. They should continue in reading and studying the Bible and in prayers to God.

"...AND HE DIED"

Those living alone need to think that the time to depart from this life and to be with the Lord on the other side may soon come; at least, if the Lord tarries His coming, it will come to them (cf. Phil. 1:23). The Bible says, "*it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27).

In Genesis, the fifth chapter, there is a long list of the ancients who lived and died. Verse after verse states, "*and he died*" (Gen. 5:5). "*And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died*" (v. 27), etc. After the flood, man's life span diminished, but death continued. So, those who are living alone, regardless of the past years of their lives, need to seriously realize this fact of one day dying.

GRATITUDE FOR KINDNESS

When I am all alone in life, I should desire the visits of friends and appreciate their acts of love and kindness. When Paul was in prison in Rome, his second imprisonment, realizing that the end of his earthly life was near, he expressed to Timothy in his second and last letter, his gratitude for the friendly visit of a dear saint, Onesiphorus. At this time, the lives of Christians were in danger by the persecution of the wicked ruler, Nero. Hence, many were afraid to attempt a visit to see Paul, so they did not try to come. This was really a turning of their backs on the imprisoned apostle who had done so great a work for the Lord. So, in his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote:

This thou knowest, that all they which are in
Asia be turned away from me: of whom are

Phygellus and Germogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me (2 Tim. 1:15-17).

Onesiphorus was a resident of Ephesus. He had often extended to Paul many acts of kindness. This Timothy knew. Maybe Onesiphorus had entertained him in his home when he was weary and persecuted. Many who showed to Paul love and kindness in the former days of his success were not afraid to go see him as he was a prisoner wearing a chain, but not Onesiphorus. So then, in his letter, Paul added these kind words: "*The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day*" (2 Tim. 1:18).

By "*that day*," of course, Paul means the judgment day, when all shall appear before the Judge of all the earth, and when all the deeds done in the body shall be recompensed by the righteous Judge (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:12).

What Onesiphorus had done for Paul at Rome was only one instance of the deeds of love he had expressed to Paul for his service to the Lord. Timothy knew of his many good deeds he had done at Ephesus for Paul.

Onesiphorus had been good to Paul in former years, and he did not leave him now in the dark and lonely days of adversity. Neither persecution, nor poverty, nor chains could prevent him now from doing good to him in prison and soon to die. This man who was so kind to the great apostle will surely be among

those to whom the Savior will say at the judgment, *"I was in prison, and ye came unto me"* (Matt. 25:36). A good man will always seek opportunities of doing good. At the judgment, those who have shown no mercy *"shall have judgment without mercy"* (James 2:13). We are to *"come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:16). *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matt. 5:7).

So, love and mercy shown to those who are alone in life is not only greatly appreciated by the receiver but will be bestowed by the Lord to the giver. This is what I desire when I am lonely, and I can thank those who are kind to me.

CHOOSE SOMEONE TO ADOPT

In Titus 2:3-4, the good women, many of whom we would expect to be alone, are given instructions to teach the younger women. Also, we see Paul choosing Timothy. As a young man, Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren (Acts 16:7), and Paul chose him to go with him. Even in old age, Paul was able to put his experience to use in teaching a young man how to be a gospel preacher. Even as Paul came to the end of his life, he wrote to Timothy, giving him instructions about faith and preaching in the two letters of First and Second Timothy.

Onesimus, the runaway slave, that we read about in Philemon is proof that an old man, living alone, and in prison can still be a powerful voice of truth in leading lost souls to Christ (Phile. 9-11).

CARE FOR WIDOWS

Usually, in almost all congregations, there are aged women who are widows and alone in their lives. They desire love and compassion of others; and they may need at times some financial help. Too, there are orphan children who need assistance. James said that:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to **visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction** (James 1:27).

Compassion and help to the poor and distressed form a very great part of true Christianity.

The word "*visit*" in the text means to give all manner of relief of which we are capable of giving to others who are truly in affliction. It means that Christians are to be charitable and relieve those in need. When such people are in need it is proper for them to ask for some relief from churches. But families are first to help care for their own elderly. Abraham was cared for in his old age by his son, Isaac (Gen. 24-25). Children are to "*honor thy father and mother*" (Eph. 6:22-23; Exod. 30:12). However, it is well for churches to note the teaching that Paul gave concerning help for lonely widows showing that families should do what they can first:

Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them first learn to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow in deed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.... But if **any provide not for**

his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works, if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work (1 Tim. 5:3-10).

Many churches, especially in foreign lands, are striving to do this kind of work. They realize that there is a place for the church in caring for the lonely, the aged, the infirm. When I am alone and in need, I want this kind of help. The aged in my country should not be discarded. With respect for God's work, the lonely can be blessed. God has promised to never leave us (Rom. 8:35-39), or forsake us (1 Peter 5:7; Heb. 13:5). The Lord will always reward the "*faithful unto death*" (Rev. 2:10).

SUMMARY

What can I do when I am alone in life? I must try to stay as busy as possible. I must continue to read my Bible and pray every day. I must visit the sick and those who are in need of an act of kindness. I must think of other people's needs and share my love. I must attend all of the public worship services, of the church, as I am able. I must continue my association with my friends. All of these things will help me when I am alone in life. I want my life to be a living sacrifice to Jesus Christ. I want to always remember the Lord

loves me. If illness comes, may I stand the test. Then when death comes, I can depart and be with my Lord in Paradise on the other side knowing that the influence of my life will continue on for good to others. So, I must not ever give up. I must rejoice with the coming of each new day and say, "*this is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*" (Psm. 118:24). This is God's will for me. Contentment is more a matter of the heart than anything else.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord...
that they may rest from their labours, and
their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

I want to be reunited with loved ones and friends in heaven in "*the sweet bye and bye.*"

Chapter 26

What Can I Do When ...I Am Young?

Cliff Goodwin



A native of Anniston, AL • Cliff is a 1995 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and holds a B.S. in Biblical Studies from Faulkner University • Has been preaching for nine years and presently works with the Ironaton church in Talladega, AL • An excellent speaker for gospel meetings, lectureships, and youth days • Married to the former Beth Williams of Talladega, AL and they have two children.

Isn't it ironic that many young people impatiently yearn to be older, while older people often long for their younger years! Both of these groups seem to focus on what they **cannot** do. The youthful may pout or sulk because they are not old enough to participate in a certain activity or to be qualified for a certain privilege. Often older people are no better. They complain about the limitations with which they are faced, because they are now too old to do certain things or because their bodies "*just can't take what they used to take.*" There is a tendency in virtually all of us (if permitted to surface) to be dissatisfied—no matter our state, our circumstances or even our age. As God's children, we must not allow such discontentment to taint our lives. We must not focus on the negative, but rather on the positive (cf. Phil. 4:8-12).

In God's kingdom there is something for everyone to do. Therefore, one's focus should be on what he **can** do. Consider, for example, a handicapped Christian with severe limitations. Even if his body is racked with the most debilitating form of illness, confining him solely to his bed, there is still something for that Christian to do. He can pray, and that fervently (James 5:16). As Epaphras did, such a person can labor fervently in prayers for others (Col. 4:12). Only heaven knows and only eternity will tell how much good is accomplished through the prayers of such "*disabled*" persons!

Likewise, opportunities abound in God's kingdom for young people. A young Christian need not be deceived into thinking that his years of service are "*out in front of him.*" The years of a Christian's service begin as he comes up out of the water—regardless of his chronological age! If one is old enough to be accountable, to discern right and wrong, and to be baptized, then he is likewise old enough to work. Satan is all too often successful in keeping young Christians on the sidelines, because they have been deceived about their roles and responsibilities. As the spiritual song exclaims, "*there is much to do, there is work on every hand,*" and God intends for His young people to be involved in the work.

I CAN OBEY MY PARENTS

All human beings are servants in one sense or another. No one can be truly styled as "*his own man*" in the ultimate sense. Paul wrote,

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Rom. 6:16).¹

The nature of man is that he will either serve sin or God – there are no alternatives and no middle-ground (Matt. 6:24; 12:30). Those who choose to serve God will find that submission/obedience to God involves submission/obedience to others. Peter brings this out so clearly in his first general epistle. All Christians are to be subject to the civil authorities under which they live (1 Peter 2:13-17). Christian servants are to be subject to their masters (1 Peter 2:18-20). Christian wives are to be subject to their own husbands (1 Peter 3:1-6). There is even a sense in which all Christians must be subject to one another (1 Peter 5:5; cf. 3:8-9; Phil. 2:3-4). Subjection, or submission, involves the placing of another's will in front of one's own; the outward fruit of submission is obedience. In other words, there are times when *all of us* have to do what we are told.

This fact is especially true of children who are Christians. One of the most important things a young Christian can do is to obey his parents. God is glorified in the life of an obedient, godly child. Consider this trio of verses.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Even a child is known by his doings,

whether his work be pure, and whether it be right (Prov. 20:11).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right (Eph. 6:1).

Working through these verses in reverse order one notices the following. One, it is right, just and proper in God's eyes for children to obey their parents. Two, a child's character is manifested and known by his doings, or works. Three, when a child's works are good, just and right, the light of his godly character shines before men and brings glory to God! Young Christians should never lose sight of these facts. Man's highest purpose for existence is to fear God and keep His commandments, thereby glorifying Him (Eccl. 12:13-14; cf. Eph. 3:21; Rev. 4:11). Christian children fulfill one of their most important responsibilities when they honor and obey their parents.

The wisdom in God's plan is easily seen. Children are brought into this world as babes—innocent, helpless, unknowing. Parents, on the other hand, are supposed to be mature, knowledgeable and seasoned. As they rear children, they have an added perspective on life that is absolutely unattainable to one in his youth. Taylor touched upon this concept by quoting Goodpasture and elaborating even further:

Brother B.C. Goodpasture used to say, "Old people know more about being young than young people do about being old." This is an added perspective that only comes from observing seasonal changes across **many** years—not just a **few**—and by learning things as each seasonal change occurs.²

Compared to their children, parents have had so many more opportunities to learn life's lessons. They have already traveled the troubled paths of adolescence and young adulthood. Doubtlessly, they have made mistakes, but by these mistakes parents are in a position to instruct and guide their children in the way of better decisions. Note these inspired words of Solomon.

Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. **For I was my father's son**, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live (Prov. 4:1-4; emp. mine, CG).

Solomon was able to say to his son, *"I have stood where you stand."* To adapt the above words of the late brother Goodpasture, *"Parents know a great deal more about being children, than children know about being parents!"* Yet sadly, in far too many homes today it seems that the roles of parent and child are reversed. Instead of honoring and obeying their parents, many children *"rule the roost."* They are permitted to come and go as they please, and when any instructions are actually *"laid down"* by the parents, they are simply ignored and disobeyed. Such parental negligence and youthful rebellion are surely resulting in the ruination of so many young lives across our land.

As one looks to the Bible, he will find young

David as an example of a child obeying his parents. David was the eighth and youngest of Jesse's sons (1 Sam. 16:10-11), apparently still living at home at the time he slew Goliath (1 Sam. 18:2). Note the circumstances that led to David's coming to the battlefield, and ultimately to the giant, Goliath.

And Jesse said unto David his son, **Take** now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and **run** to the camp to thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and **took**, and **went**, **as Jesse had commanded him**; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle (1 Sam. 17:17-18, 20; emp. mine, CG).

David was on the battlefield because he was carrying out the wishes and instructions of his father, Jesse. Jesse had told David to "*take and run*," and the Bible tells us that David "*took and went*." Because David obeyed the voice of his father, he found himself in a most unique position to benefit his nation and glorify his God! His slaying of Goliath still stands today as a great example of conviction, courage and confidence in God. Similarly, if young Christians today will honor and obey their parents, they will set an example before others and bring honor and glory to God's name.

I CAN BE RESPONSIBLE

Random House College Dictionary defines *responsible* as “*answerable or accountable, as for something within one’s power or control.*” As children grow older and mature, they are entrusted with certain chores and privileges. These should only increase as one passes from childhood into adolescence and young adulthood. Such chores and privileges help to instill responsibility in young people, as well as providing opportunities for responsibility to be shown or manifested. Young Christians must understand that they are responsible (that is, answerable, accountable) for the chores, or duties, they are assigned and for the proper exercise of the privileges they are granted.

David once again serves as an example for all young people to follow. The Bible tells us that David kept his father’s sheep (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:34). Though he was the youngest of Jesse’s sons, he was still entrusted with the care of the family flock. Whether or not the flock was cared for properly was up to David—he was accountable to his father. David took his job seriously and was dedicated to the flock. One occasion when a lion and a bear came, stealing a lamb out of the flock, David went after the wild beasts and killed them (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Even as a youth, David placed his faith in God and fulfilled his responsibility before his father (cf. 1 Sam. 17:37).

No doubt, David must have shown responsibility in other areas before Jesse entrusted the care of the sheep to him. This is a principle that seems to escape many rebellious teenagers. They insist they are not trusted, nor treated fairly. They desire more

responsibility and more privileges. Yet their "*track record*" is not such that in any way warrants an increase in responsibility. Parents can only gauge the amount of responsibility to bestow upon a child on the basis of past performances and conduct. In other words, young people who want greater responsibility (and freedom) must first be diligent and conscientious in their present duties.

There are responsibilities young Christians can and should fill both in the home and in the church. Such responsibilities are very helpful and important. Satan would like to deceive all youth into thinking that their chores, jobs, duties and responsibilities are less important than everybody else's. David faced similar ridicule in the words of Eliab, his eldest brother,

Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? (1 Sam. 17:28).

One can almost hear the belittling tone in Eliab's voice as he said "*those few sheep.*" Satan's servants will attempt to belittle the responsibilities of young people in the church, even as Eliab belittled David's responsibility in the home. Young Christians must be neither diverted nor discouraged by such criticism, ridicule or condescension.

Consider some responsibilities young people can fulfill as members of Christ's church. They can study their Bible lessons before class each week (both Sunday and Wednesday!), answering any given questions and memorizing the proposed memory

verses (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Peter 2:2). They can attend all the services, works and functions of the church, especially those designed for the youth (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9). Being responsible in this area would not only call for *attendance*, but also *activity*—actually taking part and being involved. Young Christians can be assigned certain visits within a congregation's visitation program. In fact, they might be called upon to assist in any number of areas pertaining to the life and work of a local congregation. Young people can and should be used in the work of the church, but they must first exhibit a willing attitude, the eagerness to be involved. Then as the opportunities arise and the responsibilities are given, young Christians can do their part by providing diligent, conscientious and responsible service.

I CAN BE AVAILABLE

If Satan is unable to deceive young Christians into feeling unimportant and unneeded, he definitely has a "Plan B." He knows he can still win simply by filling young Christians' schedules with earthly pursuits and interests. In other words, a Christian who is too busy doing other things to serve Christ, is really not a Christian at all!

Time itself is a precious commodity. Jesus touched upon this principle when He said, "*I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work*" (John 9:4). Christ knew that His time upon this earth was limited; His decision was to do what God had sent Him to do while He was here. It is true for all of us that time is

limited. The night of death is ever growing nearer—often much nearer than we realize. If our lives are filled with earthly, secular pursuits and pastimes, we will be negligent in doing the work that God wants us to do.

Many spiritual opportunities are ignored by young Christians because their schedules are simply full. In other words, they are not *available*. They do not come to Wednesday evening Bible class because they have ball practice or a ball game. They do not support Saturday youth rallies because they are out doing this hobby or that. Nothing is inherently wrong with sports or hobbies. In fact, it is good to have wholesome recreation and diversion. The problem arises when spiritual responsibilities are neglected in favor of secular recreation. When the youth of the local congregation have a planned spiritual activity, for example, all the youth should plan so as to be available for that activity. This involves the practice of seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

God can do great things in the lives of those who are simply available and willing to give of themselves, their possessions and their time. There is a wonderful example of this fact found in John 6:5-9.

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them

may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad **here**, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? (emp. mine, CG).

Notice the word "*here*" in verse nine, "*There is a lad here...*" What if the young boy had not been following Jesus with the multitudes? He would have missed out on the opportunity and privilege of having his "*sack lunch*" multiplied for the masses. But because the boy was there—*available*—and because he was willing to give of his own possessions, he was used by God in a most extraordinary miracle. At least one key lesson is clear: God uses young people who are available and willing to be used!

The challenge before Christian young people is to maintain a spiritual focus and prioritize their time accordingly (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18; Eph. 5:15-16). Though the world offers so many distractions, young people can learn and realize from the Bible that the things of this life are only temporary. Heaven is what is really important—and getting there (Matt. 6:19-21; 16:26). As mentioned earlier, there is nothing wrong with sports and hobbies, but they must maintain their proper place. Recreational interests often engulf the schedules of young Christians, choking out time for many spiritual endeavors. A young Christian (as all Christians) should prioritize his schedule so that God and the church always come first. One who has done this will be available when opportunities arise and when service calls.

We all have likely heard the expression, “*You’re only young once.*” Often this statement is made with reference to physical or secular endeavors. Indeed, there are a number of physical activities or achievements that are best done while young. However, there are also very special opportunities of a spiritual nature that arise in one’s youth.

For example, I believe that one of the best times in a Christian’s life for personal evangelism is during his teen years. On the surface, such a statement might appear misinformed or inaccurate, but it is actually based upon some sound reasons. One, teens have not had as long as the typical adult to become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13). Sin has a disastrous effect on the human heart, especially over time (cf. Prov. 4:23; 1 Tim. 4:1-3). The longer one lives in sin, often the harder it is for one to come out of it. Hence, a Christian teen attempting to teach his peers the gospel usually has an advantage in this area. Simply put, his teenage peers haven’t been in sin as long. Two, teens haven’t had a lifetime in which to become engrained with false religion. It is true that many teens are rooted and grounded in denominational error, but during those teen years many have a tendency to be much more open-minded than their parents. This is the roadblock into which many of us run while attempting to evangelize adults. We often hear statements like, “*I’ve always been (insert denominational name here), and I’ll always be.*” Sadly, there is not much one can do with a soul who says such and is unwilling to let the Bible dictate matters of religion. Fortunately, teens have not had *decades* in

which to become so thoroughly indoctrinated in the errors of men. Often their youthful, impressionable and idealistic minds can be reached with the pure gospel of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16-17).

Personal evangelism is not the only area holding special opportunity for young Christians. Benevolence is an area in which young Christians encounter unique opportunities, yet this spiritual area isn't often emphasized to our youth. As God's children, we are to do good unto all men (Gal. 6:10). We are to be kind, compassionate people who serve the needs of others (cf. Matt. 25:31-46). I suppose there are few times in life in which a person has more opportunity to extend kindness (and practice the "*Golden Rule*," Matt. 7:12) than during one's school years. If we would only reflect upon our own tenures in school, I'm sure all of us could remember kids who were less fortunate materially; kids who were excluded socially; kids who were neglected emotionally. Some kids needed supplies: maybe paper, pencils or even snack money. Other kids needed understanding—someone who would just listen. Some kids just needed a friend. In short, the school system is a place in which God's youth are needed—they are needed to impart help, healing and hope to so many young people who are mistreated and misguided. As I look back upon my years in school, I see so much more that I could have done as a young Christian. Those opportunities are passed and gone. All that I can do now is try to make young Christians more aware of the opportunities that surround them.

I CAN BE AN EXAMPLE

If there were one thing often underestimated by members of the Lord's church, it would likely be the power and influence of a good example. So many fail to realize that the example they set wields so much sway over the actions of others. We've all probably heard the expression, "*Monkey see, monkey do.*" I remember hearing those words in elementary school. People are certainly not monkeys, nor even descended from monkeys, but many are often "*copy cats.*" Even at young ages human beings exhibit the tendency to mimic, or imitate, others round about them. We do not lose this tendency as we get older. One problem with many older members of the Lord's church is that they have never learned **not** to imitate their peers or friends in the world. There are just times when God's people must resist the tendency to imitate the actions of others.

Obviously, an example is a very powerful thing. The good news is there are good examples, too! Paul wrote, "*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). As Christ lived upon this earth, He provided man with the perfect example after which to pattern his own life (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-22). The apostle Paul strove to follow this Divine example himself, and as he did so, he urged the Corinthians to follow, in turn, his apostolic example. The ultimate pattern did not lie within Paul; the Corinthians were only to follow Paul **inasmuch as** he followed Christ! The lesson is clear for us today. If we will dedicate our lives to following in the steps of Christ, we then can be examples unto others as they see Christ living in us.

It has been said that the way we live our lives is either drawing people closer to Christ or pushing people further away. Hopefully, our example is doing the former.

God's word not only teaches about being an example generally, it also links such a concept to youth. Paul wrote,

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

It is granted that Timothy was not likely a teen at the time Paul wrote these words. Some have even estimated his age at between thirty-five and thirty-nine years.³ Nonetheless, Timothy seemed to face a problem many Christian teens may encounter today: being discounted or made light of because of his age relative to others. No matter how old one becomes, there may always be someone older who says, "*He's still green and wet behind the ears.*" Paul is telling Timothy that those who might discount his age will not be able to discount a *bona fide* Christian example. This is true of one who is thirty-five or fifteen. With this in mind, let us look at the six areas specified by Paul.

In Word

This phrase refers to one's speech. It would be perhaps impossible to overestimate the importance of proper speech in living the Christian life. Jesus taught, "*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*"

(Matt. 12:34). A person's speech reveals his heart, and without a pure heart no one shall see God (Matt. 5:8). God's children do well to learn this lesson early in life, for it is so easy for young people to form bad habits relative to their speech. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he condemned lying (4:25), corrupt communication (4:29), evil speaking (4:31), foolish talking and jesting (5:4). Though his peers in the world may lie, curse and tell dirty jokes, a Christian young person must **not** speak in such ways.

In Conversation

This phrase refers to one's manner of life, or conduct. There are numerous ways in which a young Christian's life must be different from the lives of many young people in the world. His dealings with fellow-man must be honest, yea, even above reproach. He should treat others the way he would want to be treated himself (Matt. 7:12). He cannot be given to outbursts of wrath (James 1:19-20). Meekness and gentleness should characterize his life, not fighting or brawling (Titus 3:2). A young Christian should be outwardly different from those in the world—both in *dealings* and *demeanor*—but in a good way (cf. Matt. 5:16).

In Charity

This phrase refers to one's love. We all must remember the two greatest commandments as Jesus enumerated them: to love God with all our heart, soul and mind; and to love our fellow-man as ourselves (Matt. 22:36-40). These two areas of love are really

inseparable. John pointed out the dishonesty of claiming to love God while hating one's own brother (1 John 4:20-21). In fact, loving one another is a badge of discipleship before the world (John 13:35). But to love only our brethren is not enough; we must love all people even as God does (cf. Matt. 5:46-48). Christ's teachings pertaining to the good Samaritan bring out this point clearly (Luke 10:25-37). Even further, all of us must remember that love not shown is not love (1 John 3:16-18).

In Spirit

This phrase refers to one's attitude. Someone once said, "*Attitude is everything.*" While attitude actually isn't *everything*, it is definitely *a major thing!* We've all probably been around people with bad attitudes—both young and old. A bad attitude cripples a person's abilities, or would-be abilities, in many ways. A pessimistic attitude will kill one's own labors and will spread to kill others' labors as well. A critical, fault-finding attitude will tear down and discourage, instead of building up and encouraging (cf. Acts 4:36). The list could go on and on. A bad attitude can be so destructive in the church of Christ. A good attitude, on the other hand, can help accomplish so much good in the Lord's cause. Youth is usually known for its zeal and enthusiasm, and young Christians should have a positive attitude, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

In Faith

This phrase refers to one's trust and obedience

toward God. It is good for one to learn while young that God is a God of His word (Titus 1:2). He most certainly can be trusted. He will never leave nor forsake those who faithfully serve Him (Heb. 13:5). He will bless righteousness (James 1:25) and punish evil-doing (Gal. 6:7-8). He will open doors of opportunity (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12) and will provide the strength needed to perform His will (Phil. 4:13). He will not allow His children to be tempted above that which they are able to forbear and withstand (1 Cor. 10:13). These and so many other promises are given to us in the Bible. Young Christians should take these promises deep into their hearts and act accordingly in their lives.

In Purity

This phrase refers to one's moral purity. A young Christian must "*hold fast that which is good*" and "*abstain from every form of evil*" (1 Thes. 5:21-22 ASV).⁴ Young Christians must especially heed this admonition in the sexual realm. Later Paul would write to Timothy, "*Flee also youthful lusts*" (2 Tim. 2:22). Sexual drives are especially strong in youth. We need more young men and young women today who are like Joseph of old. He fled the sin of fornication—a sin against God and against one's own body (Gen. 39:7-12; 1 Cor. 6:18-20). Sexual promiscuity seems to be rampant among the youth of the world. Let it not be so among the youth of God. Let Christian young men and women keep themselves pure for the marriage bed, which is honorable before God (Heb. 13:4).

CONCLUSION

There is virtually no limit to what young Christians can do for the cause of Christ if they will only purpose in their hearts to follow God's word with conviction and courage (cf. Dan. 1:8). This determination will necessitate a separation; they will have to be different from the world (James 1:27; cf. Phil. 2:15). By so choosing to be different, however, they will both show forth the praises of God (1 Peter 2:9) and save their own immortal souls (cf. 1 John 3:1-3). May God help our young people to do what they can, for they can do so much!

ENDNOTES

1 **The Holy Bible, King James Version.** All other references are to this version unless otherwise noted.

2 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Studies in First and Second Peter**, (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications, 1992), 54.

3 Terry M. Hightower, "Sundry Exhortations to Timothy," in **Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus**, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 2001), 159.

4 **The Holy Bible, American Standard Version**, (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible, 1984).

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Chapter 27

What Can I Do When I Realize I Am Getting Older, Near Death?

Perry B. Cotham



Perry B. Cotham was born in Murray, KY • He began preaching the Gospel in 1929 • He attended Freed-Hardeman College and then Murray State College where he received a B.A. degree • Full-time local work with congregations in OK and TX • Full-time evangelistic work since 1972 • Has traveled extensively preaching the Gospel • Authored sixteen tracts • He and his wife Teresa (deceased) have three children.

The apostle Paul in his second imprisonment in Rome, realizing that he was getting older and was soon to die, wrote to Timothy, his beloved son in the gospel and fellow-worker in the Lord's service, these impressive words:

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8, KJV).

Paul could look back over his life with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction. Then, thinking that he might shortly leave this world, and desiring to see Timothy one more time, he said in closing his letter, "*Do thy diligence to come before winter*" (v. 21). If he did not come before winter, the season of navigation in the Mediterranean would be closed and he would have to wait until spring, and Paul realized that he might not live that long.

We can all, as older Christians, ask ourselves: "*What can I think of since I realize that I am getting older, and near death?*" Paul had already stated his views of his departure from this life to the other side in more than one place in his letters: "*...to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better*" (Phil. 1:23, "*very much better,*" NASB), and "*to die is gain*" (Phil. 1:21), he wrote to the Philippians.

Paul had spent his life, after his conversion to Christ, faithfully endeavoring to serve the Lord, and so a crown of righteousness would be his in eternity. The crown will be given when the Lord comes again (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6-11). Of course, this is true of all Christians now and as faithful children of God we can also look forward to this reward in heaven.

Physical death to a good man is only his release from this world to the enjoyments of another world (cf. Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:1). He does not cease to be (cf. Luke 16:19-31). He looks forward to the life he is to live in heaven forever as he nears death. This surely was Paul's view of death, as he died a martyr's death at the cruel hands of Nero, as he knelt beside the block and his head rolled down in the dust. But this apostle,

in one sense, did not die; his great works still follow him, even to this day, and will follow until we all reach the shores of Eternity. John wrote: "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord...their works do follow them*" (Rev. 14:13). Some day, if we also remain faithful in the Lord's work, we will meet Paul, the greatest missionary the world has ever known, in heaven the eternal home of the soul.

The Psalmist declared:

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon...
They shall still bring forth fruit in old age:
they shall be fat and flourishing (Psm. 92:12, 14, KJV).

The palm tree is an evergreen grown in the desert. Jericho was called the city of palms (Deut. 34:3). The tree does not grow rapidly, but it continues for centuries. When we see a beautiful old palm tree, standing erect, and growing amid the drought of the desert, we have a fine picture of a godly person, even "*in old age,*" who by his righteousness is living to the glory of God. This passage in Psalms tells us not only what a righteous person is, but, come what may, he shall flourish after the noblest manner. "*He shall flourish like the palm tree...He shall grow like the cedar of Lebanon.*" The cedar is another native and long-lived tree, on the summit of the mountain. Lebanon had many cedar trees.

So, the truly godly man under all adversities retains the joy of his soul and continues to make progress in the Christian life. Palm trees and cedar

trees are excellent to set forth the heirs of heaven. Paul declares, "...but though our outer man is decaying, yet our *inner man* is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16, NASB). Hence, in our old age we can "still bring forth fruit" for the Lord. Galatians 5:22-23 declares that "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things there is no law*" (NASB). This is a beautiful picture of elderly men and women who, by the grace of God, entered into the Lord's church many years ago but who are now in their old age, living righteous and godly lives. They are likened to the palm trees and the cedars of Lebanon, growing in the courtyards of the mid-eastern houses, persevering in the drought and in the heat. Jesus taught that if a man abides "*in Christ,*" he brings forth "*much fruit*" (John 15:5). Some like this are mighty in influence, and honorable to the Lord. Happy are they who can sing this Psalm. Aged believers possess a wealth of experience, even if believers are confined to bed, they bear the fruit of patience.

The God of heaven does not leave the saint when the keepers of the house do tremble, the eyes can no longer read; the grinders fail; the daughters of music are brought low (Eccl. 12:3). One day we shall die and then man "*goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets*" (Eccl. 12:3-5). "*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it*" (Eccl. 12:7).

Paul asked the faithful children of God these questions regarding their continuing in God's care although at times being persecuted:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39).

It is great to know that God will take care of us in life and in death if we continue faithful to Him to the end of life's journey.

PALM TREES

So when we look at those stately palm trees, which stand here and there on the plain, tall and slender and erect, they represent a symbol of the righteous people in old age for their beauty and usefulness. The palm tree grows slowly, but steadily, from century to century. Neither heavy weights when men place upon its head nor the strong winds that blow, can sway it aside from perfect uprightness. There it stands, looking calmly down upon the world below, and patiently yielding its large clusters of golden fruit from generation to generation. Yes, they *"bring forth fruit in old age."* The palm tree is the very best emblem, not only of patience in well-doing, but of the rewards of a righteous life in old age. To these, above all other trees, the prize of beauty and

usefulness has always been awarded. So, in reality the Christian grows happier and more fruitful as he becomes older knowing that he must soon die. The aged Christian is like the palm tree.

VALUE OF PALM TREES

Cruden's Concordance of the Bible (p. 480) gives this information as to the many values of palm trees:

The palm, especially the date palm, is one of the most important trees in the East. The fruit is the daily food of millions...the seeds are made into food for camels, the fibers of the leaf-stems are woven into ropes and rigging; the tall trunk is a valuable timber; its leaves are made into many different articles.

How appropriate, then, and full of meaning, is the imagery of the Psalmist. *"The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age."*

The palm trees are very useful. Just as the great value of the date palm lies in its wholesome and delicious fruit, so do Christ's disciples abound in the work of righteousness. How strong and lusty is the cedar! How upright and majestic and tall are the palm trees. The righteous *"shall still bring forth fruit in old age."* The aged Christians are valuable to the praise and glory of God. By the grace of God they are what they are.

The tall palm tree is beautiful and the aged Christian is beautiful in life and upright in character.

Palm leaves are symbols of victory. In heaven the redeemed are represented as having palm branches in their hands. John wrote:

After this, I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands...These are they which come out of great tribulations, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:9, 14).

IN OLD AGE

The trees of righteousness, as the poet conceive of them, are "planted in the house of the Lord" (v. 13) and in "*old age they bring forth fruit,*" in all duties of holy obedience. Surely, the child of God can say, "*Blessed be God who has given this good word of His grace. He hath given us such encouragement against the decay in temptations of old age!*" (I think I can appreciate more than ever these beautiful words of this great Psalm as I am now in my ninety-second year of my life, having preached the gospel for seventy-five years and having passed the "*threescore years and ten*" mark. I hope that I am bearing fruit in my old age.)

WORDS OF ADVICE

To those in old age there are some things we need to remember. Let us note a few of them.

(1) Let us endure in trials. We are going to have some trials and maybe some suffering. It has been

said that life begins with the pain of birth and ends with the pain of death and between the two events there is mingling of sunshine and shadows. Some may mistrust us. Let us learn to forgive from our hearts. James wrote to Christians: *"Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance"* (James 1:2-3, NASB). Some lament by saying, *"It is awful to get old as I am and cannot carry on any longer, as I once did."* But, God must have a plan for us in December as for January. Let us grow old joyfully, without fear. We must make the best we can of our circumstances. We must believe in the love and wisdom of God, *"that all things work together for good to them that love God..."* (Rom. 8:28). Paul could rejoice as a prisoner in Rome (Phil. 3:1; 4:4). *"Rejoice always,"* he said (1 Thess. 5:17, NASB).

(2) Let us continue to be grateful. To be thankless, is to be joyless. Those that **think thank.** *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"* (Psm. 10:32). Right thinking always issues to right thanking. The rich fool of the Lord's parable (Luke 12:13-21) was thankless. In his thanklessness, being conceited, he had nobody to thank but himself.

The memory of God's dealings with us will save us from fretfulness and worry. We have been in trying circumstances and God saw us through. He can do it again so, do not worry. Be joyful. Be at peace.

(3) Let us learn to live one day at a time. That is all that we have. Yesterday is gone. There is no going back to it. Often we talk about the *"good-ole' days."* Tomorrow has not arrived. None of us can live

tomorrow; it has not come. **Today** is ours. That is all that we have. We are, therefore, to live right today and not worry about the future (cf. Matt. 6:25-34; Phil. 4:6-13). We cannot live yesterday, today, and tomorrow all at the same time. Let us, therefore, join the Psalmist and say: *"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"* (Psm. 118:24). Today is all that we need. Do good to someone in need. Be patient with yourself and do not take any cares to bed with you. So live today, and do not quit; just "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3) and keep living the Christian life.

(4) Let us remember that there are some beatitudes that my friends need to keep in my old age, namely:

(a) Blessed are they who understand my faltering step and palsied hand

(b) Blessed are they who know that my ears must strain to catch the things that they say.

(c) Blessed are they who know that my eyes are dim.

(d) Blessed are they with a cheery smile who stop to chat for a little while.

(e) Blessed are they who never say: "you've told that story twice today."

(f) Blessed are they who know the ways to bring back memories of yesterday.

(g) Blessed are they who know and show that I am truly loved, respected, appreciated, and not alone.

(h) Blessed are they who ease the days of my journey home in loving ways.

(5) Let us continue to read our Bibles. The Word

of God counts for nothing if we let it alone. We need to say with David, *"O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day"* (Psm. 119:97; cf. Psm. 1).

(6) Let us continue to do all the good work for the Lord that we can. We can (if able) attend the worship services of the church, visit the sick and shut-ins, grade papers in free Bible correspondence courses, give liberally our money to help buy Bibles, do evangelistic work and help feed the poor and needy. We cannot take our money with us when we leave this world but we can send it on ahead of us (Matt. 6:19-21). There are many good works that are needing our help today and let us give generously. We can use the radio, TV, the Internet and the printed pages to reach the lost. Jesus said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel"* (Mark 16:16).

(7) Let us always continue to pray for the salvation of precious lost souls. This makes for the growth of the church. James wrote: *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16, or as the NASB puts it *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."*). So our prayers, plus our contributions, will help spread the word of God into all the world and continue to save souls.

(8) Let us continue to take care of our bodies by eating good food, taking exercise, and visiting with our friends. Take time to laugh and enjoy life. *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine"* (Prov. 17:22).

THE END WILL COME - IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

The story of the life of Horatio Spafford, who

lived in Chicago in the latter part of the nineteenth century, has been of interest to many Christians, especially the elderly. Mr. Spafford had established a successful law practice and had invested heavily in real estate. While he was away for business one week, the great Chicago fire of 1871 swept through the city and destroyed much of his law practice and properties.

Not long after he and his family recuperated from the tragedy, they decided to take a vacation. They planned to visit France and Switzerland and then join a good friend of theirs who was on an evangelistic tour through Europe. Due to last minute business, Mr. Spafford sent his wife and four daughters ahead of him to France and on the French line S. S. Ville de Harve, promising to meet them in France as soon as possible.

On the way across the ocean, a British iron sailing vessel struck the ship. Within hours the French liner sank and 226 passengers drowned. Four of these were the Spaffords four daughters. After arriving in Cardiff, Wales, with the other survivors, Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband: *"saved alone."*

Upon receiving the news, Mr. Spafford booked passage on the first ship he could get to Wales. As the ship glided across the ocean, the captain pointed out to the crew the approximate spot where the tragic accident had occurred. That night in deep grief, Mr. Spafford went in to his room and wrote the words to the song, **It Is Well With My Soul**.

The first verse of the great hymn faces the fact that there will occasionally be storms in this life. *"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea*

billows roll..." That is the bad news, but the good news is that one can have peace during life's storms. "...*whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul...*" It will not always be well maybe with your family or your marriage, or your health, or your friendship, but it can be well with your soul.

We do not have a choice as to whether or not we will have storms, but we do have a choice as to how we handle storms. We can either handle the storms of life with bitterness or with faith in God and in obedience to His word.

In the second verse, Mr. Spafford turns his attention to the single greatest peacemaking act in the history of the world—the cross. Note the beginning of verse two: "*My sin...*", but it is as if his pen cannot keep up with the abundance of emotion overflowing from his heart. His heart takes control of his hand, as he continues, "...*Oh, the bliss of this glorious thought... my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more...*" God placed our sins on Jesus, and Jesus placed our sins on the cross. Jesus died for us. Then the song concludes by faithfully anticipating the day when all wrongs will be righted and all persons will be judged in verse three. The day when Christ returns and ushers His children into an eternal peace is the day that we await with eager anticipation. "*Lord haste the day.*" This great song then concludes with the chorus: "*It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well, with my soul.*"

Mr. P.P. Bliss put the music to the words of this hymn. All aged faithful children of God should be

able to sing this song as they face the end of life's earthly journey.

THE LAST MILE OF THE WAY

Finally to conclude our study of the blessings of the aged children of God, we refer to another great hymn that is so applicable to faithful gospel preachers, written by Johnson Oatman, Jr.:

If I walk in the pathway of duty,
If I work to the close of the day,
I shall see the great King in His beauty,
When I've gone the last mile of the way.

If for Christ I proclaim the glad story,
If I seek for His sheep gone astray,
I am sure He will show me His glory,
When I've gone the last mile of the way.

When I've gone the last mile of the way,
I will rest at the close of the day.
And I know there are joys that await me,
When I've gone the last mile of the way.

Surely, in that final judgment day, the Lord will reward each of us a "*crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim. 4:8), "*that fadeth not away*" (1 Peter 1:4; 5:4). God help us to grow old graciously and to bring forth fruit in our "*old age*" as we realize that we must soon die and go and meet our Maker, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus*" (Rev. 22:20).

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