

Nineteenth Annual

TRUTH IN LOVE

LECTURESHIP

Theme:

**Keys To A
Successful
Christian Life
(And Reaching Our
Eternal Home In Heaven)**

May 13-17, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

What a tragic condition (whether physically, financially, socially, emotionally) to be **without hope!** Especially spiritually, to be without hope is beyond description!

Daily our paths in life cross with those who are struggling and need faith, hope, love, trust, encouragement, etc. The teen who feels excluded from his peers; a family that can not pay their bills; many marriage relationships crumbling with little hope of surviving; ones who have recently lost their job and are desperate to care for their own; and the sickening list goes on and on.

Further, how sad to have few or none in whom you can trust, nothing in which you can find assurance and encouragement, or to be alone. There are many who find themselves in such a desperate condition.

The powerful inspired Scripture provides ALL who will hear, listen and learn with the HOPE that is needed. Christ is the answer! He is the Saviour of all who will come to Him in simple complete faith and obedience.

This lecture series focuses on **KEYS** provided by the Word of God on living a successful Christian life. May I encourage you to read, and then read again, the challenging and uplifting lessons contained herein. You will be built up spiritually.

Our Heavenly Father has assured us that we can be victorious (1 Cor. 15:57) ultimately; that one day we can hear Him say *"Well done, good and faithful servant."* But our Lord has further assured us that He is with us always (Matt. 28:20) and that we will be able to survive any temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). He will deliver us from the temptation of Satan (2 Peter 2:9). We can read the *"end of the story"* and see how everything will one day end (as far as this life is concerned). We can read in His Word of the great eternal

Heavenly existence awaiting the faithful.

Words of appreciation are due many who have helped make this study possible. Special commendations are conveyed to each speaker for their research, time and effort to prepare the manuscripts as well as oral presentation during the lectureship.

For each one who has contributed in large or small part to teach the Word, spread the Gospel, encourage young men to preach, edify the saints - THANKS!

~ Paul Sain

Director of the Lectureship

DEDICATION

Most congregations of the Lord's people are served by dear ones known as a "secretary." Likely the majority do not know but a small portion of what is involved in all the areas of her work.

Secretarial duties, phone calls, bulletin work, group gatherings, cleaning, informing others of deaths, keeping records, channeling the mail to the right ones, serving meals, lovingly assisting the less fortunate, assisting the eldership with specific tasks, typing letters, assisting in class preparation, teaching classes, duplicating lessons for teachers, attendance records, shut-in lists, birthday and anniversary information and many other areas of involvement. If something needs to be done - make them aware of it and then mark it off your list - for soon it will be completed. Their support, encouragement, and overall Christ-like attitude is appreciated by all who have been assisted by them.



East Hill is truly blessed (and has been through the years with others who have likewise served in this capacity) to have two excellent servants: **Chris Stampfly** and



Martha Ann Dunnivant. We lovingly dedicate this volume to these two congregational workers. We appreciate and highly esteem you.

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(And Reaching Our Eternal Home In Heaven)

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***Keys To A
Successful
Christian Life***
*(And Reaching Our Eternal
Home In Heaven)*

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Keys To Successful Christian Living

***The Source
Of Our Hope***
A Call To Commitment

This Chapter Written By

Bobby Liddell

The faithful child of God; that is, one who has committed himself to God, has a great blessing that no one else has—hope—real, true, abiding hope! The wonderful promise of hope brings such strength, security, and confident assurance, enabling one to weather the storms of life, endure the pains and sorrows that come daily, and to keep on keeping on, facing, with courage, even death itself (Heb. 9:27; Psm. 23; Rev. 14:13). Though many trust in a false hope, only God’s true children have the real thing (2 Cor. 6:14-18). As Paul, the inspired apostle, penned: *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling”* (Eph. 4:4).

There is only one hope, only one way to hope, only One in whom we hope, and only one place in which we hope. That one hope is in Christ, *“which is our hope”* (1 Tim. 1:1), in the one body, the one church, the one that He built, for which He paid the purchase price, to which He adds all the saved, and that, with His approval, call themselves by His name (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18; Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; 2:47; Rom. 16:16), and is because one has made the

commitment to Christ in order to be in the one Lord, by the one faith, having been baptized with the one baptism (Eph. 4:5). All other “*hopes*” are false hopes, and all other “*ways*” of securing hope are deceitful, damning, and deadly (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

What Is Hope?

Hope is composed of two elements: desire and expectation. An ordinary working person may desire to have a million dollars, but he probably would not expect to have a million dollars. Likewise, one whose family history indicated a very high probability that he would have an inherited disease might expect to have that disease, but he certainly would not desire to have it. Real hope, Bible hope, saving hope (Rom. 8:24), involves and requires both elements—desire and expectation.

Many desire the blessings that are found in Christ, and in Christ alone (Eph. 1:3; Acts 4:12), but have never made (and will never make) the commitment to godly living in order to secure them. Most people, thinking soberly, would say, “*I want to be in Heaven one day,*” and that would be their sincere desire. Only a fool, or a madman, would seriously think otherwise. The question is, “*Does desire alone bring hope?*” The answer is, “*No.*” Desire is beneficial if it motivates one’s making the commitment and meeting the conditions to obtain that which he desires.

For example, one might desire an A in math, but will his desire alone bring him an A? Of course, it will not. However, if his desire motivates him to the point that he is willing to make a commitment

to do what is required, to meet the conditions, to acquire the knowledge, and to apply it properly, in order to obtain an A (considering he has the ability to be an A student), to study, pay attention in class, be regular in attendance, and do his homework, then he can expect to make an A in math.

If one desires to be a beneficiary of the precious promises of God, to receive the blessings available because of the loving sacrifice of Christ, and in Him alone, to have a happy and abundant life now and eternally (John 10:10), he must make the commitment to meet the conditions God has set (1 John 5:3; Matt. 7:21ff). Then, he can expect to have salvation, fellowship, and Heaven after awhile (Matt. 25:46); that is, he can live in hope. Hope is conditional. Note the word *“if”* in these verses: *“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:8); *“...for if ye do these things, ye shall never fail: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:10-11).

What *“if”* one does not *“do these things”*? Then, he shall not have the blessings, for he has no hope of having them. Though he might desire them, he cannot rightfully expect them (Heb. 5:9; Luke 6:46).

In Christ, There Is Hope

The Christian has a living hope (1 Peter 1:3); that is, his hope is alive and well. He has a blessed hope (Heb. 7:19), living in this New Testament age following the sacrificial death of the Savior (Col. 2:14), and having been cleansed by the precious blood of

THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE

the Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5). Paul wrote:

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it (Rom. 8:24-25)

In view of this, he could pen these words, indicating his hope, because of his commitment to the Cause of Christ: *"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began"* (Titus 1:2).

Thus, Christ is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1); that is, He is the object of our hope, and in that hope, in Christ, we rejoice (Phil. 4:4). To the church in Rome, Paul declared by inspiration:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1-2).

For those who commit to living BY faith, there is the blessing of living IN hope. There is hope in life, and hope in death: *"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death"* (Prov. 14:32).

The knowledge of such a blessing should be a great source of comfort, and both a continuing call to commitment, and an abiding assurance that commitment is worth the cost, no matter how great (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Cor. 15:12-19; Rom. 15:4).

Truly, the Christian can say,

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Heb. 6:19).

Others, without Christ, are as ships without anchors that flounder and sink when the storms of life assail. Unable to hold their course, or to maintain their position, they are shipwrecked on the rocky shore of discouragement and despair when the breakers of hardship crash against them. Pounded with the tides of uncertainty, and with neither compass nor rudder, they are tossed to and fro until overwhelmed and lost beneath the waves. Thank God, the Christian can safely ride out the strongest winds and largest waves that one may face, because he has hope as an anchor of the soul.

Outside Christ, There Is No Hope

Those outside of Christ have no hope (Gal. 3:26-27). Paul wrote of the former state of the Gentiles:

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12).

Notice, they had NO hope – without Christ. All who are without Christ have NO HOPE! Thus, there is not one accountable person, who is not in Christ, who does have hope. Why are there so many without hope (Matt. 7:13-14)?

As we noted earlier, all sensible persons want the hope of approval by God, and of being with

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Him in Heaven eternally, but the vast majority have no hope. Why? Very simply, most people are too busy, too unconcerned, too caught up in the world, too selfish, too wrapped up in error, or just too lacking in knowledge of things spiritual to make the commitment necessary in order to have hope. Hope does not come cheaply, accidentally, unexpectedly, or without the correct intent and committed fulfillment of one's obligations.

Maybe if men would stop for a moment, and really consider what having no hope means, they would make the commitment necessary that they might have real hope. A young boy was in surgery to have a brain tumor removed. His family anxiously waited to hear the news from the doctor. They wanted to hear good news, of course. When the doctor came out of surgery, he said sadly, *"I am sorry. We did all we could do, but there is no hope."* The family understood what no hope meant. No one had to explain to them the meaning of *"no hope."* They realized that ALL hope for his physical life was gone, for NO hope was left. They knew their precious son and brother would not live—for he had NO hope.

Without Christ, there is no hope of spiritual and eternal life. There is not SOME hope, nor just a LITTLE hope, nor is there hope that ONE DAY there will be any hope, as long as one refuses to make the commitment to live in Christ, and for Christ (Phil. 1:21). One, who lives without Christ, lives without hope. To die without hope is absolutely to abandon ALL hope forever, for there is no hope in hell, the place of eternal, fiery punishment for the uncommitted (2 Thess. 1:7-9). When (the equivalent

of) a thousand years have passed in hell, there will still be no hope of ever leaving that place of wailing and gnashing of teeth. When (the equivalent of) a million years have gone by, there will not be one more tiny bit of hope than upon one's first entering the flaming fires of eternal darkness (Matt. 25:41, 46). Having once entered, there will never be ANY hope of one's escaping that dreadful destiny of the disobedient, or of its torments ever diminishing.

How sad, and how unnecessary it is for one to be without hope. Every person who has reached the state of maturity to where he can understand his need for salvation in Christ, and what Christ would have him to do to be saved, upon hearing the Good News, the Gospel of Christ, has the choice of whether to commit himself to following the only Savior by obeying Him, or to follow Satan by obeying him, refusing the way of life, light, and love. It is the individual's choice (cf. Josh. 24:15; Ezek. 18:20; 2 Cor. 5:10). No one else can make that choice for him, and no one else can make that commitment (or keep it) for him—not mother or father, brother or sister, or friend, or preacher, or elder, or God the Father, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit—no one.

He may choose life in Christ, and rest in that hope; or, he may choose to reject the loving appeal, and the outstretched, nail-pierced hands of Christ; thus, forfeiting all spiritual blessings and choosing spiritual death (whether he acknowledges that choice, or not), and have no hope, and no hope of ever having hope in that condition. On the other hand, there is no one, not even the Devil himself, who can prevent one's having hope in Christ, if that

one makes the choice to make the commitment to live a life of faithful, obedient, loving service to the Lord (Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 6:16-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 11:28-30; John 6:68; 12:48).

Do You Have Hope In Christ?

If Christ were to come today, would you meet Him with the pure garments of holiness, having been washed and made clean by His blood, that you might have hope of eternal salvation in Heaven (John 14:1-4; Matt. 24:36)? Can you confidently say you fully expect to hear Him say, "Well done," and "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:21, 23, 34)? If death were to come today, would you face it with the hope of a better life, in a better land, forever with God and all the faithful (Heb. 9:27; James 4:14)? Or, must you honestly, sadly say that you have no such hope?

Are you living in hope? If so, you understand what a great blessing the Christian's hope is, but if not, you so desperately need the real, true, saving, strengthening, encouraging, sustaining hope that Christ alone can offer. With hope in Him, you can both desire the blessings of Heaven, and, more than that, you can confidently expect to receive them one day.

What Must One Do In Order To Have Such Hope?

If you are willing to commit yourself to the way of hope, fully, faithfully, and finally, you can do so. Begin with hearing the Word of God. "So

then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Upon hearing the Truth, the Good News, the Gospel, you must gladly receive it.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

To hear, and to obey, even "*honestly and sincerely,*" the words of men, no matter how scholarly, admired, and beloved such men may be to the hearer, will NOT bring hope (Matt. 15:9).

Hearing God's Word should cause one to have faith in the Son of God, believing in Him who was sent to die in order to take away the sin of the world (John 3:16; 1:29). One must believe in Jesus as the Christ, for He said,

I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24; cf. Heb. 11:1, 6).

Having heard, and believed in Christ, one must repent of all past sins. In godly sorrow, one must change his mind about living in sin, and about sin in his life, turn from it, changing his life that he no longer continues in that sinful way; that is, making a commitment that he, as one said, is "*getting out of the sinning business*" (Acts 2:38; 17:30-31; 2 Cor. 7:10).

The next step one must take (for the preceding steps are necessary, but do not yet put one into Christ, where hope is) is to confess his faith in Jesus

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as the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). Surely, one who believes in Him will be glad to tell others, even the whole world, of his faith in the sinlessly perfect Son of God. Then, having heard the Word of God, having truly believed, with all one's heart, that Jesus is the Christ, having repented, in godly sorrow, of all past sins, and having confessed one's faith in the risen Savior, there is one more step to be taken before the desire of hope may be united with expectation.

The final step, necessary for one to enter into that saved state is – immersion in water in order to obtain forgiveness of sins. Baptism is, by the very definition of the word, an immersion, or a burial in water, followed by a resurrection, (Rom. 6:3-4; John 3:23; Acts 8:36). Baptism, contrary to the misguided affirmations of so many in the religious world today, IS absolutely essential to salvation (Mark 16:15-16). Baptism is necessary, and required by God, if one wants remission of sins (Acts 2:38), to be saved (1 Peter 3:21), to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16), and to get into Christ, where hope is (Gal. 3:26-27).

Baptism stands between one's being lost in his sins and without hope, on this side of that watery grave, and being saved and filled with hope, after arising to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Without baptism, no accountable person, in this Christian age, will be saved. Before baptism, there is no salvation, and no hope, for it is baptism that brings one into contact with the precious blood of Christ that washes away his sins (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16).

Those who make the commitment to obey the

BOBBY LIDDELL

Lord who died for them on the cross of Calvary, who will do that which He has commanded (John 14:15), can then rightfully have hope—a hope they did not have before their choosing to commit themselves to the way of righteousness in obedience to the faith. Those, who continue faithfully (Rev. 2:10; Acts 2:42), forsaking finally and forever the paths of sin that they too long have trod, will continue to have that enduring, sustaining, wonderful blessing of hope.

Now, do you have hope? Do you desire the blessings that can be yours now and forever? Do you really, truly expect to receive them? Are you willing to make the commitment necessary to obtain them? Our prayer is that you will.

Bobby Liddell



A native of Alabama, has preached for over thirty years, in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee, as well as preaching in lectures and meetings, radio and TV, and missionary trips abroad. Written extensively, edited monthly papers and lectureship books, and directs the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures. Bobby serves as Director of the Memphis School of Preaching. He and Joan have three children and four grandchildren.

THE SOURCE OF OUR HOPE

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Faith, Hope And Love

This Chapter Written By

Josh Herndon

There's an old saying that some people will almost swear by: Bad things happen in threes. Like three trillion dollars in American debt. But the most famous one that we all hear: people die in threes. I've heard no telling how many nursing home people talk about how, if someone dies today, two more will die tomorrow (almost like it's a destined curse). There are people, even in the church, that will look for two more people to pass away after someone dies in their congregation. You never have just ONE disaster, you always have three, closely grouped together. If your dog gets run over, then your cat will eat your canary and choke to death on a bone. Disasters come in threes, so they say. Like Internal...Revenue...Service. So, there are people that really believe that disasters come in threes.

Then, there are others that see something else... they see strength in the number three...they see good things that come in threes, strong things. Like the three tenses, past, present, and future: that covers it all. The three best flavors of ice cream: vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry (at least I think). Three

points in a sermon (that's the way you know the preacher's almost finished). Three songs and a prayer. Good things come in threes, too.

There was even an article written about how it seems that in every industry there is room for three major competitors. Fewer than that, and there isn't enough competition. More than that...and the smaller ones do not survive. So you have Wal-Mart, Kroger, Super-Valu. In the book sale corner you have Borders, Barnes and Noble, and Books-a-Million. We see in the ever dwindling car market, the BIG THREE: Ford, GM, and Chrysler.

But there's a truth about things coming in threes...it is really true that extraordinary strength lies in putting together three particular ingredients. They all have to be there...but when they're put together (with God)...they are invincible. There are three indispensable qualities, that, if you take them all together, will give you the foundations for an enduring marriage, a functioning family, productive relationships, and most importantly...a successful Christian life.

Paul calls them, "*faith, hope, and love, these three.*" He says they all abide, that is, that they all last. They're strong. They continue. They abide. And, though he does say that the greatest of these three is love...we can easily see that each one is important. Each one needs the other two...to be effective. Good things, very good things, come in threes.

And what I intend to show in this lesson...is that God expects us to have these three in our lives. God expects us to have faith, hope, and love. In order to have stable marriages, in order to have happy homes, in order to have productive relationships

(within the church and without), we are going to need all three...and the first is...

I. Faith

This is the first point, so you can keep time as to when you can expect this to be over. You got two more points until we quit. First, Paul says, "*Faith...abides.*" Look at 1 Cor. 13:13, "*Now faith... ABIDES!*" Ok...so, faith is the first ingredient to living a successful Christian life, but what does it mean?! I can say, "*I have faith,*" all day long, but it doesn't matter unless I know what it means to have it and how to live a life full of that. That's like saying, "*I'm the best chef in the world,*" without ever cooking a meal for you. What does "*abiding faith*" mean?

We have the first part of the definition of faith down: To believe in God, to believe in Christ, to believe in the Holy Spirit. That's the first part of the definition of this particular word. But then, there's that last part of the definition of "*pistis*" (peestees) in the Greek...to have faith means to have a trusting, RELYING, believing heart. That changes things a little.

For example, to let faith ABIDE in my life means that I assume that others around me will tell me the truth, that they want the best for me, that they intend no harm to me, that they are loyal to me through all kinds of challenges. The easiest way I can illustrate this point is through the church, and the family that you have here. To have an abiding faith in this family...means that you TRUST in them. You believe that they are trying to get you to heaven. If I have faith in someone, it means that I never have to be afraid that their commitment to me is

wavering. If I have faith in someone, it means I am totally committed to their success. If I have faith in someone, it means that even when they disappoint me and fail me and hurt me, I believe that it was just a momentary mistake, and that, overall, that person is worthy of my trust. Faith ABIDES in life! In 16 other passages of Scripture you will find this word is translated "*to dwell.*" Where is faith to dwell? Where is faith to abide? IN ME...IN YOU! Faith keeps on trusting...keeps on believing.

How many of you have ever had your trust broken by someone close to you? I remember the worst incident in my life, when it came to breaking trust, and that was lying to my Dad when I was a junior in high school. I wanted to see my girlfriend (at the time) instead of working on the farm, so I came up with this lie to tell my Dad about where I was after school. I told my Dad that I had choir practice after school, when in reality, I was really going over to my girlfriend's house and chilling out with her and her family. It was the worst feeling, when Dad found out and then asked me, "*Son, where have you been?*" And I lied to his face...it's the worst feeling to KNOW when you've broken someone's trust, when that faith they had in you isn't there anymore...and I can't imagine how that hurt my Dad...to know that he placed that trust in me, and I chose to throw it away. But in order for us to live a successful, Christian life...we have to have ABIDING faith and trust, not only in God, but in others around us.

Where do you think most marriage problems come from? I know that husbands do not listen...I know that people have problems with finances. But

so many marriage problems involve issues of trust. Some spouse comes in and says, *"I can't trust my wife, husband! I don't have faith in them."* Have you noticed, that even in the church, we have almost abandoned trusting each other? And I think that has a lot to do with the society we live in right now. We don't trust anybody anymore. There's no such thing as a handshake, and a promise to pay you back. You have to hire a lawyer, and get a living will, just to borrow a lawn mower, or an air-compressor. And when you lose trust, and you lose faith in those around you...that has very serious consequences in your family, in the church, everywhere! When you no longer trust, and you no longer live in FAITH in anyone...then that relationship is going to go down, and go down quickly.

You have seen what happens when a congregation begins to lose trust and faith in its own, or loses trust and faith in an elder, or a preacher. Let's say that you have a congregation with a number of fine families and capable people in it. But one of the elders breaks his marriage vows, or the preacher gets into a relationship with the church secretary and they commit adultery. There is all kinds of fallout from those actions (even if they repent). It seems to start an epidemic of trust-breaking, and people begin to lose that relying faith that we have to have between each other in the church. It just seems like no one trusts anybody anymore. It's as though, somehow, when trusted people, like church leaders, don't take that trust seriously, that others abandon their commitments because of it.

The strength of a relationship depends on faith...it dwells on trust. Faith must abide in my life

if my life is going to be successful...which brings us back to God. If I were to ask all of you here: Do you believe in God? All of you would raise your hands. I have no doubt about it. But if I were to say to you: "*How many of you rely on God?*" then, if you're honest, the hands would be fewer (if you're being honest). How many of you rely on God and not the security you feel from your bank account, or your possessions, or your paycheck, or what you've been given. And that brings us back to this issue of trust. In order for faith to abide...to dwell in my life...there must be a trust, a reliance, that I have developed toward God! Must like the reliance developed between me and my wife, between me and my best friend...do we have that reliance ON GOD? Do we have that faith? Because without faith we can never please God (Heb. 11:6), and we can never live a successful, spiritual life for Him.

II. Hope

For those of you keeping time...this is number two, and you have one more point after this before we close. Faith cannot abide...faith cannot dwell where there is no hope. Hope means you have goals and visions for the future...hope is having dreams and directions in the future. Hope means knowing that your life counts for something, and that your life has a purpose, and that purpose is in God! Paul said in Col. 1:16 that,

By Him all things were created, in heaven and earth, invisible and visible...all things were created through Him and FOR Him (ESV).

Hope means you have places to go and things to do

that matter. Hope means you've started WAY BACK here...but you're headed toward something better in Christ, out there. Hope is a powerful thing when founded in the eternal.

Now...we've already seen that if you don't have faith ABIDING and dwelling in your life, then every relationship you have will fall apart. You have to trust in God and trust in others. We have to rely on God and rely on others. But what happens if you don't have hope in your marriage, in your family, in your Christian life? If you're in a family, or a marriage, or a church in which there isn't any sense of hope...no direction toward God...no looking forward to the future of heaven...then there isn't anything to shoot for, and what's going to happen when there's nothing to shoot for?

I'm not a hunter by any means, but I love to fish (with other people that have boats and gear and poles, and bait and know all the good spots on KY Lake). But what happens if you're a duck hunter, and you have been sitting in a duck blind for 10 hours in the freezing cold (icicles hanging off your nose), and not a duck has crossed the sky at all day? What happens when you go to a skeet shoot, and you have your gun ready to go, but nobody pulls the cord? You have nothing to shoot at, and you're sitting there with your gun held in the firing position...and you get tired, and frustrated, and angry, and bitter.

It's the same thing that happens in any life, relationship, church that has no hope, no goal, no vision of the good that comes in the future through God. That relationship will implode. It will destroy itself. Your care, compassion, concern for EACH OTHER will collapse. Brethren, in the church, if all

we ever do is care for ourselves, and see to ourselves, and all we ever do is look to ourselves, and we shut out the rest of the world, we will eventually get on each other's nerves, and we will turn on each other.

Faith has to be blended with hope...trust has to be put together with purpose. There is not a single verse in the Bible, not one, that says you can be a Christian, have faith in God, and then live your life any way you want to. It's just not there. God expects all of you. He doesn't want 10% of you, He doesn't want 50% of you, He doesn't want 99% of you—He wants all of you. Got it! He doesn't want you cheating on Him here, using His name in vain there, not giving Him any time or resources. He wants your life! He wants your love and affection! He wants your hope and trust to be in HIM!

What does God want? He wants every single bit of me. He wants my undivided loyalty. He wants me to obey, follow, and love HIM! He wants to have full, undiluted control of my life. C. S. Lewis (famous Christian author) wrote an essay entitled "Christian Apologetics." In it he says this profound phrase: "Christianity...cannot be moderately important." If God is real...if His kingdom will last forever...if His word is true and His power is the real deal...then we have no choice, but to trust in Him and HOPE in HIM! Faith must have PURPOSE, or it will die (let me say that again). Faith's purpose is found in Christ.

The strongest families I know, in the church, are those in which, not only do the people trust in each other, and believe in each other, and trust

in God...but they use that trust to do things. They do things for others, they work in the Kingdom of God. They're active in the church. Faith needs purpose...faith needs hope in order to abide. Faith needs purpose in order to abide.

There was a man who had retired from his job after 40 years. He said that for the first few weeks he wandered around the house, he weeded the garden, he read magazines, he hovered around his wife and asked her six times a day, *"What are you doing?"* And finally she said to him, *"Look, I married you for better or for worse, but not for lunch. Get out of this house and find something to do."* That man had lost a sense of purpose. There was no confident expectation (as the literal word *"elpis"*/hope translates). There MUST be something to DO, in faith. There has to be a purpose, an expectation in life.

And one of the things we love to do, when we know we have to do something, is put it off! When Dad would bring a big Bob Truck of unsplit wood over to the house growing up...I knew what my purpose was that weekend. It was to split and stack an infinite amount of wood. Stacks and stacks and stacks of wood (that's what it looked like to a 12 year-old). And if Dad told me to get some of that wood and bring it up to the carport, so that we could have it right there beside the door...I wouldn't want to do it RIGHT THEN! I would want to do something else like play basketball, or ride the four-wheeler. We love to procrastinate when it comes to purpose...when it comes to doing what is expected of us.

I am reminded of what James says in James

4:17 *"To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin."* James is talking about the issue of procrastination. *"I'm intending to do it."* Ever met somebody who is always *"aiming to do it."* I always want to say, *"When? Give me a day, time, appointment."* I will...tomorrow. We love to put stuff off. And James says that just because WE KNOW the right thing to do...doesn't mean we're going to do it. And James says that when we don't do it...we sin.

How do you define sin? We think of evil activities: murder, adultery, cheating, lying, stealing, but we don't really remember the sins of omission. *"To him who knows to do good and does it not, it's sin."* I can do nothing...and still sin. A successful Christian life is more than simply avoiding evil. If all that the Christian life was...was a bunch of *"don't's:"* don't do this, don't do that, then everybody who's dead would qualify as a Christian, because they don't do anything.

Procrastination kills our purpose, kills our hope. People says *"Someday I'll..." "One of these days ..."* and you never do! *"One of these days I'm going to get serious about God. One of these days I'll get back to church...one of these days I'm really gonna clean my life up."* God says you don't have any guarantee of tomorrow, none at all. Life is a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away (James 4:14).

Remember the story that Jesus told about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30? The Master gave one talent to one man, five to another and ten to another. He left, and came back sometime later. Two guys had doubled their talents/money. (A talent was a weight of gold.) The third man had taken his gold,

buried it in the ground and did NOTHING with it. He didn't use it for its purpose! There was no expectation gained from putting that talent in the ground! The master said, *"At least you could have put it in a bank account and received interest on it!"* The Master said, *"You wicked servant!"* Why? What had he done? Nothing. That's wickedness. Doing nothing with your life is bad. Make your life count! Know that your purpose is in Christ. I can do all kinds of things that keep me from doing all kinds of sins...but if I'm not doing anything for anyone else...what does it matter? God said it doesn't!

Whatever you intend to do for the Lord...do it now! Not next week, next month, next year. Thinking about talking to a friend about Christ...inviting them to church? Do it now! Thinking about teaching a class and getting involved? Do it now! Thinking about re-doing your budget, and giving more to God? Do it now!

Luke 12 Jesus told a parable...He tells the story about a man who is very successful in life, but he had no hope in God, no spiritual purpose in life...and he made a very foolish decision. Jesus told them a parable, The ground of a certain rich man was very productive [literally, abundant crop] and he thought to himself *"What shall I do. I have no place to store my crops."* Then he said, *"This will I do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods and I will say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take ease. Eat, drink, be merry,'"* but God said to him *"You fool. This night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will be these things that*

you possess?" (Luke 12:16-20, ESV; NKJV). There must be a purpose, a hope...greater than yourself in this life.

III. Love

But finally, faith and hope also need love. Faith, hope, and love abide; these three. But the greatest of these is love. These three things are founded on love. But love...is tough. It's not this warm and fuzzy feeling in the pit of your stomach where everything is outlined with clouds. That's Hollywood love. That's pre-teen puppy love. That's not love as the Bible describes it. The Bible gives us a tough, resilient, seeking, persistent, redemptive definition of love.

Love is self-sacrifice. Love is giving beyond what you have to give, and moving into what you DESIRE to give. Love is, as Paul says it, bearing all things and enduring all things. Love is discovering that a family member is sick, urgently sick, with a disease that is not only going to be fatal, but which carries with it a measure of shame. But love goes out and gets the help that they need. Love visits them in the hospital. Love doesn't abandon them.

Love is finding out that your spouse has cheated on you, made a huge mistake. An incredible mistake. But love finds a way to accept repentance, repair the breach, bridge the gap, and figure out what it's going to take to build that trust again. Love hangs on to what is right and shares in repentance for what is wrong. Love abides.

Love is enduring the rejection of your child for a while. How could he turn his back on years of privileges and advantages that we have given him?

But he has. And love becomes like the father in the parable, just waiting until that son or daughter has spent all...and he starts that long journey home. Love waits on the front porch....and when that child comes home...love runs to meet the wayward...love tries to understand. Love abides.

In a word, love is redemptive. Love never ends. Love keeps on reaching. Love is paying whatever price has to be paid in order to keep marriages and families and friendships strong. Love is getting involved when you want to back off, and sometimes backing off when you want to get involved. But love is always redemptive. Love is always seeking the good of the other, and not the self.

Conclusion

Faith, hope, and love abide; these three. The greatest of these is love, for love cures broken faith...if I choose to love somebody, I will build them up again so that I can trust them again. Wonder what would've happened if Dad never built me back up, and trusted me again after I lied to him? Faith, hope, and love abide; these three. The greatest of these is love, for love gives birth to hope...if I choose to love somebody, I won't ever give up on what God desires for them to become.

Good things absolutely do come in threes. Like faith, hope, and love. Like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father, who has entrusted us with His creation, and who we trust for daily bread and life itself. The Holy Spirit, who brings hope through prayer (Rom. 8:26). In the Spirit we have hope, for He is that guarantee to every child of God (Eph. 1:13).

And, most of all, Christ the Son of God, who is love Himself. Who is such an expression of the love of God that He was given for the sins of the world, so that the world might be saved and not condemned. Christ, who while we were yet sinners, loved us enough to die for us. Christ, whose love went to a cross, paid a price, and gave and gave and still gives. Christ, whose love never ends, whose love redeems, whose love is able to bear shame, endure suffering, and turn us around. Christ, whose love reaches to the highest heaven, and to the lowest hell.

That love was shown in that shed blood, and through that blood we are saved. It is with love that Jesus says, *"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved..."* Have you done that? Have you confessed your Lord, given Him control of your life, turned from your sins, and realized that He is your Savior, and without Him you are lost. If not...this is your chance to be made free from your sin. And if you are Christian who has decided to love the world over your Lord, the Master waits for you to return...come in penitence telling your Father you have sinned (Luke 16:21). So, be humble. Come and confess your sin, and your need to be saved.

Josh Herndon



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Keys To Successful Christian Living



***Growth Process –
From Babe To Full Age***

This Chapter Written By

Dave Miller

The Bible teaches that it is absolutely essential for us to grow, develop, and progress spiritually. Many Christians apparently do not recognize this mandate from God. We can become so busy with daily affairs that we neglect those measures that will deepen and strengthen our faith, making us more fit for service in the kingdom. Too many Christians plod along year after year doing very little to increase their spiritual stamina and move them toward maturity. The Hebrews writer addressed this very point when, in expounding the priestly role of Jesus as it relates to the Aaronic priesthood versus the priesthood of Melchizedek, he paused to admonish his readers concerning their failure to have progressed in their understanding of the more complex spiritual matters:

...of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to

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need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14).

Likewise, when Paul wrote the Christians in Corinth, he chided them for their stunted spiritual growth, even describing them as “carnal,” i.e., preoccupied with fleshly matters rather than spiritual concerns. He used the same metaphor of milk and infants:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Observe that one major result of failing to grow spiritually, and thus remaining more like worldly, non-Christian people, is that envy, strife, and divisions naturally result. Sadly, we have way too many carnal people in the church!

When Paul wrote the Christians in Ephesus, he explained the tremendous significance of the Christian system as it relates to the spiritual gifts of the first century. Why did God provide these miraculous capabilities? Why did He arrange for there to be apostles, prophets, and others, who would provide spiritual information that would equip the

saints for the work of ministry and the edification of the body? He explained:

[T]hat we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:14-16).

If members of the church were genuinely devoted to growing spiritually, maturing in Christ, and becoming spiritual adults rather than babies, we could eliminate much of the division in the church that arises over petty opinions, prideful personalities, and the pitiful excuses used to justify rending asunder the body of Christ. Bringing all of one's energies to bear on oneself, concentrating on bringing one's own passions and pride under control, in hopes of being more like Christ, would do much to bring factions together in love and mutual desire to please God and get to heaven together.

Dave Miller



A native of Arizona, Dave is the Executive Director at Apologetics Press • 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. His seminars on **Islam** and **The Silencing Of God** are superb. Deborah and Dave have 4 grown children, 3 grandchildren and reside in Montgomery, Alabama.

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Hope That Is Found In Jesus Christ

This Chapter Written By

Jeremiah Tatum

The school system in a large city had a program to help children keep up with their school work during stays in the city's hospitals. One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher. *"We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now,"* the regular teacher said, *"and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind."*

The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned to her that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, *"I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs."* When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much.

But the next day, a nurse asked her, *"What did you do to that boy?"* The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. *"No,*

no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."

Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He expressed it this way: *"They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"* ~ Bits & Pieces, July 1991.

The created world was in pain. All seemed lost. Sin had done the damage. It weakened, destroyed, and ripped out the very heart of man. Imagine the state of the world in sin before the Teacher came. The coming of the Christ gave the globe hope! God had a plan for man to live, not die. This is why He sent His Son to teach us how.

Defining "Hope"

The word, *"hope"* is found one-hundred thirty times in one-hundred twenty-one different verses in the Bible (KJV). The Old Testament, Hebrew term is *"tiqvah"* and actually refers to a *"cord."* It is an expectation, something to hold on to when nothing else will save. In the New Testament, the word is *"elpis."* Strong's Lexicon deems it as *"the joyful expectation of eternal salvation."* Within this definition is also the qualifying statement – *"for the Christian."* The simplest way to say it is to say that all hope for mankind is found in Christ!

Consider the first verse of lyrics from a popular song – *"In Christ Alone"*:

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand!

Hope in Christ is more than just an idea. It is an eternal reality. In the New Testament the word "*hope*" is found fifty-three times. Twelve of these times it is found in conjunction with the word "*Christ*." Seven times it is joined with the word "*Jesus*." Every other reference deals directly or indirectly with the fact that a future life beyond the grave is associated with a relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

Without Hope

George Bernard Shaw is perhaps most renowned as a free thinker and liberal philosopher. In his last writings we read,

The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led, instead, directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith.

HOPE THAT IS FOUND IN JESUS CHRIST

Here is a typical inscription on a grave in the Apostle Paul's day: *"I was not. I became. I am not. I care not."* It is no small wonder why Paul needed to introduce the Athenians to the *"Unknown God"* (Acts 17:23). It is hard to imagine a person, further yet a people, who have absolutely no hope at all. This is the state of the atheist, the agnostic, and the antireligious. This is the cost of sins not forgiven, not remitted, and not paid for.

Having no hope is a real problem. The exact words, *"no hope"* are addressed seven separate times in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about their status for the future before Jesus came. He said,

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh— who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11-12).

Two key phrases should come to the reader's attention in these two verses. The first, of course, would be *"having no hope."* But the second may sneak past if the reader is not careful. This crucial statement is *"that at that time you were without Christ."* Being without Christ is the same as being without God in the world. Being without Christ is the same as being without hope. But the Word became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:1, 14). His name was prophesied and realized as, *"Immanuel, which is translated - God*

with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

Therefore, Paul goes on to say in the next verse – *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"* (Eph. 2:13). Mankind was without hope before Jesus came. Before Christ, there were no real expectations of joy, no thoughts of pardon. Before Christ, there was no sacrifice that was sufficient, no sinless human blood that could satisfy the justice of God.

Paul also wrote to the church at Thessalonica, concerning the Second Coming of Christ. They were mistaken concerning the nature and time of the Lord's return. As Paul explained the future glory that was coming and the expectation of rest for all saints, he said,

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

Again the reader should notice two key phrases. The first – *"others who have no hope."* Paul is addressing *"brethren."* In his opening statement of the letter, he defined these brethren as – *"the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess. 1:1). The brethren are those who comprise the church. The *"others who have no hope,"* are those who remain outside of it!

The second phrase is *"even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."* God's promise of heaven is a promise for saints. The only way to

access the promise of eternal life with God is to be *"in Jesus."* Paul only qualifies two groups that are in such a state. They include those who *"sleep in Jesus,"* or *who are "dead in Christ"* (1 Thess. 4:16), and the *"we who are alive and remain"* (1 Thess. 4:17). The *"we"* refers back to *"brethren"* (1 Thess. 4:13). The *"brethren"* refers back to the *"church"* (1 Thess. 1:1). To be in Christ Jesus is to be in the church. To be in the church is to have hope. To be outside of the church is to be the *"others."* God be praised that He sent Jesus to eliminate the fate of being the *"others."* Jesus came so no man would have to live or die without hope (1 Tim. 2:3-5).

"Our Hope"

From Parade magazine comes the story of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Land had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. *"Stay in school,"* he admonished, *"and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you."* At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, *"I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling."* Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

The reason why the attitude of these school

children changed immediately is because of what man guaranteed, that they could never do for themselves – that the price be paid! Mr. Land was their hope. In the same way, Jesus is ours. As a teenager, one song that left an early impression on me about the person of Jesus included these words – *“He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, ‘Amazing Grace’ all day long, Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.”* When a person comes to the realization that they are no longer obligated to resolve an insurmountable debt, there is overwhelming joy and hope for a brighter future.

Paul began his epistle to the young preacher, Timothy, *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope”* (1 Tim. 1:1). Jesus Christ, our hope! Why was Paul willing to be rejected, persecuted, beaten, disbelieved, ridiculed, cast out, and more? Paul had hope. Paul had a Savior. Paul had the only thing that really mattered – a relationship with the Son of God and the continual cleansing of His blood.

Consider the following verses that explain the Christian’s hope:

- 1 Cor. 15:19 – *“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”*
– This explains in context that since Jesus is risen our hope extends into the afterlife.
- Phil. 1:20-21 – *“according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now*

also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” – To Paul, physical life was not as precious as the hope he had in Jesus.

- Col. 1:27 – *“To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* – Paul is reminding the saints of God’s desire to make known to them the mystery of salvation and the church. *“Christ in you”* is here present as *“the hope of glory.”*
- 1 Thess. 1:3 – *“remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”* – Hope in Jesus Christ is not a pipe dream that must be realized immediately or else rejected. Christians can be eager of salvation, and yet hope patiently, because heaven is worth waiting for.
- 1 Peter 1:3 – *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* – In this great verse hope is amplified by the word *“living”* or *“lively”* (KJV). The Greek word means *“to live, breathe, be among the living (not lifeless and not dead).”* Christians need to remember that their hope is as alive as the One who made it possible! Our hope remains presently at the right hand of God!

One could go on and on throughout the New Testament finding verses that associate hope with Jesus Christ. Each and every time “*hope*” is found, it will be, in one way or another, only in Jesus.

President Abraham Lincoln in his address to the U.S. Congress in 1862 included a statement that has been discussed and written about for the last one-hundred fifty years. He said, “*My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope of earth.*” If America ever had hope or will ever have hope, if it ever offered mankind, past or present, more than it could get anywhere else, it was and is only because of the people of this great nation who believed and still believe in the only and true last best hope on earth – Jesus Christ!

Paul reminded us that this hope we have in Christ is what saves us (Rom. 8:24). In essence what he is saying is that hope in Christ is what separates those who have something to look forward to from those who do not. It also assures us that to be in this hope was God’s will for mankind. So much was it His will that He offered up His own Son to make hope more than just idea. Jesus came and offered hope to those He contacted during His life, but He also gave hope to every person who has ever lived by what He accomplished in death.

Jesus Christ is the hope of all the earth. He is the “*anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast*” (Heb. 6:19). He is our “*blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13). He is our “*good hope*” (2 Thess. 2:16). He is our “*lively hope*” (2 Peter 1:3). He is the one who makes it possible for us to live forever.

By the will of God, and through His mercy and

HOPE THAT IS FOUND IN JESUS CHRIST

grace, we see that the only place to put our faith is in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter succinctly explained what Christians must do to have hope. He wrote in 1 Peter 1:21 – *“who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”*

Jeremiah Tatum



A graduate of Freed-Hardeman University (MA in ministry) • Jeremiah is presently working with the Pulaski Street congregation • A popular and very effective speaker • He is a cancer survivor • Amber Danae and Jeremiah have three children (Luke [7], Daniel [4], and Lyssabeth [1]).

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Examples Of Hope

*(When There Is No
Logical Reason To Do So)*

This Chapter Written By

Jeremiah Tatum

Introduction

I was standing in the lobby of Neal Funeral Home in Lawrenceburg, TN. It was a Friday morning, December 3, 2004, and I was present to attend the funeral of the father of a dear friend. I have a policy about funeral homes and church buildings. No cellular phones. I leave mine in my vehicle. It is just one of those things. Even if on vibrate mode it has always been the principle. We can respect God and we can respect the dead long enough to wait for whatever the phone will tell us. But today I had made a rare exception. I was waiting for some news that could change my life.

Then I felt my phone buzzing in my pocket. I took out my phone and looked at the number that was calling. I knew right then it was the doctor. So I walked out of the lobby and into the courtyard to find out exactly what I was dealing with.

It had all begun with a little lump that I noticed just to the right of my trachea. Back in June I could see it. It seemed like maybe just an infection, or perhaps it was just a little cyst. Even though I saw

EXAMPLES OF HOPE

and felt it while shaving I bypassed dealing with it right away. But by mid-September nothing had changed. It seemed the spot was perhaps larger than before. I went to my primary care physician and he immediately referred me to an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat specialist).

Arriving at the office of the ENT, he had me in a chair and with a needle in my neck within five minutes. He took a sample. It came back normal. He supposed it was just a cyst and said we could wait and see what happens. If it were not gone in a couple more months, we would take it out just to make sure.

On November 30, 2004, I had my first surgery. What was supposed to be a cyst had turned out to be a bundle of lymph nodes. So the doctor said he would send them away to pathology. We knew then it was more. We knew that we might have a problem. So I waited a few days, and here I was on the cell phone waiting to learn what it was.

Everybody always remembers exactly where they were and what they were doing, and perhaps even how they were feeling, when major, life-altering, history-changing events took place. People of another generation remember this about Pearl Harbor, the Kennedy Assassination, and Neal Armstrong's first steps on the moon. People of this generation remember this about 9/11/01. I remember this about the first time I heard the statement, "*You have thyroid cancer.*"

The doctor did his best to reassure and offer hope. He said it would mean surgery and radiation, but that we would knock it out. He was very

optimistic for a guy with such news. So we did what we were supposed to do. Since the first day there have been multiple surgeries, tests, radiation treatments, and more. I have had to be away from my family, I have gone through more surgeries. There have been moments of jubilation, defeat, happiness, confusion, tears, resolve, and just about every human emotion one can fathom. But the one thing that has made the difference, the one reality, I should say, is God. God alone. I am talking about the same God who talks about things that do not exist as though they did. I am talking about the same God who gave Abraham hope, contrary to hope. When we can learn to truly trust God with our future, and stop trying to control what happens tomorrow, it can be the most liberating and rewarding experience of our lives.

Hope Concerning Tomorrow

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, *"Eighteen to nothing – we're losing."* "Boy," said the spectator, *"I'll bet you're discouraged."* *"Why should I be discouraged?"* replied the little boy. *"We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"*

People often give up on God before it is His turn to bat. We get downtrodden about circumstances, unrealized dreams, or unfulfilled promises. When the situation looks bleak, the bleakness is all that we can see. It is so close to our face, so up in it that we cannot see what God sees.

Faith, however – that is, true and Biblical faith,

EXAMPLES OF HOPE

is hoping in what God is going to do when He gets to the plate. The Hebrew writer reveals it to us so simply, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb. 11:1). Faith and hope are thus intertwined and inseparable. Also involved is believing without seeing, hoping beyond logical reason, and trusting that God is going to do what He promised, even if the natural world says it is not *"scientifically possible."*

Abram was a man of great faith, who believed in Jehovah God. God promised through him to bless every family in the world (Gen. 12:1ff). God pledged descendants as numberless as the sand and the stars (Gen. 22:17). Abram was not only seventy-five years old and childless at the time of these commitments, but he had to wait until he was a hundred years old before the child of promise came. What kept Abram hoping, trusting, and believing? What kept him from giving up, forgetting God, and just going on with his own life as he saw fit?

Dan Jenkins once illustrated Abram's great faith in a sermon years ago. I remember it went something like this: *"Imagine Abram going out to his mailbox. And now, he is changing his name. He is crossing out 'Abram' and writing 'Abraham.' He is erasing, 'exalted father' and writing, 'father of a multitude.' The neighbors are laughing: 'Abraham!? Are you kidding!? Father of nations!? You don't even have any children! You are older than the sun!' But Abraham, that's correct, Abraham calmly finishes his new inscription and walks back inside the house. He may have presently been without an heir, but God had called Him 'Abraham' just the same."*

G.K. Chesterson once said that, *"Hope means*

hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all...As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength." This is exactly what Paul was saying about the faith of Abraham, when he by the Holy Spirit wrote in Romans 4:17-18—

...God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'

Whether or not we say it, we too, if we believe in God at all, also believe this way. Let's face it, the first verses of the Bible explain it—

The earth was without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light. And there was light (Gen. 1:2-3).

Christians believe that God exists, but seldom when things are dark, can they see what God is going to do about it...what He has done about it...what He will do about it. Hope in tomorrow is found in knowing that God will act. Hope for tomorrow is found in knowing that God can do what is not humanly or logically possible. Hope for tomorrow is understanding that test results are only statistics, current problems are only temporary, and that God is greater than our hearts (1 John 3:20).

God help us to have Abrahamic faith. If we can believe in God without all of the physical evidence we will inherit a great blessing (John 20:29).

Hope Concerning Trouble

An insurmountable task. An immovable object. An unquenchable disturbance. We face them. We are without power. We are in a situation that has no foreseeable solution. What are we going to do?

The answer is, be like Jonathan. Jonathan, son of King Saul, was the man who said to his armor-bearer,

...Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6).

Israel was at war. The Philistines had arguably the strongest army on the planet. But Jonathan didn't care. Odds meant nothing to him. He didn't care about how big the man was that he was fighting. He didn't care about how skilled the man was that he was fighting. He didn't care about how experienced the man was that he was fighting. Jonathan only cared about the favor of God.

So he put his faith in the test he offered. He took his armor-bearer with him and they met up with an entire garrison of Philistine soldiers. Jonathan waited for their response. If they said, *"Wait for us, we are coming to you,"* Jonathan was not going to engage in the battle. But if they said, *"Come and get us!"* Jonathan was going to do just that. The Philistines challenged the two men—*"Come up to us."* Jonathan thus said to his companion—*"Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel"* (1 Sam. 14:12).

Jonathan and one man then scattered the bodies

of about twenty Philistines over about half an acre of land. Trouble was all around them, and the numbers were unfavorable, but Jonathan believed in the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1) He believed, *"If God is for us, who can be against us"* (Rom. 8:31). He believed, *"For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'"* (Heb. 13:5).

We need to hope like Jonathan hoped concerning troubles. We need to stop concentrating on the pressures of the enemy and start trusting in the presence of the Almighty. We need to seek God's favor and let the chips fall. When all is said and done we will be found rejoicing on a mountain of victory.

There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.

~ Clare Booth Luce

Hope Concerning Transgressions

Hope may help us to believe in God's promises. Hope may also support us so that we can overcome obstacles. But is there any hope when our biggest problem is us? In 1970, Walt Kelly was quoted in his comic strip Pogo, saying, *"We have met the enemy, and he is us."* How true! We are our own worst enemy! We are the source of a good number of our problems. How can we have hope in ourselves when our track record is such a disaster of failures?

Steve Higginbotham includes these examples of Old Testament characters who had hope, even though they made a miserable mess of their lives:

EXAMPLES OF HOPE

A. Lot (Genesis 19-20).

1. He pitched his tent toward Sodom (13:1-13).
2. Offered his daughters to a mob of rapists (19:1-8).
3. Got drunk and had sex with both of his daughters (19:30-38).
4. 2 Peter 2:7-8—Lot was a righteous man.

B. Rahab (Joshua 2).

1. Rahab was a harlot (2:1).
2. She lied to the soldiers (2:5; Proverbs 6:16-19).
3. Hebrews 11:30-31—Listed among the *"heroes of the faith."*

C. Samson (Judges 13-16).

1. His marriage was unlawful (14:1).
2. Makes a foolish bet, and kills 30 men to meet the terms of his bet (14:19).
3. Visits a prostitute (16:1).
4. *"Shacked up"* with Delilah (16:4-20).
5. Hebrews 11:32, 38—The world was not worthy of men like him.

D. David (1 & 2 Samuel).

1. Commits adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-13).
2. Has her husband murdered (2 Sam. 11:14-25).
3. Goes back on his word and has Shimei killed (2 Sam. 19:23; 1 Kings 2:8-9).
4. 1 Sam. 13:14 - He was a man after God's own heart.

Because of the righteousness of God, we who are sinners can be found to be in right standing with Him. Titus 3:3-7 reminds us,

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Even though our sins are as scarlet, they can be as white as snow (Isa. 1:18). The Psalmist said, "*As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us*" (Psm. 103:12). There is great comfort in knowing that our failures do not foretell our future. God is in eternity. He has offered up in Jesus Christ a sacrifice for sins. He has promised, "*...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more*" (Jer. 31:34).

There is a reason why Paul referred to "*the hope of Israel*" (Acts 28:20). He was formerly a blasphemer, an insolent man, and a persecutor (1 Tim. 1:13). But because of the mercy and love of a heavenly Father, and through His obedience to Christ the Son, he became the greatest evangelist of the first century. He wrote—

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:10).

EXAMPLES OF HOPE

I once had a friend who served as a sniper in the Vietnam War. He had killed many men by obeying orders of other men. He struggled with the cause, the purpose, and each of the deeds themselves. But he told me that whenever he felt unforgiven, unworthy, or unable to be in the kingdom of God, he thought about Paul. He knew that if Paul could be forgiven, then the blood of Jesus was powerful enough to wash away his sins as well.

Oscar Wilde once wrote, *"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."* God allows for stargazing. Jesus Christ came to save sinners, not perfect men. He came to give life and hope to a dying world. He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

Hoping Against Hope

The faith of Abraham reminds us that we can hope against that which is logical. Jonathan encourages us to hope and let God work for us when we are in trouble. Real people like Lot, Rahab, Samson, and David, give us hope that we can be forgiven and become godly examples, even when our lives have become completely despicable.

Our hope, when we have no reason to hope, has nothing to do with us and has everything to do with God. Abraham's God is also our God. When there seems to be no reason for us to have hope, He is the only reason we need. *"Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the Lord his God"* (Psm. 146:5).

Jeremiah Tatum



A graduate of Freed-Hardeman University (MA in ministry) • Jeremiah is presently working with the Pulaski Street congregation • A popular and very effective speaker • He is a cancer survivor • Amber Danae and Jeremiah have three children (Luke [7], Daniel [4], and Lyssabeth [1]).

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Spreading The Message Of Hope And Trust

This Chapter Written By

Barry Gilreath, Jr.

Introduction

W. A. Bradfield was a great Christian evangelist until his passing in 1972. He was known for his booming voice and the great response to his preaching that he received during his efforts in Gospel meetings. His style was a bit unusual in that he would continue to preach as the invitation song was sung, walking up and down the aisle, and looking for those who might take action to the invitation. A dear friend of mine who heard brother Bradfield preach in several meetings said the evangelist would occasionally stop, looking into the eyes of some lost soul and simply say the words, "No Hope." The thought of no hope could prompt even the most resistant of sinners to reconsider their ways.

Hope is that which gives us the motivation to keep on pressing ahead in spite of adversity. During the darker days of our country, slaves would often sing songs of hope as they labored together under a scorching hot sun. "Swing low,

sweet chariot, coming for to take me home." Such inspirational lines of prospect and hope provided them the inner strength they needed to walk down one more row of cotton.

We can be thankful to the God of hope (Rom. 15:13) who can not lie (Titus 1:2), and has indeed provided us with great anticipation of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Col. 1:5). Such a lively hope (1 Peter 1:3) is obtained in our obedience to the Gospel and our steadfast commitment to the faith (Col. 1:23). By the glorious hope of the resurrection from the dead we are made ministers of reconciliation far and abroad (2 Cor. 5:18). Our message must be that same faithful and hopeful communication of the Gospel that we too received (Gal. 1:8-9). Consider the following acrostic for HOPE.

HEAVEN

The message of hope must point others to the glories of Heaven. Jesus offers the hope of heaven (John 14:1-6). He is the way (John 14:16; 6:35) to an eternity with no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain (Rev. 21:4).

OPPORTUNITY

The message of hope offers the opportunity to receive eternal life (Rev. 3:20-21). Jesus gives redemption for the greatest possession of man - the soul (Mark 8:36-37). The redemption of man's soul can not be purchased with his own blood, sweat and tears. It is provided through

our Lord's own blood (Psm. 9:5-8). His sacrificial death provides opportunity for the hope of a better tomorrow.

PREPARATION

The message of hope reminds man of the need for preparation. We must prepare to meet God (Amos 4:12), for it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the Judgment (Heb. 9:27). Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people (John 14:2-3). If we fail to prepare, then we must prepare to fail (Matt. 25:8-12). The Lord is coming to bring destruction upon those who are not ready (2 Thess. 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17-18).

ETERNITY

The message of hope is about eternity. Sometimes man gets sidetracked and thinks life is about pleasing self, or gaining more and more material possessions, but eternity is what life is all about, and our eternal abode will be determined by our emphasis in this life (Eccl. 12:13-14). The message of hope points men to a timeless age that the human mind can not fully comprehend.

Conclusion

Jesus offers us that hope. He provides our hope through the medium of the Gospel. As Christians we must be prepared to share the answer of the hope that is within (1 Peter 3:15). We must be diligent in our proclamation of it,

SPREADING THE MESSAGE OF HOPE AND TRUST

and steadfast in our anticipation of receiving it. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).”

Barry Gilreath, Jr.



Barry serves the Highland congregation in Dalton, Georgia as their evangelist, as well as one of the five elders. Faithfully preaching the gospel for several years, he serves as the excellent host of the television program **Fabric Of The Family** on the **Gospel Broadcasting Network** (DISH and Direct networks). Barry and his good family are an asset to the brotherhood.

Keys To Successful Christian Living



Communicating With God ~ Studying His Word

This Chapter Written By

Josh Herndon

I must do something about what I learn...I have to act on it, live it, practice it. James 1:22 *"Don't be hearers only!"* Practice it! What good is a mirror if you look at it, and don't do anything about the way you look? A mirror is no good unless you examine yourself (1:23)! The word *"listen"* in Greek is the word for *"auditor."* If you audited a class in college you did not take it for credit, no tests, no responsibility, no research. You were totally relaxed. You just listened, and you didn't have to apply it.

We have a lot of auditors in the church. They come to church, walk in, hear the word of God, walk out with no intention of ever being changed. Think about it. Examine your life and see if this isn't the case. I was one for years. I took notes, wrote things down, wrote all the verses down in every sermon...but it never changed me. We must respond to God's word, and let it change us if we're going to be blessed by it.

It's self-deception when we do not let the Word of God change us and change the way we act, and think, and react to situations! Some of us think

that just gaining content, gaining a few verses of scripture is making us spiritually mature. The test of maturity is not knowledge. A person can be the most knowledgeable person alive when it comes to the Bible, but they could still be immature. The test of spiritual maturity is character...how that Word has changed your life! A lot of people have great Bible knowledge, but they're spiritual midgets. I need to practice it, apply it, and put it in my life.

And as knowledge increases, so does my responsibility. The more we know the more we're accountable for (Luke 12:48). So...what am I doing with what I know? Jesus said, *"To whom much is given, much is required."* And James said, *"To him who knows to do good and does it not, to him it's sin."* (James 4:17)

Illustration: Let's say the folks at Union Hill decide to get concerned about my future health. They come to me and say, *"Josh, as you move into your older years of thirty we don't want you to have a flabby body anymore, or furniture problems...where your chest drops into your drawers..."* So, they go and buy me (as a gift) Arnold Schwarzenegger's Bodybuilding Book. They say, *"This book can change your life. It's fantastic. It has changed the lives of millions of people. It will keep you strong. Read this book. It will change you."* I say, *"Great."* And over the next 6 months nothing changes. I'm the same weight and I do not look like I have changed, and they come up to me and say, *"What happened? Didn't you read the book?"*

I say, *"YES! I read the book. I enjoyed it. This is the greatest book I've ever read. I loved it. I even underlined portions of it with colored markers and memorized sections of it...I even looked at the etymology of every single word"*

of the book. Every night I would spend a couple hours studying it." But nothing changed.

How often do we do that with the word of God? We give awards to kids at Bible Bowl for memorizing Scripture, quick recall...but we do not give awards for doing Scripture. We get a plaque that says *"I read through the Bible"* but do not get one that says, *"I've done what the Bible says."* We need to mark and take notes in our Bibles, YES, but we need to let the Bible mark us, too. It's not how many times you've been through the word of God. It is how many times it has been through you. You have got to be a doer of the word.

Sometimes, I deceive myself into thinking that because I have knowledge that makes me mature. Having knowledge of a bodybuilding book does not produce muscles. Just because we know something does not mean we act on it.

We live in a hotbed of Bible teaching. Some of the top Bible teachers of the nation are within driving distance of where we are right now. You can turn on the radio at any time of day, and hear godly men teaching the Word. We have a buffet of the gospel in this region. You can hear the Word of God twenty four hours a day, if you want to. A lot of us are lulled into the fact that because we are hearing a lot about God, we are maturing. Brethren DO believe what they hear, but many do not practice it. James would say, *"They are hearers, but not doers."*

That is what James is attacking. He is saying, *"If you want to be blessed, you've got to live the word of God, not just hear it. Not just know it."* I like making the Bible simple. There is a lot in the Bible that is difficult to understand, complex, deep. But I try to

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

present it in such a way that's very clear and very easy to understand and easy to put into practice. When you go out of here I want you to be able to do the word...not just hear the word of God. I work at making it practical. I try to make it simple.

Like the guy who came to church late. He walked in just as the service was completing. He said to an usher, "*Is the sermon done, yet?*" The usher was wise and said, "*The sermon has been preached, but it is yet to be done.*" Be ye doers of the word, do not merely listen. Put it into practice.

I hope that the church here has the reputation that people say, "*They are doers of the word. They practice what everybody else talks about. They live it.*" People have a Living Bible...and it's you! You ought to be a Living Bible. The best translation of Scripture is when you translate it into your life, and other people see it!

Jesus, in Matthew 7, tells the story of the wise and the foolish builder. He says the foolish builder builds on sand. He is like the guy who hears the word of God, but doesn't do what it says. The wise man is the one who hears it, and then goes out and makes an honest attempt to put it into his life. Practice it! Jesus said John 13:17, "*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*"

I think the simplest definition of maturity is to be a doer of the word. That's what it means to be mature. You do what the Bible says. We not only to read the word, we heed the word. Every single one of us knows more spiritual truth than we're putting into practice right now. You do not need to know more, most of you already know enough. It is not

JOSH HERNDON

a matter of needing to know more. We just need to put MORE of what we know into practice. I need to practice what I already know to do...THEN I am ready to learn something else.

Josh Herndon



Josh Herndon is presently working with the Union Hill congregation in Marshall County Kentucky • A graduate of Freed-Hardeman University • A popular speaker in gospel meetings and youth gatherings • Josh and his dear wife are expecting their first child.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Communication With God ~ Prayer

This Chapter Written By

Jeremiah Tatum

Charles Hodge wrote a book on prayer that explained its difficulty by introducing it as “*Simple enough for a little child, profound enough to humble philosophers.*” Consider also the first statement of his book “*I do not believe in prayer...I believe in God; therefore I pray.*”

This is a profound idea. It is God, not prayer, who works. Communication is an effort to understand. But when one does not understand how to communicate, how can they ever understand the object with whom they are trying to communicate?

Thus, two major obstacles in understanding prayer are: (1) We fail to understand God. (2) We fail to understand faith. God is the Creator. The Creator of the world is also the Creator of prayer. When we study prayer from God’s perspective, we will come to a realization of what prayer is supposed to be. Prayer is our dependence on God. Prayer is the vehicle through which we voice our faith.

Common Mistakes In Our Approach To Prayer

Most people use prayer as hands in a dark room. They cannot see where they are going and so they feel for it! This still leaves them in the dark. The better way is to simply flip on the light switch. This is the difference between knowing God and feeling God. God wants to be known. We must know God before we can feel His presence. You cannot find anywhere in the Bible where people were commanded to feel for God. But there is an entire treatise on man's need to know who He is (Acts 17)!

People also try to minimize God. It is a common reducing of God to the human level – as if he were like us. God created us in His image, yet we try to create Him in ours. We often try to tell God to listen, when communication with God should first include the attitude, *“Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth”* (1 Sam. 3:10).

Another common mistake is our pace to approach and retreat. We rush into and away from the presence of God. How many times have we rushed the prayer to get it over with and go on with our lives? How many times have we tried to get in a quick fix? How many times have we casually and rapidly thrown up a prayer, hoping, but not even slowing down to get out of our lives for a minute? If we are really going to hit our knees, such implies enough reverence to God that we will not skin them when we do it!

Too many people have modeled their prayer. They take Christ's example to His apostles so literally that they forget that the man who prayed

it knew what he was doing for a reason. Jesus had a relationship with the Father (John 10:30). True prayer is a relationship. It is not a form letter. We worry too much about “*getting it right*” when we haven’t gotten our heart right. Prayer is more than saying what the Bible says. Prayer is your personal relationship with God.

“Teach us to Pray” (Luke 11:1-13)

When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, they implied a good number of things. They knew that teaching and learning was part of religion. They recognized they could only be taught how to pray by someone who was good at it. They saw it as an indispensable part of their faith. They could heal the sick, but they couldn’t pray correctly! They saw that this was hampering the growth of their faith.

Is it possible, that some of the greatest preachers and teachers in the church are terrible when it comes to prayer? How could these men become the future leaders of gospel preaching without knowing themselves how to communicate with God?

S. D. Gordon said, *“The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. It is not the only thing, but it is the chief thing. The great people of the earth are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; Nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; But I mean those people who take the time to pray.”*

The best way to improve with prayer is to pray. There is no substitute for actually doing it! To know the ins and outs of Biblical prayer is not the same

as actually practicing it.

As a help to our communication with God, Hodge offers in his book three ways in which we can learn to pray as God would have us:

“Teach us to Pray” with FAITH

- Prayer is not a wish list. God is not Santa.
 - It is not *“Name it and claim it; blab it and grab it.”*
 - This exposes our greed and exploits God.
- We are afraid of prayer!
 - Why else do we say, *“Don’t pray for _____”*?
 - Failure to pray is failure to trust in God.
- *“Teach us to pray”* but not HOW!
 - We cannot minimize prayer into a formula.
 - Christ’s example was not a gimmick. He knew how because He knew God and He prayed often.

“Teach us to Pray” with FORCE

- The disciples heard Jesus pray.
 - Have you ever heard God talk to God?
 - No miracle they witnessed was equal to hearing the Son talk to the Father.
- Prayer was central with Jesus.
 - If He needed it, we need it even more.
- Prayer with Jesus was directed to God.
 - Public prayers are still for God (Luke 18:9-14).
 - Clichés and catch phrases should be outlawed.
 - Have we ever really prayed?

“Teach us to Pray” with FORM

- People today are not much interested in truth, doctrine, or form. But there is a HOW to do it.
- Jesus did not begin His teaching on prayer with a complex method.
 - Anything done well will be founded upon basic principles.
- Prayer is humbling self, and exalting God. Prayer is needs not wants. Prayer is *“Thy will be done.”* Prayer is persistence (Luke 11:5-10). Prayer is trusting in God for results (Luke 11:11-13).

Someone has vividly expressed proper prayer in a humorous little poem that reads: *“The proper way for man to pray,”* said Deacon Lemuel Keyes; *“The only proper attitude is down upon his knees.”* *“Nay, I should say the way to pray,”* said Reverend Doctor Wise, *“Is standing straight with outstretched arms with rapt and upturned eyes.”* *“Oh, no, no, no,”* said Elder Snow, *“such posture is too proud. A man should pray with eyes fast-closed and head contritely bowed.”* *“It seems to me his hands should be austereclly clasped in front. With both thumbs pointing to the ground,”* said Reverend Doctor Blunt. *“Last year I fell in Hodgkin’s well headfirst,”* said Cyril Brown. *“With both my heels a-stickin’ up, my head a-pointing’ down; And I done prayed right then and there; best prayer I ever said, The prayin’est prayer I ever prayed, a-standin’ on my head.”*

Often we make the simplest things so difficult. Communication with God should be exactly that – communication. How does one talk to God? It

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD ~ PRAYER

begins with knowing who He is and what He expects. It is perfected in getting together with Him as often as we possibly can.

Jeremiah Tatum



A graduate of Freed-Hardeman University (MA in ministry) • Jeremiah is presently working with the Pulaski Street congregation • A popular and very effective speaker • He is a cancer survivor • Amber Danae and Jeremiah have three children (Luke [7], Daniel [4], and Lyssabeth [1]).

Keys To Successful Christian Living

The Armor Of God Provides Confidence And Trust

This Chapter Written By

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

Without exception, it is an annual pleasure to come to this sound, solid and lovely congregation for its spring lectureship. My thanks are extended to Paul, the elders and each esteemed member at East Hill for this speaking/writing invitation. Paul always crafts a good, grand and great lectureship and the 2009 one will be no exception. We are all in his debt.

The Armor Of God Portrayed And Analyzed

Though Paul covers briefly a portion of this armor in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, his first epistle, a much more comprehensive coverage is reserved for Ephesians 6:10-18.

In verse 10 we are to *"be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."* This is not arm, back or leg power but spiritual power. John commended young men of his day because they were strong (1 John

2:14). Paul is power conscious here as he speaks of the power of the Lord's might. He alluded to such in Philippians 4:13 and Colossians 1:11.

In verses 11 and 14 Paul inculcated the military panoply of God's whole armor. This would safeguard them enabling them to stand against devilish wiles. Such would enable them "*to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.*" A partially clad armor would not equip them for the ferocious battles looming before them from enemies of Calvary.

The enemies are depicted in verse 12 both negatively and positively. The warfare is not against human forces alone but against powerful spiritual foes such as principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness in high places. Satan is "*the prince of the power of the air*" in Ephesians 2:2 and "*the prince of this world*" in John 16:11. He reaches and influences people by the doctrines of devils or demons as per 1 Timothy 4:1. Devilish imps aid their father, Satan, in ways impossible for us to comprehend fully. But God and His people and the Lamb and His army are stronger than all the foregoing in combined action.

Note the force of repetition again in verse 14. Again, we have the militant mandate, "*Stand therefore.*" There is to be no deadly compromise with the patrons of falsehood, the propagators of error.

In verse 14 "*loins are to be girt about with truth.*" Roman soldiers, perhaps the very one guarding Paul, wore a military belt around their waists. It protected the middle portion of their body, kept intact their garments and provided security for their sword. A fellow soldier did not do this girding for him; it

was done personally. Calvinism does not fare well at all before the mirror delineating the Christian armor. Christians are active in its addition to their pilgrimage of piety.

They are to be girt about "*with truth.*" Truth was potent to Paul. He had already written of its power in Romans 1:16-17. Later he would write of its power in Hebrews 4:12. The Bible was no dead letter to Paul and his seven colleagues who penned New Testament Scripture. Likewise, it must be potent to us.

In verse 14 also they were to have on the breastplate of righteousness. Roman soldiers wore breastplates to protect the region of the heart and lungs. Our breastplate is composed of righteousness. Righteousness is right doing; it is the keeping of God's commandments (Psm. 119:172). Peter's twofold duty announced to Cornelius' household was to fear God and work righteousness (Acts 10:34-35). Righteousness is something we do-not borrow as the foolish virgins sought to do in Matthew 25:8. Righteousness is right thinking, right speaking and right doing.

In verse 15 feet come into prominence. They are to be "*shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*" Foot gear was of prime importance to Roman soldiers. Their sandals were studded with hobnails providing firm footing as they marched across uneven terrain or fought man-to-man in close range. Football and baseball shoes with cleats provide firm footing for athletes in executing athletic maneuvers.

Our feet are to be "*shod with the gospel of peace.*" Jehovah is God of peace; Jesus is Prince of peace;

THE ARMOR OF GOD PROVIDES CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

the good news of salvation is the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:20; Isa. 9:6; Rom. 10:15). Peacemakers are blessed as per Matthew 5:9. This is peace based on truth—not deadly compromise. A world weary of war will never, never know its ending until all men turn to the Prince of Peace and become obedient to His gospel of peace.

The shield was invaluable to the Roman soldier. It was usually about four feet by two or two and one-half feet. He clasped it with his left hand, usually, leaving the right hand free to fight. Shields protected them from fiery darts of the enemy. Faith is to be our shield. This is unflinching and immovable faith in God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and in the gospel. Shields of faith protect us against the darts of atheism, agnosticism, infidelity, modernism, postmodernism, Catholicism, Protestantism, cultism, occultism, Islam, etc. An impotent faith leaves us vulnerable to all devilish attacks.

In verse 17 is the sword. It was the offensive weapon to the Roman soldier and was indispensable in battle contacts.

Our sword of the Spirit is God's power-packed word. It is sharp; it is two-edged; it cuts coming and going. It saves us initially. It keeps us saved. It enables us to put the devil to rout. It is our solace in sorrow. It is our guide in joy. It is Heaven's map from earth to the home of the soul.

Proponents of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon human hearts have no real regard for the drawn sword of the Spirit. They want something else, something not promised. It is NOT Spirit on spirit but the Spirit's word on human hearts for both sinners and saints. Calvinists balk here but Christians take

our courageous stand here and STAND we shall.

Potent powers of prayer in verse 18 round out the Christian's armor, his panoply for every battle he faces.

There Are Rich And Rewarding Provisions Of His Armor

We can have faith, confidence and trust in this heavenly-supplied armor because our strength is IN the Lord and IN the power of His might. This is not just a human endeavor but a divine/human transaction. Paul did not say be strong OUT of the Lord and AWAY from the power of His might. This is a battle we do not and cannot wage alone. David needed the Lord while fighting Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Paul needed the Lord while in the Roman prison in Philippians 4:13. With Him he could do all things; without Him he could do nothing that really counted for his present and eternal welfare.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because its origin is from God. The Roman armor was man-made; it was earthly in origin. Ours is from God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the whole system of truth known as Christianity. The Roman armor was fallible; ours is flawless and infallible.

We can have faith and confidence in all its fundamental facets. What Paul describes here in Ephesians 6:10-18 is not a partial panoply. Twice in this context Paul called it the "*whole armour of God*" (vs. 11, 13). God designed it for the entirety of our fighting the good fight of faith as per 1 Timothy 6:12 and 2 Timothy 4:7. We need never go into battle ill-equipped or inadequately clad.

THE ARMOR OF GOD PROVIDES CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because it is sure proof against all the wiles of the devil and his evil imps. Like Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:11 we dare not be ignorant against devilish devices. With these sly devices he conquered Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. He conquered David in an unguarded moment in Jerusalem with a bathing beauty (2 Sam. 11). With these devices he conquered Saul, Solomon, all the Northern Kingdom rulers and most kings of Judah. Men and women en masse still fall victim daily to his devilish devices.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because our enemies are identified in verse 12. We can know something about them and their manner of operations.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because the outcome is assured if we do our part. We can be 100% assured of His doing His part. He has **never** let His faithful warriors down and we will not be the first to experience His absence.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because it is truth-linked. Falsehood and errors of all kinds are totally unwelcome in this panoply of protection. Jesus came to bear witness of truth even as He professed to Pilate in John 18:36ff. He assures us in John 8:32 that we can know the truth and the truth, when obeyed, will free us from sin.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because of its connection with righteousness. It forms our breastplate. We are to hunger and thirst for its admirable acquisition. By gospel obedience it can be our prized and precious possession. Thank God for that!

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because it protects our feet with the prepared gospel of peace. This is the very gospel Jesus mandated for world-wide proclamation in Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:47. This is the gospel that has facts for us to believe, commands for us to obey, promises for us to enjoy, warnings for us to heed and implications for us to accept within its logical framework. This is the gospel which is Heaven's power to save.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because it is bound above, below and on all sides by victorious and valorous faith. It provides the shield of protection. It is our mainstay for a surety.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because it has the helmet of salvation. Salvation from sin is one of the sweetest and most sublime topics in all the Bible. The more we abhor sin the greater will be our appreciation for salvation. This salvation is blood-linked. Minus Christ and Calvary it would always be beyond our eager grasp.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because of the offensive weapon with which we are vouchsafed—the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Relative to Goliath's sword David once exclaimed, *"There is none like that: give it me"* (1 Sam. 21:9). There is none like the Bible; let us request its powerful possession to guide and govern us along the pathway of piety.

We can have confidence and trust in this armor because prayer wields a mighty place of prominence. It supplies a fulfilling finale!

Conclusion

In Ephesians 1-3 we have the wealth of the church; in Ephesians 4-5 we have the walk of the church; in Ephesians 6 we have the warfare of the church. The Christian's armor of God is the very heartbeat of this spiritual warfare.

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



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Keys To Successful Christian Living

Worship – Vital Time To Renew Our Strength

This Chapter Written By

Gary McDade

The statement from the ancient prophet Isaiah constitutes some of the most beautiful wording in the English language when in elevated tones he wrote,

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isa. 40:28-31).

This statement was written by a man who received one of the highest challenges a man who has an interest in communicating the will of God to man ever received. Back in chapter six, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say to him, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" (Isa. 6:8a). He was receiving

a commission from God to go and prophesy to the people of God who at that time were in determined defiance to Deity, yet he valiantly responded to heaven's call, "*Then said I, Here am I; send me*" (v. 8b). Isaiah displayed an unbiased disposition to declare whatever message God wanted His people to hear. But, the message was not delightful; it would be hard to see how Isaiah could remain motivated to put everything he had into proclaiming it. The message was:

Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (vs. 9-10).

Get it; those to whom he was to speak would not listen, they would not heed his words! He was to tell them exactly what they needed to hear in order to be converted, he would tell them what they needed to know to be saved, but they would not understand him, they would not perceive his message. They're heart would be fat or self-satisfied; heavy ears indicates boredom on their part with Isaiah's message. Have you ever been talking to someone about something you were convinced is really important to both you and to the most high God only to have them fall asleep on you? The Lord told Isaiah that is what they would do with his proclamation—they would "*shut their eyes.*"

Isaiah, upon the realization of the difficulty

of the task before him, asked an obvious question, *"Then said I, Lord, how long?"* (v. 11a). In paraphrase, Isaiah was asking, *"Lord, how long must I preach and teach these people who will not listen to me and be such a challenging audience for me to try to reach?"* The Lord did not resist the question; He did not reprimand the querist. The Bible says,

And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land (vs. 11b-12).

Isaiah, the enemies of Israel and Judah are going to overtake them, they are going to pillage and plunder them, they are going to destroy them from off their homeland, and you are not going to be able to convince them to turn to God and to turn away from their own destruction. Isaiah, you will see the land desolate before you see these people repent of their sins. The first part of the answer would be true of ninety percent of the populace, but there was a ray of hope in the latter part of the answer to Isaiah's question,

But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof (v. 13).

Or, as he had already been told,

Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been

as Sodom, and we should have been like
unto Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9).

Thirteen times Isaiah would refer to the righteous "*remnant*" who would be spared, who would heed his warnings. Those who would listen to Isaiah would be "*a very small remnant.*"

The question then is "*how did Isaiah, in the midst of such a discouraging response for so long a time, come to realize and believe what he wrote in chapter 40 – ‘they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint?’*" Would knowledge of that be of help to us today when we face certain discouragement? And, if so, how much more would knowing what Isaiah knew that kept him motivated, even zealous, help us when things seem to be going our way? Well, for your edification here it is:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of

hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged (Isa. 6:1-7).

The unseen veil was divinely drawn back, and Isaiah was privileged to see into heaven. His attention was directed to the throne of the universe with God Himself upon it *"high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."* The New King James Version says, *"The train of His robe filled the temple."* Angels of highest rank, seraphim (mentioned by name only here in the Scriptures), gloriously described cried out to one another saying, *"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."* The word *"holy"* is from the Hebrew word *qadosh* meaning *"pure"* and *"devoted."* The triune repetition of this word serves to emphasize the completeness of this quality in the One upon whom Isaiah was looking. Without placing overemphasis on the threefold expression of the holiness of God, the comments of Keil and Delitzsch carry some passing interest.

The Pythagoreans said that numbers were the first principle of all things; but the Scriptures, according to which God created the world in twice three days by ten mighty words, and completed it in seven days, teach us that God is the first principle of all numbers. The fact that there is the number of developed and yet self-contained unity, has its ultimate ground in the circumstance that it is the number of

the Trinitarian process; and consequently the trilogy (trisagion) of the seraphim, ... whether Isaiah was aware of it or no, really pointed in the distinct consciousness of the spirits themselves to the triune God (Keil and Delitzsch, Isaiah, 126). [As you know, the New Testament refers not to the word "Trinity" but to the word "Godhead" or "Deity" (Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9) and its use is, therefore, preferred.]

The matchless beauty of the footstool of earth God had created and by Whose power it is being sustained (Heb. 1:3) evoked the words from the angels, "*The whole earth is full of His glory!*" At the reverberations of his voice "*the posts of the door moved*" perhaps shaking or with tremors. The house or temple was filled with smoke (cf. Psm. 11:4; 18:7; 29:9). And, this look upon the throne room of God with all the attendant activities continually conducted there would sustain Isaiah through one of the more lengthy tenures among the prophets of approximately 40 years (740-701 B.C.).

As Christians today, real benefit exists in viewing our worship to God as "*vital time to renew our strength.*" Our prayers take us directly into the throne room of God ascending like "*golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints*" (Rev. 5:8). In fact, each authorized activity of adoration brings us before the throne. Think of the song which says, "*Lord we come before Thee now, at Thy feet we humbly bow.*" Christians are taught not only to pray (1 Thess. 5:17) but also to sing (Col. 3:16). Our worship is spiritual; that is why an instrument of music must not accompany the singing. The Bible says such

instruments are "*without life giving sound*" (1 Cor. 14:7a), so their use would be carnal or fleshly minded to appeal to human senses without regard for the divine. Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 teaches,

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

In the observance of the Lord's supper our reflection back to His death on the cross is designed to strengthen our love for Him and our appreciation for His sacrifice on our behalf as we "*show the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26). This is a memorial declaration every Christian makes "*upon the first day of the week*" (Acts 20:7) as we are assembled together in worship (1 Cor. 11:20; Heb. 10:25).

The weekly contribution (1 Cor. 16:1-2) consists of our returning a portion of our material blessings to God (2 Cor. 9:6-7) and reminds us of our Lord's teaching,

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).

In making such weekly contributions we also affirm our total dependence upon God to sustain our lives here (Matt. 6:22-34). We are giving to the Lord, and that brings us before His throne in worship or adoration.

Then the preaching of the Word of God is intended to communicate the *"whole counsel of God"* to the congregation (Acts 20:27, ASV). Whereas in prayer we talk to God through His Son, Jesus Christ (John 16:23; 1 Tim. 2:5), in the preaching we allow God to talk to us through His revealed Word, the Bible. The preacher is to *"preach the Word"* (2 Tim. 4:2).

How then do these five authorized actions of adoration—praying, singing, observance of the Lord's supper, giving, and preaching—*"renew our strength"*? By allowing us, at least for a fleeting few precious moments, to transcend this world's anxieties and cares with sometimes what seems almost insurmountable challenges and to appear before the throne of God where Jesus Christ is seated at His right hand and before whom is the Spirit of God (Rev. 4:5). Time spent in Worshipping God *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:23-24) is therefore, *"vital time to renew our strength."*

Now, having stated the premise positively, let's establish that worship is *"vital time to renew our strength"* by looking at it negatively. The Bible is clear to say that forsaking the assembly is sinful (Heb. 10:25-26). As Christians, our hearts are broken because we have been closely associated with brethren whose presence in worship has been of great value to us by bringing us the edification such spiritual

fellowship is intended to produce and now many have fallen away. No more do they reciprocate in singing the *"great songs of the church."* No longer does their contribution aid in the advancement of the cause of Christ in this world. They have ceased to *"show the Lord's death till he come."* No longer do they congregate to collectively express shared plans and dreams for the church and petition for mercy in prayer. When the precious Word of God, the last will and testament of our Lord Jesus Christ, is read and studied their seat is empty, and they are missed (1 Sam. 20:18). Some of the *"heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"* are not showing up for the reading of the Will! (Rom. 8:17; Heb. 9:15-17). The wayward need to come home, come back to the work and worship of God, while time and opportunity grace our vaporous lives (2 Cor. 6:2; Jas. 4:14). The Bible closes with the realization that some who were once faithful will not repent and ultimately will be lost. The disciple whom Jesus loved wrote,

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still:
and he which is filthy, let him be filthy
still: and he that is righteous, let him be
righteous still: and he that is holy, let him
be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly;
and my reward is with me, to give every
man according as his work shall be (Rev.
22:11-12).

A real test for the efficacy of the principles presented here of *"renewing our strength"* in worship can be given by applying the observations about the prophet Isaiah receiving strength by going to the throne room of God in the Old Testament to the

apostle John in the New Testament as he was exiled to Patmos *“for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (Rev. 1:9b). While we may know Patmos only from pictures and maps of its tiny size excluded from society off the coast of Asia Minor, we have a similar island of punishment in this country. It is called Alcatraz or simply The Rock. Since 1963 it is no longer a den for the most notorious criminals in American history, its story is retold to millions of visitors annually who traverse from Pier 33 at the Fisherman’s Wharf the cold, swift, shark-infested waters that separate it from civilization to appease a fearful even morbid curiosity about what happened there. While many Christians were dying for their faith (Rev. 6:9-10) and John was in exile, once again the unseen veil divinely was drawn back, and this time the apostle John was allowed to see into heaven itself. As you read the description of what he saw, think of how worship is *“vital time to renew our strength”* even as John and those early Christians who saw their loved ones dying for their faith vitally needed their strength renewed.

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne

were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:1-11).

The time between Isaiah's vision and John's was about three quarters of a millennium, yet the same

AMERICA IN TRANSITION

angels are still saying, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come*"! Therefore, we rest assured,

...that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

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Keys To Successful Christian Living



**Optimism
Versus Pessimism —
As A Christian**

This Chapter Written By
Billy Bland

Introduction

There are many things happening in the world, especially right now, which could cause one to take a pessimistic view of life in general. The American economy is bad and many people have lost their jobs. Our government has provided stimulus money to failing companies only to have those same failing companies literally give millions of dollars in bonuses to their CEOs.

Many of our young men and women are in foreign countries fighting battles due to terrorists who would love to terrorize, demoralize and kill Americas (and any others who disagree with their religion and/or philosophy).

Health care is another concern for those who are now without jobs and consequently without medical insurance. What does the future hold for us? What should be the Christian's outlook on the future in the face of all these problems? I suppose one could take the view described to me by a taxi driver as I was traveling in Finland. Some of us in the cab brought up the well known law known as

"Murphy's Law," which basically affirms *"if anything can go wrong, it will."* The taxi driver interjected into the conversation by saying many in his homeland of Finland believe in *"Sullivan's Law."* Never having heard of *"Sullivan's Law,"* we inquired; *"What is Sullivan's Law?"* He replied; *"Mr. Sullivan believed that Mr. Murphy was way too optimistic."* He was joking, of course, and we all had a big laugh relative to *"Sullivan's Law"* which surpassed *"Murphy's Law"* in pessimism. But with jokes aside, it is recognized, there are some discouraging factors in the world and in each person's life. But, again, what should be the Christian's outlook in troublesome times?

Before one takes a dark view of life, perhaps he should consider most of us can go for a walk and hear song birds singing their melodious songs. We can go outside and see flowers blooming and spreading their sweet fragrance and also beautifully decorating the landscape around us. Question - Does the One Who created the birds and gave them their songs care about me? Does the One Who provides sunshine and rain for the flowers know that I also need His attention? INDEED HE DOES! Jesus reminds us;

No man 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. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither

do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:24-34).

Definitions

“Optimism” is from the Latin word “optimus” meaning “best” (Merriam-Webster). It is defined as “an inclination to put the most favorable construction upon actions and events or to anticipate the best possible outcome” (Wikipedia). On the other hand, “Pessimism” is “from the Latin pessimus (worst) is a painful state of mind which negatively colours the perception of life,

especially with regard to future events” (Wikipedia). In short, optimism looks to the future with the best possible view, whereas pessimism looks to the future with the worse possible view.

Now which of these views should a Christian possess? Should a Christian look at life with the best possible view or with the worst possible view? Which of the two views did Jesus possess? Did Paul accomplish all the great good he did by being pessimistic or by being optimistic? As we consider this subject, we point out that one who is optimistic does not ignore the realities of life (troubles, sickness, death, etc.), but he views them in the best possible light.

Good Thinking Helps Produce Good Health

Does the way a person thinks affect his health and countenance? It does, indeed. It should be no surprise to us that the way a person thinks directly affects the organs of the body. Tell someone that he is to speak in a public setting and his heart rate and adrenalin can increase. Just the mere thought of him speaking publicly creates psychological and physiological effects within his body! Some people literally get sick due to the fear of public speaking. Their thinking (mind) has affected their body (health). Again, if someone becomes embarrassed his face may turn red. Why is this? His thinking has created an physiological effect on his blood vessels that causes his face to blush.

Dr. McMillen writes:

With each passing year, we obtain a wider
comprehension of the ability of the mind

(psche) to produce varied disturbances of the body (soma): hence the term psychosomatic. Invisible emotional tension in the mind can produce striking visible changes in the body, changes that can become serious and fatal. This concept should give us a new perspective on conditions that are often contemptuously referred to "being in the head." Obviously various conditions as vomiting, diarrhea, asthma and arthritis are "not in the head"; yet these and scores of other serious diseases are triggered or aggravated by tension in the mind. A large percentage of most physicians' practices are made up of patients whose illnesses are directly or indirectly the result of emotional stress.... Stress often reduces a person's ability to fight off infections.... The brain, where all the emotional stress is processed, is the control center of the entire body. From the brain millions of nerve fibers course out to every organ in the body. Chemical released from these nerve fibers control or influence every chemical reaction in every organ of the body. Because our health is dependent on the proper balance of all these chemical reactions, it is no wonder that emotional upset in our brains can disrupt chemical reactions in a far-removed organ and cause disease (pp. 98-99).

With the above in mind, it is easy to see how anxiety (worry) and stress can affect the body's well being. Among the things that Dr. McMillen lists that are caused or affected by stress include; disorders of the digestive system, disorders of the circulatory

system, disorders of the genito-urinary system, disorders of the nervous system, disorder of glands, allergic disorders, muscle-joint disorders, infections, inflammatory and skin diseases, nutritional and drug disorders and cancer (pp. 101-103). This is not to say that every sickness or illness is the result of faulty thinking. One's genetics and contact with disease, bacteria, accidents, etc. obviously have a bearing on one's health.

There are going to be times of stress and sadness in our lives. Right thinking does not keep "*bad things*" from happening to us. However, right thinking does help us cope with the tragedies that come into our lives. One must keep in mind that even Jesus wept (John 11:35). Jesus could be moved to tears. On occasions, He even got angry and was grieved (Mark 3:5). God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Gen. 6:6; Mark 3:5; Eph. 4:30). There will be times when we too are grieved due to various circumstances in life. One should not feel guilty when these feelings arise, as they are normal for us and God! Solomon observed there is a time to weep and a time to laugh (Ecc. 3:4). Leroy Brownlow observed;

Being endowed by the Creator to live life realistically, we were also given the fatiguing emotions of fear, anger, anxiety and sorrow (p. 15).

All of our emotions have their proper place. However, these negative emotions should not dominate our life, especially to the point of mental or physical illness. Again, God does not expect us to live a life of doom and gloom. Jesus came to give us an

abundant life, not one that is full of despair and depression -

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

Even in a world where there is tribulation, we can still be of good cheer. Jesus instructed -

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Notice the Biblical benefits of having a merry heart, i.e. thinking joyfully or optimistically:

A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken (Prov. 15:13).

All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast (Prov. 15:15).

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones (Prov. 17:22).

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works (Eccl. 9:7).

Causes Of Pessimism

If a person has some sort of physical imbalance in his life that causes uncontrollable depression, he

should seek medical help. It is possible that a person has medical problems for which he needs medical attention. Also one should keep in mind that it is possible for one to be over-stressed and simply is having a bad day. One usually "*snaps out*" of this and is back to normal in a day or two. Richard Curry used to tell his students, "*never make a major decision on a blue day.*" Many preachers have most likely "*quit on Monday*" (in mind) only to start again on Tuesday. Yet, others have spiritual problems with "*pessimism.*" This problem is more dangerous than some might think. This spiritual pessimism will cause one to disobey God. Israel is a prime example of spiritual pessimism. God worked many wonders in Egypt, sending plague after plague on the Egyptians in order to bring Israel out of captivity. He even opened the Red Sea so that the Israelites could cross on dry ground, and then destroyed the Egyptians when they tried to cross the same Red Sea as the Israelites. He promised Israel the land of Canaan. The only thing was, however, they must go in and possess the land. They send twelve spies to find out the best way to enter the land. When they viewed the land, they came back with their report. Ten of the twelve spies said they could not take the land. They convinced the congregation they could not possess what God had promised! Because of their disobedience they wandered in the wilderness for forty years until all that were twenty years old and above in that generation died. Moses, reminds the generation following them why they did not possess the land.

And I said unto you, Ye are come unto
the mountain of the Amorites, which the

LORD our God doth give unto us. Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged. And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come. And the saying pleased me well: and I took twelve men of you, one of a tribe: And they turned and went up into the mountain, and came unto the valley of Eshcol, and searched it out. And they took of the fruit of the land in their hands, and brought it down unto us, and brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us. Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God: And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there (Deut. 1:20-28).

Would you say they were optimistic or pessimistic? Obviously, they were pessimistic. What does God call their pessimism? He calls it *"unbelief!"*

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief (Heb. 3:12-19).

Pessimism is a lack of faith. It will cause us to have fear and failure rather than success and salvation. Even the world knows "*success comes in cans*" and not in can-nots. Remember being taught as a child about the little train that said "*I think I can, I think I can?*" How much more should the child of God, who has a loving Father have an optimistic disposition!

Reasons For Optimism

There are many reasons for the child of God to be optimistic. Only a few will be listed. (1) As previously stated, we have a Father who loves and provides for each of us. Jesus admonished;

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him (Matt. 7:7-11).

(2) We have a Savior who gave His life that we might have eternal life -

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

(3) We have the Holy Spirit who revealed God's complete revelation to us through inspired men in the first century and who intercedes for us today (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Rom. 8:26).

(4) We have brethren all over the world who genuinely care for us and we for them.

And, (5) we have the providence of God who provides for us every day of our lives (1 Peter 3:12). We have a great and worthy purpose to life - to glorify God and to seek and save the lost (Eccl. 12:12-14, Eph. 3:21, Mark 16:15-16).

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is *"the Lamb slain from the foundation*

OPTIMISM VERSUS PESSIMISM

of the world" (Rev. 13:8). When He came to this world, He knew he would suffer ill treatment by man and ultimately would be crucified, though He did no wrong. However, one does not read that Jesus was pessimistic. He was troubled in spirit (John 13:21), yet He maintained faith and confidence in God, the Father. The Hebrews' writer tells us of Jesus optimistic attitude, even while suffering at the hands of sinful man. He wrote;

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).

Jesus could (and did), endure the cross knowing the joy that was set before him. What a great lesson for us!

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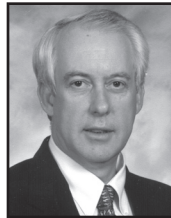
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Keys To Successful Christian Living



***Developing
The Attitude Of
Lowliness Of Mind***

This Chapter Written By

Billy Bland

Introduction

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE OF LOWLINESS OF MIND

of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:1-11).

In the above passages, the Holy Spirit admonishes, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."* Lowliness of mind - what a wonderful attribute that each should possess! Many relationship problems could be solved in local congregations, as well as across our great brotherhood, if each of us would let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, esteem others better than ourselves.

The words *"lowliness of mind,"* come from the Greek word, *"tapeinophrosune"* which according to Thayer means; *"1) having an humble opinion of one's self, 2) a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness, 3) modesty, humility, lowliness of mind."* *"Tapeinophrosune"* is used seven times in the New Testament and is translated in the King James Version of the Bible as follows:

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews (Acts 20:19).

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Eph. 4:2).

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let

each esteem other better than themselves
(Phil. 2:3).

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (Col. 2:18).

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh (Col. 2:23).

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering (Col. 3:12).

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).

One is not to possess a false humility as described in Colossians 2:18, 23, but a genuine lowliness of mind as seen in Philippians 2:3. The humility commanded of God is not to be in the afflicting of one's self or asceticism as was characteristic of the Gnostics in the first century and later in Catholicism, but in humbleness of mind which causes one to obey God, to treat his own brethren with proper respect and properly evaluate oneself.

Lowliness Of Mind Keeps One From Thinking Too Highly Of Himself

If one isn't careful he can think that his way, his work, his worth is more important than the way, work and worth of his fellow man. Diotrephes displayed such a disposition. John wrote;

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 1:9-10).

It is obvious that Diotrephes thought more highly of himself than he should. While all of us, to some degree appreciate some recognition, hardly anything is more obnoxious than seeking it! Diotrephes wanted to be "*tops*" and he was going to have his way, even if it meant running roughshod over his brethren, even to the point of "*casting them out of the church.*"

In order to avoid such an ungodly disposition, the Holy Spirit stated;

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

If one possesses lowliness of mind (a humble

attitude), and considers others better than himself, he is not going to involve himself in strife or vain (empty) glory. He will not instigate, nor be a party to, a campaign designed to destroy another person, and/or his good work. Differences of opinion will arise among brethren. However, if brethren have lowliness of mind and consider others better than themselves, sinful attitudes will never be displayed. Although Paul and Barnabas had strong disagreement whether or not to take John Mark with them on a missionary journey, even to the point of going separate ways, they never campaigned against each other. In fact, they later worked together. There never was a "*brotherhood squabble*" over the matter. Brethren can strongly disagree in matters of judgment and still be in fellowship!

Material wealth can cause one to think of himself too highly. Paul admonished Timothy;

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, 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).

There is no inherent spiritual blessing in being rich or poor. There can be dangers in riches as one may be tempted to be "*highminded*" and trust in his wealth rather than in God Who has given him richly all things to enjoy. Abraham and Job are

good examples of men who were rich, yet did not allow their riches to turn them away from God. Consequently, it is possible to be both be rich and faithful. The rich are instructed to use their wealth in good works. By so doing they are laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come and are laying hold on eternal life.

Lowliness Of Mind Contributes To Unity

The apostle Paul was one who strongly encouraged unity among brethren. To the Philippians, he wrote;

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves (Phil. 2:2-3).

Notice the words, "*likeminded,*" "*same love,*" "*one accord,*" "*of one mind,*" and "*nothing be done through strife or vain glory.*" The way to accomplish this was for each Christian to possess "*lowliness of mind,*" and each "*esteeming others better than themselves.*"

In the twin epistle, the letter to the Ephesians, the same writer penned the following;

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

Part of endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, was for Christians to walk *"with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."* Jesus said that the badge of discipleship was love. He stated;

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

A valid question; *"Is the church of Christ known today for the love we have one toward another?"* Also, *"is the congregation, where I hold membership known for its members being lowly in mind (humble) and demonstrating love one for another? Or, are we known for in-fighting, biting and devouring, and gossiping about others?"* A bank can have great financial benefits and offer wonderful service for the public, but the bank-teller by his or her attitude can ruin or destroy the business! Likewise, we may have the truth and know God's plan of salvation, but members can destroy the church's influence for good by ungodly and sinful attitudes. Let's make sure we possess lowliness of mind and demonstrate proper love for one another, that we may be catalysts for the *"unity of the Spirit."*

Lowliness Of Mind Contributes To One's Usefulness In The Lord's Service

If one desires to be of good use in the Lord's service, he must possess the attitude of lowliness of mind or humility. Paul set a good example for the proper attitude to the Ephesians. Luke records;

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews (Acts 20:17-19).

The words "*humility of mind*," in this text is from the same Greek word translated "lowliness of mind" in Philippians 2:3. Consequently, Paul not only taught that Christians should serve with lowliness of mind, he demonstrated it. Because Paul was humble or lowly in mind, he was useful in the Lord's service. Paul wasn't in Ephesus to promote his own agenda, but to further the Cause of Christ in saving souls. Paul, an apostle, set a good example for the Ephesian elders. Elders, while possessing authority to oversee the local congregation wherein they serve, must remember they are to serve the Lord in "*lowliness of mind*." Among the qualifications of elders are the prohibition of being a "*striker*" and a "*brawler*" (1 Tim. 3:3). As much as possible, they should be promoters of attitudes of peace among the brethren.

Saul, Israel's first King, possessed the attitude of lowliness of mind when he was chosen of God to serve Israel as its king. In fact, when God pointed people to Saul as their king, Saul was "*hid among the stuff*" (1 Sam. 10:22). As time continued, Saul left his lowliness of mind, which ultimately manifested itself in rebellion against God. Due to the Amalekites earlier laying wait for Israel, God instructed King

Saul to utterly destroy them. Saul failed to obey God, however, by sparing the king and some of the animals. Although somewhat lengthy, the following record describes Saul's downfall;

And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto

the LORD thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD (1 Sam. 15:13-31).

Saul, when he was little in his own sight, was made head and king over the tribes of Israel (1 Sam. 15:17). Somewhere along the line, he quit following God, however, and began to substitute his own will. In so doing, he was rebelling against God and would lose the kingdom.

When we are little in our own sight (lowliness of mind), we are of use to the Lord. When we become haughty and are lifted up with pride, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov. 16:18).

Lowliness Of Mind Makes Possible God's Habitation In One's Life

God, through the prophet, Isaiah, stated;

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

God is high and the lofty One. He inhabits eternity. His name is Holy. He dwells in the high and holy place. Yet, He also dwells with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit! If we would have God dwelling with us, we must possess an humble spirit. It is very obvious we can be *"right"* in some areas and yet still be lost for possessing a haughty spirit. We must have a *"contrite and humble spirit."*

The Psalmist wrote; *"Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off"* (Psm. 138:6). God, as high as He is,

has respect unto the lowly! Likewise, the Proverbs writer shows the blessings of possessing a lowly spirit. He states; *“Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly”* (Prov. 3:34). Also, *“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom”* (Prov. 11:2). And finally, *“Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud”* (Prov. 16:19).

Being lowly in spirit will cause us to receive God’s instructions to separate ourselves from evil so God can dwell in us. Paul wrote;

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Each of us should so live as to have Christ in us, the hope of glory (cf. Col. 1:27). Let us not be so *“full of ourselves”* that there is no room for God.

How To Develop Lowliness Of Mind?

It is imperative that each Christian possesses the attitude of lowliness of mind. It is very likely that some who do not possess this essential attribute, may not know he is not *"lowly"* in his thoughts and actions. It is therefore essential that each of us do an honest examination of ourselves. Paul admonished;

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates (2 Cor. 13:5).

As one examines himself, he should ask himself questions, such as, *"Am I actually submitting to the will of God or simply 'obeying' certain aspects with which I agree?" "Do I feel that I need to have 'my way' in matters of judgment?" "Am I seemingly always in an argument or disagreement with my brethren in matters of opinion?" "Do I genuinely esteem others better than myself (Phil. 2:3)?"* This in no way is suggesting one should compromise the truth. But sometimes it is a rather small step for some to make matters of judgment into matters of faith and create division over those things. He may even convince himself he is standing for the truth, when actually he is simply trying to get his way in a matter, or save face on his position. God is not pleased with factious brethren. Paul commanded;

A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned (Titus 3:10-11, ASV).

DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE OF LOWLINESS OF MIND

Not wanting to be condemned and wanting to be of good service in the work of the Lord, how can one develop the attitude of lowliness of mind?

Use Jesus as Your Example: Jesus gave us an amazing example of lowliness of mind! There was nothing which Jesus did that ever displayed an arrogant attitude. Zechariah prophesied;

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass (Zech. 9:9).

His triumphant entry into Jerusalem was done in lowliness. Jesus was meek and lowly in heart. He invites;

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Just how lowly did Jesus become? Notice the following inspired admonition,

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross
(Phil. 2:6-8).

Jesus is in the form of God, He is equal to God. None of us can be so exalted! Yet, He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant! When he came as a man, He didn't enter as most kings would have entered, with much pomp and ceremony. He came as a servant. Even coming as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient unto death! But He did not just obey "*unto death*," but unto "*even the death of the cross*." Who did this? Jesus - God! Now why do we have trouble humbling ourselves!? Are we really following Christ's example? God's Word teaches we are not only to mind Christ, but we are to have the mind of Christ! We are to think like Christ thought. He thought and acted with lowliness of mind, as a servant, putting others ahead of Himself. At times, Christians want others to serve them. They seem to be asking, "*what have you done for me?*" Jesus' attitude was vastly different. Some want to be in places of honor and/or of great authority in the church. Even some of the apostles were not immune to such desires. The mother of Zebedee's children came to Jesus seeking places of honor for her sons, James and John, in the kingdom of Christ.

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus

answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 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. 20:20-28).

Notice that when they were seeking prominent positions in the kingdom, such activity created indignation against them by the other ten. Today, position seeking among brethren can create indignation and strife. Jesus corrected the situation by reminding them that His kingdom is not like worldly kingdoms. Those who would be great among His disciples must be a servant. He then stated; *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

Jesus, The Master, Was Himself A Servant!

Parents Should Teach Their Children To Be Servants: Parents should teach their children to be respectful. Children need to learn that they do not have to be first in everything! All of us take great pride in our children. However, "*little Johnny*" needs to learn, he is not always right, doesn't have to always be first, neither is he the best in everything. Parents need to make sure he respects his teachers, his elders and all others. If he learns selfishness at home, he will demonstrate it in society as well as in the church. Let him learn the principles of Jesus' teaching on being a servant. Fathers have the responsibility to teach their children these vital lessons.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

Conclusion

There are many problems facing the church today, such as false doctrines, compromising with error, etc. However, we also need to recognize there can be attitude problems as well as doctrinal problems. We should never be guilty of creating, nor being a part of, a party (sect), due to someone's ego.

DEVELOPING AN ATTITUDE OF LOWLINESS OF MIND

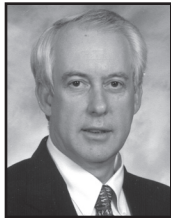
Let each of us examine ourselves and make sure we have the mind of Christ, even when we are earnestly contending for the faith (Jude 3).

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-5).

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Keys To Successful Christian Living

America In Transition

This Chapter Written By

Gary McDade

*R*ighteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people (Prov. 14:34) is as true today for modern American as it has been for every civilization since the beginning of time. The farther away from God's Word American society travels, the farther away from the expectation of His providential care the people of America go. An example emerges from an ancient Babylonian king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. The pinnacle of power enjoyed by that nation corresponds to the time God raised them up to punish his idolatrous people, the Southern Kingdom of Judah (606-536 B.C.). A period of seventy years was prophesied for the Southern Kingdom of Judah to be punished. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied, "*And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years*" (Jer. 25:11). The prophet not only pointed out the length of time this punishment would last but also promised a restoration to their homeland following the period of punishment,

For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward

you, in causing you to return to this place
(Jer. 29:10).

In giving this prophecy, God's judgment on the king of Babylon following these seventy years was also woven into the fabric of the prophecy. Jeremiah said,

And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations (Jer. 25:12).

Nebuchadnezzar, famous for his dreams, wanted Daniel, concerning whom the prince of his eunuch's had given the appellative Belteshazzar, meaning "*may [the false god] bel protect his life*" (Dan. 1:7; 2:26; 5:12), had another terrifying dream. While he did not know what it meant, he correctly made the connection with it and the principle now being discussed once Daniel explained it. Nebuchadnezzar observed that the dream was "*to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*" (Dan. 4:17b). Nebuchadnezzar's dream embellished his power and the prominence of his kingdom at that time. In his own words he told Daniel the dilemma of the dream.

I Nebuchadnezzar was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace: I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to

bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers: and I told the dream before them; but they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no secret troubleth thee, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: Nevertheless leave the

stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men (Dan. 4:4-17).

Daniel was astonished for one hour and his thoughts troubled him. At the encouragement of the king he said,

My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies. The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth. And whereas the king saw a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, and saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the

stump of the roots thereof in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him; This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king: That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots; thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule (Dan. 4:19-26).

The admonition of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar is of telling importance to the theme "*America In Transition*" because what the prophet Daniel advised is exactly what the politicians and people of America need today. Daniel said,

Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility (Dan. 4:27).

Daniel's inspired advice has four points.

Number one, "*Let my counsel be acceptable unto thee.*" Nebuchadnezzar needed to condition his heart

before he could expect his condition to improve. He needed to have the attitude of the Psalmist who declared, *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer"* (Psm. 19:14). The needed conditioning of his heart was to honestly invite the teaching of God's Word into it. Jesus Himself spoke of two preconditions of the heart that are required in order for the Word of God to have its designed effect. Speaking of the Word of God being like a seed and the human heart like soil, He said,

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

The two preconditions or prerequisites are an honest and a good heart. (Notice that before a heart can be good it must first be honest). To his credit Nebuchadnezzar initially does deal honestly with his prideful attitude and humble himself, but, as you know, he will not stick with that commendable attitude. N.B. Hardeman once spoke in a sermon about *"our reception of any truth is determined by our attitude toward that truth."* The application here is that if Nebuchadnezzar could not accept the truth that his pride in his accomplishments would bring about his downfall, then he could not change his behavior. The shallow depth of his character is realized when he cannot sustain the lesson that was shown him in horrifying detail that he is about to learn.

Number two, *"Break off thy sins by righteousness."* I like Daniel's preaching. He does not coddle sin, even in the life of the most powerful man on earth at

that time. He does not counsel him about his feelings toward his sins and seek to alter his feelings about sin in the hopes of modifying Nebuchadnezzar's sinful actions. He tells him to break them off in a snap by ceasing to sin. Here he makes Bible readers think of Paul's statement to the Corinthians concerning the sin of fornication. Paul simply said, "*Flee fornication*" (1 Cor. 6:18). Not think about it, reason concerning it, ponder it, but flee it. When Daniel said, "*Break off thy sins by righteousness,*" he directed Nebuchadnezzar in a positive direction, the direction of righteousness. It is not enough to just cease sin; one must also start living right. Again, our Lord commented along this line in Matthew 12:43-45,

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

Human life is never static; it is always dynamic, filled with thoughts and actions. The Lord taught those who would be his disciples from the beginning of his personal ministry the blessings of "*hungering and thirsting after righteousness*" (Matt. 5:6a). Such is the only truly fulfilling life (Matt. 5:6b).

Number three, "*Break off...thine iniquities by*

showing mercy to the poor." The miseries of life are counteracted by expressions of mercy or pity shown from those in positions of advantage. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matt. 5:7). We are saved from sin by the mercy of God,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).

And, those who show no mercy toward others need not expect to receive any from God. James wrote, *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment"* (James 2:13).

Number four, *"If it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility."* This part of Daniel's statement shows that obeying God generates hope that peace and tranquility may be extended from God. Daniel did not say that God would lengthen Nebuchadnezzar's tranquility that he could find in doing righteousness and showing mercy, but that he could reasonably hope that God would give him peace. Paul taught young Timothy to pray,

That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:2b-4).

Unfortunately, like so many good sermons that go unheeded, a year after the lesson Nebuchadnezzar

reverted to his former prideful attitude. Daniel wrote of it,

The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty? (Dan. 4:30).

In the same hour his kingdom was taken from him, and he was driven from men to dwell with the wild beasts of the field, to eat grass like oxen, to be wet with the dew from heaven having his hair grow out like eagle's feathers and his nails like bird's claws (v. 33). And, for what purpose did all these things happen to Nebuchadnezzar? To show him that *"the heavens do rule"* (v. 26); so he would know *"that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will"* (v. 32). Did he at long last – *"till seven times shall pass over thee"* (vs. 25, 32) – learn the lesson, the thought of which frightened him and the experience of which was designed to humble him? Yes! He could and did learn the lesson. In fact, inspiration chose to permanently preserve it for posterity. Nebuchadnezzar affirmed,

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of

heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase (Dan. 4:34-37).

The question of the hour is with "*America in transition*," can America learn the lesson all history and the Bible itself teaches? What lesson? God's

...dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Succinctly put, the lesson is "*The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*" (v. 32). America can learn the lesson just as Nebuchadnezzar learned the lesson, and it is up to the church to fulfill its mission in preaching the gospel to teach the lesson to the nation. Daniel had to stand up and preach the truth to the heathen world leader Nebuchadnezzar; should the church expect to do anything less?

The means increasingly are being made available for us as members of the churches of Christ to go outside the four walls of our meeting houses to influence the masses of humanity in the marketplaces of thought and action. One example is the Gospel Broadcasting Network where about 100 gospel preachers appearing on 80 programs are able to preach to sixty million people for an hour a day, seven days a week, year in and year out. A satellite network such as GBN cannot be censored or stopped. We can speak as freely, even to the leaders of the free world, as did Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar. The responsibility cannot be left up to the denominations to defend the moral basis upon which a Godly nation should rest. While many of them have the money to have such television networks, they do not have the desire to build them or the biblical message to declare using them. For example, the Pentecostal network TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network) uses the airtime before key political elections not to discuss any kind of biblical basis for making moral decisions but in their insatiable greed to raise money with extended telethons! It is beyond dispute that more members of churches of Christ are watching TBN through the week than are attending the worship service of the living God on Sunday nights! This to say the public media is having an impact on the thinking of people in American society and even on our own brethren. It is time to praise God for making the means available to teach not only the lost and dying world but our own members with the seriousness of seeking the truth of God and standing up for it.

We need to support works like the Gospel

Broadcasting Network because America is not in transition for the better. And, it is going to take something powerful to stem the tide of moral and political decay in this country; it is going to take the powerful Word of God. Paul wrote,

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged 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).

And, the Word of God must be preached (2 Tim. 4:2; Mark 16:15). The church of Christ must not be diverted from this mission of preaching the gospel to all the nations (Luke 24:46-47) because the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

One indication that we have *"America in transition"* and not for the better is the rulings of the Supreme Court. One recent ruling barely blocks unrestrained vulgarities to be uttered on commercial television. Joan Biskupic reported in USA Today, *"In a 5-4 decision written by Justice Antonin Scalia, the court endorsed a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) policy against the use of vulgarities associated with sexual or excretory functions"* (Wednesday, April 29, 2009, 3A). Justice Scalia was joined in his vote to block the unrestrained vulgarities described by Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Anthony Kennedy, Justice Clarence Thomas, and Justice Samuel Alito. Those Justices who believe the first amendment to the constitution allowing freedom of speech means people can say anything anywhere anytime without regard to decency or decorum are Justice John Paul

Stevens, Justice David Souter, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Justice Stephen Breyer. They may currently find acceptance for their dissenting votes politically, socially, or even legally, but they will never be justified spiritually. The Word of God still says,

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:29).

He who is Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) decreed,

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment (Matt. 12:36).

Even though *"FCC acting Chairman Michael Copps termed the decision 'a big win for America's families,'"* the thin margin of only one Supreme Court Justice is all that is presently standing between some semblance of verbal restraint in American society and filth in public communication media that we cannot bear to imagine.

Could we have *"America in Transition"* to righteousness? Surely so! Jeremiah assured that truth centuries ago when he wrote,

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to

do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:7-10).

Just as any nation could err; any nation can repent. Further, Ezekiel dealt with this concept extensively in his writings,

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of

Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezek. 18:20-32).

God has no pleasure in punishing the wicked. Our hope is that through our preaching, teaching, and godly living we can one day see *"America in transition"* to righteousness. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Prov. 14:34).

Gary McDade



Gary presently serves as the Executive Director of Gospel Broadcasting Network. He preached for the Getwell congregation in Memphis, TN and directed the annual **Spiritual Sword** lectureship for several years. A speaker on the program **The Everlasting Gospel** for the Gospel Broadcasting Network. He is a staff writer for the **Spiritual Sword** journal. Gary and Sheila are excellent servants in the kingdom of God.

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Needs Of The Home In Today's World: Spiritual Leadership

This Chapter Written By

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

As a general rule, today's home is not the ideal of Genesis 2:21-24; Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:21-23; Colossians 3:18-21; Hebrews 13:4 or 1 Peter 3:1-7. Gold and silver, not God and the Savior, rule marriage and the family today. TV sets the norm of family behavior, not the truth. Fleshly indulgence takes precedent over faith intents. Secularism has replaced spirituality in numerous homes. Temporary unions have replaced marital permanence. Dysfunctional family life is more likely to be found than wholesome homes where all do their part respectively to make homes havens of holiness, harmony and happiness.

The Need To Recognize That The Home Is Divine In Origin

Marriage existed in the mind of God before it became a reality in human hearts. God made men and then made woman to be man's help meet, to

complete the incomplete. As long as Adam was alone, he was only half of human kind; the other half needed to be formed and fashioned—the beautiful half, the helpful half, the queenly half. We read about this tremendous transaction in Genesis 2:20-25. Man and woman came from God or the sublime—not from “*slime plus mutations plus time*” (Brad Harrub). Marriage and the home came from God—not experimenting couples seeking to meet, match and mate calling it marriage.

The Need To Recognize That Marriage Is A Threesome

Marriage is not a twosome or a straightline with husband at one end and wife at the other. In Eden we have three—the Lord, Adam and Eve. In Cana of Galilee in John 2 we have three—Jesus, the unnamed groom and the nameless bride. In Matthew 19:6 we have the Lord or the One who does the binding or joining and the couple—man and woman—who are bound by divine decree. Thus marriage is a triangle with the Lord at the apex angle and man and woman at the base angles. The world does not define marriage as such but the Book Divine and its Heavenly Author do.

The Need To Recognize That Marriage Is Heterosexual—Not Homosexual

God made a woman for Adam—not another man. When Eve was made, God did not make another woman for her. Marriage is for a man and a woman—not for two women, not for two men, not for a human and an animal. Can we be far

from this third union in our Godless, Christless and Spiritless society? In the Bible we have Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Elkanah and Hannah, Amram and Jochebed, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary and Aquila and Priscilla. So-called homosexual or lesbian unions, now sanctioned by a growing number of states, belong to a Sodom-infested era—not a Biblically-oriented one. No morals and no standards sum up our sin-saturated society.

Commitment Is Needed

Adam and Eve knew this in Genesis 2:23-24. Enoch and his wife knew this in Genesis 5:21-24. Abraham and Sarah knew this in Genesis 12-23. Isaac and Rebekah knew this beginning in Genesis 24:67. Jacob and Rachel knew this beginning in Genesis 29. Joseph and Asenath knew this in Genesis 41:45. Elkanah and Hannah knew this in 1 Samuel 1-2. So did Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary and Aquila and Priscilla in Luke 1, Matthew 1-2, Acts 18, Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Timothy 4. In today's home there is to be marital commitment, parental commitment and commitment from children to parents.

Communication Is Much Needed In Today's Homes

Marriage counsellors, after whom I have read, are in unison labeling a lack of communication as one of the major deficiencies of modern homes. Problems galore erupt. He clams up; she prefers silence; solutions are not sought; the door for divorce

opens wider all the time. Lines of communication should be kept with diligence between husband and wife, between parent and child. When Jacob faced mounting problems with Laban, his father-in-law, Jacob communicated freely with Leah and Rachel in a place where they could talk freely minus interruptions from Laban and his sons. The two wives were fully supportive of Jacob's plans, at God's bidding, to return again to Canaan (Gen. 31:4ff).

Fidelity To Vows Is Needed Desperately

A Communistic leader of Russia last century once said that international treaties are like piecrusts—made to be broken. Khrushchev broke far more than his share of such. Men and women en masse treat marital vows just like that—made to be broken. After all, this is currently what modern marriage is all about—made to enter, made to remain a little while and then made to dissolve. But this is not what they promised God and each other at the wedding altar. Fidelity to marriage vows will take care of future roaming eyes, lustful intents and adulterous liaisons when the marriage becomes boring and the excitement ends. Faithfulness is imperative if marriages and homes remain happy,, harmonious and intact. Such will make unnecessary any separation or a deadly divorce. Marriage is serious business for a surety!

TLC Needed In Large Doses

The initials stand for **Tender, Loving Care** with intense interest placed on each word. Diligent practice of the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 will

insure it in home settings. The Golden Rule is of far greater scope than just the home but surely is inclusive of marriage and the family. So are three words by Paul in Ephesians 4:32, "*...be ye kind.*" Consideration and kindness are usually top priorities in the wooing and winning of a mate for marriage. Courtship and consideration are holy handmaidens in this period. However, subsequent to the entrance into marriage, marital mates may become cold, indifferent, insensitive and harsh with each other. Neither gender has a monopoly since both husbands and wives are guilty. Instead of out-niceing each other, far too many couples want to out-knife each other. Constantly cutting each other down becomes daily habits of harshness. Very easily, it spills over into parent-child relationships also. This is sad, inexpressibly sad!

Homes Need To Be Drug-Free

By this I mean illegal drugs which cripple people physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and eternally—not prescription drugs designed to help restore health or treat incurable diseases keeping pain to a minimum. Addiction to harmful drugs exacts a heavy toll in home life. Beverage alcohol should be off-limits to every household member. Its entrance calls for a vanishing of household harmony, health and happiness. Addiction to nicotine should be avoided at all costs. It robs people of health and longevity of life. It is selfish to the nth degree for husbands and fathers to shorten their lives by this killer drug. The same is true with wives and mothers. They are casting a sure vote for serious

health problems ahead and less years to live. Such practices are not selflessness by any stretch of the imagination!

Permanence Is Needed

God's ideal has always been, "*One man for one woman for a lifetime.*" Genesis 2:24 endorses that concept. So do Matthew 19:6 and Romans 7:2-3. Marriages are becoming shorter and shorter even as life averages increase. Many couples live long enough to celebrate fiftieth wedding anniversaries and yet never will due to marital collapses in earlier times of their marriages. With far too many it is no longer "*till death do ye part*" but "*as long as love lasts and excitement persists.*" Marital longevity is lost in such settings. Marital continuity is not even a goal with many in our day. Yet, there is permanence in, around, atop and at the bottom of Matthew 19:6 and Romans 7:2-3. When husbands love wives as they love their own bodies and as Christ loved the church and wives love with the same degree of devotion, permanence will return to the marital fold but not before!

Selflessness Is Greatly Needed

Selfishness and selflessness both begin with the same alphabetical letter but there the similarity ends abruptly. They are opposite ends of each other. Like the proverbial east and west—never shall the twain meet. One has to go before the other can survive. Satan is selfishness personified; Jesus is selflessness personified. Surely, we want to be like the latter and not the former. Far too many enter marriage with

the ingrained philosophy, "*Now what can he/she do to insure my happiness.*" This is selfishness gone to seed and then some. Treading a much higher mountain peak in marital relationships is the philosophy, "*Now what can I do to make him/her happy, contented and satisfied?*" This is a sure and secure building block for lasting harmony and permanent happiness in marriage. It has not been tried and found wanting; it has not been tried by the masses period!

Christ In The Home

Nearly forty years ago, I wrote a book on the home and gave it this four word title. It and **How Young People Get Hurt** have been my two best sellers and have gone through multiple reprints. His being in first century homes made all the difference in the world such as His visits to Peter's home in Mark 1:29-31, Jairus' home in Mark 5:23ff, Martha and Mary's home in Bethany in Luke 10:38-42 and the home of Zacchaeus, the wealthy publican of Jericho, in Luke 19:1-10. He was the welcome guest in these homes, supplied their needs and left each one better than He found it. He should ever be the welcome guest in our homes. He comes as Helper. He makes them better if we cooperate. He solves home problems as NO ONE else can. He richly blessed these four Palestinian homes of the first century and will do the same for our homes today if we cooperate with Him to the fullest degree.

Frequently, I close lessons on the home with three paramount queries. (1) What has Jesus meant to our homes in the past? (2) What does He mean to our homes right now? (3) What will we allow Him

to mean to our homes in the future? There is not much we can do about the past except repent of its errors and profit from its mistakes. But there is much we can do about the present and even more about the future if such we have. **Christ In The Home** is an intense imperative. Minus Him the home will NEVER be what it can be with Him present.

Spiritual Leadership Is An Intense Imperative

Let us approach it negatively at first. Cain was earth's firstborn. We read about his marriage and family in Genesis 4. It is obvious he never provided godly leadership in his spiritually impoverished family. His descendants helped bring on that universal flood in Genesis 6-7.

The peers of Noah did not provide spiritual leadership for their flood-doomed families.

Lot surely did not, else some of his family might not have perished in that fiery holocaust in Genesis 19. This surely would have been the case if they had listened, learned and obeyed. Look at how two of his daughters acted in getting Lot drunk, with each one committing incest with children conceived by these illicit unions. Had they not been taught that drunkenness is wrong and that sex with their own father was way off limits? If so, they surely did not live up to it.

Eli, judge and priest, worked wonders with the lad Samuel but was a miserable failure with his two sons—Phinehas and Hophni—in the early chapters of 1 Samuel. He was anything but spiritually tough with these headstrong and deeply rebellious sons.

Yet he had three sets of authority in his hands—parental, judicial and priestly. Both sons came to tragic ends.

David, the adulterer and cold-blooded murderer in 2 Samuel 11, did not provide the type of spiritual leadership his wayward sons needed and especially Absalom.

Jeroboam, first king of Israel in the North, was a total failure in providing spiritual leadership for his own family and the eighteen kings who succeeded him on Israel's throne. He left as legacy the one who made Israel to sin. What a way to be remembered!

Ahab and Jezebel provided nothing by way of godly demeanor and spiritual leadership for their daughter—Athaliah. She, in turn, became her son's counsellor to do wickedly (2 Chron. 22:3). Her parents and she all came to tragic ends.

The Herod line of fathers in the New Testament were total strangers to spiritual leadership among family members. Look at their ungodly descendants. Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa I were wicked to the very core as we see in Matthew 14 and Acts 12.

Positively portrayed are some eminently great and godly leaders of families.

Enoch lived on earth 365 years and was then translated. He became a father at age sixty-five. Methusaleh and his young siblings never knew a day but what they had a father who walked with God (Gen. 5:21-24). This was ancient spiritual leadership at its finest.

Noah provided spiritual leadership for his family of seven. He did this by being *"a just man, and perfect in his generations. And Noah walked with God"* (Gen.

6:9). As a father he was in a class by himself in his era. He is enshrined in Inspiration's Hall of Faith and Fame (Heb. 11:7).

The Lord in Genesis 18:19 knew what kind of leadership Abraham would provide for his family and household. Peaceful Isaac was a fruit of such spiritual leadership from his illustrious father.

Amram and Jochebed provided excellency of spiritual leadership with Miriam, Aaron and Moses in the early chapters of Exodus. They are praised for such by Stephen in Acts 7 and by Paul in Hebrews 11.

Joshua is an eminently great example of providing spiritual leadership for his family and the nation he led. He was great as general under Moses, faithful as a spy and successful as conquering general of Western Palestine. Fairly, he parceled out the land to nine and one-half of the tribes west of the Jordan. Yet, the famed leader of Israel never stood taller, at least in my judgment, than when he said, "...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). Note that he did not say, "Neither I nor my family will serve the Lord;" "I minus my family will serve the Lord;" or "my family minus me will serve the Lord." He spoke for his family. It would be a God-serving and law-abiding household. His influence was nation-wide as Israel served the Lord faithfully all his life and the lives of the elders who outlived him (Josh. 24:31). What amazing leadership within a family and entire nation!

Zacharias and Elisabeth "*were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*" (Luke 1:6). This was the very high type of spiritual leadership into which John

was born and reared.

Joseph and Mary provided devout spiritual leadership for Jesus in His youth. We see their worshipful devotion in Luke 2:40-52. They knew from His birth onward that Jesus was special and extraordinary. Luke 2:52 sets the tone and establishes the tenor of His upbringing.

Lois and Eunice, grandmother and mother of Timothy respectively, provided the finest of spiritual leadership for a very special person—Timothy. Paul alludes to their success in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15.

The elect lady of 2 John did the same for her children whom John loved and praised highly to her (2 John 1, 4).

Conclusion

Never have we needed faithful fathers and godly mothers as badly as we do today. Never have we needed spiritual leadership quite like we need it today. How well are we meeting these serious challenges?

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Keys To Successful Christian Living



A Life Free From Contamination And Condemnation

This Chapter Written By

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

Introduction

Webster defines contamination as *“intrusion of or contact with dirt or foulness”* and condemnation as *“to declare to be evil”* (245-235). The English term, contamination, is not found in Holy Writ, but a synonym is - corrupt (c.f. Mal. 1:14). The English word, condemnation, is in scripture and is negated at Romans 8:1. *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (KJV). To be free from corruptness and condemnation, in the spiritual sense is to be free from the pollution of sin and from the guilt of past sin.

Contamination to a Christian is like the barnacles on a ship. Lee wrote:

Interesting to those who know their boats—and their barnacles—is a special article which declares that the old bugaboo of seagoing vessels, the barnacle, has been licked. By using a special paint with a heavy

mercury content, the United States Navy has banished the troublesome ectozoa.

Since man put ships on salt water, the barnacle family has been a primary and important enemy of shipping. Specifically, the barnacle is an animal about the size of a dime, consisting of flesh without a heart, equipped with six pairs of legs, and possessing the greatest tenacity known in history, since once firmly attached, it holds on indefinitely, chucking its shell, losing its eyes and growing new armor in which it will be a life-long prisoner. Its ravages cost ship owners millions of dollars annually. A year-old growth on a ship of 10,000 tons deadweight may amount to as much as thirty tons. It causes a slowdown of natural ship speed, increases fuel consumption, and stimulates excessive vibration which may render fire control apparatus useless.

Regular routines exist in ship repair yards for barnacle removals. If the ship is a large one, it is drydocked and the hull hosed down with fresh water. Then the sides are scraped and wire-brushed, following which paint is applied. Taking about eight hours, the cost ranges from five hundred to seven hundred dollars.

The Navy's riddance of barnacles is accomplished by spraying the special paint smoking hot, once the hull is clean and dry, and providing a surface to which the barnacle can not attach itself, a matter certainly most pleasing and soul-satisfying to every man who ever had anything to do with a ship.

How wonderfully beneficial it would be if human beings would get rid of the undesirable barnacles of bad habits which militate against health

and happiness (Sourcebook, 151).

What is the biblical record concerning corruption/contamination and how one is not condemned who is "in Christ?" Shall Christians gain the victory over the "barnacles" of life?

Corruption / Contamination

Corruption of the soul is connected to what the child of God does. *"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit"* (Matt. 7:17). One needs to be *"born again"* in order to have one's soul cleansed from sin, for the soul of man controls one's actions (John 3:3-5). *"Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof"* (Rom. 6:12). Some have erred in thinking that once one is *"saved,"* no sinful action of any kind can affect one's soul. But, since one can prevent sin from *"reigning,"* then that person's actions are entwined with one's soul's fate. *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Cor. 11:3).

Corruption of the soul results from false teachings having been followed. *"Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself"* (1 Tim. 6:5). Why, if what one hears does not have a corrupting influence, should one withdraw oneself? *"For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins; led away with diverse lusts....men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith"* (2 Tim. 3:6, 8b). Daniel, even though living under the Mosaic covenant, wrote

about the corrupting influence of men's words. *"But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you; for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed"* (Dan. 2:9a). Daniel was quoting Nebuchadnezzar, but it is evident that even that pagan king knew about corrupt speech and false teaching. He also knew the penalty to be imposed!

Worldliness is a fierce, corrupting influence on Christians. Therefore, Jesus gave a warning about valuing things too highly.

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. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matt. 6:19-23).

When one *"sows to the flesh,"* that one *"reaps corruption"* (Gal. 6:8). The light of the body can be corrupted.

The location of corruption is in the world. *"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 1:4). Those who opt to stay *"in the world"* (that is, outside of Christ),

"shall utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Peter 2:12b). And, those who take the lead in worldly gain from appearing religious, make great speeches and lead many astray. *"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage"* (2 Peter 2:19). Too many television and denominational preachers have led the world into contamination.

The physical body, at death, begins to corrupt. *"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Cor. 15:53). *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption"* (1 Cor. 15:42). But, such physical corruption is far less terrible than spiritual contamination, for the physical body will be changed without any effort on the part of the Christian. To avoid spiritual corruption, one must obey the Christ and change oneself.

The goal of one's actions, teachings heeded, worldliness avoided, and resurrection anticipated is to prevent corruption of the soul. *"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"* (1 Cor. 9:25).

Condemnation

The word, condemnation, in the English Bibles (or condemn, et al) is from some form of katakrino (Word Study, 412). The latter Greek term conveys the idea of the *"punishment following sentence"* (Bauer, 412). In fact, the English word, doom, is a good translation of katakrino.

The sin of Adam and the beguiling of Eve by Satan, brought the condemnation of physical death on all mankind. *“And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification”* (Rom. 5:16). *“Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life”* (Rom. 5:18). Men still are allowed to exist on this planet because of the interposition of the Christ who overcame the problem Adam caused. What difficulty did Adam introduce – physical death as to the result of his sin.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come (Rom. 5:12-14).

The condemnation due sin was a problem that was not reconciled during the Patriarchal nor Mosaic ages. *“For if the ministration of condemnation (the law of Moses, K.M.) be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory”* (2 Cor. 3:9). No animal sacrifice could meet the requirements of a holy and just God. When Adam sinned, he not only opened the door to physical death (Rom. 5:12), but he also placed a certain demand on God’s justice. Adam was a perfect being prior to his sin (Heb. 2:7), but when

that perfect man rebelled against God, a Perfect Man would be needed to be sacrificed in order to satisfy the one for one, justice of God. *“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous....That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom. 5:19, 21).

It is no wonder, then, that the Hebrews writer exclaimed to those opting for a return to Judaism that:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God (Heb. 10:1-7).

The worshipper who served under the law of Moses was reminded upon offering his animal that he was not yet justified. Only the blood of Christ

could remove the sin and its guilt (Matt. 26:28). God's plan to forgive the people who obeyed Him while living under the Patriarchal and Mosaic eras was to pronounce those worshippers as "*forgiven in prospect.*" The fathers and ancient Jews were not technically justified until Jesus shed His blood on the Cross.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission (Heb. 9:15-22).

The apostle Paul discussed the issue as to whether or not God was "*just*" in forgiving the obedient ancients before Jesus died on the Cross:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (Rom. 3:19-31).

Note that Paul wrote that both Jew and Gentile were under God's law (Rom. 3:19). Those who

believe that the Gentile, who lived before the time of Christ (Rom. 1:18-32), was following some *"law of his heart,"* will need to explain Romans 3:19 which verse explicitly claims that the Gentile was *"under"* God's law. Since both Jew and Gentile had to obey God in order, eventually, to be cleansed by the blood of Christ; was God *"just"* in such a plan?

Paul wrote that Christ was manifested to be a hilasterion (propitiation, KJV at Romans 3:25a) or mercy seat (Word Study, 384). Christ, then as the *"mercy seat,"* is the only One in Whom one can meet the Father! Jesus said, in fact: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me"* (John 14:6). It would take faith in Jesus' blood to reach the *"mercy seat"* (Rom. 3:25b).

Jesus' blood was shed on Calvary, and the very fact of the crucifixion declared God the Father's *"righteousness for the remission of sins that are past"* (Rom. 3:25c). God's forgiveness of the sins of the ancients found its justification in the blood of Christ! God's forbearance, or long-suffering grace, is and was a justified act. In fact, Paul repeats for emphasis that *"he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:26). God could see the Cross from all eternity and the blood of Christ flowed *"backward"* over those who were obedient under the Patriarchal and Mosaic systems (c.f. Heb. 9:15). God was proven *"just"* in his prospective acts.

God overlooked (Acts 17:30, KJV has *"winked at"*) a time characterized by ignorance of the judgment day, for He would not have been *"just"* to bring such a day before Christ's blood was shed. But, now God commands all men, every where to repent

(Acts 17:30b). Why *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31). There is a judge, now, who is ready to pronounce sentence. He is the Christ (John 5:22).

God *“overlooked”* (*“made no move immediately to punish”*: Bauer, 61) the ancient’s idolatry and rebellion, but judgment day and condemnation arising from the corruption of sin now await. The gospel of Christ is for the whole world for *“every creature”* is amenable to it (Mark 16:15-16). A day, fixed by God, is ready for everyone (2 Cor. 5:10). To be judged *“in righteousness”* on that day implies that there is the right and there is the wrong. The certainty of such a judgment day is emphasized by the fact that the one who would be Judge had been raised from the dead (Acts 17:31b). This knowledge of God’s holiness and justice should be a warning to all men that He is severe in His treatment of sinners (cf. Rom. 11:22).

Too many have drawn a wrong inference from Acts 17:30 and have taught that God *“tolerated”* some sins before Christ came, but now God does not allow such. God did not immediately punish sin in the sense of sinners coming to judgment, only because that day was not yet appointed. The judge had not yet *“come to the bench,”* for the Word was still in heaven at that time (John 1:1-3). However, the Judge is now ready (Acts 17:31). But, there is another *“side”* to *“now”* which *“side”* is wonderful and amazing.

Now! No Condemnation

There is no katakrino or imprecatory judgment for those in Christ (Rom. 8:1)! It is possible to be condemned at the judgment. *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and condemn it"* (Matt. 12:41a). But, if one is a penitent, baptized believer, that one is in Christ and free from condemnation (c.f. Heb. 8:12)! There is a vivid difference between believers and sinners when the day of judgment is considered. The contrast is continued through Romans, chapter eight.

Those who walk *"after the Spirit"* and not *"after the flesh"* are free from condemnation. That is, those who are judged by the gospel and not by the law of Moses are uncondemned. The law of Moses condemned, but the law of Christ sets free! And, the law of Christ brings a new way of thinking and living in this life (Rom. 8:9-11). The *"mortal body"* in which one now lives is given new life in Christ (cf. Rom. 6:4, See note under Works Cited.) The *"new life"* is filled with great blessings.

Those who have *"no condemnation"* are *"walking"* or active in their faith. They are His sons by adoption (Rom. 8:14-16; cf. 1 John 3:1-3). Roman adoption was done by purchasing the child and God's children have been purchased by Christ (Acts 20:28). These sons are led by the gospel of Christ, and thus are said to be led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:17; cf. John 6:63). His sons are, literally, His possessions (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9).

Those who have *"no condemnation"* are heirs and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; cf. 8:29). Christians will sit with Christ on His throne (Rom. 3:21). It is more than amazing to realize that whatever Christ

inherited also belongs to faithful Christians. Note that Paul wrote *"if children."* Only the obedient can claim the inheritance. This blessing will be revealed (the KJV has in from eis, K.M.) to us at the resurrection (Rom. 8:18).

A third blessing to those in Christ who stand uncondemned is that there is a harvest-time. The creature or human body will be changed and *"harvested"* at the resurrection (Rom. 8:19-22). This *"redemption of the body"* (Rom. 8:23b) means that God can preserve the *"seed"* element until Jesus comes again (c.f. 1 Cor. 15:41-57). *"When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Col. 3:4). The psalmist added:

Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity (Psm. 98:7-8).

Those not condemned also live with hope and are saved by hope (Rom. 8:24). Why can Christians patiently wait for the resurrection at His second coming? Because Christians desire His coming and expect to be with Him. His Children have biblical hope and not *"pie-in-the sky"* wishful thinking. Biblical hope is desire and expectation and not secular wishing.

A fifth blessing is help in prayer. As hope does, this help strengthens the Christian's ability to wait for the resurrection. Sometimes there are infirmities of life which do not fall under the category of the

revealed will (the Bible) of God. At those times one may be confused as to what to pray and as to whether the prayer would be in the will of God. Two intercessors go to the Father for Christians when such infirmities occur—the Holy Spirit and the Christ (Rom. 8:26-27, 34). The Father, who searches men's hearts, blesses the faithful through those times (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7).

Finally, those who have "*no condemnation*" have happiness of mind (Rom. 8:28-30). God has worked out "*all things*" through His plan of redemption so that Christians need not fear the judgment day. Trials strengthen the Christian, for God did not give His Son in order to do men wrong. "*For God sent not his Son unto the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*" (John 3:17).

Conclusion

Despite the corruptions in this world that are far worse than barnacles on a ship, the Christian can overcome the pollution/contamination/corruption of sin and stand before God uncondemned. Is there a greater promise than to be His sons, free from sin? For, "*there is therefore, now, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus*" (cf. Gal. 3:26-27).

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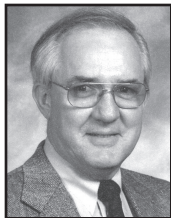
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NOTE: Some have applied Romans 8:9-11 to the resurrection.
But, the "mortal" body is the one living now. The resurrected
body is immortal.

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Keys To Successful Christian Living

**Confidence
In The Face Of
Adversity And Turmoil**

This Chapter Written By

Barry Gilreath, Jr.

Introduction

In the late 1960's and 70's a long running television program featuring country Music Hall of Famers such as Roy Clark, Buck Owens and Minnie Pearl would occasionally parody the trials and tribulations of southerners. One skit performed over and over again featured a group of farmers lounging around an old front porch with a hunting hound sleeping nearby. The denim overall clad group then mournfully sang,

Doom, despair and pain and agony.
Deep dark depression, excessive misery.
If it weren't for bad luck,
I would have no luck at all.
Doom despair and pain and agony.

Yet how unfortunate it is that these gloom and doom lyrics sang by those who would pass through the halls of the Grand Ole Opry could accurately depict the despair and misery echoed within the halls of some church buildings. Some Christians portray anything but confidence and assurance in

the face of adversity. Their portrayal is more like unto a holding pen for cattle or sheep who wait helplessly and hopelessly upon the slaughter. It is regrettable that in times of turmoil some Christians are ready to lie down and be offered up on the altar of woe, having little confidence in the outcome of their trial. They share a lack of confidence in the Savior like unto the disciple Andrew who dolefully remarked in a time of trouble, *"There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many"* (John 6:9)? Andrew could have taken his place right on stage with the other Hee Haw cast members as they sang their sorrows away. Andrew lost sight of the fact that the God, who created the fish, could also multiply the fish. Jesus demonstrated that with God all things are possible. He can take a time of turmoil and adversity and bring about a marvelous work (John 6:10-13). As Christians we must be rooted in confidence, and the good news is that for the Christian there is no reason to wallow in self pity and doubt. Through every challenge, obstacle, trial and tribulation, there is a grand opportunity that awaits us as God's children.

Confidence That Adversity Will Come

Webster defines adversity as *"a state, condition, or instance of serious or continued difficulty."* Turmoil is defined as *"a state or condition of extreme confusion, agitation, or commotion."* Both adversity and turmoil manifest themselves in different forms and through various outlets. Yet one thing is certainly true of both—one can not go far in life without experiencing

them (Psm. 90:10). The Devil and his servants will make sure of it (1 Peter 5:8). From the moment one is born until the day one dies, life will give all men a drink from the well of adversity and turmoil. Some will even be required to swallow an exceedingly great portion, as was required of Job, King David, the Apostle Paul, and Jesus Christ; nevertheless, all men will be brought to the bitter waters of the well of life. God's children are not exempt from such harsh experiences.

Adversity and turmoil will confront us through people, events, and circumstances. Jesus often faced these things in His life. Whether such was presented through his encounters with His enemies (Matt. 16:1-4, 21; Matt. 17:17), His struggles as a common man (Luke 9:58), or even the events that led to His sacrificial death on Calvary (John 19), the Lord has left us both example (Heb. 4:15) and instruction (2 Tim. 3:12) demonstrating that trying times, events, and people will come, and we can expect it. Furthermore, though expectation of such unsettling commotion is provided, there is often no advance warning of its arrival. Adversity and turmoil do not knock politely outside our door calling to seek entrance into our lives, but rather often burst into our lives at what may seem the worst of times. Sickness can befall one suddenly. Personal attacks can come out of the night. Accidents happen without prior knowledge. Kids do not ask permission to rebel. Death is never convenient, and life can be tough to say the least. Therefore we must strengthen our confidence in the one who can help us in a time of need.

Confidence That God Will Come

In the days of the Judges, an angel appeared unto a poor man named Gideon and gave him a message from God. *"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour"* (Judg. 6:12). Keep in mind that at this very moment, Gideon was hunkered down behind a winepress trying to separate wheat grain from the chaff. His peculiar posture was due to the fact that he feared that the Midianites, who had taken his land, might see him and also take his food away too. The angelic message was, *"The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior."* Gideon was obviously not as confident as the angel, demonstrated by his odd manner of threshing wheat.

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites (Judg. 6:13).

Perhaps you have found yourself thinking similar thoughts, as some herald reminded you that confidence in God could be found in times of adversity and turmoil. Maybe, just maybe, you found yourself wondering how God could be with you when troubles and trials have staked out a dwelling place in your life and have begun an all out assault upon your faith in the providential care of God. If you have ever found yourself crouching, hiding and hoping to pass under the radar of detection in hopes of avoiding the attention of

some modern day Midianite, then this message is especially for you. Friend, you can have complete confidence that God will come to your aid in a time of need.

In reality, if you are a faithful child of God, He has always been with you. He has never left your side. He has assured you through His word that He is with you through all things. *"He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Heb. 13:5). The child of God can have total confidence that he or she is not walking alone. The last words of Christ before ascending to the glory of Heaven, was to provide assurance of His abiding presence. *"I will be with you alway, even unto the end of the earth"* (Matt. 28:20). What peace and serenity the words of Christ ought to bring to the hearts and minds of God's children. This consoling truth has inspired many poets and song writers throughout the ages. Such comforting and encouraging sentiments were so beautifully expressed over 150 years ago by the great hymnist Henry Lyte who wrote,

Abide with me fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide,
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

The assurance of God that He will abide with us ought to embolden our confidence in times of adversity and turmoil. For anxiety, fear, and worry were laid down at the waters of baptism with the old man of sin. The new man in Christ has no use for these implements of despair. There is never a trial ahead of us that is as great as the One who is behind us, with us, and before us all the way.

For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go
by flight: for the LORD will go before you;
and the God of Israel will be your reward
(Isa. 52:12).

Yes, God will be our reward at all crossroads of life.
He will be our reward in times of conflict, crisis,
and crossings, even the great crossing from life unto
death. The psalmist penned,

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).

Please note that our Lord does not stand at the
other side of eternity, beckoning us to come to
him from afar. David reveals that God is with us
throughout the entire process. From the moment
we close our eyes in death until the moment we
step upon the glorious shores of eternity, God is
with us. David references the fact that God's rod
and staff are with God's children. Why were these
symbolic tools of care and guidance said to be with
the psalmist, even in death? It is because God will
be present wherever his rod and staff are present.
That includes the death of the righteous. We can
be confident that in times of adversity and turmoil,
we are not alone!

Confidence That Blessings Will Come

Yet despite the adversity and turmoil that life
may bring, we can yet praise God again and again
that through these difficult experiences, He offers us
the prospect of great blessings. That is how great
and powerful the Lord is in all things relative to

His children. He can take the basic dust of the ground and form a man with all of his complexities. He can also take the adversity and turmoil of a man and with those same elements mold that man into what he should become.

Of course, God's beneficial use of such troubles does not in any way remove personal initiative and accountability on our part. To get out of adversity, we must first go through it. God provides that opportunity. It is His gift to us, but what we become through adversity and turmoil is our gift to Him. Yet mankind is no doubt the greatest recipient of the gifts that are exchanged between God and man.

Consider just a few of the great blessings that God affords His people during difficult times. There is the blessing of purity that comes through threshing. Before the wheat has been threshed, it is of little use. Perhaps it could be used for feeding filthy livestock in a field, but when it has been threshed and prepared, it is fit for use on the banquet table of a king. The separation of the wheat from the chaff provides the grain value and utility (Dan. 2:35; Psm. 1:3-4). Adversity is God's threshing instrument upon His church. Persecution and trials purify God's people. It either makes us bitter or better, but the choice is ours, and the process is divine.

Secondly, exposure to hardship provides the blessing of inner growth of the mind and spirit. One can not become champion weightlifters who never lift heavy burdens. Straining and struggling are a part of the process for increasing stamina

and strength in our physical bodies. As the muscle is stretched and broken down under a load, new tissue forms over the old, and gain is the result. The same is true of God's people. God's church must strain and stretch under adversity to achieve the continued growth of the spiritual body of Christ. This process towards spiritual development and growth has always been in God's plan for His people. In fact historically, the fastest growth in the body of Christ occurred during a time of the greatest persecution of God's church (Acts 8:1-4). The church of Christ can never be the church God wants us to be if all adversity, afflictions, and discipline are taken away from us. As peculiar as it may seem, the trying times of life are for certain an opportunity for blessing from our loving God.

Thirdly, there is the blessing of fortitude that is gained through friction with the world. If you have ever shaken the hand of an old farmer you understand this point precisely. A farmer's hand is more calloused and toughened than one who works from a desk with paper and pen. The farmer's skin has adapted to the constant turmoil and adversity upon his hands. In a similar fashion, a Christian's spiritual resilience will increase and abound through adversity and trials of life. James wrote,

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience (James 1:2-3).

Confidence That We Will Overcome

During those difficult days of trial and turmoil,

Christians can have the full confidence in the promise of God that they will overcome all things. Paul affirmed this truth in the Roman epistle when he wrote,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

First, notice that God promises to work all things together for good. Some may mistakenly think that this verse is a guarantee that no bad things will ever happen to the faithful child of God. However, the Apostle himself had to suffer many adversities in his life for the cause of Christ (2 Cor. 11:24-28). Obviously, he is not teaching that the Christian is immune from turmoil or adversity. The two key words, "*all*" and "*together*," would include just that, the good, the bad, the happy and sad. The verse means precisely what it says—"*all things work together*." The blessed assurance we can receive in times of trial is that the mixture of all things will eventually work out for the good of all those under consideration in the passage.

Such great confidence is not available to the drunkard, the debased, the denominationalist, or even the derelict apostate. There is no assurance given to the rebellious, the reprobate, or simply the religious. The precious promise of providential care is made to a select group of people—to those who love God, and are called according to His purpose.

Love of God is a prerequisite in obtaining the bountiful blessing of assurance. Jesus provided the proper criteria of love, when he spake, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). One can not

separate love for God and commandment keeping. They go together like a hungry dog and a bone. You can not pull them apart! Like two oars in a row boat, the love for God and obedience to His will work together in perfect harmony to keep the boat moving.

Furthermore, the promise of overcoming adversity is offered to those who are called according to His purpose. God's purpose would exclude the ideologies of man. So many men seek to disguise their will for the Lord's. Yet keep in mind that the will of God will never take you to where the truth of God will not permit you to travel. In other words, we can not make claim that something is His will if His word demonstrates that we are simply pursuing our own. To be called according to His purpose requires that we know what His purpose is (Eccl. 12:13), and then faithfully apply it to our every day lives (Rev. 2:10).

One who is called by the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) and lives according to the purpose of God can have the confidence of overcoming adversity and turmoil in the end. Conversion and commitment are essential to the confidence we possess in the visage of hardship. If we persistently pursue these two principled objectives, the Lord will take care of everything else. It's our business to do God's business, and it's His business to take care of our business. He has promised us that he will do that very thing. Let us determine to do our part!

The eventual good provided to those who love God and are called according to His purpose is the eternal reward of Heaven above. Our Lord promised

such to his disciples who faced hardship for the cause of Christ.

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. 5:11-12).

Children of God, who suffer the harsh gauntlet of unjust criticism, personal attacks, or physical adversity, can gain great confidence and assurance knowing that their greatest reward yet awaits them above.

Conclusion

The child of God can have great confidence in times of adversity and turmoil. Through such trials we find comfort in the words of Paul who penned,

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Be confident, Christian! Be committed and consecrated throughout your trials of faith! Yes, adversity and turmoil will come, but God will also come to aid you in life's storms. He will provide abundant blessings as a result, and one day you will overcome all things. So in trying times let us not be fainthearted. Lift up the hands that droop. Let us

CONFIDENCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY/TURMOIL

take a deep breath, get our second wind, and then smile towards the glory of Heaven that awaits us just beyond the bright blue!

Above the bright blue, the beautiful blue
Jesus is waiting for me and for you
Heaven is there, not far from our sight
Beautiful city of light

Barry Gilreath, Jr.



Barry serves the Highland congregation in Dalton, Georgia as their evangelist, as well as one of the five elders. Faithfully preaching the gospel for several years, he serves as the excellent host of the television program **Fabric Of The Family** on the **Gospel Broadcasting Network** (DISH and Direct networks). Barry and his good family are an asset to the brotherhood.

Keys To Successful Christian Living



Ever Watchful
(Cautious)

This Chapter Written By

Bobby Liddell

Being watchful is a difficult, but absolutely necessary attribute of Christians. We may unwittingly let slip away truths once received, and gradually give up traits once regarded as part of our character. Or, we may unintentionally allow temptations to overcome us, and turn from the way of light that we once followed. Like solids in solution, the things in life that are weightier sometimes sink to the bottom in our thinking, if we are not watchful. Without our realizing it, the less important rises to the top and becomes that which has our attention. Yet, we need to remember, and especially do we need to be reminded of that which is of such vital, eternal importance to the salvation of our souls, our most precious possessions (Matt. 16:26), and we must ever be on the lookout for the dangers that threaten us spiritually (1 Peter 5:8). Thus, we need to be reminded of proper priorities (Matt. 6:33), lest we falter and fail through carelessness, or forgetfulness.

The Need For Reminders

The apostle Peter, who was well acquainted with

the possibility of doing the very thing he boasted he would never do (Matt. 26:31-35; 57-75), reminded his brethren, of the things they already knew, because it was his responsibility to do so. He wrote:

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth (2 Peter 1:12).

As do all preachers, Peter had the duty to bring "*these things*" before his brethren again, and he would not be negligent in his duty. Like the watchman of old (Ezek. 3:17-21), he would watch and give warning, to the saving of the souls of those who would heed the warning, but also to the saving of his own soul. Instead of negligent carelessness, he would be ready to put them "*always in remembrance of these things.*" No doubt his use of "*these things*" also looks back to the immediate context of the preceding verses.

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. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall

be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-11).

The Christians, to whom Peter wrote, needed to hear these great, stirring truths again, even though they already had heard them, knew them, and were established in them. They needed to have these things reemphasized unto them lest they be blind and forget they were purged from their old sins (2 Peter 1:9). If they did forget, they would fall, and would not enter the everlasting kingdom (2 Peter 1:10). They needed to be reminded of the obedience God had enjoined upon them that they might enjoy what God had promised to the obedient. So, Peter brought these things to their remembrance in order that they might be watchful, lest they become barren and unfruitful.

Certainly, we are all aware that our understanding should be increased with multiple exposures to the truth. Have we not studied these scriptures before? If it were the case that "*once taught*" meant "*always taught*," why study these same scriptures again? Why not read them once and rip them out of our Bibles? Or should we, having read through the entire Bible, put it on the shelf, never open it again, and consider ourselves as knowledgeable concerning God's Word as we ever could be? No, we need to be reminded. Likewise, we need to understand that once saved does not mean always saved, for one might enter the kingdom of Christ, and live faithfully for a while only to depart from the life of purity, and go back to the world, if he is not careful.

The wise preacher knows the need to remind,

and does so, by presenting sermons to refresh the memory, and to cause the listener to recall the truth already known (Matt. 11:4). He is ever vigilant in planning and preparing in order to insure that he preaches all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and that he brings to the listener's recollection the timely truths from the very throne of Heaven. For example, he knows the need to preach again and again on the subject of repentance. So, he plans to present, periodically, sermons that define repentance, and show the need for repentance, as well as the blessings that come when one repents. It just may be that one present this day was not present six months ago when this topic was presented. Another, today, may have reached the ability to understand and apply what he had not attained the last time this subject was preached. Yet another may, today, be pricked in his heart, and, by the preacher's building upon sermons in the past and reminding, one more time, of the need to repent, be convinced to do just that.

Peter realized his responsibility to remind even though they were established in the present truth. He had no new truth to bring to men, and neither do we (John 8:32; 17:17). The truth of God's Word is more than nineteen hundred years old, and has been once for all delivered (Jude 3). Those who love the truth can never hear it too many times. The simplest sermons are like cold water to a thirsty soul. They are like food to the starving, for the eager hearer is hungering and thirsting to hear and hear again the good news of a loving Savior who died to set him free.

Brethren, we have a solemn responsibility to remind all who will listen of the need to do what God would have us to do, and to be what God would have us to be. We dare not neglect our duty, for souls are at stake, including our own. *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober"* (1 Thess. 5:6). As well, we need to be reminded and should truly appreciate having brought before us again the precious message of God's love and grace, and the ever present danger of departing from it, or losing sight of it. The call to vigilant watchfulness is a call from hearts filled with love for our souls.

Peter reminded them because it was the right thing to do: *"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle..."* (2 Peter 1:13). In place of the word meet, the American Standard Version has right. Bringing these things to their remembrance was the right thing for Peter to do. It is right today. Let us never forget this vital point. We can never emphasize too much, nor too many times, the need to deny *"ungodliness and worldly lusts,"* and to *"live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:12). We can never say, or hear, too many times: *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"* (1 Cor. 16:13).

Peter knew he had a responsibility to remind his brethren as long as he was in his tabernacle (a tent, or temporary dwelling place); that is, in his fleshly body (2 Cor. 5:1ff; cf. Eccl. 12:7). We sometimes hear from members, who have "retired" from serving the Lord, statements such as, *"Well, I have done my part. Now it is time for the younger ones to do the work. After all, I have reached retirement age."* No, brethren, we

EVER WATCHFUL

must, as long as we inhabit this tabernacle (and, of course, have the ability physically and mentally) be actively, zealously, steadfastly laboring for the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). There is no retirement age for Christians. Older Christians should have the greatest knowledge, wisdom, experience, desire (as those nearer the doorway of Death), and influence after a long life of faithful service. We must not throw these abilities away, but use them until the last breath is drawn. Do we need to be reminded to be faithful to the end (Heb. 3:6)? Knowing the brevity and uncertainty of life, must we be cautioned again, and again, to watch? Jesus said, *"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is"* (Mark 13:33).

Peter reminded them in order to stir up his readers: *"... to stir you up by putting you in remembrance"* (2 Peter 1:13). To stir them to action was his reason for reminding.

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (2 Peter 3:1-2).

"Remember the Alamo" was a stirring call in years gone by to rally our countrymen. During World War II, the motivating cry was, *"Remember Pearl Harbor."* Now, we say, *"Remember 9-11."* Football coaches stir up their players by reminding them of the loss to the cross-town rivals at their home field by saying, *"Remember last year!"* Being reminded should stir up our minds, calling us to consider again what

should take precedence, what should have priority, and making us to be enthusiastic about living the Christian life. The Ephesians were called back to their first love by the Lord's saying, "*Remember*":

Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

In like manner, our partaking of the Lord's Supper is in remembrance of Christ:

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Some, rejecting the need for this reminder, relegate their observance to once a quarter, twice a year, or even once a year. They say partaking more often makes this sacred communion lose its meaning, and causes it to become commonplace. Well, the blessed Son of God said it was a reminder, whose observance is plainly shown to have been, and thus always to be, weekly (Acts 20:7), and in which we engage in remembrance of Him. Is it too much to remember, once a week, that He shed His blood and sacrificed His body for us? It certainly is not. If we do not have such reminders, we will surely forget, and

we will drift away from our spiritual moorings.

How did Peter propose to stir up his readers? By reminding them of *"these things."* When did he propose to do so? Right now, for the time of his departure was coming. Peter reminded them because he knew time was short: *"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me"* (2 Peter 1:12). While Peter was concerned about his brethren in the present, he was also concerned about what would happen after he put off his tabernacle; that is, after his death. He said such would happen *"shortly."* The American Standard Version has *"swiftly,"* better indicating that his death would come quickly when it did come. Peter's impending death was according to what the Lord had shown him (some thirty years earlier). No doubt, he refers to that which is recorded in John 21:18-19.

Peter, now an old man, was spurred on by his knowledge that death was coming:

Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance (2 Peter 1:14-15).

He used the word exodus in writing of his death. Truly, death is a departure that is not far from any of us. *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"* (Heb. 9:27). Should one live to be a centenarian, what is that in comparison to eternity? Thus, Peter wanted to remind them so that after his passing they would remember. By his inspired writing, he still accomplishes what he intended, and yet encourages all to faithfulness.

What will we leave behind? Will our labors bring

blessings of happy remembrance? Will our teaching by word and deed be a memorial to Christian living, and spur on those whom we leave behind? Surely, we should be caused to think soberly when we contemplate our respective legacies. We often hear preachers say they speak as dying men to dying men, which truly is the case. Like Job, our days pass faster than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6).

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psm. 90:10).

Our lives are like a vapor that appears for a little time, then vanishes away (James 4:14), and we do not know what the morrow will bring (Prov. 27:1).

In view of these facts, we need to get busy reminding men what God has said, calling them to become and to remain Christians, and calling them to be ever on guard lest sin should creep back into their lives, or Satan should gain advantage, or the Lord's return be to their eternal ruin because they were unprepared (Matt. 25:1-30). We dare not neglect doing what is right, by stirring up the brethren, urging them to get ready, and to stay ready. We dare not fail to remind, for time is so short. Just so, we all need reminding. We all need to remember, for we will remember after a while, if not in this life:

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now

he is comforted, and thou art tormented
(Luke 16:25).

Let us remember now, to follow the way that is right and cannot be wrong. Let us hear the loving call to come to Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30), that we may avoid an eternity of the deepest and most horrible regret, remembering how we failed to prepare. So, Peter said he would endeavor, or give diligence, just as he exhorted them to do (2 Peter 1:10). That was his focus. To the end that they might, even after his death, *"Have these things always in remembrance,"* he diligently labored.

When one forgets his rewards, he forsakes his responsibilities; and when he forgets his responsibilities, he forsakes his rewards. We must *"keep in memory"* the good news *"that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"* (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Likewise, we must be ever vigilant, not only of safeguarding our own souls, but also in reminding others of these great truths, and warning them of impending doom should they disregard and disobey that alone by which they might have salvation.

The Need For Readiness

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

There will be a day in which all men will be judged. There is no question that there will be such a day, nor is there any doubt that we all will be there, but, the question is, "*Are we ready for the judgment day?*" Life is short, and death is coming (James 4:14). As surely as we have an appointment with death, we have an appointment with judgment (Heb. 9:27). Let us seek to understand the need for readiness for that great judgment day, to the intent that better understanding will spur us on to being ever watchful.

Jesus promised He will come back (John 14:1-4), but we do not know when (Matt. 24:36). He will return, in His second coming (Heb. 9:28), as the apostles saw Him ascend (Acts 1:11). When Christ comes, He will not set foot on earth, but all (both good and bad) in the graves will be resurrected (John 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:50-58), and the saved will "*meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (1 Thess. 4:17). On that day,

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 (2 Pet. 3:9).

So there will be no earth upon which man could continue to live, nor on which Christ could reign (as premillennialists falsely assert; cf. Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 6:13; Heb. 8:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:23-24). That day will be the last day, and eternity will begin (John 12:48).

All nations will be present on that great day (Matt. 25:32). We ALL will be there.

For we must all appear before the judgment

seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

Christ will judge the whole world on that day (Acts 17:31), and all those who are ready will be there (Rev. 2:10), but all those who are not ready will also be present, and will be judged (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Jesus Christ the Lord will judge (Acts 17:31; John 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8), and He will separate the good from the wicked (Matt. 25:32). The righteous will be told, *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25:34), but the wicked will hear: *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matt. 25:41). Jesus said, *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"* (Matt. 25:46).

There will be no *"second chance"* on (or after) the day of judgment. Christ is not coming back to preach the Gospel, for He has already done that (Mark 1:14-15). He is not coming back to invite men to come to Him (Matt. 11:28-30), for He has already done that. All men will settle up with God on that day, the last day (John 12:48), and there will be no more opportunity to hear the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), to believe in Christ (John 8:24), to repent of sins (Acts 2:38), to confess faith in Him (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10), to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Gal. 3:26-27; Acts 2:38), nor to live faithfully as a child of God (1 John 1:7-10; 1 Cor. 15:58). If one never found a convenient season before, it will be too late then (Acts 24:25). If one were almost, but

not altogether, persuaded, it will be too late on that day (Acts 26:28). If one knew better, but did not do better, it will be too late. If one had "*good intentions*" of obeying God, but never did, it will be too late. For church members who warmed a pew, were lukewarm, apathetic, and indifferent, it will be too late. Those who failed to watch will wish forever that they had (Mark 13:34ff).

On that last day, the standard of judgment will not be any of the following: man's opinions, ideas, wishful thinking, or the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9). Likewise, these will not be taken into account: what the majority believes, likes, or wants; what loved ones believed or practiced; what the world approved; what appealed to the worldly, ungodly, carnal, or hypocritical; what synods, conventions, and forums of men decided; or what felt good, seemed right, or promoted union (not real unity). It will not be a day of escape by placing blame on others, and there will be no appeal. The judgment will be righteous (Acts 17:31), based on each man's deeds (2 Cor. 5:10), as compared with the books (Old and New Testaments), and the Book of Life (Rev. 20:12-15). Jesus said:

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

For all living in the Christian age, the basis of judgment will be the Word of Christ. Teachings of Islam, Confucius, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc., will not be the basis of judgment.

Friends, God means what He says, and He will have the last word. There will be a day when Christ

EVER WATCHFUL

will judge the world (Jude 14-15). None will avoid this day when the Lord will decree eternal destinies for all. For the righteous, there will be great reward, but for the wicked, there will be eternal punishment. Certainly, it behooves us to be ready. Watch and pray!

Bobby Liddell



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Keys To Successful Christian Living

Challenges Facing The Church / Home Today

This Chapter Written By

Curtis A. Cates

Introduction

When studying the theme “*Keys to a Successful Christian Life*” (and *Reaching Our Eternal Home in Heaven*), it is appropriate to examine some of the challenges to the home and to the Lord’s church. We live in a day in which old-time moral standards, and thus ethics, in our beloved country have been increasingly attacked, especially since World War II. The value system upon which the United States was established is seriously threatened. Some have rejoiced as God’s absolute standard of morality and ethics has been ridiculed and abandoned by many, while others have been alarmed at the evident trends toward abandonment of former values which were characteristic of our society.

One has but to observe the influence of Secular Humanism and moral relativism in our schools, in the media, and in Hollywood to realize that God [and, consequently, His Word] and Biblical morality have been ruled out and new “*values*” have become the

major thrust. We are facing a moral crisis in America. With rapid and tremendous advances in technological and medical fields, there is an ever-increased and urgent need for a moral/ethical standard. Yet, in the field of human philosophy, there is a searching, a saying of "Lo here," and "Lo there." Human reasoning is unsure of itself;

O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23).

Paul affirmed that when people have turned to human reasoning (cf. Col. 2:8), they "*became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened*" (Rom. 1:21). Why? It was "*because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks.*" Can that happen to our beloved nation, to the church, to our homes, to us as individuals? Are the consequences good, positive, and beneficial?

When in Scouting, the writer learned to orient his map of the woods, using a compass. Also, when a child, the author [and others in the United States] knew the difference between right and wrong. He was taught the "*truth*" in the areas of morality and ethics. In the minds of most people, the matters of morality, honesty, and ethics were not subject to individual opinion; they were not subject to the "*situation*" [also known as "*situation ethics*"]. Might it not be the sad, regrettable case that we have lost our moral and religious compass and are walking aimlessly and without direction through the deep "*woods*" of this life? Has this had a positive effect on the home and on the church? Has it enhanced

our individual needs of security, love, acceptance, fulfillment, and hope? What challenges do the move away from and decline in belief in God, in morality, and in ethics present to the family and to the Lord's people?

The Challenge Of The Rejection Of God

With the appearance of Humanist Manifest I [1933] of Humanist Manifesto II (1973), of A Humanist Declaration, et al., our society has seen an increased attack upon and rejection of belief in God, our Creator. In the futile attempt to chase God out of His universe [*"but there is a God in heaven"* (Dan. 2:28)], some have averred that the universe is self-existing, and that its marvels of unity and indescribable beauty came about by a mere accident and by the fate of nature. The religion of atheistic Humanism claims [unscientifically] that life came from non-life and that human beings are but a product of mindless evolution and are thus merely advanced animals [certainly not created in God's image]. Note: *"As non-theists [atheists – CAC], we begin with humans not God, nature not deity....But we can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves"* (Humanist Manifesto II, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, p. 16).

When God is ruled out, mankind is without chart or compass for life; morals are not grounded in the absolute Divine Standard, the Word of God, but are simply the product of the experiences of human beings. Thus, ethics are situational [depending

upon what man at a certain time and place thinks may bring personal “*happiness*” and “*fulfillment*”]. If there is no God, then the question involves whose values are going to be the authority, what are those authoritative values, and are those values going to be constantly changing?

In previous generations, most people in our society turned to the Bible as the standard of right and wrong and as the valid basis of moral decisions. The principles in God’s Word were the commonly accepted and shared rules for morality and ethics; they have been the undergirdings of our society.

Speaking of His people in the Old Testament, God through Moses stated the wisdom and understanding and blessings of keeping His sacred statutes.

For what great nation is there, that hath a god so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:6-8).

When they respected and observed God’s laws, He blessed them; when societies respect God’s will today, He will bless them. “*Righteousness exalteth a nation; But sin is a reproach to any people*” (Prov. 14:34). When a culture places more emphasis upon the secular and less emphasis upon God and His standard of morality, that culture is in spiritual decline; very often, those who plead for the values which have underpinned the nation are either dismissed out of hand or belittled. And, some do not speak out.

Paul warned that when societies reject the knowledge of God and reject the revelation and inspiration of His Word in attempt to answer the basic questions of life [Where did I originate? What is my purpose in life? and Where am I going?], it always ends in vain speculation and vain imaginations (Rom. 1:18-25). In fact, man cannot even understand himself (1:26-32). Apart from the Holy Scriptures, human beings are unable to direct their own steps (Jer. 10:23). Paul warns against human traditions, philosophies, and rudiments of the world (Col. 2:8).

The Challenge Of The Lack Of Responsibility And Self-Sacrifice

God, our Creator, wants human beings to be truly happy. No one has to inform Him as to what makes us happy, for He created us; we are made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). *"...he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man"* (John 2:25). Solomon set forth to find out what makes a person truly happy; he *"applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly"* (Eccl. 1:17). He, in carrying out his scientific experiment, formed several hypotheses [first, pleasure; second, human wisdom; and third, riches] and collected the data on each. He rejected each of these hypotheses, for he found that each one failed to bring genuine happiness. He then turned to another hypothesis—that obedience to the Word of God brings true joy and fulfillment. Notice his conclusion: *"This is the end of the matter; all has been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man"* (12:13). He found that life

wrapped up in oneself alone is vain, unfulfilling, and sad; we need to think of God and of others.

Christ came to teach us the life and joy of serving God and others. He *"came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10); *"the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28). He taught His apostles the invaluable lesson by stooping to wash their feet [when they had refused to humble themselves to wash each other's feet (John 13:1-17)]. Our Lord taught the great principle of loving our neighbors as ourselves, as well as honoring our fathers and mothers (Matt. 19:19). That is the second great commandment (22:39). We all remember the good Samaritan and the Lord's command to *"Go and do thou likewise"* (Luke 10:27-37). What if we all took seriously the admonition of the apostle Paul,

...doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other [people] better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... (Phil. 2:3-5)?

Would it enhance our society?

Our Lord, thus, taught us to be willing to sacrifice for others; He also taught us responsibility. Even the Lord of heaven and earth came *"down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). Like Christ, we are to obey God's commands; *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:4). Christ stated, *"Every one therefore*

that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened to a wise man..." (7:24). "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

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, KJV).

In order to become a Christian and to be thus freed from sin, we must sacrifice *"self,"* we must submit to the rule of Christ [who is King over His kingdom], we must repent of past sins, we must confess that He is the Son of God, and we then must be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:15-16). We are thus delivered *"out of the power of darkness,"* and are translated *"into the kingdom of the Son of his love"* (Col. 1:13-14). We must then keep the old man of sin buried, as did Paul (1 Cor. 9:27), *"through love be servants one to another"* (Gal. 5:13), and *"present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God....And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."* (Rom. 12:1-2).

Increasingly in our culture, it seems, less emphasis is being placed upon individual service, self-sacrifice on behalf of others, and individual responsibility and more emphasis upon self, upon pleasure, upon being free from personal sacrifice and pain, and upon being free from thinking of the needs of one's fellow human being. *"We must watch out for Number One,"* the saying goes. Regarding our nation years ago, President John F. Kennedy spoke these memorable words, *"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."*

Sometimes when we think only of ourselves, we may have a tendency to abandon some God-given principles of right and wrong; Eve, when tempted and deceived by the devil, thought only of herself and thus ate the forbidden fruit; she had to suffer the consequences. Satan had convinced her that God was trying to take away her "*rights*," whereas God was actually trying to get her to fulfill her responsibility of obedience to His command and thus to maintain her life of freedom in the magnificent Garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

God created us male and female (Gen. 1:26-27), and He instituted marriage (2:24). The writer of Hebrews stated,

Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4).

Unfaithfulness to the marriage bond is "*a heinous crime*" (Job 31:9-12); God hates putting away, "*therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously*" (Mal. 2:14-16). Christ commanded, "*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*" (Matt. 19:6; cf. 19:9).

In emphasizing "*the preciousness and dignity of the individual person*," which they affirm is "*a central humanist value*," the Humanist Manifesto II stated,

The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitative, 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.... (Ibid, p. 18).

The Challenge Of Liberty Without Law

We live in a nation of freedoms and law; liberty requires the existence of law. Not only did Adam and Eve have freedom from the bondage of sin, in the Garden, but they also had the law of God. When they disobeyed, they lost the blessings of Eden.

When the Hebrews were freed from their cruel taskmasters in Egypt by being “*baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea*” (1 Cor. 10:1-2), the Lord placed them under law, for freedom without law is impossible. Liberty without law is license to do whatever one’s heart desires. However, when persons do what they desire [without restraints or restrictions], it inevitably ends in anarchy. It has been correctly observed that “*My freedom ends where your nose begins.*” Any civilized society must be characterized by laws and by punishment when those laws are broken. Otherwise, chaos will develop, and out of chaos will come bondage and slavery under a dictatorship or a dictatorial regime. God did not want the Hebrews, His chosen Old Testament people, to return full-circle into bondage—which they ultimately did some seven to eight hundred years later.

We can understand why Christ said,

If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32).

It is certainly unbecoming for Christians [who have in Christ gained freedom from the taskmasters of sin and Satan, their former master] to “*continue to sin, that grace may abound*” (Rom. 6:1-2). When one escapes the defilements of the world, to be again entangled therein, it is the height of folly; he departs from freedom in Christ back into the pollutions of the world; “*the last state is become worse than the first*” (2 Peter 2:20-22). The same is true of any culture; whenever a nation’s laws have been based upon the Divine Standard, the Holy Scriptures, and upon its principles of morality, honesty, human dignity, and ethics, that nation’s freedoms are in jeopardy.

These Challenges Faced By The Home

Marriage and the family unit are facing ever-increasing pressures and attacks as God is becoming increasingly rejected, as the principles of responsibility and sacrifice are being ignored or bemoaned in our society, and as more and more persons seek individual freedom and “*rights*” apart from the restrictions and protection of law. God’s authority in our personal lives and in our homes to many people is a relic of the past, in spite of the fact that the home is the foundation of society. The God-given two-parent family is often the subject of ridicule, and the role of fatherhood in the home is often abdicated (Eph. 5:22-33). And often, God’s prohibition against having sexual relations out of marriage is not taught. God’s will is that young men and young women keep themselves pure for marriage. “*Keep thyself pure*” (1 Tim. 5:22). “*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example to them*

that believe...in purity" (4:12). "But flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). "Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to distain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). The love of the world brings spiritual and eternal death (1 John 2:15-17).

In the home, there is to be the family unit; therefore, there is the responsibility of the husband and father, the wife and mother, and the children. One's self-interest and pleasures do not take superiority over what one owes to his/her home and family. The family and marriage, sacred in the sight of God, must be stable if society would be stable. Marriage is to be permanent, "*till death do us part*" (Rom. 7:1-3). As God's standard of morality is increasingly abandoned, the home should appreciate and treasure its regulations more deeply and train our children to love and cherish His sacred missions and commandments for their lives. As the influences in our culture, in our schools, in the media, in Hollywood become increasingly Humanistic and secular, the duties of bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord becomes increasingly urgent (Eph. 6:4). They must be taught Biblical morality, honesty, ethics, and service. "*Great peace have they that love thy law; and they have no occasion of stumbling*" (Psm. 119:165). Great responsibility rests upon the husband and the wife toward each other in marriage, and it rests, as well, upon them as parents.

In addition, responsibility rests upon the children.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord:
for this is right. Honor thy father and

mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long upon the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

Even a child maketh himself known by his doings, Whether his work be pure, and whether it be right (Prov. 20:11).

In the Godly home, children learn to sacrifice, to share, to cooperate, to serve, to be pure, to live within constraints, to have commitment, and to love. These great attributes will serve him or her well all the years of his or her life. Deeply blessed are the communities, the states, the societies, the nations, whose children are brought up in the Lord's nurturing.

These Challenges Faced By The Church

Christianity and the New Testament church are also facing great challenges. Like the home and the nation, the Lord's church was instituted by God. The church was in the eternal purpose of God and is a manifestation of His manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10-11). It was built by Christ (Matt. 16:18), who is its Head. As King over His church/kingdom (Acts 2:29-36), Christ has all authority (Matt. 28:18).

One challenge of the Lord's church is to affirm and preach the existence of the God of heaven and earth, as did the apostle Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-31).

...there is no God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the

Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

A second challenge of the Lord's church is to be set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17), to maintain the New Testament pattern (Acts 2:42; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:16; Heb. 8:4-6; Exod. 25:40; 2 Tim. 1:13); to reject feelings, subjectivism, and relativism and accept and abide in truth (Rom. 10:17; John 8:32); and to "*Preach the word*" (2 Tim. 4:2).

A third challenge of the Lord's church is to maintain moral and ethical purity. We remember when sin arose in Corinth and the brethren did not love their brother enough to mourn over this wickedness, Paul rebuked them and commanded them to rid the congregation of this old leaven and to seek to save his soul (1 Cor. 5:1-13). As the result, the erring brother repented and was forgiven and comforted by the brethren (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

A fourth challenge of the Lord's church is to sacrifice on behalf of others and to demonstrate a servant's heart. The church in Jerusalem cared deeply for each other, even to the point of having all things common and of selling their possessions and parting the monies to all, as they had need (Acts 2:43-46). They were of "*one heart and soul*" (4:32). They suffered and rejoiced as one, and they showed great lamentation over Stephen, who was stoned to death for preaching the Word (Acts 7:54-8:2); they together endured great persecution for their moral and ethical goodness, for their helping to save souls, and for their adherence to the Scriptures.

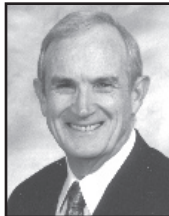
A fifth challenge of the Lord's church is to realize that one's soul is worth more than things, worldly pleasures, riches. The rich young ruler preached to himself that "*things*" were his most valuable possessions, whereas Christ stated that "*a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*" (Luke 12:13-21).

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).

Conclusion

Life is serious, the temptations are great, and the challenges to us as individuals, to our marriages, and to the church are many in number. Let us fortify ourselves in the gospel of Christ and be anchored in hope.

Curtis A. Cates



Brother Cates has been faithfully preaching the gospel for almost fifty years. Holds various degrees from respected universities. Served as Director of the Memphis School of Preaching (1982-2007). Author of various superb volumes. Mission work in Singapore, Malaysia, and Russia. Annette and Curtis have two sons (both are faithful gospel preachers) and four grandchildren.

Keys To Successful Christian Living

***Needs Of The Church
In Today's World ~
Spiritual Leaders***

This Chapter Written By

Barry Gilreath, Jr.

Introduction

Effective leaders are critical to the success of any great organization. Whether on a ball field or battlefield, accomplishment is closely aligned with the effectiveness of leadership. A business will not succeed, a family will not thrive and a church will not prosper without leaders spurring them onward to victory.

So often when the subject of spiritual leadership is considered, the greatest focus is on the office and function of elders. Though these men are indeed the overseers of the local congregation and vital to the growth and health of the spiritual body of Christ, there are many others within a congregation who provide needed spiritual leadership who will never obtain the office of a bishop. Deacons are spiritual leaders. Bible school teachers are spiritual leaders too. Those who lead the singing, visit the erring, send cards to the sick, offer tracts to visitors, or simply lend a listening ear to a troubled soul, demonstrate

facets of spiritual leadership that aid the church of Christ.

Maybe you have never thought of yourself as a spiritual leader. You are not an elder, deacon or Bible school teacher. You do not take a public lead in the worship assembly and feel ill-equipped to assume some leadership position in the church. Spiritual leadership is something that you see in the person sitting across from your pew or the men who serve as elders of the congregation, but you do not see yourself as possessing the ability to lead others in spiritual matters.

Though it is true that not everyone scripturally qualifies to assume certain tasks such as the work of a bishop or deacon, please consider that in the Bible the vast majority of spiritual leaders came from very modest beginnings and did not arise to greatness overnight. Moses did not regard himself as an especially effective public speaker (Exod. 4:10-12). He was even doubtful at first that he was capable of such a great task as leading God's people out of Egypt. However, God saw something in Moses that he did not see in himself. That is often the way it is with those who possess the ability to lead in spiritual matters. Others will see in us potential that we are oblivious to.

Then there was the young man David who was but a lowly shepherd boy tending to sheep day after day. I am quite confident that as he watched the rams, lambs and ewes grazing upon the grassy hills surrounding Jerusalem, he never could have imagined himself as the eventual king and spiritual leader of the sheep of God's pasture. Yet look at the

heights that this unlikely lad attained. For certain there were naysayers such as his own brother Eliab who downplayed the potential for leadership that his little brother possessed (1 Sam. 15:28); and those who could arise to grasp the reins of spiritual leadership within God's church today will have their critics as well. Yet such pessimism didn't put David in a box and neither should it contain us either.

Then there was an outdoorsman named Peter who in his early life would not have fit the common profile of a leader in sacred matters. He was a blue collar worker, laboring aboard a fishing vessel on the Sea of Galilee. His appearance would have presented a weathered look through constant exposure to the sun and wind of the high seas. His hands would have been calloused with the feel of sandpaper from the years of physical labor in his vocation as a fisherman. It would be expected that this man of men could have discussed with ease the art of fishing, the dangers of strong water currents, and the hardships of life on the sea. Yet, who could have envisioned him standing before the small and the great on Pentecost Day, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ on such a historic occasion? The Lord certainly saw such leadership potential in this seafaring fisherman, just as He so often sees such similar potential in our lives long before we perceive it and believe it.

Maybe you work in a factory and punch a clock week after week. You are struggling to make a living and sometimes have difficulty seeing past tomorrow. Perhaps you sit behind a desk and calculate numbers for a living or you work outside everyday, dealing

with cold, rain, and heat throughout the changing seasons. If such is your lot in life, you are not all that different from the likes of many of God's great spiritual leaders from days gone by. Truly it matters not whether you are a doctor, cab driver, or college student. Spiritual leadership is within your grasp as a child of God. If you have obeyed the Gospel of Christ, you are a new man created unto good works (Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10). God can accomplish great things through your life. God can even exceed your own expectations for yourself. Remember that He is the same Lord who used a young boy and a sling to bring down a giant. He is the same innovative God who used an old rugged cross and a few nails to bring down the power of sin. He can do a great work through you if you will only permit him to use you up in His service. It matters not what talents or abilities you have in your hands today, it only matters that you are willing to allow God to use you in His hands today.

Consider where the world would be without the godly man Noah? He didn't have much to offer, but he gave his all, and through such a life he found grace in God's eyes. God used him to preach to a lost and dying world, and then to replenish the earth following the devastation of the flood. You and I owe our very existence to the willingness of Noah to use what he had in his possession to the service and glory of God.

Consider also, how the history of Israel might have been altered had it not been for the humble servant Moses who went before Pharaoh with ineloquent speech, and yet profound message of

authority (Exod. 9:1). If it had not been for Moses' willingness to stretch his leadership abilities beyond his comfort level, the Hebrews might have remained in slavery for yet another 400 years. We ought to thank the God of Heaven and earth for men like Moses who will allow the Lord to use them as He sees fit.

Consider also, the early formative years of the church of Christ. What would the household of faith have resembled had it not been for the spiritual leadership and meek service provided by the man of God named Paul? We all owe a great debt of gratitude for this man who was willing to radically change his entire life so that he might walk in harmony with his conscience and the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was through Paul's wiliness to use what he had, a pen and paper, that the Lord provided most of our New Testament.

Yes, the Lord has always paned each generational horizon in search for spiritual leaders to carry His mantle of truth. He longs for servants like the prophet Elijah who are confident in Jehovah, and will boldly plunge into the thickets of his work. He seeks men of God like Isaiah who penned, *"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me"* (Isa. 6:8). God still needs spiritual leaders today who will arise to the urgent call of leadership and provide motivation, guidance and example in the greatest work and cause known to man today. Yet relatively few Christians embrace the call for spiritual leadership within God's church. It is far easier to sit in our easy chair and wait for others to do what needs to be done. However, we can not become so lax in our faith and

righteous fervor. The cause of the Lord is too great and the stakes are too high. Soldiers of Christ must arise and put their armor on!

Spiritual Leaders Adhere To The Faith

The Bible says, *“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* To do something by faith, one must respond in accordance with the teaching of the Bible. One can not be a spiritual leader for the Lord who does not passionately pursue the spiritual things of God. It is not sufficient to acknowledge a god, or to even give lip service to the God. Faithfulness requires that we bond to the faith like paper to glue. Only then can we become a spiritual leader for the cause of Christ.

Some erroneously assume that an important quality of a spiritual leader is one who wins friends and influences people. Such a flawed formula ignores the paramount relationship of friendship with God above all else (James 4:4). Far too many professed Christians want to be the friend of all men, even to the extent of forsaking friendship with God. Winning friends is not the primary objective of a godly spiritual leader (Gal. 1:10), and if one’s efforts do not influence others towards becoming Christ-like, what eternal good has one accomplished?

The great Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, *“A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.”* Such would also describe spiritual leaders for God. Good leaders do not put their finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing before they determine their values and beliefs. God’s leaders are to be molders

of consensus, and that consensus is the system of faith delivered once to the saints (Jude 3). It is complete, perfect and profitable for all doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). In pursuit of the faith, popularity with the masses will evaporate. Spiritual leadership is not demonstrated in doing whatever it takes to be liked by the brethren or by those in the world. It is doing whatever it takes to be pleasing to God, and then motivating others to follow in our example (Exod. 32:31-34 Heb. 11:5; 1 Cor. 11:1).

Spiritual Leaders Answer The Door Of Opportunity

Why is it that so many do not arise to the call for spiritual leadership in the church? Could it be fear? Perhaps the fear of failing or confronting new challenges hinders some from walking through doors of opportunity for leadership. Christians must overcome any fear that immobilizes them from spiritual leadership.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7).

We must arise and set loose the ropes that keep us in the familiar waters of the marina. A ship is not built to stay docked in the safety of the harbor. A ship is made to sail, and so are we as God's recreation through Christ.

Spiritual Leaders Attempt Impossible Things

Have you ever stopped to consider that the number of people who fail is proportionate to the number of people who never attempt something or else quit once they have begun? This is not to suggest that there will be no setbacks along the way in leadership; however, a hindrance need not be the end of the road for spiritual leaders. Setbacks are opportunities for faith development and inner growth. Hurdles should not become excuses for failure or reasons to run for the exits. Moses surely faced many obstacles along the way from Egypt, yet as he stood with the Red Sea at his face and the Egyptians at his back, he yet affirmed,

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever (Exod. 14:13).

When we like Moses are faced with trying times and difficult people, we must resist the temptation to jump ship or to turn and run. Quitting is not an acceptable alternative. We must press onward with the wind in our face and the Lord as our guide.

One ship sails east and another sails west
With the self-same winds that blow.
Tis the set of the sail and not the gale
Which determines the way they go.

Spiritual Leaders Admit When Mistakes Are Made

Spiritual leaders are not superhuman. They are not above the mark of transgression. Sometimes elders will sin. Preachers can miss the mark too. Deacons, bible school teachers and other spiritual leaders will fall short of the glory of God at times. However, one quality of a spiritual leader is that they do not equate confession of wrongdoing as a fatal character flaw.

Contrariwise, confession is an attribute of strength and moral fiber in spiritual leaders. David affirmed that such a quality was an attribute of a godly person (Psm. 32:6). In fact, Psalm 51 is a very painful confession of wrongdoing that King David penned in response to his adultery and hand in the murder of an innocent man. Personally, I do not know of anyone in the pages of Holy Writ who admitted to wrong doing more often than David; yet, who would deny this man the rightful description of a spiritual leader for the Lord? David was a leader in spiritual matters because David was willing to face the music, even when he did not like the tune. God needs spiritual leaders like David who do not struggle with a confession recession. Confession is good for the mind, body, and spirit. It is good for the church as well. Spiritual leaders will lead the way in admitting wrongdoing when mistakes are made.

Spiritual Leaders Appreciate The Service Of Others

Lighthouses are not in competition, and neither

are spiritual leaders. They appreciate the service of others from days gone by, and value such sacrifice in those who lead in the present. When seeking to direct Christians from the path of apostasy, the Hebrew writer reminded his readers of the great servants of God from previous generations (Heb. 11). There was not one shred of jealousy indicated in his use of former leaders in the faith. They were all on the same team, and he greatly valued their examples of faith and devotion. Spiritual leaders today will do the same.

Not only do we have the inspired accounts of the heroes of faith in our Bibles, but we are also blessed with those uninspired examples of Christians who have fought the good fight of faith and blazed the trail for the Lord's church in more recent times. These men ought to be upheld and honored for their years of sacrifice and service. What a disgrace it is to hear so called church leaders speaking despairingly of the men who helped to mold others into what they are today. May we never fall prey to petty jealousies and ungodly envy which is rooted in worldliness and sinful behavior. May we always uphold and give honor to those who have faithfully proclaimed and advanced the work of the Lord in generations before and those that may yet come. Let us always value the sacrifice and service of others who have in the past or yet continue in the present to labor in the kingdom of God's dear Son. Such is not only a quality of true spiritual leadership, but most assuredly a trait of Christians in general.

Spiritual Leaders Annoy The Devil And His Messengers

One thing that all godly spiritual leaders have in common is that they are a thorn in the flesh to the Devil and his servants. Perhaps this is why Satan would rather do nothing more than to bring about the demise of those who would arise to the call of spiritual leadership in the church. The old Devil walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He exploits temptation, harassment, discouragement, trying times, and any other means he can use to get a foothold in his assault upon spiritual leaders. We must be mindful of the wiles of the Devil (Eph. 6:11) and resist him in the faith so that he will flee from us (James 4:7). We can not afford to give him an inch or he will take a yard, and fight for more. Satan knows what is at stake when Christians arise to the call for leadership in the Lord's church. He fully understands the threat that such people pose to his devilish agenda. He is more afraid of a hundred sheep led by one lion, than one hundred lions led by one sheep. Therefore, he will try his best to intimidate, agitate, castigate, investigate, and berate those who would dare step forward to serve as a spiritual leader among the Lord's people. We must prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually for the great battle that is before us and then march undistracted towards the glory of Heaven.

Conclusion

God is still searching the ends of the earth for people to stand in the gap and lead his church

NEEDS OF THE CHURCH: SPIRITUAL LEADERS

on to glory. He still seek out leaders who will not backup, shut-up, or give-up one inch to His enemies. He is looking to His church for candidates. He sees that potential in us all. He asks not that we do that which we can not do, but only that we allow Him to accomplish that which He can do through us and in us all. We are but the tool. He is the carpenter. Are you ready to be used in His service as He sees fit? You can do it! Jehovah will be your shield and exceeding great reward (Gen. 15:1).

Your leadership is not for the betterment of one's self, though one is made better by it. It is not for the purpose of gain in admiration, though men will admire you in your leadership. The spiritual leadership that you offer to Christ is for the purpose of bringing unselfish glory to the Lord and His church. May we always seek to hide behind the cross of Christ and in the shadow of His glory!

Barry Gilreath, Jr.



Barry serves the Highland congregation in Dalton, Georgia as their evangelist, as well as one of the five elders. Faithfully preaching the gospel for several years, he serves as the excellent host of the television program **Fabric Of The Family** on the **Gospel Broadcasting Network** (DISH and Direct networks). Barry and his good family are an asset to the brotherhood.

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Peace, Joy And Happiness Of A Christian

This Chapter Written By

Perry B. Cotham

It is a delight to again visit this good congregation and speak on your lectureship. Many of you, like Paul and LaDon have been my dear friends for many years. Too, it is good have visiting brethren from a number of nearby congregations to come and be with us. The East Hill congregation continues to do a great and good work for the Lord.

Our subject for this hour's study is "*Peace, Joy and Happiness of a Christian.*" Truly, as the Scriptures teach, there is peace, joy and happiness in this life by being a faithful and devoted child of God and eternal life in the world to come.

The Peace Of God

Jesus said to His disciples, prior to His leaving this world to return to the Father:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

The apostle Paul in his writings to Christians often spoke of *"peace from God the Father"* (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:2, etc.). He also spoke of *"joy and peace in believing"* to the Romans (15:13), and *"we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement"* (5:11). The wise man Solomon declared, *"whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he"* (Prov. 16:20), and *"he that keepeth the law, happy is he"* (Prov. 29:18).

To suffering Christians Peter wrote, *"if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye"* (1 Peter 3:14). And James said, *"we count them happy which endure"* (James 5:11). Again Peter said, *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye"* (1 Peter 4:14). The Psalmist declared: *"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them"* (Psm. 119:165).

People of the world think that living a life of sin and wickedness is a real way to have happiness in this life, and that faithful Christians are missing out in much real happiness. This is not true. To live by the teaching of the Holy Spirit in God's word brings, among other things, *"joy, peace"* (Gal. 5:22), and finally heaven. Moses was a great man of faith. He refused *"to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season... for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward"* (Heb. 11:25-26; cf. Psm. 1:1-2; Matt. 7:13-14).

Christians Are To Be Happy In Life

Jesus began the great Sermon on the Mount by

speaking what is commonly called, "*The Beatitudes*," statements beginning with the word "*Blessed*." However, many translations, and commentaries, like to begin the statements with the word "*happy*." "*Happy are the pure in heart; for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8, etc.).

The New Testament translation, **The Living Oracles**, uses the word "*happy*" to introduce each statement. George M. Campbell assisted in the translation of this book. Alexander Campbell in his study, liked this translation and had it reprinted, adding some helpful notes and comments at the end of the book. Philip Doddridge also used the word "*happy*" in his book on the translation of the New Testament.

Christians are taught in the Scriptures not to be full of worry and anxiety, but to have inward peace, joy and happiness in their hearts. Jesus also said in this sermon,

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on (Matt. 6:25).

Taking "*thought*," as used in our old King James A. D. 1611 Version, is better rendered by translators as "*do not worry, or be filled with anxiety*." "*Be happy*." The same is true of Paul's statement to the Christians in Philippians 4:6: "*Be careful for nothing*." "*Be anxious for nothing*." (ASV). The Bible teaches that we are to obey the Lord, put the kingdom of God first in our lives, and not try to be crossing the bridges before we get to them. Leave the results up to the Lord; He will take care of us. "*God will take care of you*" we often sing. This is a true statement.

A good friend of mind, C. R. Nichol, a great gospel preacher in his day, was walking up town one day and as he came near a store one of the clerks said, "*Brother Nichol, you walk like you owned the universe.*" And with a quick flash, he replied: "*My heavenly Father does.*" And he walked on. Yes, we are the children of God! The Lord loves us!

So Paul could say to those who were living in obedience to God to not be full of worry.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

He also said regarding himself: "*I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*" (v. 11). What a great lesson to learn! What a great message to give to Christians who worry over many things! Do not live a life full of worry and anxiety.

Christians Are Great People

God's faithful and obedient children are the greatest people on this earth. Once Jesus said concerning John the Baptist,

Verily, I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matt. 11:11).

John the Baptist was never in the kingdom, or church, of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church had not been established in John's day. He lived under the Law of Moses. Christians today live under the New Testament, and they have blessings that John

never had. Even the very least in the kingdom of Christ is greater than John. He is greater than Abel, Elijah, even Solomon, for they were never in the Lord's kingdom. So Christians can say today, "*I am greater than John the Baptist.*"

Daniel gave a prophecy of the world's kingdoms when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2). Beginning with the Babylonian kingdom there would follow three other kingdoms, and in the days of the fourth kingdom God would set up a kingdom that would "*stand for ever*" (2:44). The worldly kingdoms that followed were the Medo-Persian, Grecian, and the Roman. This we know from history. The Roman government was in control of Palestine when Christ was born, during His personal ministry, and when the church was established in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Rome went down in A.D. 476 and Constantinople was established. There has not been a world government of universal existence since that time. Hitler tried it, but he failed. Christ is reigning today over His spiritual kingdom; the church exists, and Christ will continue to reign until His last enemy, death, is destroyed. "*Then cometh the end*" (1 Cor. 15:24-26). All the dead will be raised and death will be no more.

Daniel also prophesied of the ascension of Christ:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and

languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Christ ascended in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11) and was welcomed back into heaven and was seated at God's right hand (Acts 2:34-35) to reign over His kingdom, the church (Eph. 1:22-23), as "*Lord of lords, and King of kings*" (Rev. 17:14). That is where He is today.

When Christ left heaven and came to this earth to be born of the Virgin Mary angels announced to the shepherds His birth and they went to see Him (Matt. 1:20-24; Luke 2:8-18). When Christ was returning back to heaven to be made king angels also came out to meet Him and to welcome Him back into heaven. This is described by the Psalmist:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up ye heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory (Psm. 24:7-10).

Hence, Christians are today in an eternal divine kingdom, church – that which can never be destroyed and some day heaven will be their eternal home. Salvation and all spiritual blessings are in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10; Acts 2:47; Eph. 1:3). How grateful we should be for these many blessings. How grateful we are to be in the Lord's church!

The Blessed / Happy Dead

When the aged apostle John was banished to the rocky island of Patmos to receive the Lord's revelation to the churches, he was "*in the spirit on the Lord's day*" (Rev. 1:10), and among other things he was told to write,

Blessed [Happy (American Bible Union Version, The New English Bible, The Amplified New Testament)] are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

For one to die "*in the Lord*" he must first enter into Christ, the Lord, by being baptized into Christ as a penitent believer in the Lord (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:38; 8:15-39) and then by faithfully living unto death he can receive the "*crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10).

The blessing here pronounced was upon a certain class of the dead—those 'who die in the Lord.' This implies two things as necessary to receive this blessing: first, to come into the Lord, for no one can be in the Lord who does not come into him; second, to live faithfully in him till death, for no one can die in the Lord (be worthy of Christ's mercy and favor) unless he is faithful unto death (Matt. 24:13). (Hinds, 217).

What a blessed and happy thing it is then to die as a faithful child of God. This is true of Christians in all ages.

The Last Mile Of The Way

Life here on earth is like taking a journey. We are on the way to heaven, the eternal home of the soul (Psm. 90:10; Eccl. 12:7). To die is not to cease to exist, but to depart this life and to be with Christ on the other side, which is *"very far better"* (Phil. 1:21-23, ASV).

At the end of the journey, at the judgment, we can then hear the Lord say, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord"* (Matt. 25:21, 23). So, faithful children of God can take this attitude: *"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory"* (Psm. 73:24). Saints of old have looked forward to this blessed event. We shall see our Lord and Savior some day. John also wrote, *"...we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2).

Face to face with Christ my Savior,
Face to face - what will it be;
When with rapture I behold him,
Jesus Christ who died for me?

~ Mrs. Frank A. Breek

Surely, one's eyes have never seen anything that is equal to the beauty that shall burst upon his enraptured vision when he enters the eternal home of the soul, heaven, there to meet the dear Lord and many loved ones and friends who have gone on in death.

There the saints of all ages in harmony meet,
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet,
While the anthems of rapture unceasingly roll,
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.

As John Newton said in this great hymn,
"Amazing Grace:"

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Truly, "*The best is yet to be*" (Robert Browning, English
Poet, 1812-1889).

We often sing this sweet song: "*The Last Mile
Of The Way:*"

If I walk in the pathway of duty,
If I work till the close of the day,
I shall see the great King in His beauty
When I have 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.

Here the dearest of ties we must sever,
Tears of sorrow are seen every day;
But no sickness, no sighing forever,
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.

~ Wm. Edie Marks

John wrote concerning heaven:

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. 21:4).

So, we can sing the songs:

Heaven holds all to me,
Brighter its glory will be;
Joy without measure will be my treasure:
Heaven holds all to me.

~ Tillit S. Tiddie

How beautiful heaven must be,
Sweet home of the happy and free;
Fair haven of rest for the weary,
How beautiful heaven must be.

~ Mrs. A. S. Bridgewater

Hence, *"thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:57, ASV). Heaven will be a place where we will live and *"never grow old."* I am nearer my home today than ever I've been before!

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All Scripture quotations are from the **King James Version (1611)** unless otherwise noted.

Perry Cotham



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Keys To Successful Christian Living

Blessed Assurance: Trust God, Be Not Afraid (Worry)

This Chapter Written By

Jimmy Clark

Blessed assurance is a confidence that rests upon God, not on man. There are plenty of things in this world to cause man to give up and fret for the rest of his days if it were not for faith in God. The Psalmist David said himself, *"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living"* (Psm. 27:13). The entrance of sin into the world brought the consequence of fear that man faces on a daily basis. A part of the work of redemption was to deal with the problems that Satan brought into the world through sin. One of those problems was the concept of anxious care. The Lord's work of redemption provides the peace of mind and heart needed to live in this troublesome world. It is truly a blessed assurance that gives peace to the mind and conscience.

Concept And Characteristics Of Worry

The English word *"worry"* comes from an Old English word meaning *"to strangle"* (Webster's

Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1030). Some synonyms for the term are anxiety, anxious care, fret, fear and dread. The Old Testament word for worry is the Hebrew word meaning "*fear, dread, anxious care*" (Gesenius, p. 184). The New Testament term most often translated for the concept of "*worry*" comes from a word meaning "*to be drawn in different directions, hence, care, anxiety*" (Thayer, p. 400). One can see from such insights that worry does not provide the best for man's life. Various passages bring this to light from both the Old and New Testaments.

The Lord said to the prophet Ezekiel,

Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity (Ezek. 4:16-17).

The Lord again said to Ezekiel,

Son of man, eat your bread with quaking and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. And say to the people of the land, Thus says the Lord God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it, because of the violence of all those who dwell in it (Ezek. 12:18-19).

Worry brings a sense of uneasiness and stress that is so disturbing that life is no longer pleasant.

Jesus said in what is commonly called the parable of the soils,

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful (Matt. 13:22).

Mark's account of this thorny ground heart reads,

Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful (Mark 4:18-19).

Luke's account of this same heart states,

Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity (Luke 8:14).

There are two interesting thoughts from these New Testament passages concerning worry that go back to the root meaning of the term. Jesus stated that cares "*choke the word*" (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19) and that the thorny soil hearts "*go out and are choked with cares*" (Luke 8:14). The Old English word from which the current term "*worry*" is used means to strangle. The word received by the heart is not able to produce the needed fruit because worry and its fellow worldly attributes choke the word in the heart. Luke's account denotes that the hearer himself is choked by the strangling effects of the worldly pursuits. A

BLESSED ASSURANCE: TRUST GOD, BE NOT AFRAID

second interesting thought is in the idea that the New Testament word translated “*care*” or worry follows the thought of going in different directions. The heart characterized by the thorny ground is not single-minded. Worry tends to be true of the person who is constantly pursuing any and every way that the world would travel. There is a constant sense of unrest where worry is present.

When Paul spoke to the philosophers in Athens about the true and living God, he addressed his discourse with the words,

Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: (Acts 17:22-23).

Their anxious care concerning the gods of idolatrous practices had led them to turn to every possible god with the final conclusion that they must build an altar to a possible god that they did not know. Superstition and worry go hand in hand.

Lest one think that worry only finds its way into the hearts of unbelievers, consider the account of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha. When it came time for the meal to be eaten, Martha concerned herself with the meal while Mary listened to Jesus. Consider what the text states of the situation as it relates to worry.

But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said,

Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me. And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things (Luke 10:40-41).

Here it can be seen that worry affects those who are disciples of the Lord. It is characterized by being distracted and places stress upon things that are of minor significance. Worry works itself into being critical of good people. It has as its companion a troubled mind. The human family is constantly plagued by a troubled mind where worry is allowed to reside in the thinking.

Contrast To Worry

A single-minded heart is the necessary component to combat worry. James stated,

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

Martha was concerned over many things while Mary was single-minded in her purpose the day Jesus was with them. Jesus said of Mary,

But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:42).

BLESSED ASSURANCE: TRUST GOD, BE NOT AFRAID

Listening to what Jesus had to say took priority over looking to the food to fill the belly. Single-mindedness points to the next aspect of the contrast to worry: confidence in God.

A supreme confidence in God is proclaimed throughout the Bible to deal with the stresses of life. David wrote of old, *“Cast your burdens on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved”* (Psm. 55:22). When Peter was writing to those facing the fiery trials of persecution, he closed the inspired words to those readers with the message, *“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). This is a quote from the very words that David gave to comfort the righteous in his day. David also wrote in another psalm,

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity...Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass,...Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,...Do not fret—it only causes harm (Psm. 37:1, 3-5, 7, 8).

A solace of spirit due to a spiritual mind is the result of true peace. Where there is a single mind and a solid confidence in God there follows a peace of spirit that makes life sweet. Paul wrote from a Roman prison,

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11-13).

It is written in the book of Hebrews,

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me? (Heb. 13:5-6).

Concrete Steps To Eliminate Worry

The Lord, knowing that man would have trouble with fears, gives sound instruction to overcome and eliminate worry. Faith in God is the key component to circumstances beyond one's control.

There is quite an interesting statement made by Jesus to the apostles about the persecution that they would face and how they would handle it. The persecution of the first century Christians would make any sufferer worry if not forewarned and forearmed with the proper mind and equipment. Jesus stated to the apostles,

But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the

gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11).

The inspiration of the Spirit providing divine revelation was the means by which the apostles would deal with their stressful situations. Today, divine revelation is in the inspired word of God. Paul wrote to Timothy,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Therefore, the more one knows and applies the Bible to life, the more one is able to conquer the problem of worry.

Jesus Himself spoke of the problem of worry in what is often called the Sermon on the Mount.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into

barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or what shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt. 6:24-34).

It is quite interesting that Jesus points out several things already addressed by other passages cited in this manuscript. First, there must be the service of only one master. This points to the single-minded servant. Second, a materialistic approach to life is a sure path to a worrisome life. Third, trust in God to take care of the basics of life is a step toward conquering worry. Fourth, setting spiritual priorities of the kingdom of God and His righteousness fills the void of a life of worry. Fifth and finally, man does not need to let his mind fret about tomorrow since he can only live life one day at a time. While

this does not eliminate the need for planning ahead for the future (cf. Luke 14:28), it does mean that anxiety over what might not even have to be faced is a waste of good time. Luke's account of these same words gives this detail. *"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12:32). The command *"Do not fear"* or *"Do not be afraid"* in the face of trying circumstances is found throughout the Bible (cf. Josh. 1:9; Acts 27:24).

Another concrete step to deal with worry is to lay troubles before the throne of God in prayer. Paul wrote to the Philippian brethren,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

Note three things in this citation. First, one is to put away anxious care. This is commanded and must be let go. Second, one is to pray to the Lord concerning one's needs. Prayer is not for God's benefit but for man's. God knows what we need even without our asking (cf. Matt. 6:32) and is able to do exceedingly more than anyone is able to ask or think (cf. Eph. 3:20). Prayer is the pouring out of man's heart before the One who is the great supplier of needs (cf. Phil. 4:19).

Another concrete step is to fill one's mind with good, positive thoughts as a child of God instead of the fearful cares of this world. Paul wrote further in the Philippian letter,

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report. If there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (Phil. 4:8).

Transforming the mind to focus on the spiritual above the worldly is key to handling worry (cf. Rom. 12:2).

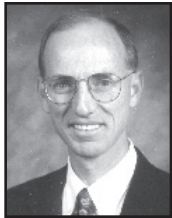
A final concrete step to overcome worry is again in the book of Philippians.

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you (Phil. 4:9).

One cannot be simply a hearer or mere student of the Bible without applying its teaching to everyday life. Here is probably one of the biggest reasons why worry overtakes so many. It is not a matter of whether people know the passages in the Bible that address peace and contentment. It is the matter of applying them to life. Being a forgetful hearer does not produce the blessed life (cf. James 1:22-25). Jesus Himself stated the principle, *"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them"* (John 13:17).

Worry is a great robber. It robs the heart and mind of true peace. It robs the soul of its closeness to the Lord. It robs the physical body of the strength needed to face the obstacles of the day. Let all simply heed the words of the Lord with a single mind and *"Fear not."*

Jimmy Clark



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Keys To Successful Christian Living

The Changing Versus The Unchangeable

This Chapter Written By

Perry B. Cotham

Introduction

We are today living at a time when some are making changes in the teaching of the Scripture and in their practice. The apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus in his farewell talk to them that *"grievous wolves"* would *"enter in among"* them, *"not sparing the flock"* (Acts 20:29); that even among their *"own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (v. 30). So he said to them, *"Therefore watch"* (v. 31).

A few years later he wrote to Timothy and said:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the later times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy... (1 Tim. 4:1-2; cf. Jude 3; Rom. 16:17-18).

Later the apostle John wrote:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because

many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Then he told the Christians how they might determine the difference between those who were speaking the truth and those who were not:

We (i.e., the inspired apostles) are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (v. 6).

In writing to *"the elect lady and her children,"* John declared:

Whosoever transgresseth (goeth onward, ASV), and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 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, 9-11).

To *"the wellbeloved Gaius,"* he said: *"He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God"* (3 John 1, 11).

A faithful gospel preacher will preach *"all the counsel of God,"* as Paul said he did (Acts 20:27). A preacher may preach *"truth"* every Sunday from his pulpit and still be lost. Why? For not preaching ALL the truth. So, we are afraid that many preachers are going to come up short in the final day of Judgment for not preaching the **whole** counsel of God on every

Bible subject. We are to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and *"speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Peter 4:11). However, some will *"wrest"* (i.e., twist) the Scriptures *"unto their own destruction"* (2 Peter 3:16).

Since inspired men have given to us the complete word of God as it is contained in our correctly translated Bibles, we are not to make any changes in it. God's inspired word is unchangeable! It will always remain the same, and the word of the Lord will judge us in all day of judgment. Jesus said, *"... the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:48).

Sometimes people will ask us, *"What does your church teach"* on this or that subject? Then we answer, *"What does THE BIBLE teach on that subject?"* That is how the question should be asked. God has spoken to us in His word (Heb. 1:1-2). *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed"* to what the Bible says (2:1). It is always right to obey the Lord and always wrong to disobey the Lord.

Bible Examples Of Obedience And Disobedience

We shall note some efforts that are being made by preachers and teachers in some churches to change the word of God. They are sometimes referred to as *"change agents."* But true churches and true gospel preachers will always remain true to the unchangeable word of God. Note now a few examples:

1. **Some are changing the Lord's plan of salvation.** They say, *"pray the sinner's prayer,"* or

THE CHANGING VERSUS THE UNCHANGEABLE

"Just believe in Jesus." "We are saved by faith only," or "have an experience of grace." "If you have done this, or experienced this, you can be a part of our fellowship and we will count you as a member of the church. You do not need to be baptized."

But the Bible teaches that one must hear the gospel of Christ and believe in Jesus as the Son of God (Rom. 10:17; Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:35-39; 18:8). By the preaching (teaching) of Paul, Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:14-15). The believer must also repent of his sins (Luke 13:3, 5). God *"commandeth all men every where to repent"* (Acts 17:30). On the day of Pentecost Peter told the people to *"repent, and be baptized...for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2:38). He also wrote that the Lord was *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). So, it is repent or perish, turn or burn!

One is also to confess the name of Christ. The Ethiopian eunuch confessed: *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"* (Acts 8:37). Paul wrote:

...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Rom. 10:9).

Jesus said,

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 10:32).

Finally, one is to be baptized into Christ by a burial and a resurrection in water to consummate the process of conversion or salvation to Christ. Jesus said,

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

Salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10), and one is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Christ is man's only Savior, and He is "*the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him*" (Heb. 5:9; cf. Matt. 7:24-27; Rev. 22:14).

Sometime one will say, "*Jesus is my Lord.*" But Christ said: "*And why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46). The person who has not been baptized as the Bible teaches is not saved and added by the Lord to His church. The Lord adds those who are saved to His church (Acts 2:47).

Hence, the faithful gospel preacher will still preach and teach faith, repentance, confession and baptism for the remission of sins and to be added to the Lord's church. The Bible hasn't changed and it will not change. The Bible teaches who is a Christian (Acts 11:26).

2. Some are changing the worship of the church. Some are beginning to add mechanical instruments of music into the worship. The items of worship as the New Testament teaches are (1) teaching or preaching God's word; (2) singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in the heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). And songs should be sung that are in harmony with the teaching of the Bible; but no instruments are to be used in addition to singing (cf. Lev. 10:1-2). (3) Partaking of the Lord's Supper on each first day of the week also in remembrance of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Acts 20:7;

1 Cor. 11:23-29), the unleaven bread and the fruit of the vine in memory of the body and blood of Christ shed on the cross, doing this in quietness and reverence. Christ instituted the Supper before His death on the cross. There is no special day besides the first day of the week for the Christians to partake of the Supper as "*Easter Sunday*" or "*Thursday night before Easter*," and the Supper is not observed by those who are not Christians. (4) Praying is always a part of the worship service. Jesus taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9-13), but we are not to follow these words exactly every time we pray in our worship services. We pray "*after this manner*." The Lord's church, or kingdom has already come; it has been established, but we can pray for the church to grow, for missionaries to go and preach the gospel, God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Paul urged the Christians to "*Pray without ceasing*" (2 Thess. 5:17), and James said, "*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (James 5:16). We pray for the sick and many others. We pray that sinners may obey the gospel as Paul did (Rom. 10:1). (5) Christians are to contribute, give of their means. Paul wrote to brethren: "*Upon the first day of the week (first day of every week, MacKnight's translation) let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him*" (1 Cor. 16:2). He gave this order also to the churches of Galatia (v. 1). In the second letter to the Corinthians he gave further motives and admonitions for liberal giving (2 Cor. 8 and 9). Faithful gospel preachers are to be supported, but it is wrong to give to those who are not preaching and teaching the truth.

3. **Some are changing the role of women in the church.** From the biblical texts women are not to

be public preachers and prayer leaders in the public worship services of the church (1 Tim. 2:8, 12; 1 Cor. 14:34). But some liberal churches are changing this also and elders and preachers are not teaching the truth on this subject. There are many things that women can do in the church besides publicly leading prayers and preaching.

Back To The Bible

Many of us today, who were young years ago, did not witness what is now being taught and practiced by some congregations of the Lord's church. We can remember when the gospel plan of salvation was given and many were being baptized. The church growing by "*leaps and bounds.*" Gospel meetings were being held, and the church was recognized as one of the fastest growing religions in the nation. Now, it is different. But the word of God has not changed. We did not then have instruments of music in connection with our singing. We did not have joint fellowship services with the denominations, and partake of the communion with them, and help them in their meetings. Our plea was to go back to the Bible and restore true New Testament Christianity. And the church grew. This is what is needed today. The word of God hasn't changed. Thank God for the churches that are remaining faithful!

The church of the apostolic age is the model for the church in all succeeding ages. To follow and obey the word of God as was done in the first century will reproduce the same church today, the Lord's church. Christ built the church, and He prayed that all of His followers might be **one**, that the world

might believe (John 17:20-21). This can be done if all will follow the New Testament. There were no denominations, as we know them today, in the first century. Men later built their own denominations. These organizations are nowhere mentioned in the Bible. The pure word of God, as it is spoken by the Lord in His word, the Bible, as all that man needs today, and it is unchangeable.

The pioneer preachers preached the Bible and it alone, in school houses, and people came, they listened, they learned the truth, and many obeyed the Lord and were baptized. The plea was made for people to return to apostolic Christianity.

The "*seed of the kingdom*," the word of God (Luke 8:11), was planted in their hearts and many people believed and obeyed it, it produced nothing else, nothing different, than the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. People by the hundreds renounced denominationalism and became just Christians only. They were no name but "*Christian*" (Acts 11:28), and had no creed but the Bible. This teaching is still being done today.

My Early Life

I grew up under the influence of a good Christian father and mother. The congregation had good faithful gospel preaching. We did not use the organ in our worship. We immersed people for the remission of sins in the name of Christ, and at an early age I was baptized and soon began to preach. J. W. McGarvey, of Lexington, KY, was a great Bible scholar and taught and influenced many men to become gospel preachers. He passed from this life just three months before I was born.

Now for 80 years I have been preaching the gospel of Christ and encouraging people to obey it, and this I intend to do until I die. Our young people today need the writings of the old pioneer preachers who made a plea for the restoration of true New Testament Christianity. This will help them to be faithful to God's unchangeable word today. They said, *"In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; and in all things love."* Many of you have read their writings and have been members of the Lord's church for many years. Your desire is for others to obey the Lord.

Conclusion

Changes may come in the religious world but we believe that this good congregation, with its preachers and elders, will remain true and faithful to God's unchangeable word, and that many others will do the same.

If you are present today and have not obeyed the gospel we plead with you to do it today; do not delay. *"Tomorrow"* could be forever too late.

Perry Cotham



A faithful preacher of the gospel for over **70 years** all around the world! A zealous, enthusiastic worker in the kingdom of God. Full-time evangelistic work for the last few decades. Frequently travels to foreign countries to preach and deliver Bibles. Author of various tracts and books. A regular speaker on lectureships throughout the brotherhood. Theresa (deceased) and Perry have three children.

THE CHANGING VERSUS THE UNCHANGEABLE

Keys To Successful Christian Living

Never, Never Give Up!

This Chapter Written By

Keith Mosher

Introduction

Several years ago, during my holding a gospel meeting at the beloved East Hill Church of Christ which is hosting the lectureship for which this manuscript was assigned, I came to the church building on Wednesday morning and discovered that my brother and dear friend, Paul Sain, was in tears; so was everyone else who was present. I inquired as to the reason for the weeping and was told that a great and good sister, Carolyn Foster (a school teacher and floral shop owner) had been murdered by a student. Also killed was a fourteen-year old girl and another teacher was wounded. What terrible news and, like all the horrible tragedies of this life, where does one turn when such horrifying information is heard? Will the family of the victims remain for that? Will the church members blame God and quit attending? What is the challenge? The Christian has a motto by which he lives: Never, never, give up!

Many have "*thrown up their hands*" in disgust and quit the Lord when seeming failure occurs. But, the advice from God is:

NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:2-8, KJV).

In thinking about this subject, five areas of investigation came to mind: 1. Why is this challenge needed? 2. What kind of person will not quit? 3. What was Jesus' attitude? 4. What kind of person fails? 5. We must win the race to heaven.

Paul wrote, "*I can do all things through Christ who (keeps on, K.M.) strengtheneth me*" (Phil. 4:13). Bob Spurlin, who authored a book entitled "*Never Give Up*," wrote: "*Not giving up requires that one make adjustments in life.*" Brethren, let all Christians hold on to hope.

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Heb. 6:18-19).

Why The Challenge?

A Baptist preacher, Sam Morris, once wrote: *"We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul"* (Mosher, Class notes). Morris went on to pen:

The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of his soul. That is settled in Christ and Christ alone....All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from adultery to murder will not his soul be in any more danger. The justification of the human soul is through the atonement of Christ and not through the efforts of man (Ibid.).

Despite the fact that Morris (above) has confused one's own works from God's demands which are His works, there is still the admission that falling away is a concern. Morris opted for the idea that man cannot fail and so tried to eradicate the thought that there is any problem. Unfortunately, the Bible teaches that there is a danger that one might quit and lose one's soul.

Paul wrote about his concern for his own faithfulness: *"But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to*

NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP

others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). The term in the foregoing passage, *castaway*, is *adokimos*, translated *reprobate* in all other places in the King James Version (Rom. 1:28; 2 Cor. 13: 5-7; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:16; Heb. 6:8; Word Study, 14). To illustrate his concern about becoming *reprobate*, which is a translation of the negative of *dokimos* which latter term means *genuine, true, or approved* (Bauer, 203), Paul used an Old Testament account of the falling away of those Jews who escaped from Egypt.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

It is important to notice from the four verses above that the *"moreover"* (*gar*, for, K.M.) of verse one connects to 9:27. Therefore, Paul is describing some who were *"baptized"* or overwhelmed in a miraculous journey across the dry ground of the Red Sea and were protected by God, yet, as he was fearful of being a *castaway*, so they fell. Many of them were overthrown in the wilderness from lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring (1 Cor. 10:5-9). The word, *overthrown* is transliterated into English as *catastrophic*. The original, *katastronnumi* denoted an action that could hope for no results and ended in ruin (Bauer, 418-16). The reason for

the apostasy of those ancient Jews was idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), but it was a special type of such a sin that caused their ruin. Paul adds:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. 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 (2 Cor. 11-13).

The children of Israel had surrendered to the feeling that their particular difficulties were greater than anyone's had ever been and, since the Israelites were so "*special*," they should not be having so many difficulties. They felt that God and Moses, who had been on Mount Sinai, had deserted them and they were standing alone in their trials (Exod. 32:23). Paul concluded from the actions of those ancient peoples that when one thinks that one's trial is greater than any others have endured and that that one is having a "*special*" difficulty; that that one is ready to fall (1 Cor. 10:12)! One is "*worshipping*" self by imagining that no one has ever suffered in such manner (1 Cor. 10:14). The self is the "*idol*" in Paul's conclusion.

The problem is that there is no trial extant that all have either suffered or could suffer. "*For there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man...*" (1 Cor. 10:13a). No one is given some "*special*"

trial by God, and no one is to think of self so highly that he blames God for one's difficulty and then "gives up." The term, temptation in the King James Version at 1 Corinthians 10:13 comes from *pirasmos* (Word Study, 610). The term's primary idea is a test, but it is a word whose meaning has to be derived contextually. The word can mean "enticement to sin" (Bauer, 640). The Israelites were tested by the trial and then gave in to the temptation for they failed to realize that God had not deserted them, for "God is faithful" (1 Cor. 10:13b).

The tests of life are always present. The "escape" is to remember that God is faithful and one is not to surrender but is to conquer. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Who Will Not Give Up?

David asked the question, "Lord who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill" (Psm. 15:1). The word, abide, in the foregoing is from the Hebrew *gur* (Young, 3). Who can sojourn (*gur*) with God and be in a position to win the Christian race?

In the first place, the person who "walks uprightly" and keeps on doing what is right before God is one who can abide with God (Psm. 15:2a). Peter discovered this eternal truth and said: "...Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). A further description of the persevering is that he "speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psm. 15:2b). Rawlinson

notes that David did not say *"from"* one's heart but *"in"* it (Pulpit, 91). Rawlinson adds that *"in his heart"* points to internal truthfulness (Ibid.).

Second, *"he that backbiteth not with his tongue"* is in position to abide with God (Psm. 15:3a). James noted:

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:5-8).

Third, one is not to do *"evil to his neighbor"* (Psm. 15:3b). The term, neighbor, is either friend or companion (Pulpit, 92). There is special evil in harming one with whom one is intimate. Such injurious actions lead away from God. The term, neighbor, in the latter part of Psalm 15:3 is different from that term in the first part of the verse and implies that God's man does not spread rumors. So many have given up because of false reports about them!

In the fourth place, those who persevere with God are those who are no respecter of persons. *"In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord"* (Psm. 15:4a). Men's outward

circumstances are of little or no concern to God's man, but he honors (or holds in contempt) moral qualities. Such a one is not discouraged by the externals.

Fifth, the one who has the best chance to avoid stumbling and falling away from God, "*sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not*" (Psm. 15:4b). "*The righteous man, if he happens to do something which it turns out will be to his own hurt, nevertheless keeps his engagement*" (Forsyth, 92). One keeps one's promises even if it may cost one more than first thought.

Sixth, the sojourner with God is "*He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent*" (Psm. 15:5a). Usury, or interest, when one Israelite borrowed from another, was forbidden (Exo. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19). Usury could be charged to a foreigner (Deut. 15:3; 33:20). The perseverer is not greedy for money nor interested in bribery. (The contrary conduct, as in America, was widespread in Israel: Isaiah 1:23.) How many have suffered financially for others, yet have remained faithful to God? Perhaps the "*love of money*" is the greatest obstacle to getting to heaven (1 Tim. 6:5-11).

The upright, faithful, honest, moral child of God is an "*abider.*" David added: "*he that doeth these things shall never be moved*" (Psm. 15:5b). Forsyth added that to such a man "*his happy destiny is sure as the throne of the eternal*" (Pulpit, 95). There are some things in life that are unstable, but God's man cannot be moved.

Jesus Did Not Quit

The Christ had a mission to "*seek and save the lost*" (Luke 19:10). He set His face toward His

crucifixion in Jerusalem and never looked back (Luke 9:53). In fact, He said: "...No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 9:62).

On one occasion, Peter rebuked Jesus for insisting on completing His mission. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21). "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matt. 16:22). Christ, obviously disappointed by Peter's lack of understanding, turned and said to Peter: "Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence to me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). A strong admonition to all who would be disciples of Christ follows the encounter with Peter:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 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. 16:24-26).

The persevering saint will "deny himself," which was a revolutionary idea in Jesus' day (and still is). Greek philosophers, in that ancient time, taught that men should "know" themselves in order to happiness.

Jesus' instruction was to empty self (including self-preservation!) and "take up" the cross (Matt. 16:24b). A cross, then, was used to put one to death. It is far easier to be in the frame of mind not to quit the Christian race if one is dead to self.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:1-3).

Suppose that Jesus had decided that all the torture, abuse, and humiliation were too much and he would just quit! How petty are the excuses given for not finishing the Christian's mission of entering heaven. Christ is the example and Christians can follow Him (1 Peter 2:21).

Who Does Fail?

The inspired wisdom of Solomon lists some who will fall away from God. Five types of moral character are listed here as prone to failing and are separate ideas from the self-worshippers described earlier in this essay while discussing 1 Corinthians 10:1-14.

In the first place, "*Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall*" (Prov. 16:18). The term for pride is *gaon* (Wilson, 326). The meaning is that one has exalted oneself to greatness (Ibid.). Isaiah said of Moab that: "*We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so*" (Isa. 16:6). Imagine being proud of one's pride! Solomon

added: *"Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud"* (Prov. 16:19).

In the second place, wickedness is lethal to those striving to go heaven. *"The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way; but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness"* (Prov. 11:5). The term, wickedness, is rishah and its primary meaning is imperious or ungodly (Wilson, 481). But, there is some question about a primary meaning. There is a sense of restlessness to the term as if one were *"tossed about with various evil passions"* (Wilson, Ibid.). *"It is descriptive of the wicked in respect to their internal state...springing from sinful desires which constantly impels them to fresh misdeeds"* (Ibid.).

In the third place, the worldly are quitters. *"He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch"* (Prov. 11:28). Jesus spake of those who obeyed the gospel but were later impeded by *"the deceitfulness of riches"* (Matt. 13:22). After all, the *"love of money"* is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

In the fourth place, those who cannot control their evil desires to misuse their tongues are most apt to fall away. *"He that hath a forward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief"* (Prov. 17:20). Forward is from iggesh which means deceitful or perverse (Wilson, 178). Out of a deceitful heart, then, arises the need to use one's tongue in a perverse manner. The word, perverse, is translated from haphak which has a primary meaning of turned or changed (Wilson, 308). One is *"turned"* in one's tongue who has a deceitful mind bent on

tale-bearing, back-biting, and hate-mongering. Such people are failures.

In the last place here, the hard-hearted are going to fall. *"Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief"* (Prov. 28:14). Up to now no mention has been made of the Hebrew term translated fall or falleth. It is *kisshalon* and is related to *kashal* (Wilson, 155-57). It has the meaning of stumbling so as to fall away (Ibid.). Hosea, writing of Northern Israel, penned: *"Therefore shalt thou fall (kashal, K.M.) in the day, and the prophet shall fall (kashal, K.M.) with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother"* (Hosea 4:5). Northern Israel was a quitter. She gave up on God and fell away because of her wickedness. The prideful, wicked, worldly, deceitful, hard-hearted are, in reality, quitters who have opted for this world instead of the next one.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin (Heb.12:1-4).

The *"race"* set before Christians involves faith and trust in God. Using Jesus as the *"polar star,"* one can look to Him who captained the race and who

finished His mission. Many have had difficult lives.
Note the following:

By 1989, baseball player Nolan Ryan reached an incredible 5,000 strikeouts and pitched a number of no-hitters. Ryan is a phenomenal baseball player. In his rookie year, 18 years earlier, Gill Hodges was the manager of the Mets, and was impatient with Ryan. Although Ryan could consistently throw the ball over ninety miles an hour, most of the time it didn't go over the plate. He was walking everybody, hitting a lot of people, too. Hodges told Ryan at the beginning of a particular game that he was to pitch better in that game or he would pull him out and trade him. He would be finished.

Ryan went into that game trying to do his best, determined that he was going to succeed. He was miserable. He walked something like seven or eight batters in four innings. Hodges took him out. Later that season he was traded to the Angels.

After the game Richard Reeves went down into the locker room to interview the players. He noticed Nolan Ryan was apart from the others, looking into a mirror, obviously having difficulty tying his tie. Reeves got closer to him and noticed that there were tears in Nolan's eyes. He was crying. He couldn't see to tie his tie because of the tears.

Reeves remembered that incident on the occasion of celebrating Nolan Ryan as one of the immortals of baseball. He remembered that this legendary man, Nolan Ryan, BEGAN his long string of success

thinking he had failed. But he kept on working. He kept on practicing. He kept doing his job (Brewer, 4).

The idea of running a race is a favorite image of Paul's (1 Cor. 9:24; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). This race is an arduous struggle (1 Peter 4:18). The Christian's life is not a stroll, but is a race. There is a goal to be kept in mind for the race is in front and the prize is to be won. The Christian must run with steadfastness and not allow his "*ardor to decline*" (Jerdau, 364). Nolan Ryan finished his "*race*" for a secular reason, but the Christian can finish for an eternal home!

The conditions to being successful in the race are to lay aside any encumbrances of doubt, sin, and unbelief (the "*besetting*" sin) and run! Note the following about a shipwreck, for one can make "*shipwreck*" of the faith (1 Tim. 1:19).

Standing stark above swirling white waters on the Saumarex Reef is the rust-rotten ruin of the U.S. Liberty Ship Francis Preston Blair. Some eighty feet separate this forlorn wreckage from the sea since it was blown there by a violent hurricane in 1945. From the distance it still looks like a ship underway rather than the ruin it is. On the ocean side, a few hundred yards away, cobalt breakers as big as houses explode in slow frost-white cataclysm and thunder. Salvage of the great ship is impractical since cost would be prohibitive. And so it stands, losing the battle against time, eventually to be swallowed by the elements.

Shipwreck is a word striking terror in hearts of men of the sea and land alike. Ships are the largest

conveyance of people and cargo of any mode of transportation, and they never become castaways without dramatic results. There are few parts of the world's coastal regions without bleached bones of broken vessels.

Even the largest and most pretentious vessels are not impervious to the whims of the waters. Authorities assured people that the Titanic would never sink; but it did, taking over fourteen hundred lives with it. The winds and the waves refuse to be mastered.

Many feel they can successfully master winds and waves. They feel that the driving forces of their own lives—intellectualism, security, position, or prominence—will keep them from the shoals. However, none of these is guarantee that their lives will not end up on the corals of death. Paul draws on this knowledge to warn young Timothy of the destructive breakers of sin: " *Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck*" (1 Tim. 1:19). In other words, just as the liberty ship was blown helplessly on the high coral, so our lives can be wrecked and ruined by winds and waves of passion. A walk down any city street gives tragic testimony to this truth. Very apparent are ruined lives rotting and rusting on the corals of sin, losing their personal battle against time. These are the walking dead, hopelessly locked in their loneliness on their own particular coral reef of despair.

Lest we despair, there is a force greater than winds and waves of sin. Christ one day was sleeping in the bow of a boat when the seas began to churn.

NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP

Frightened, the disciples awakened Him, crying, "*Carest thou not that we perish?*" In that moment He proved He was Lord of all by simply stating, "*Peace, be still.*" The Bible says, "*And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm*" (see Mark 4:37-39).

Although our lives are driven by mighty forces that would shipwreck us, there is a Master of the ship who can always be with us to calm the seas. He can also salvage those who have been stranded on shoals of despair, making them seaworthy again. God said that His Son would "*give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*" (Isa. 61:3). No wonder the songwriter could sing:

Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons or men, or whatever it be,
No water can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean and earth, and skies;
They all shall sweetly obey His will,
Peace be still, Peace be still.

(This entire quote is from Hembree, 61-64.)

Conclusion

Despite all of the overwhelming disappointments and tragedies in life, the Christian must "*Never, NEVER, Give Up!*" The Bible recognizes the challenges of fear, loneliness, and grief and gives the way out as remembering that God is faithful (1 Cor. 10:13). The one who abides is upright, honest, and a practitioner of the "*golden rule*" (Psm. 15; cf. Matt. 7:12).

Those who quit have given in to wickedness springing from self-deception and perverseness. Jesus

never quit and even though the race may at times be agonizing, to make shipwreck of the faith is far worse than struggling to finish the arduous journey. Christians are not out for a nice walk, but God has said:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

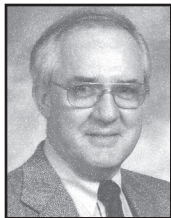
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Keys To Successful Christian Living



The Eternal Home Awaiting The Faithful

This Chapter Written By

Dave Miller

Because we are fleshly creatures whose experience on Earth is one in which we are subjected to the passing time, it is difficult for us to view heaven and afterlife as near—something that we will enjoy anytime soon. They almost seem like faraway dreams or possibilities. Yet the Bible repeatedly affirms that the termination of life on Earth is an ever present reality, and that eternity is near—even if you live long on the Earth. So we must constantly remind ourselves that our time here is temporary and brief. One way to keep eternity in view is to contemplate frequently what heaven will be like—an endeavor that never ceases to capture our imagination. Examining various Bible passages yields the following amazing characteristics of heaven:

1. No tears. Earthly life cannot help but include the shedding of tears—on many occasions throughout life. But heaven will be such that we will experience no future tears, and God will remove all past tears—i.e., the regrets and heartache of earthly life!

2. No decay. The eternal environment will

transcend the physical realm where, according to the laws of the Universe that God Himself set in motion, everything wears out, decays, breaks down, deteriorates, and dies. No so in heaven. All will be new. And our new bodies will be spiritual bodies that will experience no corruption, suffering, disease, or sickness.

3. No sorrow. Earthly life is naturally filled with many sorrows. Think of the loved ones you have lost. Or the loss of a job and financial security. Or perhaps the loss of health. These, and a host of other earthbound predicaments, create sadness and sorrow in our hearts. How often have you been weighed down by grief and heartache? Not so in heaven! Instead, we will enjoy complete contentment and total happiness.

4. No death. Do you remember the first time in your life that you were old enough to face the tragedy of death? Hebrews 9:27 indicates that death is the common lot of humanity. The longer we live, the more death we must experience—the passing of relatives, dear friends, and fellow Christians. That earthly separation can be extremely traumatic. But there will be no such occurrences in heaven—no funeral homes, no caskets, no cemeteries.

5. No pain. When children first experience pain, it's as if their little world has come to an end. But Momma or Daddy lifts them up and comforts them, and treats their bruise or cut, and life goes on. But that is only the beginning. Life is inevitably fraught with both physical and emotional pain. The physical pain can come in many forms—from broken bones, burns, and lacerations, to kidney stones, migraines,

and childbearing. Cancer can inflict great anguish and agony. Our bodies degrade day by day as we feel more and more of the aches and pains of old age (2 Cor. 5:1-4)—while youth look on in naïve wonder. It's hard to imagine a place where there is no pain. But such will be heaven!

6. No sin. We live in a sin infested world. We face it constantly. If we are not caught up in it ourselves, we encounter it all around us. Sin can be very, very ugly, tragic, and sickening—from the disgusting condition of the drunkard, to the despicable depravity of the child molester, to the abortionist butcher. The depth of moral decadence to which our own culture has slumped deepens with each passing year. The filth of sin is rampant. Imagine a place where all such unpleasantness is completely absent. Indeed, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

7. No useless, fruitless, mundane endeavors. The only meaningful purpose in life is to please God, to so live as to be permitted to be with Him for eternity. Life can be so confusing, distracting, and filled with worthless pursuits, dreams, and ambitions. Heaven will be the one place, stripped of all frivolous pursuits, where the ultimate purpose of existence is brought to final fruition.

8. No fatigue/stress/cares. The hustle and bustle of life, the responsibilities that must be performed, the schedules that must be kept, the work that must be done, the effort that must be expended—these conditions make it necessary for us to sleep and rest frequently. They also mount up to the point that we

face exhaustion and seek a release from the seemingly endless, constant pressures by taking days off and periodic vacations. Do we not yearn for rest—an ultimate rest? Do we not seek a final rest where we are rescued permanently from the cares and toils of earthly life? Heaven is that rest—perhaps, in one sense, the supreme vacation.

9. No drabness/imperfection. Heaven will be a place of unimaginable, indescribable beauty. It will be so flawless and incredibly beautiful, that God had to use figurative language for our limited, finite minds to grasp even some sense of the beauty of heaven. He speaks of a city foursquare, 1200 miles square—a perfect cube, with walls of jasper, gates of pearl, a street of gold, a crystal river, and the very throne of God in its midst. The most impressive, attractive, breathtaking scenes of earthly life—whether majestic mountains, flowing streams, dazzling sunsets, colorful wildlife, crystal clear lakes, or blue oceans—these will all pale compared to the infinite, incomparable beauty of heaven.

10. No fear/loneliness/insecurity. We sing, “*I won’t have to cross Jordan alone.*” We humans were created by God to be sociable and tied to other people—from the very first human being, of whom God said, “*It is not good for man to be alone.*” Yet, even if you have close, dear friends, and even if you live for 50 or 60 years with your soul mate, he or she must leave you. That’s why David said, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—for thou art with me.*” Technically, no one on Earth can ultimately salve for us that inner sense of being alone. But heaven will break down that inner dread and satisfy that innate longing. We

will be surrounded for all eternity by the very best: God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, not to mention the angels and the redeemed of all the ages. Though hell will be heavily populated by the vast majority of all who ever lived on Earth, together with the devil and his angels, no comfort will be gleaned there by the presence of others. Those in heaven, however, will experience the end of all anxiety and fear.

City, Country, Home

Consider the three biblical metaphors that help us to conceptualize the eternal realm. In addition to the metaphor of a city provided in the book of Revelation, Hebrews 11 provides another image by which we may contemplate heaven. This image is particularly vivid in the writer's remarks regarding Abraham:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

That final statement surely quickens the pulse and creates eager anticipation in our minds. Three verses later, the writer summarizes the lives of the faithful who lived during the centuries preceding Christ:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar

off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:13-16).

Such passages cheer our hearts and evoke an expectation, an enthusiastic desire to participate in these marvelous promises.

But the title of this lecture makes use of another metaphor: heaven as a home—the home of the soul. Consider Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

Paul added in verse 8: *“we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord”* (ASV). To be *“at home with the Lord”* is surely our premiere aspiration—our one all-consuming goal in life. It lies behind all we do.

It bolsters our hearts to bear up under the strains, stresses, and temptations of life.

In Jesus' depiction of heaven in the Revelation, describing it under the figure of a garden, listen carefully for the feature that spotlights the intimate fellowship the faithful will enjoy:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:1-5).

That phrase, "*They shall see His face,*" is astounding! Home—our true home—will be where we see the face of God. As the songwriter declared:

When by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face,
Will through the ages be glory for me!

The home of the soul will surpass anything our puny, finite minds can imagine or conceive. Yet the Bible, written to assist us with grasping some inkling of how great is the eternal home that awaits

the faithful, provides sufficient words to draw us toward that home:

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:15-17).

Paul comforted Thessalonian Christians by assuring them that even if they died before the Lord returned, they would not miss out on the eternal abode: *“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words”* (1 Thess. 4:17-18). Is your heart stirred by the words, *“we shall always be with the Lord”*?

Or what about Paul’s to the Philippians: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body”* (Phil. 3:20-21). John echoes similar thoughts: *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3). One strong motivation to purify ourselves spiritually is in anticipation of being with and like Jesus—hearing Him announce: *“Come, you blessed of*

My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

Think of the words we often sing about heaven that capture the thoughts of Scripture so well and buoy our spirits dramatically. Here are a few verses from a variety of songs in our songbooks:

Pure waters of life there are flowing,
And all who drink may be free;
Rare jewels of splendor are glowing,
How beautiful heaven must be!

We read of its beauty, but some how we know
Its glory has never been told,
But think of the rapturous singing up there
In that beautiful city of gold!

Ever thankful am I that my Savior and Lord,
Promised unto the weary sweet rest:
Nothing more could I ask than a mansion above,
There to live with the saved and the blest.

We shall sing on that beautiful shore,
The melodious songs of the lest,
And our spirits shall sorrow no more,
Not a sigh for the blessings of rest.

Glory is waiting, waiting up yonder,
Where we shall spend an endless day;
There with our Savior, we'll be forever
Where no more sorrow can dismay.

No night is there, no sorrow,
No death and no decay;

THE ETERNAL HOME AWAITING THE FAITHFUL

No yesterday, no morrow,
But one eternal day.

May God bless us, each and everyone, to do whatever it takes to be faithful to Him, that we might attain unto the eternal home awaiting the faithful. Heaven will surely be worth it all!

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