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II CORINTHIANS

By: Dr. J. Richard Chase

It is extremely important in our lives, especially as Christians, not to lose sight of the ultimate goal and final victory which will be ours in Christ. The apostle Paul realized the significance of this as he underscores the ultimate objectives and purposes for believers. Certainly one of the paramount desires which motivates us is the understanding that eventually we will be with Christ in heaven. Sometimes the problems of life get us down so that we fail to see the glorious culmination. Let me illustrate. If you have a goal of a slimmer figure, but lose sight of it, the discipline of restricting your meals becomes a burden too great to live with. You may even rationalize, "Fat is beautiful" justifying the additional food. For the Christian, if we lose sight of the goal of being with the Lord and pleasing Him now with effective service, then suffering amid trials and testings becomes just too great a problem. With this in mind, there is a direct relationship to II Cor. 5:1-4. Paul was aware as we saw in the end of chapter four of all the suffering and affliction he faced. He knew that believers who share their faith will find obstacles thrown in their way by Satan. Some situations will be difficult to live with. His confidence never wavered as he testified, "For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison" (II Cor. 4:17). As the apostle continues with his encouragement he observes, "For we know that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:1-4). The uncertainty here isn't whether there is a resurrection, but rather what happens if we die before the return of Christ. Further light is shed on this in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. There will be a generation of Christians at the time of the translation of believers who will not experience physical death. They will meet Christ in the air. The contingency that the Lord might come at any time is a healthy spiritual outlook. It keeps us ever ready to meet our Lord (I John 3:3).

There are several interesting contrasts here which bring confidence. The first we notice is the contrast in the body, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down." The earthly body compares with the description in I Corinthians 15 where Paul speaks of corruption, dishonor and weakness. The "tent" shows how temporary this modest dwelling really is. This tells us that our present body is inadequate. In comparison to the celestial body that we will someday have, this body presently is inadequate, or really only fitted for this present life. It is like being naked in relationship to what might be ours through Christ in the future. Paul knew that the Greeks were deeply distressed and concerned over the fact that there would be a soul without a body. In looking for the return of Christ, he expected to be with Him shortly; still in the light of that, he used expressions which indicate that he longed to be clothed properly while he still had a physical body. For this reason a mortal body is like being naked for the spiritual soul in comparison with the tremendous celestial body that will be ours when we are finally with Christ.

The second contrast follows that we have a mortal body as opposed to something that is spiritual. The word "mortal" is related to the Greek concept of death. Paul has already told us that this outer body of ours is decaying, deteriorating. Its final end is death (II Cor. 4:16). No wonder there is nothing in essence to wear for all eternity because all we have on this earth is a physical tent prone to death. Apart from a God-given celestial body there would be no hope for the future.

While we are God's creation now yet the mark and effect of sin is indelibly stamped (Romans 5:12). This is why God sees these bodies as being only temporary, not to be compared with the tremendous, eternal, celestial bodies which someday are guaranteed to be ours. The purpose being "that the mortal may be swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). One must get a grasp of what it is to be a new creature in Christ, with the abundant grace which comes through Christ, to find sufficiency for all daily needs. We must learn to live as God wants us to live, not simply as others dictate we ought to live. The Greek word used here for "life" conveys the concept of wholeness or completeness. The physical body is mortal; its end is death. The new body which comes from Christ is God-given. There is no decay possible (I Cor. 15:54).

There is also a contrast in attitude. "Now we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven" (II Cor. 5:2). This has the concept of yearning, having a keen desire. This is the temporary nature of our bodies. Most of us haven't caught the picture of what the future holds. Many are quite happy with what we have now. Death so frightens us with all the unknown reservations that we scarcely allow ourselves to think about it. This no doubt is even a greater problem for young people with happy, healthy bodies. They can't imagine anything better. Paul knew the facts, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he shares them with us. The contrasts we have seen are certainly all in favor of our new body in glory. This should be enough for each of us so that with the apostle we too yearn and long for that better land!

In the last few years there has been much discussion about the importance of guarantees. Any warranty on a commodity is obviously only as good as the company which stands behind it, or is forced to "make it good" by the government. Transcending far beyond any man-made provisions are those marvelous irrevocable guarantees the Lord provides with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We thereby have assurance of a new life and a new body which will be ours for all eternity. One beautiful confidence we are given states, "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge" (II Cor. 5:5). We can absolutely bank on the fact that new bodies are being prepared for us which are really far superior to what we have now, or even what we could possibly imagine. God is the initiator and designer of them. I am attracted to the two words, "who prepared." In the original Greek it means to accomplish a task successfully and in an effective fashion.

To make certain we would understand His covenant with believers, Paul tells us that the Lord has given us "the Spirit as a pledge." This, in essence, is the down payment. For now we can't see our new bodies. In fact, we can't even see God. So we have to live by faith.

The Holy Spirit has come to reside in our lives to indicate that all these things are so. We have a similar situation in II Cor. 1:22 where we read that God "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." This is in the area of salvation. Then in Romans 8:16 we discover that "the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." We are provided the realization that there is a new and even greater life awaiting us when we are freed from this terrestrial body through the resurrection. This provides a sense of confidence beyond human explanation. The work of the Spirit within our lives verifies this is true.

With the future promises for the believer which are so bright, we are urged to "walk by faith and not by sight" (II Cor. 5:6-8). This is really the pivotal point in the

passage. Faith isn't only confidence in God, but it is also agreeing with Him to such an extent that we act implicitly on His Word. We haven't seen our new bodies, nor have we seen God. Still we can be of "good courage" because we agree with God that all these things are true. While we can hear a great deal about the resurrection, and our new celestial life, unless we capture in our lives the commitment to these truths and act upon them, faith isn't there for the living of our lives. We miss the good courage so necessary in this day.

Paul reminds us that "We walk by faith" (II Cor. 5:7). To walk means that which is consistent and steady. While it may be slow, still there is progress. In the Christian life God doesn't expect brilliance as much as He does consistency in our performance.

Faith in God produces good courage even in the light of discouragement, disappointments and even death. The testimony is bright and beautiful, "While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord" (II Cor. 5:6). Paul doesn't look upon heaven as something strange or foreign. It is home to him, something as meaningful and restful to him as a dwelling place here on earth. The prospects of living this life now are an encouragement to him because of what the Lord has provided for the future. The apostle was a man with two homes. Even the affliction that could easily lead to death couldn't discourage him. He had confidence in the warranty God gives to all who live by faith in the greater life coming.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Am I really ready right now to go to heaven?" We begin to analyze all of our comfortable relationships down here and, while we know this is our final glorious destiny, yet there are things that still bind us to this earth. Such a view is only natural since we so often live by sight rather than faith. We need to gain a greater glimpse and appreciation of the glory which awaits us in a coming hour. It wasn't a case for Paul that he was so dissatisfied with this life that he could hardly wait to get out of it. Scripture shows us that his thoughts of life in heaven were only pleasant to him. Therefore, the possibility of affliction and ultimate death, which could take him there weren't cause for discouragement (Philippians 1:21-24). Bonds for some people here on earth make life for them desirable, even as the bonds in Christ for us should make life in heaven even more desirable. While Paul prefers heaven over earth he doesn't abhor this life. He had relationships that encouraged him to stay here. At all times he recognized what the new resurrection body was all about. If the fear of death, burdens of affliction, or ties of this world have us depressed, there may be a lack of clear knowledge of what the Lord has in store for us. Gain confidence and insight into the encouragement Paul has here in II Corinthians by catching a glimpse of all that God has in store for us in those celestial bodies (II Cor. 5:6-8).

Realizing what is in store for us with our new resurrection bodies should result in good courage for this life on earth. Paul gives us the admonition, "Therefore, also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (II Cor. 5:9). He has already talked about the resurrection, the guarantee we have from God that it is true, and now we should want to conduct ourselves in an exemplary fashion. The word "ambition" carries with it the concept of self-interest. Paul uses it here, however, in a positive sense. While it still captures the idea of drive and enthusiasm, yet in this instance it isn't for personal gain. The goal is to be pleasing to the Lord. Conditions shouldn't alter this compelling desire. In essence the apostle is testifying, "When the situation is perfect for praising the Lord, such as in heaven, obviously I want to do that. But even while I am in this physical body with all its problems and peculiarities, still my objective is to be pleasing to Him."

The focal point of Paul's entire life was to conduct himself in such a manner that the Lord might find satisfaction and glory in his existence. This is the one thing

he found most satisfying in life. Too often people feel they have to "give up" things to serve God. The Christian life isn't a negative existence. While there are negatives in the Bible (and they need to be emphasized) yet there is no greater joy for a person than to do what God wants him to do. Our walk with the Lord need not be characterized solely by tears and agony. Paul found the greatest joy in life in serving the Lord. This was the result of a healthy appreciation for Christ's resurrection and the new bodies we will be given for all eternity. The hinge of finding joy in serving the Lord is a clear focus of what life in the future will be all about.

Next we find a very appropriate and yet sobering thought introduced. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). The judgment seat of Christ is a place of evaluation where evidence is going to be sifted. The word in the Greek is "bema" which refers technically to the raised step where the judge would sit, speaking in his official capacity as he rendered decisions. Pilate judged Christ at a "bema" seat (Matthew 27:19; John 19:13). The final Judge for the believer will be Christ Himself. Romans 14:12 indicates that each one of us as believers in Christ shall give an account of himself to God. This is one good reason why we shouldn't judge one another. This always causes us to put an obstacle or stumbling block in someone else's way.

Keep in mind that the unbeliever will not be at the "bema" of Christ. They will be judged for their rejection of Christ at another time when they appear at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). The only evaluation there is whether one's name appears in the book of life. This has nothing to do with actions or deeds whatsoever. The only way an individual is acceptable in God's sight, giving him entrance into heaven, is through accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. Works, words, and deeds aren't in view at all. In contrast, the only people to be judged at this bema seat are believers in Jesus Christ. The scene takes place in heaven. The only question revolves around how one has lived his life since he accepted Christ as personal Savior.

The specific focus of our judgment relates to the deeds done in the body (II Cor. 5:10). This whole passage has been talking about the human body here on earth. The contrast is to a greater celestial body that is someday going to be ours. The interesting thing is that the good things are to be recompensed for while the bad things carry no value whatsoever. The contrast is similar to that in I. Cor. 3:12 which talks about precious metals in distinguishment to combustible wood, hay and stubble. Some things are worthless and are thus completely discounted and annihilated. It is only the good things for which we receive rewards. The great news is that there is no condemnation here, only commendation. There is nothing negative; it is all positive. Notice the emphasis, "that each one may be recompensed." This means to take care of, or to provide for. The good deeds in Christ's sight are all honored. You will not be punished for worthless efforts. Paul told the Romans that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). No where in Scripture do we ever get a picture of Christians being judged and put down. This never happens because there is no condemnation for our sin once it has been committed to Christ.

What motivates a person to do a good job? In the business world it is generally extra pay or some form of monetary incentive. Research and experience have shown that this isn't always as successful as recognition, increased responsibilities and positional status. Motivation is an essential part of life. Interestingly, the apostle Paul sees this factor as being important in his ministry. In II Cor. 5:11 through 21 he shares what causes him to serve effectively for Christ. Two reasons seem contradictory: fear and love, although Paul doesn't view them that way.

In II Cor. 5:11 we note that fear is the sobering realization of how we shall be judged. "Therefore" ties back to the previous section where we learned of Christ's bema seat of evaluation of our lives here on earth. Often concerning "fear" we mean reverential awe or complete submission to the Lord. These are realistic evidences of the truth. In this verse, however, the word for "fear" in the Greek means both terror and flight. Certainly we aren't terrified by the One who loves us and who has indeed given us eternal life, nor do we need to run from Him. Our desire should be to flee to Him from the world. This term shouldn't be "watered down" whatsoever. Paul had been given a task to do. If he didn't accomplish it there would be no rewards. As with most of us, the apostle desperately wanted to please the Lord. He was fearful in the proper Biblical sense. He kept in mind the goals he wanted to accomplish for Christ. He was ever communicating the message of salvation to others.

Paul never felt he had arrived at the quality of life essential to complete perfection or maturity. He was always attempting to make spiritual progress. This wasn't because of being threatened by God nor fearful in the sense that the Lord might somehow shatter his life. His primary concern was that he wanted to be sure of doing everything he could for the Savior who loved him and gave Himself for him (Philippians 3:12). Here was true motivation.

Notice in verse 11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God." This is Paul's ministry in the light of his evaluation by the Lord. He wanted to reach men for Christ, realizing his privilege and obligation. In the Greek the word for persuade speaks of influencing others for the Savior. Paul wanted to be about the business God had called him to do. He earlier testified, "If I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me" (I Cor. 9:16, 17 NASB). There are such important tools as preaching and living wisely, as well as the fact that his whole life was totally known to God. The apostle truly wanted to persuade men "wisely" because God, to whom all things are manifest, would be the One to judge him. This is why he desired to follow through on his commitment in an effective fashion.

The last aspect of verses 11 and 12 gives us a minor digression. Thinking the things that motivated him might be misunderstood, Paul briefly follows up on a thought about effectiveness. He adds, "And I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences." Some may have doubted at Corinth, undercutting the apostle by suggesting that he wasn't doing his job effectively. He goes on to point out, "We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart."

Recently I was reading an article about an attorney who had as his client a very powerful, well-known international figure. The lawyer told how he always had to be well prepared in facing the man because he was constantly asking questions. He had to do a good job because his client was very perceptive and demanding. Someone else whom he represented legally and who might know very little about law could give him the opportunity to let things slip by, or to do a mediocre job. You see, it is possible to mislead people who judge us on the surface. At the same time, it is not possible to mislead God. Paul observed, "Some people take pride in appearance and not in heart. I know God will evaluate every facet of my ministry and I'll be rewarded only for the positive things I've accomplished. That's why I can't operate only to please men with this evaluation before me." Motivation is extremely important in all we do. Fear is powerful and useful in a constructive sense.

In addition to fear being a strong motivating power, there is also one other important factor. The apostle Paul was concerned about the love of Christ as a cause

for being moved to action. He testifies, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (II Cor. 5:13-15 NASB).

The word "philos" is a good one for love as it is found in Biblical passages. It can refer to our love for Christ as well as God's love for those upon the earth. It is the general term most people used, but it was far from the meaning found in "agape." This is a special kind of divine love which is very unique in its close relationship. It has to do with the overwhelming love Christ displays toward us, especially as it concerns His sacrificial love for His own. With the definite article in front of it we have the strongest possible means of describing the love of our Savior which controls and motivates believers. It doesn't just mean to be kind or gentle toward others. It is rather the deepest kind of love Christ demonstrated for us on the cross of Calvary. This is the same kind of love displayed in John 15. "Greater love (agape love) hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (verse 13). John also defines it in the explanation, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sin" (I John 4:10). Paul felt exactly the same way.

The apostle tells us, "The love of Christ controls us." The King James uses the word "constrains" which has some real benefit for our study. The Greeks had a compound word which meant "to hold together." This is what is used here. It conveys the idea of enclosing or encompassing individuals or animals for the purpose of controlling them. Cattle are placed in a corral to confine them. The Greek term "phalanx" was used of soldiers who were designated in the proper order to protect an advancing line of soldiers. Paul uses this idea to show that Christ's love is so great and pervading that wherever he turned agape love was there crowding him back to his rightful task as an apostle. He was literally "constrained."

We have many instances in our homes which illustrate this kind of love. None is better than the love of a mother for her child. Who hears the little six-month old infant cry out in the night? Most often it's the mother. Who gets up and feeds the child or changes the diaper? It is the mother, unless somehow an agreement has been reached ahead of time. (And even there, it is usually the mother who must wake the father to get up and do his task!) The mother seems to thrive on that love more than anyone else. The child almost "hems" her in. Even so, Christ's love ought to control us, such as even hemming in our thoughts. When our mind begins to wander it is the love of Christ which should restrict and help us do that specific purpose so necessary for true spiritual growth. How about the use of our tongue? Here again, the all-pervading influence should be the love of Christ. That powerful love, demonstrated on the cross of Calvary, will enable us to focus on the specific task before us.

It is also significant to consider the source of such powerful love. Paul affirms, "Having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." The fountain-head of this powerful love is the fact that Christ gave His life freely for all people. Therefore, we are no longer to live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. This reveals His substitutionary death. Actually, we should have died for our own sins. The fact that we were separated from the Lord in obstinacy, wanting to go our own way, is indicative that we ought to carry the penalty of our sins.

As a persecutor of the early Christians, Paul never lost the wonder of Christ's love for Him. He testifies, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). He never lost the wonder of the fact that he would never have to pay for those sins himself. The Lord took care of it all on

Calvary. It is also the Savior who has power over the grave (II Cor. 5:15).

The results of this agape love are indicated in that believers "should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them." Paul told the Christians at Rome, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4). This is why we should "consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).

Paul's response then to this great love was one word, "ecstasy" (II Cor. 5:13). He was excited and actually carried away with the fact that God displayed such love upon him. This term literally means to stand outside oneself, or to change so completely that it is amazing to the individual. Many times in the New Testament the translation is "amazement," and still, in essence, it is our word "ecstasy." Paul could hardly be rational when he thought of God's love toward him. When Paul stood before King Agrippa the apostle was told in no uncertain terms, "You are out of your mind; your great learning has driven you mad!" Perhaps he appeared before these men to be carried away because of his enthusiasm in the task God had given him to do. This was simply the normal reaction of a person who had captured the essence of the agape love of God in his life. Paul declares, "Towards God, we are beside ourselves. By effort and design I try to make myself intelligible and effective to you at Corinth."

There is an important lesson for us today. Sometimes we can get carried away talking about hymns, special Christian experiences and very heavy theological truths the average person of the world could never grasp. A young person can get trapped too in a lack of depth from both a scriptural as well as an experiential involvement so that nothing of significance is really shared with others. People may be watching the "performance" but no real communication takes place. Our goal should be a life lived for Christ with joy unspeakable, clearly expressing itself in word and deed to all mankind, that they, too, may share in all the blessings God has given.

We don't minimize the importance of proper motivation in our service for Christ. Paul was concerned by the eventual judgment or evaluation by the Lord Himself, as well as by the controlling and compelling love of the Savior. A key third element is the fact that we become new persons in Christ. The message of salvation alone can transform lives. We should want to share it with others, despite any discouraging problems we may face. The people at Corinth weren't strangers to "Roman positive thinking" or to the Greek intellectual philosophies of the day. Then there also were the Pharisees and the scribes who sought to set people straight about how they ought to live their lives. The great news though was that in Christ one can be totally acceptable to God, a new creature before Him. This is what the apostle wanted to share with the world and what he encourages us to emulate.

We have two prime verses which focus on this theme. "Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Cor. 5:16, 17 NASB). The climax is the phrase, "All things have become new."

There are rightfully certain conditions for this new life. One has to be "in Christ" before all things can become new. Another scriptural phrase which is set in contrast is "in Adam." This refers to the natural union we have with the first man. In essence it states that we are born physically. "In Christ" is a supernatural

term. It indicates a union which shows we have been born spiritually. Paul had told the believers in Corinth about these responsibilities earlier. He pointed out, "For as in Adam all died, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22).

One of the ramifications of being in Christ is the fact that we share with Him some of these great things that have not touched the human life before. We become, for example, sons of God. This is a completely new standing before God. To be sure, your desires and temptations to sin won't automatically stop just because you claim Christ as your Savior. Of course, the power is there to have victory over them. The basis for change is in our walk with the Lord. We are to progress, turning from the former pattern of life which seemed so ingrained in everything we did. We are to cease from a static life of spiritual stagnation to one of growth. The potential for growth is ours, whereas, before we knew Christ, there was no possibility of any development whatsoever because we were dead spiritually. In God's holy and righteous eyes, before we were Christians, we were unacceptable to Him because of sin. Once we receive the Savior we are made heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. This is why we have encouragement to walk appropriately in this new life now open for us. There is no longer any condemnation before God. This verse explains, "old things are passed away." The old thing of sin and resulting eternal death is all passed away. From everlasting damnation we are now free. Apart from Christ we are bound to the old; in Christ we are free and new creatures (John 8:36). Divine righteousness becomes ours because of our position in the Lord.

Because we are new creatures in Christ we recognize no man according to the flesh (II Cor. 5:16). This means we don't judge people by the surface appearance. When we are committed to Christ a transformation takes place internally before God. Most of us come to grips with our feelings as we look at another person's outward appearances. As Christians we ought not visually to size up others according to the flesh. This is all too human. Paul is excited because in Christ he found a way of relating to people which overlooked problems, difficulties, and circumstances which might normally have "turned him off." The apostle judged others simply on the grounds of whether or not they had accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. This frees us from the tyranny of human judging which becomes little more than criticism. You can't guess the motives of other individuals by outward appearances. God looks at the heart for that is what counts.

Paul was no longer interested in knowing Christ just as a mere man because he now knew Him as Savior and God. Some people have known Jesus by the study of Scriptures from a human perspective, simply as a person. The apostle testified, "I don't want to judge the Savior in that manner." That standpoint alone would truly distort the real issues. The same should be with other individuals. Yes, Paul was properly motivated because he knew the message experienced in his own life which caused the miraculous transformation. He was a new creature. He could hardly wait to make certain that others would take this same step of transforming faith.

The apostle Paul often spoke of Christian liberty, knowing what it was to be free from the bondage of sin. He now was a bondsman to Christ. He was properly motivated by his commission from God. It was so special and significant that Paul counted it a privilege to serve the Lord. In our passage for this study he explains, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:18-21 NASB.)

Undoubtedly Paul's commission was from God giving him the ministry and privilege of reconciliation. We note from verse 20 that the Lord entreats others through us. The fact is that if you will share the Word with others, it is the very God of the universe who chooses to minister through you. Now that is a tremendous commission! No wonder Paul was strongly motivated.

Paul's commission was also significant because it is tied into the fact that we are "ambassadors" for Christ. This comes from a Greek verb meaning to be the eldest son. Generally an ambassador was an older person, the most important in relationship to representing a nation. An ambassador was a favored, trusted, senior authority who acted on behalf of the king being represented.

Not too long ago I was reading a publication in which a special study was made relative to what really motivated people. It was discovered that recognition and expansion of duties were very powerful and motivating factors. Nothing can compare with being called by God. This is a privilege as well as an awesome responsibility. We should carry out our duties wisely and effectively. I get enthusiastic when I think of the kind of responsibility given to each of us.

Paul was commissioned to the ministry of reconciliation. The term "to reconcile" means to change from one position or relationship to another. For instance, a change from enmity to friendship. Isaiah 59:2 shows the significance of the ministry we have, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." It was the sins of mankind that separated us from God. Yet, He loved us so much that He sent Christ to this earth to live and then to die for our sins. Still, so few really respond to that divine love. Those people still carry the burden of their own iniquities in their lives. There needs to be a change or a reconciliation. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Reconciliation reverses a life of spiritual condemnation to sonship, eternal life and commendation instead of condemnation.

The method of reconciliation is explained in verse 18, "All these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." Christ is the only channel through which reconciliation takes place (v. 19). The sins people have committed, which should properly rest upon their shoulders, have been taken away by the death of Christ on the cross. He is the One who bore our sins for us (v. 21). Thereby, the sins we were liable for have all been blotted away, taken care of by the Savior. How sad that some people would rather live in their obstinacy, standing apart from God. Yet the complete provision is still there. Our new position is the righteousness of God (v. 21). We are perfect before Him through Christ. This isn't a relative goodness which means we are a little better than the next person.

It is true that sometimes the way we live on earth belies the fact that before God we are righteous new creatures. This doesn't alter the fact, however, that in God's sight, through Christ, we are individuals who are totally acceptable to Him (I Peter 3:18). This special ministry has to be experienced and then discharged by sharing it with others.

Paul knew the feeling of alienation as well as the joy of fellowship. Having experienced salvation he in turn shares his enthusiasm with others. This is the ideal pattern for us to follow, too. It is urgent for us to realize that people are living apart from God in sin. We must be certain of our own commitment and commission. Make certain of your motivation. This is always crucial when God evaluates a life. This high calling Paul had is the same type we should desire as we seek to be effective ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

In the first ten verses of II Corinthians 6 Paul builds directly upon the fact that

he is an ambassador of Christ. Because of his great calling and special commission he wants to be faithful in service. "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain--for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you;' behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is the 'day of salvation'" (II Cor. 6:2 NASB). The foundation for Christian service is "working together with Him." The apostle was not suggesting that it was so much working together with the people at Corinth or even with other apostles, but rather that it was working together with the Lord. He used a similar concept earlier, "For we are God's fellow workers" (I Cor. 3:9). Service for Christ is a partnership. We are the vessels He uses to communicate eternal truths to this world. You see, we don't have to do the job alone.

If we really felt that everything had to be done in the Christian life solely through human instruments, we might easily despair. We could even come to the same place Elijah experienced. He thought Jezebel and her Baal worshippers had gained the upper hand. He even felt there was no one else who was much interested in bowing down before Jehovah. He commiserated, "I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away" (I Kings 19:10). He had virtually no spirit or desire left. Amid such overwhelming discouragement the Lord spoke to him with assurance that he wasn't alone. There were still 7,000 in Israel who hadn't yet bowed down before Baal.

Sometimes a housewife will have moments of discouragement. She can never get ahead of all the responsibilities. No one else really seems to care. Feeling the load is all on our shoulders does create despair. Somehow you feel you are the only one who is attempting to do a quality job for the Lord. Keep in mind that there is no reason to despair in the Christian life. After all, we are working together with the Lord.

There is another error which can creep in and this can even be more damaging--pride. There are some people who relish the idea of being the last one who can do anything. It may be that you feel you are the only pastor in the community who is really conservative and believes the Bible. This tendency of pride gives us the feeling that we can accomplish things with or without God's help. Did you know that the English language is one of the few in the world which capitalizes the letter "I." We so often tend to focus on self. In the Christian life there is no room for pride. We work together with the Lord, not apart from nor independent of Him. We are teamed together with God.

The major thrust of faithful service is a valid commitment to Christ. We should be in the business of urging people to be reconciled to God, accepting Christ as personal Savior. We are "not to receive the grace of God in vain." This is a difficult phrase written to believers who know full well that they are not backslidden from the standpoint of their pattern of life. They know they have made a commitment to Christ. Yet somehow or other they aren't carrying on effective evangelism as a person should. They are urged by the apostle to be a spiritual benefit to others. They should be faithful in passing on the message of salvation, with the necessary and appropriate exhortation.

Paul urges the believers to consider, "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation." The truth was to be passed on. He uses these phrases, "Now is the acceptable time," "Now is the day of salvation." The phrase "acceptable time" is almost as if a salesman came up to you and urged, "There's no better time to buy than now." Then came the persuasive pressure. Isaiah states the same thing (Isaiah 49:8). You know the old phrase, "out of sight, out of mind." Someone who ignores Christ, turning his back on the Bible many times, blindly goes on without any thought about what God could mean in his life.

From our experience as Christians we know there are days of heartache which come, but

there is also a "day of salvation." The believers at Corinth were urged to share with others the good news. The ability to choose one's eternal destiny is taken from us forever in death. Of all the things Paul wanted to do as a faithful ambassador uppermost was the desire to see others saved and brought into the family of God. Have you responded to salvation? If not, remember today is the acceptable moment. May we have this urgency in our ministry as ambassadors for Christ.

As a co-laborer with Christ and His ambassador to the world, the apostle Paul was committed to a faithful ministry of reconciliation. Despite adverse situations and difficult problems he was able to adjust to all circumstances (Philippians 4:11). Unfortunately, most of us aren't like that. People irritate us and problems get us down. Discouragement keeps many of us from an effective Christian life. We are controlled and influenced, to a great extent, by outside conditions dictating whether we are going to be a success or a failure. Paul was anxious to set the pace for a spiritual walk with the Lord in "giving no cause for offense in anything" (II Cor. 6:3). The word "offense" in its basic sense means to stumble or to cause someone else to trip. Technically in the Greek it means to strike one thing against another. In the Greek Paul uses a double negative. He says, "nothing in nothing is going to cause me to offend other people." The apostle is putting himself in a very strong straightjacket. He wants to build bridges to other people, making certain nothing would foul up his opportunities to reach them for Christ. Paul did not want to emphasize himself so much that he became an irritant to other people. He wanted nothing in his life to be a stumbling block. In I Corinthians 8 he talked about eating meat offered to idols. That was a stumbling block to some Christians even though it may have nothing to do with spirituality. Still, being obnoxious about one's freedom in Christ isn't a wise thing. For practical human reasons as well as common sense we need to make certain that nothing is found in our lives that will cause people, even weaker Christians, to falter in their decisions for Christ.

Paul's major concern was that "the ministry be not discredited." He looks upon his task as a sacred commitment. Paul emphasizes the ministry not so much as a person on a pedestal who is announcing certain decrees, but rather someone out in the middle of people dedicated to helping them. The idea behind the concept of "discredited" means to be blamed or ridiculed. Too much of what is claimed to be service for Christ is more of a selfish show, open to attack by unbelievers which ultimately hurts the opportunity for reaching them in a positive fashion. When a church has a fight or even a split it has all kinds of problems. Those in the world are ready to point the finger of scorn. The very same holds true in individuals when they live inconsistently. It will hurt the cause significantly. We know that there are poor Christians in the church. Paul didn't think it was his business to cover up this fact. He was more concerned about making certain his own life was right before the Lord, as well as that the hypocrites get right with the Savior so that they wouldn't be stumbling blocks to others.

There is an important positive side to everything we do. Paul urges, "But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God" (II Cor. 6:4). This phrase "commending myself" is in contrast to "offending others." This doesn't mean that we pat ourselves on the back. In the Greek it means "to stand together" or "to bring together." The speaker and the listener are united in one goal. There are ways you can reach other people if you try to do certain things effectively to build bridges to them. This gives opportunity of communicating Christ properly. Commending is the ability to help people come together. Paul virtually explains, "It is my obligation to live properly so that you will want to get together with me, standing together, and sharing with others what God has done in our lives."

To test yourself out on this principle, consider those who really irritate you. Finding those people who annoy you, asking yourself, "What can I do to bring the two of us together, without having the other person change one single thing?" Remember

it is you who has to do the changing or the accommodating. This was Paul's approach. He was willing to humble himself to reach others. He controlled his ability to be effective. It wasn't contingent upon whether or not someone else was pleasant to him, or if the circumstances were right. He has for us a God-enabling formula for success. His commitment to Jesus Christ as an ambassador of the cross was so strong that his motivation could overcome problems and irritants. These so often creep into our lives. Circumstances may cause us humanly speaking "to throw in the towel." Here we see that it needn't be that way.

Let's consider some of Paul's tremendous obstacles. "In much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses" (II Cor. 6:4). There is a definite sense of patience here. Such doesn't result in despair or misery. Affliction has the idea of pressing or squeezing. So often outside conditions weigh on us. It may be the pressure of not enough money. It may be rumors people are spreading about you. It may be the fact that you have lost your job. There are so many irritants and hardships we all have to face. Paul didn't allow pressures to keep him from building bridges to others in an effective manner for Christ.

Sometimes problems just can't be avoided. They may often be necessary for our spiritual welfare. If you're captured and tortured there isn't much you can do about it except to endure it. So Paul is using this kind of concept, a strong word of compressing, of pressing in upon an individual, and at times a related word. Notice also the word "distresses" (v. 4). Even with these the apostle indicates that they wouldn't destroy his desire to serve Christ (Romans 8:35). He could still endure, reaching out to help others. What a faithful servant and what an example for us!

Years ago, when I first started to play golf, I thought I was much better than I really was. I muttered to myself rather loudly, playing with three others, "What am I doing! What's wrong?" I literally just griped my way around the course. One of the fellows with me, who was quite a good golfer having played for years, observed frankly, "I'll tell you what you're doing. You're out here on a golf course to enjoy golf, and not to irritate the people you're playing with. Why don't you try that approach?" I got the point! It didn't make much of a change in how I was hitting the ball, but it certainly made a change in my attitudes. In the Christian life, isn't that true? We are out to reach people for Jesus Christ, not to trip them up, regardless of their problems or ours. Why don't we follow this pattern of success and victory?

"I'm tough to live with until I have my first cup of coffee." Ever hear a friend say that? Thankfully, I don't have that problem, although I'm sure I have other ones which trap me often enough. Certainly habits and desires for certain things all too often control our lives and attitudes. The apostle Paul's motivation to serve the Lord faithfully was strong enough so that he could even handle hunger, sleeplessness, combined with a side order of beatings and a few other strongly odious things. God had equipped him well to function effectively as His ambassador of reconciliation. Consider just a few more of the difficulties he had to go through in his life of service, "in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings" (II Cor. 6:5). Despite these extremely adverse circumstances he didn't want to give any cause for offense as he sought to commend himself and the Gospel to others. The word "stripes" in the Greek refers to a blow or being beaten on the back with an instrument of torture. It is a standard reference to beatings. In Acts 16:22, 23 there is an illustration of the use of this word in an actual setting. Paul was at Philippi, "and the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods and when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely." Even with those brutal rods Paul didn't want to be the kind of person who would allow such circumstances to weaken his desire to reach others for Christ.

He also uses the word "imprisonment." This could be traced to a number of situations in Acts as well as in other portions of Scripture where the apostle was in prison. To him prison meant physical isolation from friends. Several times he was even prohibited from having visitors. There was the emotional problem of being separated from the basic task he desired in communicating the Lord. Being behind bars was a difficult situation, yet he could testify, "Even this won't separate me from the task I have."

Next is the word "tumults." This means disturbances, disorders, unruliness, in fact, it simply illustrates a mob out of control. Paul was trapped many times in the middle of a crowd bent on his destruction (Acts 16:22, 23). Such groups certainly don't operate on reason. Over the years I have had opportunity to teach advanced classes in the area of persuasion. Sometimes we spend a great deal of time looking at the research articles dealing with crowd psychology. A group can be manipulated by emotion so that they are incited to do things together that they would never do on their own. Reason goes out the window completely.

Someone was telling me about a game between two Christian high schools. They had an opening prayer before the football clash. Immediately after the "Amen" someone in the stands from the Christian high school shouted out, "Kill 'em!" Of course, the idea was to go out and win the game. But the crowd soon joined it. What a contrast this made. Similarly, many people go to a baseball game and yell, "Kill the umpire!" They say things about the players they would never utter in private to their faces. Even so, Paul was the center of storm in a crowd. Bolts of lightning were always aimed at him. Several passages for you to study on your own concerning this would be Acts 13:45-50; Acts 14:4, 5, 9; Acts 21:27, 40; 22:23. Take the time to read the entire context, too. Even in the midst of these tumults Paul didn't want anything which would cause him to live a life which might bring disrepute upon the ministry of reaching others for Christ. He wanted to build bridges to those who had never received the Savior.

The apostle also faced strenuous "labors." Some work is good and satisfying, certainly necessary for our well balance. But not all of the toil we face comes out that way. Some things don't have a happy result. There is the uphill battle, so fatiguing and difficult. Although the fruit is eventually there, things just don't fall into place easily. The Greek word for "labors" here more often gives the connotation of tremendous demands and struggles. Paul faced principalities and powers up against his total defeat and destruction. We remember his earlier challenge, "Therefore... always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58).

Paul also mentions his faithfulness "in watching." There were doubtless hours of devotion and service which could only be done late at night or early in the morning when others were asleep. The apostle agonized over the ministry given him. There were long journeys, special meetings, and fellowships never governed by a clock. All of these cut down on his time for rest and sleep. There were cold, damp places, inconvenient and not conducive to proper rest. The discomfort made sleep fitful at best. Above all, there was agony of heart in seeing individuals not responding. He knew antagonism from certain leaders who attempted to prohibit his claiming the message of salvation. Paul didn't allow lack of sleep to turn him into a sour stumblingblock to those who were looking to him for spiritual guidance. He rather endured.

The last concept in verse five is "in fastings." This means hunger in general. It wasn't so much formal fastings for spiritual or religious purposes. This was simply a lack of food. The apostle missed many meals because he was busy praying, preaching, or traveling. Still, he endured. Some can't function without that first cup of coffee. Some aren't fit to live with unless they get enough sleep or food. Paul didn't allow himself the luxury of being obnoxious because of a few missed meals.

There were no offenses, for he wanted to build bridges. Circumstances were not going to get him down. His sacred goal was to minister effectively for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a challenge for us! May our commitment to the Savior be so strong that we, too, will endure for His sake.

The next thing Paul exhibited was faithfulness towards positive attributes. He never faltered "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" (v. 6). These things aren't achieved by simply lifting yourself by your own bootstraps. Genuine love doesn't come that way.

Consider first of all the concept of purity. The Greek word used here is actually found only this once in all of Scripture. It refers basically to something that inspires religious awe or respect. It is anything which is clean in a religious or spiritual matter. Paul is talking about making sure that the life is clean in relationship to the responsibility we have of living effectively in service for Christ. Paul is still in the business, not of patting himself on the back, but of adjusting so that he can be effective to others even in rather difficult situations. It wasn't a "holier-than-thou" type of arrangement. We are not to be obnoxious to others playing the role of a Pharisee. Paul wanted his daily life to be straightforward so that others wouldn't look down on the ministry and ultimately down upon God. His wasn't a false spiritual goodness. It can come only as Christ cleanses a life, enabling a person to make wise decisions in matters which affect various temptations.

Paul also uses the word "knowledge" (v. 6). The apostle was an expert on life, both now and eternal. He knew people and their needs. He was well acquainted with the problems of pride, and how heartaches had to be endured. He was thoroughly versed in the Old Testament Scripture, having been a Pharisee before he met Christ on the road to Damascus. Certainly he knew the message of life and hope through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul thought, studied, prayed, and observed. He was in the business of discussing crucial issues of life and he did it well. In Acts we notice in many situations how well he communicated the truths of God with both power and conviction. His central theme was eternal life in Jesus Christ. This should remind us of our high and holy privilege of Biblical knowledge. Remember, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

Paul was also faithful "in patience." He wanted to make certain that he commended himself for the Savior, and he knew waiting on the Lord was important. In the Greek it means literally to have a long spirit. This compound word is translated "long-suffering" in Galatians 5:22 in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. It is an extended temperament as opposed to one who is always "flying off the handle." It is the opposite of someone who can't control his reactions. What an entirely different example Paul set! He allowed the Holy Spirit to control his life so that he could accomplish his God-given purposes. He didn't let others color, shape, alter or ruin his life and mission. An angry outburst by somebody was not a signal to Paul to blast back. By design he tried to turn the situation around to win the individual for the Lord.

The very next phrase is "in kindness." Again we find this in Galatians 5:22 where it is translated "gentleness." The basic Greek word from which we get "kindness" is related to the concept of things. I think Paul is saying that he wants to be kind to people. In this way he can build bridges, helping others to see their need for Christ. The apostle might literally testify, I'm as practical in my message as with my money. I'm going to be down-to-earth and practical." Even as God was practical in what He did for Paul on the road to Damascus, the apostle similarly wanted to be practical in meeting the basic needs of individuals.

When there was also the need for "kindness in the Holy Spirit." Listing the qualities he wants to find in his life, standing him in good stead, he emphasizes the advantage of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who gives us enabling power for the demonstration of these qualities Paul listed. The result of a new life in Christ is the ministry and the fruit of the Spirit producing qualities which will bring ultimate glory to the Lord.

Paul goes on to close verse six with the phrase "in genuine love." Most times we speak of Christian love with the Greek word "agape," as we find it here. It stands by itself as a means of truly communicating God's purpose and desire for all mankind in eternal salvation. Notice that it is not simply love Paul has in mind, but rather that which is "genuine." There is no hypocrisy involved. There is no actor "role playing." You can't really be effective if you fake love.

How have you stacked up on this little check list? The apostle Paul declares, "I don't want anybody to stumble on my account. I'm not going to put my foot out to trip people since I don't want to be a discredit to the ministry (v. 3). I don't want to be a professional apostle; all things must be real and genuine." The wonderful fact is that all of this can be realized in our lives as well through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. May we be willing for this God-enabling to take place each day as we trust Him fully.

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REVELATION

By: Dr. Lloyd T. Anderson

There are some Bible teachers who are of the opinion that Babylon will never be raised up again, as far as ever becoming a great city. It is true, however, that this city was inhabited after its original destruction. A study of related passages also shows that the area immediately surrounding Babylon will likewise be destroyed (Jeremiah 51:43). It should be noted that this prophecy hasn't yet been completely fulfilled.

The territory around Babylon is very fertile and productive even today. Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon would be destroyed so thoroughly that no stone would be left which could be used for building purposes (Jeremiah 51:24-26). We know this hasn't taken place since in actuality many different cities have been constructed from the ruins of ancient Babylon. Bricks with the word "Babylon" stamped on them have been found as far away as the city of Baghdad. This further emphasizes that the prophecies of the Old Testament have yet to be fulfilled.

The time for Babylon's destruction is specifically mentioned in Isaiah 13:6,9,13. This time period includes both the Tribulation and the Millennium. The description of the city's final downfall is given in Revelation 18. Verse ten tells us that judgment will be accomplished in one hour. The devastation will be utterly complete. John testifies, "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all" (Revelation 18:21). This coincides directly to what we find in the Old Testament with the words of Jeremiah (51:63-64). This will probably be toward the end of the great Tribulation. Those who have profited from its evil systems will cry out in anguish when they see the smoke of the city in ashes (Revelation 18:18). Fire will come down from heaven, even as it did in the holocaust of Sodom and Gomorrah.

For these reasons it seems clear to me that Babylon must be rebuilt so that it can be destroyed during the last days. The time of this prophesied conflagration will be during the Day of the Lord. This expression prophetically includes the Tribulation. It is possible that Rome will be the ecclesiastical capitol of the world during the first half of the Tribulation. Rebuilt Babylon could become the political and commercial capitol of the world during the last three and a half years. Only time will reveal the exact fulfillment of all these details.

Revelation 17 describes the apostate church during the Tribulation. The true Church, the Body of Christ, made up of all born again believers, has already gone home to be with the Lord. The ecclesiastical efforts of our day portend this final last world-wide religious system. The philosophies of our day seem to be, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you cooperate." The woman, who is the prostitute, is destroyed by the ten nation kingdom. She has ridden that force like a beast, which now turns on her. I do not personally believe that the woman of Revelation 17 is the same as the city in chapter 18. Although they have the same name they are two different entities. This distinction is also made clear as we read, "After these things" (Revelation 18:1). This refers to what takes place following the destruction of the apostate church.

The apostle John declares, "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great prostitute that sitteth upon many waters" (Rev. 17:1). This woman, whatever her name may be given, obviously symbolizes the apostate church.

As we pointed out in an earlier study, it is not unique for a woman to be associated significantly with religion (Revelation 2:20). This false church is also mentioned in Revelation 19:2, "For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great prostitute, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand." This teaches us that God directly executes judgment on the apostate church. He uses the Antichrist as the tool along with the confederated empire. It is after this time that the Antichrist exalts himself as god.

The prostitute amalgamates all of the cults and pagan religions in the world of that day. This super organization is far greater than any one church system or denomination. Its scope will be absolutely universal. In the council of churches we have today there are the shadows of this coming situation. As a part of it will be all the segments of false religions, apostate Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism, to say nothing of the multitude of pagan religions. We see the broad coverage of this evil combination in Revelation 17:15, "And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the prostitute sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

After the true Church has been taken home to be with the Lord, the ecumenical movement will proceed rapidly to its logical end as the one world religious system. It will boost the Antichrist to power as people gladly welcome this false messiah who claims to hold the secret for global peace. This unholy alliance is not unlike some of the similar relationships we have seen down through the centuries. The false church will yield to this arrangement so that she can gain political preference and power. That groundwork is already being laid today.

We get a clearly focused picture in this 17th chapter of Revelation. John tells us, "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (v. 3). The beast was already identified for us in Revelation 13:1ff. He is the one who has horns on his head symbolizing the coming political universal rulership. He is the Antichrist.

The awesome power of the prostitute, which is this world religious system, is so great that the beast allows her to ride and control him. He knows the advantage he will gain in his final and eventual bid for power. Because this will be a state religion it will receive financial and political help as well as military protection. We see the depth to which the apostate church will go in its unholy alliance with the world (Revelation 17:3). Spiritual adultery is spoken of in the Bible as one of the greatest crimes anyone could commit. False religion is the worst enemy of true religion. The hardest person to win to Christ is the one who has embraced some false system which has only its outward show of worship for the Lord.

The clothing and wealth of this evil organization are also amazing, "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (Revelation 17:4). We recall that purple and scarlet were the colors of Roman imperialism during the rule of the Caesars. They are also used today by many churches. We saw that earlier when we studied the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:17). The apostate church of the Tribulation may be gilded with gold but it will only be an outward display of beauty. Inwardly it will be as our Lord described the Pharisees who were filled with dead men's bones and all kinds of uncleanness.

The apostle sees the woman with a golden cup in her hand. This is representative of the false gospel. It is filled with the abominations and filthiness of her prostitution. Such symbolism isn't ordinarily used of heathen nations. Rather, it refers to people who claim to carry the name of the Lord while actually they worship and

serve other gods. These are merely professing believers who have never been saved.

Verse 5 gives us her name, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." The word "mystery" is used because of the religious rites of Babylonianism which are brought into the apostate church during the Tribulation. We again recall the earlier warning of our Lord addressed to the church at Thyatira, "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds, And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Revelation 2:22, 23). This evil amalgamation will direct persecution upon the remnant of believing Israel living during the Tribulation. This will also be true of Gentiles who believe in Christ in the same period. Many will turn to Christ and find as their reward untold persecution.

The cry of religion today is for tolerance. Yet, when the opportunity and power is available, false Christianity will absolutely put up with no one who doesn't subscribe to its beliefs. Today the Holy Spirit, through the Church, is hindering evil. When His restraining hand is removed, as believers are raptured away, there will be no holding back on the wickedness of man. It is then that this evil system, represented by the prostitute, will be drunk with blood of the saints.

While we don't find any happiness in considering the dire events that are coming on the world, we do feel it is important to understand the teaching of the Word of God as it is found in the book of Revelation. We can be grateful that the Tribulation period will have its final culmination.

The apostle John explains, "And the beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition" (Revelation 17:8). The beast that was no doubt refers to the past history of the Roman Empire. The beast that is not typifies the present condition of that fragmented confederacy. The phrase which says that the beast will ascend out of the bottomless pit is better translated, "is about to come up out of the bottomless pit." This no doubt refers to the reactivation of the Roman Empire or this ten nation kingdom around the Mediterranean Sea. It will be headed up by this political beast, the Antichrist, and energized by the devil. That this superman is to go into perdition shows us the destruction of the last world government at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do people react to this? God's scribe observes, "They that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is" (Revelation 17:8). The beast is further defined, "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth" (Revelation 17:9). This seems to be a clear reference to a certain city in the world that has seven great hills, namely Rome.

The angel then tells the apostle John, "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast" (Revelation 17:12). This means that the ten kings will reign with the Antichrist. They will be in subservience to him. Willingly or unwillingly they will give their authority over to him, becoming his puppets and doing exactly as he demands.

These kings receive power with the Antichrist for one hour (Revelation 17:12). The expression seems to refer to the purpose rather than to the time. It isn't so much a reference to an hour of 60 minutes, as it is a time to accomplish a purpose. This foolish ten kingdom confederation, with the Antichrist at its head, has the audacity to make war against the Lamb who is the Lord (v. 14). Christ is the only Redeemer, and all other imposters will be brought to their end. The Savior will be victorious over the armies of the earth.

Whereas Revelation 17:14 looks ahead, verse 15 looks backward, "And he saith unto me, the waters which thou sawest, where the prostitute sitteth, are the peoples, and multitudes, and nations and tongues." This refers to the first verse of this same chapter. Waters are clearly identified as peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues. This shows the far-reaching power of the world church in that coming awful hour.

Downfall for the evil religious system will be swift and certain (vs. 16, 17). We notice especially the phrase, "God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will" (v. 17). This emphasizes the fact that the Lord is in ultimate control, even though it may not seem like it during the raging storms of the Tribulation. The Almighty puts it into the hearts of these ten kingdoms to give their power to this one superman. Then all of them turn against the woman who represents the apostate religious system of that day. God permits one evil power to destroy another to accomplish His will. This isn't the first time Scripture records how the Lord allows violent destruction (II Kings 9:7-37). Jezebel was destroyed because she had brought false worship into Israel. The Lord's hatred of Baal worship was so extreme that He had her so done away with that it was impossible to find all of her body for burial. This was accomplished so that no one could erect a monument to her. It is a good thing to notice for our own lives as well. God will not countenance apostasy.

It is during the time of the Tribulation that the apostate church will come into full-blown existence. The Antichrist is willing for a time to share his place of exaltation with this prostitute. While she seeks to advance his cause, she also shares in his glory. The ten kings headed by the beast become envious of her influence and wealth. The Antichrist, at the end of the first three and one-half years, not only breaks his covenant with the people of Israel, but also his relationship with the apostate church. He then destroys the very ones who helped him achieve his place of power.

The woman is made desolate, shorn of all her support. Her attractiveness is taken away and she becomes the gazing stock of the multitudes as her bones are burned with fire. Worship is then turned wholly to the devil and his false christ. This has been the avowed ambition of Satan throughout all the ages. We reflect back at this point on the Christians in the city of Thessalonica during Paul's day. They were confused thinking perhaps they were already living during the Tribulation. Paul reminded them that the true Church must first be taken out of the world (II Thess. 2:2-4).

With the destruction of the apostate church, persecution isn't improved at all. The darkest hour in religious history is introduced when the Antichrist has gotten rid of the woman representing all false systems. He sets himself up to be worshipped instead. The rebellion that began in the Garden of Eden, seen later at the tower of Babel, and finally at the crucifixion of Christ, will climax in the catastrophic pressure of the Antichrist. This is what Daniel, as well as Jesus, refers to as "the abomination of desolation." There will be the image of the beast in the temple of God. All men in that hour will be faced with a choice of receiving the mark of the beast, or being martyred for the faith.

Still another angel now appears to the apostle John in Revelation 18. There is a definite contrast between these two chapters. The Babylon of chapter 17 is ecclesiastical or religious. The Babylon of chapter 18 is economic, political and commercial. The apostate church is destroyed by the kings of political Babylon. Political Babylon, however, is destroyed by the direct hand and judgment of God. Mystery Babylon, the prostitute of Revelation 17, is destroyed about the end of the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation. Commercial Babylon of chapter 18 is destroyed at the end of the Tribulation at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to establish His millennial reign on earth.

At this time when oil is such a precious commodity, when all of the wealth has shifted to that part of the world, one can begin to see the possibility of a literal Babylon being revived in the land of Iraq. The commercial Babylon of Revelation 18 is the final capitol of the political power of the beast. This city is ultimately destroyed by the great earthquake when the seventh bowl of God's wrath will be poured out.

It is important to underscore the difference between the two Babylons of Rev. 17 and 18. The first has to do with the religious and apostate church on the earth following the true Church being raptured to glory. In chapter 18 a commercial and political system is in view. The downfall of this cultural and economic entity will be swift and definite (Revelation 16:18, 19). The wrath of God will break loose in all of its fury against sin, iniquity and the hardness of man's heart. Babylon will be guilty of defying the Lord. Her transgressions will reach to heaven (Rev. 18:5). This prophetic picture of future events should serve as an excellent warning to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Don't harden your heart but come out from the world system and be separated to Him.

The destruction of Babylon will be realized in one day. This great city will be the governmental and commercial capitol of the world but such will not keep it from being catastrophically laid waste. There is no rejoicing over its downfall. In fact, we read of the kings and leaders of the earth "standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more" (Rev. 18:10, 11). It is no wonder we hear such strong feelings since Babylon will dominate the world during the last half of the Tribulation. It will be the center for everything economically important. It also takes the lead in rebellion against the Lord. On the day when judgment is brought upon this area and system, the sun will rise in the morning just as it does on any other day. But by sunset Babylon will be nothing but smoldering ruins. All the riches of the world will suddenly be gone. In one brief hour there will be dashed in pieces all hopes for the future. Earthquakes today only involve localized areas. At that time the earthquake that destroys Babylon will bring world-wide destruction.

The merchandise destroyed covers every phase of business. Just look at the list in verses 12 through 14 of Revelation 18. People throughout the earth may see the devastation on their television screens. They will be weeping and wailing with the loss (Rev. 18:15-17). Everybody who profits by sea trade will also lament (vs. 17-19). Everything is wiped out in one single hour. All those who have been dependent upon Babylon's wealth will be at wit's end because of their financial losses.

Although this scene is in the future, there is a personal application for us today. How is the luxury of the world affecting us? What are our attitudes toward the life style of this present generation? Each Christian needs to examine his own heart in these matters. Where do you set your goals and ambitions? Are you hoarding for just another day or do you really recognize that you are living in the end times and that Jesus Christ may very soon be back? Our Savior has clearly told us, "Occupy until I come." We should keep working as believers until the Lord returns. We certainly need to guard against the deceitfulness of riches. The Bible warns 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" (Matthew 6:24). Never forget this important consideration for this present hour.

We are not left to question God's feeling concerning the defeat of Babylon. Listen as the exhortation comes, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her" (Rev. 18:20). There is no lament or funeral session in glory regarding this evil, secular system of earth. Rather, there

celebration. What diametrically opposed views are these two. To the man of business and commercialism during the last part of the Tribulation, the devastation will mean tragedy and total bankruptcy. In heaven, however, there is joy because the holiness and righteousness of God are vindicated.

Let me ask you, how would you feel if suddenly everything was taken away from you? Would you rejoice in God's faithfulness, or would you be like those during the Tribulation who will have put their trust in riches. They will have absolutely nothing else to count on. After the Lord allowed Satan to take away all of Job's possessions this faithful saint responded, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

The method of Babylon's destruction is interesting to contemplate. "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all" (Rev. 18:21). Babylon will sink into the earth; most likely into hell itself. Nothing will be salvaged from the city, nor will stone be left which can be used for building other structures. It reminds us of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Keep in mind that Babylon hasn't ever been destroyed in this manner before. Therefore, it is necessary for this city to be rebuilt so that prophecy can be fulfilled. For all these past generations, the area around Babylon has been inhabited. When the prophecy of Jeremiah 50:39 is fulfilled, it will be no more inhabited forever. This will take place at the end of the Tribulation, just before the Second Coming of our wonderful Savior to this earth visibly and bodily. There is much for which to rejoice if we truly know and love the Lord.

While in Revelation 17 Babylon represents false apostate religions, in the 18th chapter it is symbolic of a commercial and political system pervading the earth. It is doubtless true that the majority of the populations of the world live under governments which believe that the human soul and life are nothing but merchandise. They can be destroyed, wasted, and buried. It was Lenin who avowed "What would it matter if two thirds of this world were destroyed, if one third remains to be Communist?" Trafficking in people's lives is characteristic of future Babylon. To them it will be nothing to be tortured, starved, and killed. As long as the particular political system is thriving is all that seems to count. It was our Lord Jesus Christ who told the story of the one lost sheep, and the one lost coin, and the one lost boy. From the Savior we learned that the life of a man was worth something. There is a dignity that belongs to every human creature. We have been made in the image of God. This very body is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. We learn all of that not from Hitler, Genghis, Stalin, or Lenin, but from God's own Son! Departing from these truths there is nothing left but the emptiness of the persuasion that an individual's life is like that of an animal. He is simply a beast of the field. Woe to that nation which can kill someone and think no more about it than as if they were destroying a dog walking across the street. God brings upon this arrogance, conceit and blasphemy His terrible judgment. This is exactly what we find in Revelation 18. Babylon represents the climax and culmination of all of culture and commerce. It shows man apart from God during the last hours of the Tribulation. This is, of course, after the Church has gone home to be with the Lord in the air.

We are in a spiritual war of ideas to the death. God tells us that evil is here and that it will grow and grow across the face of the earth, finding its culmination in Babylon. We will have to contend with this challenge until the end of the age. Personal accountability of sin is one of those great principles by which God governs our destiny, yet we hardly realize it at all. You don't need to murder all the prophets to be guilty of all the prophets' blood (Revelation 18:24). You don't have to kill all the saints in order to be guilty of all the blood of the saints. You do

not have to commit every sin in the catalog in order to be judged by God. It is the tendency towards sin which the Lord judges. In the courts of earth, each person is judged for what he does and for his activity. As an example, one man is judged because he killed another. In heaven, God judges that man for the sin of murder which was in his heart. God looks at the tendency of his sin, not only at what he does. James rightly puts it, "He that breaks the law in one part is guilty of having broken the whole law." It is like a chain. You don't have to break every link in order for the chandelier to fall. When a man sins in one transgression, God sees the tendency of that sin. The Lord knows he will do it a thousand times over. This is why He calls this city Babylon. It is to be judged for all the blood of the prophets through the centuries, though they may have only killed some of them. Sin is sin, and the tendency of it violates everything in God's nature. Yes, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

The 18th chapter of Revelation is significant because of the clear-cut prophecy concerning the ultimate destruction of the great political and commercial Babylon. The preceding chapter deals with Babylon as the apostate religious system that will be world-wide during the Tribulation. That will be composed of all religions which haven't accepted Jesus Christ as personal Redeemer. All of them, strangely amalgamated together, will be overturned and destroyed by the Antichrist and his forces. The Babylon of chapter 18 isn't the same at all. The former represents apostate religion while the latter represents the culture and commercial civilization.

In the midst of this message of judgment, God is calling for a spiritual separation on the part of those who have trusted in Him during the Tribulation. John urges, "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4). Even as Lot had to come out of Sodom so God's people will have to come out of Babylon before He destroys that wicked city. Living today, we realize that it can't be long until Jesus comes for His Church. We will be raptured out of this world to meet the Lord in the air. Therefore, it won't be long until the Tribulation breaks out upon the entire globe. How important it is that we not compromise with present day satanic systems. Of course, there is a singular unity between all of God's born-again people, no matter what church or denomination to which they happen to belong. We cannot endorse efforts toward an amalgamation of all religious systems. This is anti-scriptural (II Cor. 6:14-17; I John 2:15-17). This doesn't mean that we aren't to have friends among unbelieving people. The fact is, we aren't to be absorbed and taken up with their life styles, living as the enemies of God. We are to be separated people.

The Babylonian system is measured by extreme wickedness, "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (Rev. 18:5). God is keeping the records! Even though judgment may seem long delayed, it will finally break upon the city which will be the commercial and political capitol of the world.

Today the Lord is withholding His judgment. It isn't that He doesn't notice the evil taking place. The purpose of His longsuffering is explained by Peter, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but He is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). You see, God is waiting for sinners to receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior. He won't always delay. There will come a day when His judgment will be held back no longer.

For a picture of that coming hour we read of Babylon's just reward, "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double" (Rev. 18:6). What is true of Babylon is also true of every person who rejects Jesus Christ as personal Savior. If you haven't accepted Him, don't forget that God remembers the iniquities of the unsaved.

He keeps the books, not because His memory is short, but for the sake of those who don't remember. This is why, when the unbelieving are judged at the Great White Throne, the books will be opened. Then, they will remember (Rev. 20:12).

Coming judgment isn't only inevitable, it is also just (Romans 2:4-11; Heb. 2:3). Remember, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

We see the foolish self pride and complacency of Babylon, "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow" (Revelation 18:7). The word "deliciously" actually means to live in outstanding luxury and sensuality. We can also see this as the spirit of unbelieving mankind today. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5). The evil concentrated in the city of Babylon during the Tribulation is representative of the evil in commerce, politics and religions of the whole world even today. Let us be looking for "that blessed hope."

Following the destruction of the two Babylons, recorded in chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation, a glorious transaction takes place. It is exciting in contemplation to realize that God will ultimately receive all the honor and glory. "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are His judgments. . . And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:1-9).

There are four "Alleluias" in this passage. The first is over the destruction of the great prostitute or the false world religious system. The second is over the destruction of the commercial, political, cultural entity of Babylon. With her annihilation will come the doom for evil depraved Christ-rejecting men. No wonder all heaven begins to feel the triumph of God's grace. And again they say, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. Then our attention is called to another Alleluia. The third Alleluia is uttered by the exalted and glorified creation of our Lord in heaven. We notice their exclamation, "Amen" (19:4). This word first appears in Numbers 5:22. It continues as the sealing declaration of the Gospels and the Epistles. It is the heavenly committal to truth. It is really the highest word of praise human speech can possibly utter. We read of that coming day when our Savior "shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. And His name shall endure for ever, Blessed be His glorious name and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen" (Psalm 72:8,17,19).

The fourth Alleluia is in answer to a call from the throne itself. The mighty crescendo in response comes from the vast innumerable multitude surrounding the presence of God which will sound like the roar of the thunder of many waters. The exaltation is, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." What a consummation, victory, and triumph!

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PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel: Dr. Chase, Dr. Feinberg and Dr. Sutherland

Q. "Some people tell me that the serpent of Genesis is the devil. I fail to find any mention of Satan from reading Genesis through II Kings. When did he actually come into existence?"

A. In the Hebrew, Satan means "opposer." We know that he is "the accuser of the brethren." He is also called the deceiver and has been a liar from the beginning. Our Lord called him a murderer. The devil has numerous other names and characterizations, none of which are complimentary in nature. To find the origin of this sinister, real personality, we look at such passages as Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-14. This is more fully given although we read of his involvements right from the earliest fall of Adam and Eve. When Satan was created originally he was complete, perfect in beauty, and known as Lucifer, the anointed cherub, the son of the morning. Perhaps it was because he was so close to the throne of God and had been so highly honored of the Lord that he began getting dilutions of grandeur. Just as Adam was created innocent and without sin, Satan too was created perfectly. Still, he was given a will and eventually chose to rebel against God. He wanted and still does, for people to pay him the homage and honor which is only due our heavenly Father. How ridiculous of this deranged rival to think he could be a competitor to the living God, the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent One. Only God is the non-created Being, Deity, in three persons, all of eternal character. The mention of the devil in II Kings doesn't mean the first time chronologically. The serpent in the Garden of Eden was used for the embodiment of the evil fallen angel. In Job 1:6 we read of how Satan came to appear before the Lord relative to God's faithful servant. This is way before the happenings of II Kings. From every indication of the book of Job, including its poetic style and chronological setting, it probably transpired before the bondage and exodus of Israel. There is no mention of the tabernacle, the law, or other similar aspects, so it probably records experiences during patriarchal times.

We also find this sinister character enticing David to depart from trusting God (I Chronicles 21:1). He wanted to get God's servant doing the wrong thing. As a result, the Lord did visit Israel in affliction through plagues.

When you come to the book of Revelation you discover fully who this diabolical person really is (Revelation 12:9). This passage deals with the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the male child who will eventually rule the nations with a rod of iron. Psalm 2 tells us specifically who that is, none other than David's greater son, Jesus of Nazareth. In Revelation 12:9 the sinister creature waiting to devour the Messiah is referred to as the dragon, a wicked serpent. That he is red means he is thirsty after blood. The word "old" used in the Greek (as well as in Rev. 20:2) means the ancient one. This points us directly back to the book of Genesis. The devil existed before the creation of man. He was a created cherub, as the other angels. Thank God we have in us the Holy Spirit, One for whom Satan is no equal.

Q. "There is a phrase used by many speakers, 'a born-again Christian,' which seems to me to be a redundancy. I thought when a person accepted Christ as Savior he became a Christian and was automatically born into the family of God."

A. You are absolutely right in your evaluation. The reason why it is necessary for this redundancy is because today the word "Christian" has come to mean just about anything and is a title almost universally accepted, particularly in our nation. People in America don't consider themselves pagan so they prefer to be thought of as

Christians. Living in a "Christian civilization," however, is obviously a far cry from being "born-again." Sometimes we emphasize the aspect of our salvation even further by saying, "He's a real born-again Christian." This means it is truly a possession of Christ as Savior and not merely an empty profession. You don't hear the world talking about being "born-again." This is totally a Scriptural revelation and relationship.

"In I John 5:16 we find an interesting phrase, 'sin unto death.' Does this refer to people who are Christians, since the word 'brother' occurs in the passage?"

The word "brother" in the Bible may mean an actual physical brother. At the same time, the term has come to carry a much higher meaning as we find in our relationship together as believers in the family of God. It is clear from this portion of Scripture that a saved individual is in view. The question then comes, "What is the sin unto death? How can it be committed by one who knows the Lord as personal Savior?" This apparently is a transgression committed by one who has so constantly, consistently, continuously, hardened his heart that he no longer wants to be subservient to the Lord. Such unwillingness has marked him out as one whom the Lord can't use any further. This doesn't mean that he has sinned all through life until death takes place. It is that he has committed a sin so grievous that the Lord literally says, "This is the stopping place," and he is taken home. We have examples of this in the Bible such as Ananias and Sapphira. For this reason Paul warned the Corinthian believers as to how they approached the observance of the Lord's table (I Cor. 11:28-32). While we do not know of too many cases like this, and we are certainly not to sit in judgment of any who die perhaps in a strange or untimely manner, yet it is a very sobering and real situation.

Q. "What do you think of Christians having pool tables in their home? I feel this is an appearance of evil."

A. Many of our opinions concerning Christian morality stem from childhood training. Many years ago when I was a youngster, few people could afford the luxury of a pool table. Most of these games were almost limited exclusively to places of gambling and drinking. The environment was anything but conducive to consistent testimony of believers. Because of my heritage, I still feel exactly as this writer has proposed. At the same time, we recognize that there is today an aura of respectability which pool tables have received. They are found in many fine Christian homes. Young people in good conservative churches may have parties where pool is played, along with other games, without gambling. It is simply a game of skill. We would caution with the reminder that the danger lies in a young person being used to playing pool in a good Christian home and then become so accustomed that he goes into a public pool hall and maybe gets involved in gambling. This would be wrong.

Q. "According to God's time plan, where are we on the prophetic calendar in the light of Matthew 24:4-15, and especially that last verse?"

A. This passage is a part of what we know as our Lord's Olivet Discourse. Parallel commentaries are found in Mark 13 and Luke 21. According to God's time plan these remarks relate to Israel when the Church is gone to heaven. This follows the removal from this earth of the Body or Bride of Christ. In itself that is the very next event to which we eagerly look forward. It could happen at any moment. The disciples had been asking, "Please give us the signs that will help us to know we are approaching the end of this age." Verse 14 states that the "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." This isn't just specifically a missionary verse. We believe we should do all in our power to reach the lost (Acts 1:8), but this has reference to those Jewish evangelists of Revelation 7 who are preaching the same message as was entrusted to

John the Baptist. They will be warning, "Get ready, repent, because the King is coming." Our Lord answers precisely. The visible return of Christ to the earth will be immediately preceded by the universal world-wide preaching of the Gospel. This is not taking place now, nor will it fully, until the Church has been removed from the scene. What we proclaim today is the Gospel of grace. We urge everyone everywhere for your salvation.

Q. "Could you comment on the so-called 'wilderness movement'? By this I mean, Christians moving with their families deep into the interiors, or even into communes, to protect them from the evil which is in the world."

A. Considering all the problems and perplexities of this life it would be sorely tempting to throw everything over and just get away from it all. A theologian from some centuries ago pointed out correctly, "If I would move out of the world to remove myself from the sin of the world, lo, I still would find a world of sin within." How right he was. No matter where we go, the devil will still endeavor to bring us spiritual defeat. We certainly aren't in favor of living in groups. Communism was attempted in the early church and failed miserably from the Biblical point of view. Of course, we aren't referring to those extremely valuable and necessary times when we can get away to meditate on the things of the Lord. Furthermore, we can't grow spiritually by continuing to be away from the world. We need that perfect strength the Holy Spirit provides so that we can withstand the every wind of doctrine and false speaking that comes along.

Q. "Will you please tell me how one can tell when a promise from, or of God, is conditional and when it is unconditional?"

A. An unconditional promise from God is simply one which has no provisions attached to it as far as man's part is concerned. As an example, we know from Genesis 15 that God promised Abraham that he would have a great number of descendants. There wasn't any condition attached to the prophecy. Nothing was dependent upon the patriarch. A similar unconditional covenant was made with David. While the "sweet singer" of Israel wanted to build God a temple here on earth, the Lord did not allow him the privilege. Instead, He told David, "I'm going to build you a house known as a dynasty through which eventually the Messiah will come." There were no requirements placed on David whatsoever. On the other hand, as an example, we have the conditional Mosaic Covenant. The promises would only be fulfilled if the people did precisely what they were told. By way of observation, it is interesting to note that all of the conditional covenants aren't fulfilled because they do depend fully on man's obedience. Whenever the situation depends on the grace and goodness of God, they are unconditional for the Lord sees to it that everyone of them comes true to the very last detail.

Q. "Did Lazarus actually die again? Hebrews 9:27 tells us, 'It is appointed unto men once to die.'"

A. The statement in the epistle is the general rule. Of course, the Lord can make an exception as He chooses. We remember, as an example, how He did this in connection with His walking on the water. A man born blind isn't supposed to see but in several instances the Savior made an exception. We believe that Lazarus certainly died again. It is a fact that Christ perhaps didn't do Lazarus a favor by resurrecting him! Actually, he had to die all over again. We don't know what that experience is like since no comments were ever recorded by him. Our Lord performed these miracles as signs proving His Deity and revealing the fact of all His glory. Remember that at the Second Coming of Christ in the Rapture of the Church there will be a whole generation of people who won't physically die but who will be translated to glory.

Q. "The Bible tells us, 'In everything give thanks.' Are we even to give praise for the evil things which happen to us such as being beaten and robbed?"

A. This Scriptural injunction is absolutely correct (I Thessalonians 5:18). It is "the will of God in Christ Jesus" for all believers. This is even in spite of adverse circumstances. Remember, though, that everything doesn't cover evil. This isn't what the verse teaches us. In Paul's day there were even those who taught that we should do evil so that good might come of it. Please underscore the fact that God never makes sin a necessity for His world nor individual programs. He is sovereign and doesn't need any help from the devil. So, while we may not be thankful for the beating or robbing, we can thank God that we weren't robbed of eternal things. There is always something which provides a ray of light even amid the darkest clouds. One Christian used to pray in perplexing trials, "Thank you, Lord, for bringing me into this situation, because I'm going to have the wonderful privilege of seeing how You solve it!" This is really the meaning of "in everything give thanks."

Q. "How do I love the unlovable? I'm thinking, for example, about those who are very badly deformed or victims of strokes. Do you have any practical suggestions?"

A. This is a very penetrating and heart-searching question. These are among those whom we should show special deference in love. So often the world casts them aside. It is our God-given privilege, opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, shed abroad in our hearts, toward those who may be quickly forgotten by others. Keep in mind that each of us, in our sinful condition, was just as unlovely and unlovable to the Lord. Love in such instances requires a degree of self-discipline. We need to look at others by seeing them as the Lord Jesus Christ does. In this way you can overlook their physical condition.

Q. "Isaiah 9:6 tells us, 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Isn't it true that this particular passage is speaking of Jesus Christ? If so, then can you clarify how the Savior is also the 'everlasting Father'?"

A. There is no question but that this passage refers prophetically to the Savior. We read, 'unto us a child is born.' That couldn't be God the Father since He has never taken on a human body. It was the One entrusted with government in the line of David. This had to be the Son of David, the Son of Mary, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. "Everlasting Father" means the Father of eternity. Distinctions in the Godhead are much clearer in the New Testament since the emphasis in the Old Testament is the unity of God. In redemption the Father draws, the Savior loves, and the Holy Spirit fills. He promises to make all the redemptive work of Christ available to any soul in any age, under any circumstances, who will do no more than trust the Savior. All three are separate personalities, each having 100 percent of the essence or nature of Deity.

Isaiah 9:6 doesn't state that the Son becomes the Father, any more than the Spirit becomes the Son. There is no overlapping or overshadowing of one into the other. He is called everlasting Father because He has a fatherly care for His own in eternity. This is one of the functions, just as He is Prince of peace and the mighty God. It also doesn't mean that God the Father isn't God or that God the Holy Spirit isn't God. There is just this added designation.

Q. "Some people look forward to the time when Satan is bound during the Millennium. It doesn't make sense to me that he is in chains for awhile and then loosed later. Why is this?"

A. Keep in mind that the Lord may do many things which may not make sense to us.

You can put it down that our God will always do justly and righteously. The Millennium follows the seven year period of Tribulation. This will be a perfect time when righteousness will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. The Lord Jesus Christ will reign theocratically from the throne of David in Jerusalem. It will be totally beneficent with everything perfect. People's hearts will be right. In fact, it will be as difficult to sin during the Millennium as it is to keep from sinning now. We can hardly imagine what a wonderful time it will be. There will be people born on earth during this 1000 years. Those living on the earth won't have had the opportunity by faith of turning from sin to the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. Many will not have known what real sin is, such as we know it today. There must be a time when their free wills are exercised so that they can make their own decisions. This may well be the reason why Satan is loosed for a little season. He will tempt these people who, even after a thousand years of wonderful fellowship with the Savior, may yield to Satan's wicked ways. Following the enticements and leading of the devil they will encompass the great city of Jerusalem. Fire will then come down from heaven and devour them. The devil will then be consigned to hell forever.

Q. "When was the term 'Jew' first used? Someone told me that the Jews are only the people from the tribe of Judah. I had in my mind that all of Israel were Jews. Will you please explain this for me?"

A. Actually, the word is a translation of "Judahite," just like a Benjamite or a Simeonite. It is the tribal designation. Usage didn't become popular until after the northern kingdom was taken into Assyrian captivity (722-521 B. C.). Five-sixths of the nation had its capitol in Samaria. The southern kingdom went into captivity in 586 B.C. in Babylon. The only people from Abraham's seed who could be identified with him were those from the South where the prominent tribe was Judah. This is the tribe from which the royal dynasty proceeded. Therefore, anyone who was a descendant of Israel was called a Jew, even as they are today. This doesn't mean that they all are from the tribe of Judah. Although the Jews, or Israelites, have been scattered all over the world since 70 A. D., no one could have imagined that once they got back into the land would be this burning question: "Who is a Jew?" One-third of the nation was blotted out during the Nazi regime. Yet, having gotten back to the land they still admit they don't even know the definition of a Jew. Biblically, a Jew is anyone who has come from any one of the twelve tribes. The word, incidentally, occurs in the book of Esther. So, all of Israel have been Jews since the captivity.

Q. "Is a Christian living in sin and disobedience to the Word of God if he or she isn't baptized? Please give Scripture references."

A. We certainly don't believe such to be the case at all. While hanging on the cross, one of the thieves asked our Lord to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus told him, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The robber wasn't baptized; there was no time. We believe certainly that he was saved. In John 1:12 the Bible promises, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the authority to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The experience of being born again means simply to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. Baptism doesn't add or detract from our eternal destiny. We are only saved by calling upon the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:13). On the other hand, baptism, we believe, should normally follow acceptance of the Savior. It is an outward sign of an inward change of heart. It should be the normal procedure and desire on our part to be identified with the Lord.

Q. "How do you explain the fact that those who were raised from the dead apparently

were not questioned by their families and friends as to what their experience was like while with the Lord? At least, there is no record that any of them gave an account of any kind. Could it be that the Lord blotted out from their memory the glory they had to make it possible for them to cope with this earthly life again?"

A. This is a question that can't be answered dogmatically. It is an argument from silence. We don't know what went on between the families and friends. It would be very unusual if there weren't some questioning. The fact is that the Holy Spirit didn't feel it was to be material for our later understanding. We notice that Lazarus was four days in the tomb with his body beginning to decay. This was different from Jairus' daughter who had just died. From a human standpoint we might think that Lazarus would really have conducted some Bible conferences! Yet, there is absolute silence. The Lord knows what information is valuable to us, and when there is no clear information it could also be accepted as a blessing. Here is another interesting thing. Never in the Old Testament, where we learn that on the Day of Atonement, once a year the high priest went into the holiest of all, are we told what was said. Not even in rabbinical talmudic literature is there ever anything indicated concerning a high priest who came out to hold a press conference. The high priest never uttered a word in the holiest of all. This is beautifully stated in Habakkuk, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." Paul said about his own experience that it wasn't lawful for a man to utter information about the subject--it was so glorious that it made everything else pale into insignificance. This definitely shows where one's priorities are. There are times when it pays to keep silent!

Q. "Regarding Christ's coming for His Church, I understand we believers will be changed into our spiritual bodies. When and where, though, does the soul meet with the redeemed body before we see our Lord?"

A. Most of us would like to know the answer to that chronological event. The exact information isn't given in Scripture. That it does all transpire makes the time element totally insignificant, compared with the glorious fact of the occurrence. In the case of living believers, when the Lord comes the body will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. We will be given a resurrection body fashioned like unto the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20, 21). Our spirits will make whatever change may be necessary, if any. We read that "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Decomposed, long since turned to dust, they will emerge and instantly be complete and perfect entities. Bodies and spirits will be reunited. It will take place so quickly that it really won't make any difference. It is an instantaneous procedure to which, as believers, we earnestly look forward.

Q. "Please explain the meaning of the phrase in James 5:14, 'Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.'"

A. Many are confused on this point because of those who erroneously teach so-called healing in the atonement. This stems from a failure to read the passage carefully. The section is dealing with affliction. Sickness happens to be one of the experiences in this veil of tears. According to this passage, the sick one is to call for the elders of the church. This anointing of oil was a means of physical therapy. It is the prayer of faith which will deliver the sick one. It is ultimately the Lord and not some kind of "hocus-pocus" operation which causes the restoration. Sometimes the Lord lays an individual in the faith away because God wants to get to his inner consciousness. This can be a purifying experience. The passage in question needs to be read through and through. The more one does this the less ground we can see for the so-called healing operations so prevalent today.