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**THE MIND
OF CHRIST**

THE MIND OF CHRIST

being the



Abilene Christian University
Annual Bible Lectures

1987

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PREFACE

The lectures and special classes contained in this volume are those which were given at the 69th Annual Bible Lectureship at Abilene Christian University on the theme, "The Mind of Christ."

The mind of Christ is the pattern room for Christianity. Following Jesus means to see the world as He saw it, to treat people as He treated them, to value the things He valued, and to serve as He served. The Lord's people must be diligent in the task of discovering and imitating the mind of Christ as it is revealed in the Bible.

The primary purpose of the Annual Bible Lectureship is to further the cause of Christ in the world. The Lectureship Committee seeks each year to bring outstanding men and women of God to the campus to speak on the most relevant and helpful subjects facing the people of God. It is hoped that these lectures will be helpful not only to those who were able to attend in person, but also, through this volume, to thousands of others for years to come.

CARL BRECHEEN
Lectureship Director

THEME SPEECHES

Have This Mind: The Fruit Of Humility

David Davenport

It is said that words are like little children: they can never stand still. They are forever growing, developing, changing. After Sir Christopher Wren completed his greatest building project, he anxiously awaited the reaction of Queen Anne on her first visit to St. Paul's Cathedral. "It is awful; it is amusing; it is artificial," were her royal observations. Rather than bristle in offense, Sir Christopher bowed in appreciation since, in 1710, awful meant awe inspiring, amusing was amazing, and artificial signified artistic value.

I am assigned such a restless word, I think, for this presentation. The Romans regarded it as a term of contemptible weakness. Even the rich Greek vocabulary contained no favorable or admirable rendering of this word. If, however, a man were to chase it, he would probably never catch it, and the man who says he has it almost surely does not.

Yet, when Christ describes his own heart, he says this quality is there. And when Paul examines the mind of Christ, this is precisely what he finds there. Indeed, this word comes directly from the central text of the lectureship theme, Philippians 2:5-11:

Have this mind among yourselves which is
yours in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God, did

not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This a powerful passage, to be sure. One commentator calls it “oceanic, where the fathoms are countless and the tides are measureless.” “In the whole range of scripture,” exclaims another, “this paragraph stands in almost unapproachable and unexampled majesty.” Still another proclaims it “the sublimest passage in Paul about the person of Christ.”

This is a majestic paragraph, but at its heart is that troublesome word: humility. To the world of the Romans and the Greeks, even the word suggested a shabby, servile quality that was to be avoided. To our world today the dictionary reminds us that humility comes from the same root as humus, of the earth, of the soil, a dark substance from the decay of leaves. In a world where we dress for success, eat power lunches, and win by intimidation, humility is almost a joke. Indeed, the only compliment Winston Churchill could accord his political rival, Clement Atlee, was to say that he

“is a very humble man.” “Of course,” Churchill added, “he has a lot to be humble about.”

On this nearly everyone agrees: humility as a spiritual quality is not derived from the Romans or the Greeks or the English dictionary or Winston Churchill. It comes directly and uniquely from the mind, the heart, the life of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the only time I can find that Jesus describes his own heart, he calls it gentle and humble (Matthew 11:29). And, in this magnificent theme passage on the mind of Christ, Paul challenges us to be of one mind (Philippians 2:2), to be humble (verse 3), and to have the mind of humility seen in the life of Jesus Christ.

But how do we do that? What can we say about humility that will, in a practical way, help us meet Paul’s challenge to “have this mind?” It is an especially difficult question because we all sense that we cannot approach humility in quite the way we would other Christian graces, yet we are not sure why we cannot or, on the other hand, how we should pursue it. We know it is not right to say, “Let’s leave here today and all go out into the world and be humble.” That kind of direct pursuit does not really fit the target. And we would resemble the little boy in Sunday School who received the badge in his class for being the most humble, but who had to give it back the next week because he wore it!

Perhaps our problem stems from the fact that we have failed to recognize that humility is essentially a fruit. Like the other fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) it comes not by direct pursuit, but it is a serendipity, a byproduct, a gift that comes as a consequence of something else. So many of the great discoveries are

the byproduct, the fruit of other pursuits. Emerson said Columbus was looking for a direct route to Asia and stubbed his toe on America. Edison was searching for the electric light when he discovered the phonograph, a mixed blessing to most parents. An open window and a gust of wind contaminated culture plates in a hospital laboratory and led to the development of penicillin.

And so it is in the spiritual world. As J. Wallace Hamilton points out in his delightful book, *Serendipity*, many of the greatest Christian virtues cannot be pursued directly; rather, they must grow as a fruit, a serendipity from the pursuit of something else. The surest way not to find happiness and peace, for example, would be to spend your life trying to get them, and literally millions of frustrated lives have demonstrated that.

Instead of straining and struggling, and reaching in vain for the fruit of humility, perhaps we need to step back several paces and do some groundwork. Maybe we need to work on the tree and some of the other elements that must develop before the fruit appears. In fact, one of my favorite children's songs that we sing in our home reminds us that first there is a hole in the middle of the ground, and in that hole there is a root, and from the root there grows a tree, and on the tree there is a limb, and on the limb there is a branch, and on and on it goes. Reach back with me for just a few moments, and see if even our text, Philippians 2:5-11, does not teach us that very lesson about humility.

I. The Soil

Just as our children's song starts with an empty hole

in the ground, we, too, must begin our quest for the fruit of humility with an emptying. The ground must be cleared, and the soil must be prepared for the tree that Jesus seeks to plant.

A close look at the verses before this text reveals the problem: our hearts are filled with “selfish ambition and vain conceit,” (verse 3) as we busily pursue “our own interests” (verse 4). Even as Jesus did not count what he had, equality with God, as something to be grasped and emptied himself (verses 6-7), we must be willing to divest ourselves of the selfishness and pride that so naturally fill our hearts and minds.

We are people, however, for whom emptying does not come easily. In fact, our tendency is quite the opposite. It is to fill ourselves with more things for ourselves. A husband and wife were discussing this very subject when, suddenly, the husband stopped and said, “Dear, I just have to know something. If I lost everything, the car, the house, my job, the boat, would you still love me?” “Yes, honey, I would still love you,” came the reply. “I would miss you, but I would still love you.” Perhaps this typifies our age — a time of pride, of possession.

But Jesus begins his earthly walk with God with an emptying of himself. The best way I have come to understand this process is by analogy to my father’s years in the Navy, beginning with the day of induction. “First,” he told me, “they emptied my pockets. Then they took my little suitcase and the clothes off my back. When I thought they’d taken everything, they took the hair off my head!” Only then, he explained, did the Navy provide for his needs: clothes, food, travel, care.

But, as if to illustrate his total dependence, the emptying, the stripping had to precede the supply.

Although the analogy is imperfect (serving God is surely better than serving the U.S. Navy), most of us enter the Christian life seeking the supply without the emptying. We want to add Jesus to our list of friends; we want to add the church to our roster of memberships; we want to add pursuit of the Kingdom to our other goals. But Jesus says everything is to be reoriented as we first deny ourselves (Matthew 16:24) and are emptied as he was. As John the Baptist so perceptively and powerfully summarized his own life, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

We are told that Socrates was once asked, "Why is it that Alcibiades, who is so brilliant and has seen so much of the world, is still such an unhappy man?" Socrates answered, "Because wherever he goes he takes himself with him." The ground must be cleared, the mind must be emptied to prepare the soil for the fruit of humility.

II. The Tree

Into the soil we are ready to place a tree. It does not look like much at first, just the form of a young sapling. But we know from the form that someday, with proper care, it can stand tall as a mature tree. Even as the son of God took on the form of something he really was not, a mere servant (verse 7), God calls on us to take on a form of something we may not yet fully be, a servant. He asks us to plant at least the form of a tree. Like the young sapling, our servant may not look like much at first, but properly nourished, this is the very form on which the fruit of humility can grow!

Thank goodness humility does not blossom full grown from an endless struggle of the mind. I am not called to sit in my quiet time each day with fists clenched and teeth gritted, trying to will my way to humility. Instead, as I follow the example of Jesus in the natural progression of this passage, I turn next to action by taking the form of a servant and beginning to serve. And perhaps I find, as William Glasser believes, that it is easier to act my way to a better way of thinking and feeling.

Although the attitude of mind and feeling of heart may not be all God wants just yet, I nevertheless “put on then” the servant’s action-oriented wardrobe of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Colossian 3:12). I pick up the towel of service (John 13) and I take on the form of a servant. I begin to do the kind of serving that the action-oriented definition of agape love (I Corinthians 13) requires. And as I do, my mind begins to make that turn toward humility as it learns, slowly but surely, to think first of others. We learn for ourselves the lesson Jesus knew about himself: “The son of man came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45).” We, like Him, take on the form of a servant.

III. The Roots

“There, we’re all finished,” my four-year-old daughter would say. “The ground is cleared and the tree is planted.” But Jesus would reply, as he did in the parable of the sower, “The tree will wither if it has no roots” (Mark 4:6). Indeed, one of Paul’s special prayers for his fellow Christians was that they become fully

rooted in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 2:7).

This is where both the “theology” of our children’s song and the practice of many Christians may falter. The roots do not come first in the process; they come after the emptying of the soil and the planting of the tree (or seed). Notice in the text that Jesus is described as first emptying himself (verse 7a); then taking the form of a servant (verse 7b); and being found in that form, humbling himself and becoming obedient (verse 8). After we empty ourselves of our own selfishness, and after we take the form of a servant, then we must seek to humble ourselves and grow the deep roots of true obedience.

You see, just as a tree will wither and die without roots, the servant who is merely carrying out the form of service, without the roots, without a reason, without a heartfelt commitment, will soon wither and die. It is one thing to start “putting on” acts of agape love and service, but eventually we must have a root system to support those actions. For the tree, beneath the visible trunk and branches are the tap roots that drive deeply into the ground where moisture and nourishment will be found. For the corporation, all the experts are telling us today that, beneath the frenetic activity of success, a company needs a clear and compelling mission to provide the roots of health and life. And for the Christian, Jesus shows us that beneath the form of a servant must run the roots of humble obedience.

Roots are not a high priority to many. They are not the most glamorous part of the tree; indeed, the real tap roots are not even visible. Few will ever say, “My, what nice roots you have!” In fact, the stronger and deeper

they run, the less visible they are. In addition to their low profile, roots take a long time to develop. There are not instant routes to roots, no seminars on “How to grow roots in five days or your money back.”

But Jesus, having emptied himself, having taken the form of a servant, humbled himself and grew the deepest, strongest roots of obedience we will ever see — unto death, even death on a cross. And you see in Jesus the careful, even painful, process of obedience. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus shed the tears of obedience:

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears . . . and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. . . . (Hebrews 5:7-8).

Surely the life of Jesus demonstrates the truth of his own motto: “I do nothing on my own. . . for I always do what pleases Him” (John 8:28-29).

The whole Christian life, then, becomes a quest for the deeper roots of obedience. Children obey your parents, the Bible teaches (Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1). Why? To start learning to grow the roots of obedience. Citizens obey your government (Romans 13:1; I Peter 2:13-14). Church members, submit yourselves to the leaders of the congregation (I Thessalonians 5:12,13; Hebrews 13:17). Slaves (employees?), learn submission to your masters (employers?) (Colossians 3:22). All need to grow the deep and, yes, painful roots of obedience.

IV. The Fruit

At long last comes the fruit. From a mind that has been emptied of selfishness, from a body that is inclined to serve, and from a spirit that has learned obedience blossoms the fruit of humility. And, unlike the false humility of many, what a sweet and delicious fruit it is! For it has not been simply grafted onto a mind that is still so full of pride that its real instinct is to think only of itself. Nor is it captured in a body that contradicts the very existence of humility by failing to serve others. Nor is it shallow and without roots. We have neither produced nor enjoyed a fruit artificially, before its time. But we have grown it the old-fashioned way, the scriptural way, from the ground up.

Perhaps we could call humility a journey from the land of self-serving to the land of self-giving. Perhaps it is the top of a ladder, as Bernard of Clairvoux described it in his *Steps of Humility*:

Humility is that thorough self-examination which makes a man contemptible in his own sight. It is acquired by those who set up a ladder in their hearts whereby to ascend from virtue to virtue, that is from step to step, until they attain the summit of humility.

I have chosen to call it a fruit. But, in all of these, it is not to be pursued directly; rather, it is a byproduct of turning the mind away from self and toward service to others and obedience to God.

Here, at last, stands God's very special man, Jesus Christ: his mind emptied of pride, his body serving, his spirit obedient. God calls him humble, and, in his

special and mysterious world of surprises, he then exalts him and bestows on him a name above every name (verse 9). Humility was not what Jesus sought, but the fruit he received.

To us, Paul says simply, and yet eloquently, “have this mind among yourselves.”

The Mind Of Christ Concerning Obedience

**F. Furman Kearley, Editor
Gospel Advocate**

Introduction

Paul told us, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:" (Philippians 2:5). Genuine Christians desire to let Christ's mind be their mind. We want to think like Christ and act like Christ in every area of life.

The topic assigned for this study is "Obedience and the Mind of Christ." We desire to think as Christ and act as Christ concerning obedience. Fortunately, we have the revealed will of God and Christ through the Holy Spirit contained in written form in the Bible. A careful study of the Bible will reveal to us the mind of Christ concerning obedience.

The sinful, fleshly nature of man stubbornly rebels against obedience to God. Mankind could still be living in the garden of Eden (paradise), if your ancestors from Adam on down had obeyed God. Their obedience caused them to be expelled from the garden and man, woman, and the earth to be cursed (Genesis 2:7-3:24).

We emphasize excessively our freedoms, our rights, and our privileges. We stress that we will not bow down to anyone. Thus, to obey and to be subject to others comes hard for our sinful nature.

A humorous incident may illustrate this. A naval of-

ficer was in command of his first voyage after being promoted to Admiral. On a stormy night, the lookout reported what appeared to be the light of another ship headed straight toward them. The Admiral, determined to show his authority, instructed that this message be sent. "Alter your direction ten degrees by command of Admiral Jones." The answer flashed back promptly, "Alter your direction ten degrees or you will be in serious trouble." The message was signed "Seaman Second Class Smith." The Admiral flashed back quickly, "I am an Admiral in charge of a battleship. You must alter your direction ten degrees or suffer punishment." The answer flashed back, "You must alter your direction ten degrees. I may be only a Second Class Seaman, but you will be in serious trouble if you do not alter your course ten degrees for you will crash into the island where I am in charge of the lighthouse."

Man stubbornly, pridefully insists on having his own way. This sets him on a collision course with God's natural and spiritual laws. "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). God's laws and, certainly, God will not move as the lighthouse would not move. Therefore, our pride and stubbornness must move and yield to obedience to God.

Christ Demonstrated His Mind Concerning Obedience

In Philippians, just below where we were told to have the mind of Christ, the Scripture tells us that Christ became obedient "unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Hebrews 5:8,9 affirms of Christ, "though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became

unto all them who obey Him the author of eternal salvation; . . .”

Christ's example of obedience and subjection to others is demonstrated in at least four areas. First, He was subject to God. In the creation, God spoke and the word created carrying out the design of God (John 1:1-3). When the Father called on Christ to relinquish His divine prerogatives, Christ did not count “the being on an equality with God a position to be tenaciously held, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, . . . and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, . . . (Philippians 2:6-8). Christ obeyed the Father's will to become incarnate. While on the earth, He emphasized His obedience to God by saying, “For I am come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me,” (John 6:38). Christ's obedience to the will of God is reflected by His prayer, “Nevertheless not My will, but your will be done.” (Luke 22:42).

Second, Christ obeyed His parents. Luke 2:51 says, “He was subject unto them.” Jacques Bossuet observes, “Thirty years of our Lord's life are hidden in these words of the gospel.”

Third, Christ obeyed the government and taught others to do so. Jesus sent the half-shekel to the authorities (Matthew 17:24-27). He held up the denarius with Caesar's image on it and said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:15-22).

Fourth, Christ was obedient to the needs of mankind. Paul tells us in Romans 15:3, “For Christ also pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, ‘The reproaches of

them who reproached you fell upon me.’ ”

If we will have the mind of Christ concerning obedience, we will be obedient and submissive according to the will of God. Henry Frederic Amiel has said, “The distinguishing mark of religion is not so much liberty as obedience, and its value is measured by the sacrifices which it can extract from the individual.”

The hallmark of Christianity and the teaching of Christ is that every Christian should subject himself to God and to the needs of others. The central issue of the Christian religion is whether we will obey God and Christ or whether we will stubbornly rebel and do our own will.

Man’s separation and alienation from God happened because of Adam’s disobedience in Eden. Christ came to reverse this and to show us how to reverse it. Paul stated in Romans 5:19, “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous.” Christ’s obedience sets us right with God when we by faith accept the atoning grace and mercy of God. In order to stay right, we must become children of obedience (1 Peter 1:14) and cease obedience to sin and become obedient unto righteousness (Romans 6:12-23).

Vital Question Concerning Obedience

What is obedience? Obedience in the Old Testament is translated from the word *shama* primarily. This means “to hear” or “to listen.” It carries with it, however, the ethical significance of hearing with the intent of obedient assent (1 Samuel 15:22).

In the New Testament, obedience is primarily translated from *hupakoe*. Literally, this suggests “hearing under.” It means to subordinate one’s self to the person or thing heard; hence, “to obey.” Another less frequent translation is from *peithomai* which indicates persuasion or being so fully persuaded as to obey.

Obedience is the supreme test of faith in the word of another. When we believe another sufficiently to act on his commands, we demonstrate strong faith. Thus, the supreme test of our faith and trust in God and Christ is whether we believe Their word enough to act on Their teachings.

Is obedience essential? Some attempt to minimize obedience or even to annul our need to obey. This misapplies the concept that we are under grace and not under law. A part of the grace of God and Christ is to instruct or command us concerning what is right and what pleases them. Paul wrote Titus, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and Godly in this present world. . .” (Titus 2:11,12).

The strong example of Christ and the clear commands of the Bible demand the conclusion that we must make every effort to obey God or we will be lost. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:21-23, “Not everyone who says unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” Jesus will tell those who claim to do deeds in His name to depart from Him. He compares the disobedient to the foolish man who built upon the sand. He compares the obedient to the wise man who built

upon the rock (Matthew 7:24-27).

John 3:36 affirms, “He who obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Hebrews 5:9 instructs that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him. We must obey Him willingly now, in this life, for all who are disobedient now will be forced to obey ultimately. “. . .in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . .and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father,” (Philippians 2:9-11).

What is the relation of grace to obedience? The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by the grace and mercy of God and Christ through faith (Ephesians 2:4-10). However, it does not teach that we are saved by these alone without obedience response on our part. James emphatically says, “You see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith” (James 2:24). The Bible would be complete nonsense if this were the case. Why would the Holy Spirit expend so much time and space in Scripture giving commands and instructions that God’s children are to obey if obedience were not necessary? There are commands to repent, to confess, and to be baptized in order to become a Christian. There are commands concerning acts and time and manner of worship. There are commands concerning morals and relations with other human beings. We must obey these to demonstrate our faith and trust in God and Christ. By our works or acts of obedience, we show our faith (James 2:14-26).

On the other hand, we are not saved by obedience only. The Bible does not teach the doctrine of salvation by meritorious works. No matter how many good works

we do, we cannot earn salvation. Obedient acts can never put God in our debt. Jesus taught that the servant never even earned thanks from the master by doing the things that are commanded. He stated in Luke 17:10, “. . . when you shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.’ ”

Perhaps the proper relation of grace to obedience can best be illustrated by the case of a heart transplant patient. The patient has been told by the specialists that his heart will last for only a few days longer. His only hope is a heart transplant operation. He says, “But I do not have a donor and I cannot afford the exceedingly, expensive operation.”

A fellow patient dying of cancer graciously says, “I will donate my heart.” The hospital, by grace, will donate the essential facilities. The specialists, by grace, donate the necessary skills. The operation is successfully completed, and the patient has a strong heart.

When the patient is alert, the doctor visits him. He outlines for him a specific regimen of rest, diet, and exercise. Then the patient responds,

Doctor, I thought this operation was by grace of the donor, the hospital, and you. Now you are telling me I have got to obey you in order for it to be any good. How can my recovery of good health be of grace?

The doctor would reply,

The grace is on the part of the donor, the hospital, and myself, but you also have a part in the healing process. Obedience to good health

practice is your part if you want to be truly healthy.

God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit have graciously made the atonement and given the instructions for our salvation. Our part is to obey God's inspired instructions for a healthy spiritual life and for the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:1-23).

Does the Bible teach that we must have perfect obedience in order to be saved? Absolutely not. A part of God's system of grace is the process of repentance, confession, and obedience in order to obtain forgiveness. The alien sinner—the one never saved from sin—is instructed to believe, to repent, to confess, and to be baptized for the remission of his sins (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:10). The Christian who has stumbled and sinned is told to repent and pray (Acts 8:18-24).

We are promised forgiveness as often as we stumble, but we must repent and pray (Matthew 18:15-35). However, we must take caution and make a clear distinction between our sins and disobedience due to the weakness of the flesh and our sins of deliberate, rebellious disobedience. We must always strive to be strong and not yield to temptations and sin, but, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

On the other hand, if we willfully disobey, we harden our conscience, and it may be impossible to renew us again unto repentance. There remains no more a sacrifice for our sins. Our last state will become worst than the first (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

Whom are we to obey? The Christian's obedience is always because of God and our relation to Him. The foundation principle for order and stability in society is the recognition of the authority of God and obedience to His authority. When people reject God's law, there is no other law to govern society. The inevitable result is anarchy or "might makes right." The writer of Ecclesiastes summarized our duty in these words:

This is the end of the matter; all has been heard: Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, . . . (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

We certainly must obey God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. At the transfiguration, God decreed, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matthew 17:5). The Hebrew writer instructs us that in this last age—the Christian age—God has spoken unto us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2). Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Jesus tells us that we must obey Him in John 12:47,48:

And if any man hear My sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and receives not My sayings, has one who judges him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day.

To the person who has the mind of Christ, the commands of God and Christ are a joy and not a burden.

John says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

In a secondary sense, we are to obey many human authorities because God has given them authority and commands us to obey them. Some such ordained authorities include:

1. Parents (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20).
2. Governments (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1,2; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Acts 5:29).
3. Wives should obey their husbands (Ephesians 5:21-24,33; 1 Peter 3:1-6).
4. Servants or employees should obey masters or employers (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; Titus 2:9,10; 1 Peter 2:18-25).
5. Christians are to be obedient to elders (Acts 20:28; 21:17-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:12,13; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 5:2).

What are the benefits and blessings if we do obey?
The Bible makes it abundantly clear that God’s blessings are strongly related to obedience to God. The Old Testament pronounced great blessings on the obedient and extensive curses on the disobedient (Leviticus 26:1-46; Deuteronomy 28:1-68). These principles are illustrated repeatedly in the lives of obedient individuals or nations or in the disobedience of individuals or nations.

The New Testament continues this emphasis on “whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap” (Gala-

tian 6:7). In the book of Revelation, the promises of blessings and rewards are directly tied to the ones who hear, obey, and overcome the evil. On the other hand, Revelation clearly indicates the extensive punishment for the wicked. Ultimately, our obedience or disobedience will lead to the hearing of one of two pronouncements. To the disobedient, the Lord will say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: . . ." (Matthew 25:41). To the obedient, He will say, "Come, Ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: . . ." (Matthew 25:34).

We must play by the rules or forfeit the victor's crown. During the 1972 Summer Olympiad in Munich, a sixteen year old swimmer from San Rafael, California, competed in the 400 meter free style. Rick DeMont out-swam the field of international athletes who had qualified for the final round. At the close of the race he received a gold medal and proudly stood at attention while the national anthem was being played.

Forty-eight hours later, Rick DeMont was notified that he would have to relinquish his medal because blood tests indicated he had taken a non-approved drug prior to the race. Even though it was established that the drug was a regular prescription used by DeMont to control an asthmatic condition, the young man was disqualified because he had not competed in accordance with the rules of the meet.

What are the motives for the Christian's obedience?
The only ultimate, beneficial motive for obeying God and Christ and Their revealed will is love. If we obey out

of fear, it profits us nothing. Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3,

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but not have love, it profits me nothing.

We must obey because we want to please God and Christ, and Their mind is our mind. If we obey because we have to; that is if it is by necessity forced on us, we are not pleasing God and Christ. Christ said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

Aristotle said, "Wicked men obey from fear, good men, from love." Faithful servants of God will echo the words of the poem by Mary Brown,

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain, or plain, or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be.

Love One Another

Charles Siburt

Back in 1983 I heard Richard Hughes read a letter written by James Mathers to Barton W. Stone in 1836:

Dear Brother Stone:

We have come to a crisis in our history. The theory of the gospel has done all it can alone. The world is in possession of our reasoning, our arguments, and our conclusion. Brother Stone, they are now looking for the practical part. Indeed, the reformation begun among us can go no further unless the dear brothers and sisters show by their untiring zeal and disinterested labors of love and their devotion to the cause of truth that they are Christians of the original stamp, cast in the gospel mold.¹

Though the letter was written 150 years ago, I cannot help but wonder if we are not still stuck in the same crisis. We've come as far as our theory, our reasoning, and our arguments alone can bring us. Now the world is looking for the practical part. Gospel talk isn't enough. The world just won't settle for anything less than gospel people. As one analyst suggests, "The creation of living breathing loving communities of faith at the local church level is the foundation of all the other answers."²

But this awareness really isn't anything new; Jesus left us specific instructions about how important our love for one another would be.

One of the most moving sections of John's Gospel is

the one often referred to as the “farewell discourses” (13:31—17:26). Jesus is telling his disciples goodbye and preparing them for how they are to live after he has left. What will they do without this life-giving relationship with him? Does his leaving mean that they will never know this one-of-a-kind relationship again? Jesus has the answer for them: “You make this loving relationship that you have known with me and make it a sustaining reality among yourselves. You cannot live your lives together as though I never lived among you. My love for you has been a witness of what God intends for the people. If this witness is to continue—and it must—then you must love each other in the very same way that I have loved you. And when you do, then it will be as though I am still with you, living and loving among you, still witnessing to the world (John 13:34, 35).”

This is inside talk, family talk. But what a paradox! Jesus says that the most important witness the church makes is that which it makes by its “inside” behavior, by how its members treat each other.

Two things about these instructions from Jesus grab us. One is that he *commands* us to love. He doesn’t suggest, or imply, or encourage. He commands it. This means that our response is a matter of obedience, not emotion. Frederick Buechner’s observations are helpful here:

In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion but an act of the will. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with

a cozy emotional feeling. You can as well produce a cozy emotional feeling on demand as you can a yawn or a sneeze. On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end, even if it means sometimes just leaving them alone. Thus in Jesus' terms we can love our neighbors without necessarily liking them. In fact liking them may stand in the way of loving them by making us over protective sentimentals instead of reasonably honest friends.³

Or, Scott Peck has offered his definition of love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."⁴ Love can be commanded because love can be willed.

And the second gripping truth is that Jesus commands us to love each other with the very same love that He has loved us. And since divine love is different, a community of divine love will be different, too.

For one thing, its members will not love with self-centered love. Thomas Edison lived in a large house with a huge fence running around the whole compound and a very heavy iron gate. Those who came to see him had to push the gate open with great effort and push the gate back closed again as it clanked shut. Someone complained that, if he insisted on having such a large gate, he ought to have the thing fixed so that at least it would be easier to open. With a twinkle in his eye Edison took the man and showed him an elaborate mechanical device he had set up, a combination of levers and pullies

and pumps. Then he took him up to the roof of the house and said, “What you don’t know is that everybody who comes to see me and opens and closes that gate automatically pumps a gallon of water into the tank on top of my house.””

So much of what passes for love is nothing more than someone enjoying himself at another person’s expense. But this self-serving, people-using “love” will not be the norm in Jesus’ community. It was He who taught us that we receive only when we give; we gain life only when we are willing to risk it; we love ourselves most when we love others more. That’s the way life is.

Listen:

Time before time, when the world was young, two brothers shared a field and a mill, each night dividing evenly the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and a large family. Now the single brother thought to himself one day, “It isn’t really fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed.” So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother’s granary to see that he was never without. But the married brother said to himself one day, “It’s really not fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he’s old?” So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain

mysteriously replenished each morning.

Then one night they met each other half way between their two houses, suddenly realized what had been happening, and embraced each other in love. The legend is that God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, "This is a holy place—a place of love—and here it is that my temple shall be built." And so it was. The First Temple is said to have been constructed on that very sight. The holy place, where God is made known to His people, is the place where human beings discover each other in love. The absolute is known in the personal.⁶

It's true. Life is found only by getting outside of ourselves. During the second World War, there was a young woman who lost her husband, a doctor, in India, from some tropical disease. The shock of it sent her into deep despair. She lost all interest in life and didn't care whether she lived or died. She booked passage on a ship back to America, and on that ship she met another survivor of another tragedy, a seven-year-old boy, whose missionary parents had been killed in the fighting in Burma. The little boy was attracted to the woman, but she would have nothing to do with him. In fact, she scheduled her time on ship board so as to avoid him. She couldn't get outside of herself and her sorrow long enough to comfort a little boy. She said she had her own problems to deal with.

That ship was torpedoed one night, and it began to sink slowly. The woman came out on deck and prepared himself to go down with the ship. She thought that was the solution. But on the deck she saw the little boy,

shivering with cold and fright. He saw her, came over to her, and hugged her. And something came over her. She led him to one of the life-boats. They both got in. And for the several days, until they were rescued, she held him. Her friends, looking back on that incident, say they don't know whether the woman saved the boy, or the boy saved the woman.

If we love each other as we have been loved, then our love will not always be soft and tender. The well-known Dr. James Dobson has done us all a real favor by reminding us that sometime love must be tough—not ugly, not unhealthy, not uncaring, but tough. There are times when love has to be firm in order to be genuine love. There are times when soft love is inappropriate and in violation of our brother's dignity and responsibility as a Christian. There are times when the most uncaring thing we could possibly do is to be so soft that we fail to call our brother or sister to a responsible behavior within the Christian family. There are times when soft love is loveless love, nothing more than a refusal to take another person seriously enough to put ourselves out for his sake.

Here is an example of what I mean:

Many decades ago during the rapid development of the American West, a contractor was hired to build a bridge across one of the wilder and more remote areas of the frontier. The turbulence of the water during most of the spring and fall made it necessary for him to complete his foundation for the bridge in the course of the dry summer months. Prompted by this need for

haste, the contractor drove his crew with relentless severity. The men worked in shifts around the clock, seven days a week, with only enough time off for meals and a few hours of sleep.

In addition to being a hard taskmaster, however, the bridge builder was something of a practical psychologist. He knew that the toughest roughneck has his breaking point and must be given an occasional chance to let off steam. So one Friday afternoon the boss assembled all of his laborers to the mess tent and announced to them that they would have the weekend off and would be driven in wagons to the nearest town, 30 miles away. The crew responded with a boisterous cheer.

You can imagine what happened. Those men hit every bar and bawdy house on Front Street, and by Sunday night most of them were locked up in jail.

But bright and early Monday morning the badly hung-over sinners were herded before the bar of justice and found their boss waiting there with a large roll of bills in his hands. "Your Honor, he said to the judge, "I know that these reprobates deserve to rot in their cells for a long time for the way they wrecked your town. But I just can't spare them that long. I have important work for them to do." And with that the contractor paid all of the fines and herded his wretched charges into the wagons and back to camp.

It so happened, however, that when the baliff had led the prisoners into the courtroom that morning, he had inadvertently included two local habitual drunks. When the laborers had filed out from the bar of justice, this pair was left standing there in confusion before the bench. The judge looked at them in disgust. "You old fools," he said, "aren't worth the cost of keeping you in jail. So I'm going to be merciful this time. Charges dismissed. Go on. Get out of here."

So as the bridge builder went back to work, the local deadbeats headed for the nearest saloon.⁷

I suppose we could say that the contractor exercised a certain kind of love toward those who did not deserve it. But what about the judge? Was he indeed merciful? Did he do the loving thing by being soft on the drunks? Did he act in their best interests? No, he didn't. He just did the easiest thing to get them off his hands and not be bothered with them. What he essentially said to the drunks was, "I don't care enough about you to make you accountable, to treat you like responsible human beings, like adults instead of children, like persons of respect and dignity and strength." If God's love is unmerited favor, what he gave them was unmerited, but it most certainly was not favor. It was not good for them. It was, in fact, an act of self-relief to keep from having to do the loving thing toward them. God doesn't love us with such loveless love.

Just go back and take another look at the story of Cain and Abel. There is a real crisis here. Cain, one of God's boys, has been hurt by the choice that God himself has made. The problem is not that God accepts

little brother and does not accept Cain; the problem is that God accepts both Cain and little brother. Cain's problem—and my problem—is not that he is not loved, but that God does not love only him. The problem is that God is Abel's God, too. So when God loves both Cain and Abel without partiality, Cain begins to hate little brother and to wish that he were dead, so that Cain could have God all to himself.

Cain's heart sinks; his dream of being God's one and only favorite comes tumbling down; his sweet fantasy sours into a bitter nightmare; brotherly love corrodes into jealous rage. And it is written all over Cain's face.

Cain's reaction takes God by surprise. He makes a little speech to Cain, consisting of three questions and two options: "Why have you decided to be angry? Why are hate and hurt painted all over your face? The final outcome of this situation is really up to you, isn't it? It's not like you are helpless or have no choice about what happens here. Look, if you decide to handle yourself and your feelings responsibly, won't you still be as accepted and as well off as you ever were? But, of course, if you decide not to handle yourself and your feelings in a healthy, appropriate way, then you will have chosen to play right into the hands of the evil that is always ready to make you its slave. The choice really is up to you, Cain. You're not a helpless victim. You can master it, Cain. And if you want your life and your relationship to hold together instead of falling apart, then you must handle it.

In what we call the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus holds us accountable for a higher righteousness, a more responsible way of behaving toward other people. "I

know how you have been taught to handle your anger, your lust, your hurt, your marital conflicts, and your hate for your enemies. But you can handle all of these crises more responsibly, and you must. I hold you accountable to love people more maturely than they love you. If you don't, then what is the difference between you and them? Loving those who love you anyway is nothing more than atheists do. But if God loves the just and the unjust, then you must do the same. You must be more mature (perfect) than other people are."

Jesus commands his community to forbid small, childish, immature, whining, shimpling, killing behavior to prevail among His people. Mature deference for the sake of the "weaker brother" is one thing, but giving in to the pouting "Cains" among us just because we don't love them enough to insist upon more mature behavior from them is something else.

To love one another as God has loved us will also require a love that endures in spite of our failings. The Gospel of Mark says that when the women came to the tomb and found it empty, they saw a young man sitting there. He told them, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He told you (16:7)." The women were astonished and afraid. The last thing in the world they expected was for this to happen after all the disciples' failures.

Mark has made it clear that the disciples never quite understood Him, even though they were the closest to Him. They didn't even know for sure who He was. After He tells them that He is going to be crucified,

suffer, and die, they immediately begin to argue over which one of them is going to be first in His kingdom. When he asks them to stand by while He prays in the garden, they fall asleep. And when He is taken away, they run away. After all this, the Resurrection happens. The young man gave his instructions to the women, “and they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Why the astonishment? Could it be astonishment that God accepts us after we reject Him? That God takes our failures, our broken lives, and our betrayals and hands them back to us as opportunities for new life? Maybe they were astonished by unexpected grace.

The young man at the tomb says, “Go tell the disciples and Peter. . .” Why the disciples *and* Peter? Why not just the disciples? Why single Peter out? Could it be because Peter, who had tried the hardest, had also failed the worst?

The Greek word for “and” can mean either “and” or “even.” So you can read this passage this way: “Go tell the disciples, even Peter, who feels he is the world’s biggest loser, that Jesus will be waiting for him in Galilee to give him another chance.” Even Peter who denied Him three times. They were amazed! Astonished! God’s love in spite of our failures is astonishing.

In Lorraine Hansberry’s unforgettable play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, the strong matriarch of the struggling black family is Mama Younger. Her late husband had literally worked himself to death to give his family some stake on the future. The only estate he was able to leave them is a \$6,500 insurance policy. Mama plans to use the

money for her family—to help her son, Walter, buy a good house of his own and to send her bright daughter, Beneatha, to college. But Walter won't settle for such limited progress. His dream is to be able to quit his job as a chauffeur and set up his own liquor store business with his friend Bobo. So he risks all \$6,500 in a scheme which backfires when one of his would-be partners takes off with the money. When Bobo breaks the news to Walter, the whole family is paralyzed with unbelievable hurt. After an emotional act performed by Walter, he goes to his room. Then Beneatha blurts out, "That is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat . . . he's no brother of mine."

Mama answers Beneatha: "What you say?" "I said that that individual in that room is no brother of mine." And Mama replies:

"That's what I thought you said. You feeling like you better than he is today? You wrote his epitaph too—like the rest of the world? Well, who give you the privilege? . . . I thought I taught you to love him."

Beneatha snaps, "Love him? There is nothing left to love."

Then Mama speaks her mind on the subject of love:

"There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing. Have you cried for that boy today? I don't mean for yourself and for the family 'cause we lost the money. I mean for him; what he been through and what it done to him. Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most;

when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain't through learning —because that ain't the time at all. It's when he's at his lowest and don't believe in himself 'cause the world done whipped him so. When you starts measuring somebody, measure him right, Child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is.'⁸

Just think. If our neighbors could witness that church is the one place in our lives where we can go to face our failures and sins instead of denying them and hiding them, they might be much more interested in bringing theirs to church, too.

And, finally, to love one another as we have been loved has to mean that we love with a love that makes each other whole.

John tells us about a man who had been sick for 38 years, palsied, lying at a pool near the Sheepgate in Jerusalem (John 5:1-18). We know that he had been a member of the synagogue because when Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, it caused trouble. We don't know what the synagogue (his church) did for him while he was ill. Surely they prayed for him, felt pity for him, maybe even took up alms for him. But it wasn't enough. He wanted to be well. So when somebody told him that he could find healing down at the Sheepgate, he was excited and went, saying to himself, "I can be well; I'll go to the pool."

But he didn't find healing at the pool either. You had to be the very first one into the water after the angel stir-

red it, or it wouldn't do you any good. The competition was fierce, and he never did come in first. The first ones in were not the poor souls with curved spines, twisted legs, or blind eyes. No, the first ones in were those with chapped lips or hangnails.

Thirty-eight years, and then Jesus came. Jesus knew that what the man really wanted was to be a whole person, to be a full human being. Jesus made him whole.

But it was the Sabbath. When the man picked up his little mattress and started home, the leaders of the synagogue stopped him and said, "Hey, you're carrying your bed on the Sabbath. It's against the scripture to carry anything on the Sabbath. You're breaking the law." Isn't that something? Sick for 38 years and healed on the wrong day! Do you hear the judgment in this story upon religion that never can get beyond its own technicalities or its own desperate need for experiencing God enough to get to the heart of the matter—putting broken lives in touch with the power of Jesus that will make them whole human beings? This is the point of the church. This is the heart of our purpose.

Bernard Pomerance's 1979 play *The Elephant Man* is based on the life of John Merrick, who died in 1890. The victim of neurofibromatosis, Merrick had been rejected by his mother as an infant. He was five feet and two inches tall with a huge head 36 inches in circumference. A bony mass stuck out from his forehead, and another spongy brown glob disfigured his mouth. A large scaly growth hung from his neck and back, and his enormous right arm looked like the arm of an elephant. He was so grotesque that he became a freak show in a second-rate circus.

Then one day he was befriended by a prominent London surgeon, Dr. Frederick Treves, who rescued Merrick and took him to London Hospital where the “it” became a person. Hidden in this repulsive body was an intelligent, sensitive, artistic human being. Over a period of time he constructed in his room a scale model of the church he could see from his window. Some say that the scale model represents his longing for the reconciliation and affirmation which only the people of God can properly provide. Over a period of time, Dr. Treves’ unqualified love teaches “The Elephant Man” that not even he is too unlovely to be embraced as a full human being.

Toward the end of the play, the pathetic patient turns to that caring doctor and offers the greatest compliment possible:

“My life is less than full, but if it had to end tomorrow, I could have no regret because I know I am loved. I have gained myself—and I could not say that except for you.”

What higher compliment could a local church receive than for one of its members to say:

“My life isn’t perfect, but I have the most important thing; I know that I am loved. I have experienced God’s love in your love. I have gained myself—and I couldn’t say that except for you.”

And how marvelous it would be if that church member’s friends could say:

“We don’t understand it. All we know is that since she has been a member of that church, she’s

been a different person. She seems to have found herself and put it all together.”

That’s possible if we love one another as God has loved us.

Jesus had told us that “the practical part is the loving part.” Just imagine:

A man is going home from work. He’s already late. He’s a farmer. He cuts across a field to get home because he knows his wife is worried.

But he forgets that once on the quarter-section there had been a farm house with the usual cistern. He falls in the cistern. It is muddy and sandy on the bottom and the sides are covered with moss and are slick. He tries to get out. He’s a proud fellow and strong, and he does his best to get himself out. But finally he has to admit, “I can’t get myself out of here.” he calls, “Help; Help.” Finally, somebody comes by and looks down in the hole and says, “Uh, huh, that’s just what I thought. All along I’ve suspected that you were that kind of person. Down there in that hole. Just think of your family and kids and all the people who have respected you and believed the best about you. But there you are. And now we know.” Then he goes away, and says to himself, “I’ve been wanting to say that to him for a long time.”

But does it help him? He’s still in the hole. He keeps calling: “Help me, somebody.” Another fellow comes by and says, “You know, this sort of thing ought to be against the law.” He goes

into town and gets the city fathers together. They put up a sign: "\$50 Fine For Falling In This Hole." It's a good law, but John is still in the hole. He keeps calling, "Help!" Some people driving by hear him, pull over, and say, "Oh, this is ugly; this is an embarrassment to our city." So they form a club, and they come out and put azaleas, some rose bushes, and some English boxwood around it. It's all very nice, and they put up a sign: "Sponsored by the Beautification Group." It's all very nice and beautiful, but John is still in the hole.

With raspy voice he says, "Help. Please, somebody, help me!" Another fellow walks by, stops, looks down into the hole, and says, "John, this is dangerous here after dark, isn't it. I know, I've almost fallen in here myself." Then he reaches his strong hand down and scotches his heels and lifts John out.⁹

We've all been down in that hole, haven't we? And we all know who loved us enough to help us out, don't we? What could be more practical—and more divine—than to keep on loving each other that way?

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The Sacrifice Of Christ

Roy H. Lanier, Jr.

Introduction

During the last week of the life of the Lord, in some of the temple debates with the scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers, Jesus challenged them with the piercing questions, "What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). And the world has ever tried to answer these questions with humanistic approaches and concepts. None of these will give the accurate answers. The truth will only come from God's Word.

In answering, "What think ye of the Christ?" in regard to his sacrificial mind and life, one usually looks at the suffering and death on the cross for the sins of the world. He did learn obedience by the things which he suffered (Hebrews 5:8), and he died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). He was made to be the sin offering (2 Corinthians 5:21) and obtained eternal redemption for man by offering his blood (Hebrews 9:12).

Yet, is his suffering and death on the cross the ultimate to understanding his sacrificial life? Was this the greatest sacrifice he made?

It might be well to consider two concepts, perhaps not studied much by the vast majority of Christians, in order to gain more insight into a fuller idea of the sacrificial nature of the Lord.

The Son Became Incarnate

First, notice some of the pertinent teachings of inspired men.

“Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same. . .” (Hebrews 2:14).

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . .” (John 1:14).

“But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, . . .” (Galatians 4:4).

“. . . being made in likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

“. . . who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3).

“He who was manifested in the flesh. . .” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“. . . every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:” (1 John 4:2).

That the Son of God was true flesh and blood cannot be denied by those respecting the Bible. It is a mystery how this was accomplished and all the various aspects of the dual natures are beyond the profoundest of man’s abilities. Yet, one must accept the fact the Son of God became also the Son of Man.

Second, there have been many failures in understanding the true nature of the Incarnation. Some views have failed to give proper recognition to the deity of Christ; i.e., Ebionites, Arians, Socinians, and Unitarians. Some have failed to give proper recognition to the humanity of Christ; i.e., Docetics, Apollinarians, Eutychians, and even Roman Catholics. Still others have failed at the point of the union of the two natures in Jesus Christ.¹

Third, there are essential concepts to accept in the In-

carnation. Without these, one limits too much the accurate concept portrayed within Scripture.

1. *Incarnation portrays Divine sacrifice.* Not only is this the sacrifice of the Father (John 3:16; Galatians 4:4), it is also the sacrifice of the Eternal Son of God (Philippians 2:5-8). "Whatever else. . .they do call attention to the great truth that the Incarnation was an act of divine sacrifice for the salvation of man. . .Paul shows clearly that the motive in the whole thing was God's love for man and his purpose to save man. . .It reveals God as a god of infinite love who gave himself in Christ to the limit of remission of sins."²

2. *Incarnation demanded self-emptying.* Paul's expression, ". . .but emptied himself. . ." (Philippians 2:7), speaks of a vast and puzzling change in the status and nature of the Son of God. Prior to this emptying he was in the form of God; after this emptying he was found in fashion as a man. Evidently prior to this self-emptying one can speak of him only as God; after this one must speak of him as the God-man. "He passed from a state of glory to a state of humiliation."³

Mullins goes on to point out, "It was a divine self-limitation for a purpose." Then asking about the puzzle of Deity being able to limit Itself, he argues ". . .creation itself is an instance of self-limitation of God's part. Creation does not exhaust God. He has expended himself only partially therein."⁴ To conclude his argument, he says, "The self-emptying of Christ in the incarnation, then, meant the retention of divine powers, but under the restraints and limitations of human life. There was voluntary suspension of the full exercise of divine attributes in the incarnation."⁵ Thus one can

opine the Son of God did not lose any attribute of Deity, else he would no longer have been Deity. He did not lose equality with God, nor did he lose his Deity when he voluntarily accepted humanity in self-emptying. He merely was willing to suspend and qualify his use of attributes.

3. *Incarnation is the indissoluble union of two natures.* “In the incarnation our Lord added to His divine nature, not another person (which would have given Him a double personality), but impersonal, generic human nature so that He was and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever.”⁶ The peculiarities of both natures are to be found within him equally, but it is not accurate to speak of Jesus doing one thing “by his human nature” and another thing “by his divine nature.” He was not two persons, he was one person of dual natures. He did not have two wills, two minds, two hearts, two personalities, two consciousnesses, etc.; Jesus was only one person. Neither was he a third nature, seemingly the error of the early Eutychians. Mysterious though it may be, the essential fact is clear. “. . .the Second Person of the Trinity added to His own nature a perfectly normal human nature, that His life on earth was passed as far as was fitting within the limits of this humanity. . .”⁷ Another scholar adds, “An incarnate life is an enfleshed life. It is not a divine coupled with a human life. . .as if he were sometimes God and at other times man. . .This one personality was divine-human. It was constituted by the indissoluble union of a divine and a human factor. . .all sense of dual consciousness and dual life is absent.”⁸ Each nature “. . .was unaltered in essence

and undivested of its normal attributes and powers, they with equal distinctness represent Jesus Christ as a single undivided personality. . .so that he is properly, not God and man, but the God-man.’”⁹

Since Christ uniformly speaks of himself as a single person, since the powers and attributes of both natures are ascribed only to the one Jesus Christ, and since his atoning blood would be unfathomable otherwise, one must recognize the single and undivided personality, for, “We cannot separate Christ’s divine from his human acts, without rending in twain the unity of his person and life.”¹⁰ Further, this union in two natures is necessary “. . .to constitute Jesus Christ as proper mediator between man and God. His two-fold nature gives him fellowship with both parties, since it involves an equal dignity with God, and at the same time a perfect sympathy with man (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:15,16).”¹¹

4. *Incarnation was humiliation.* How could God be born upon earth? How could he be a helpless infant? How could God be subjected to advancing in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man (Luke 2:52)? How could he live in the humblest of homes, work at the most menial of labors, associate with the commonest of the earth, and accept the embarrassments of snide rejections and mockeries of his own people?

This descent of humiliation was immeasurable. He “emptied himself. . .humbled himself” (Philippians 2:7), thus “divesting himself” or “abasing one’s self” of rightful prerogatives. He, for our sakes, “became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9), which means some kind of poverty and beggarliness. He, who is eternally beyond conditions, subjected himself to conditions. He is un-

created perfection, but he put himself under human development. He is the Father of eternity, but he became subject to time. He is omnipresent, but he subjected himself to space. He is omniscient, but he humiliated himself to limited knowledge. He is the Almighty One, but he lowered himself to pray for help. As when the sun is clouded by night, so Jesus' divinity was clouded by humanity.

This Prince of Glory suffered all the more intense humiliations as his career neared its close. Rejected, despised, forsaken, he was betrayed, tried illegally, and hung upon the cross. Perhaps one might suppose his humiliations were “. . . completed in his burial, in which His sacred body was put away in the grave as if he shared the common end of men who die and are buried, whose bodies decay and cease to be.”¹² This can also be conceived of as the time when the Son of God was willing to lay aside the use of His glory and powers. “It is conceivable that he might have laid aside, for a time, the symbols or the manifestation of his glory. . . It is conceivable for a divine being to intermit the exercise of his almighty power, since it cannot be supposed that God is *always* exerting his power to the utmost. . .”¹³ This author further argues, “His object is to state the depth of humiliation to which he descended, and this was best done by saying he descended to the lowest condition of humanity, and appeared in the most humble garb.”¹⁴

5. *Incarnation involved the reality of humanity.* He is often referred to as a man (Acts 2:22; Romans 5:15; 1 Corinthians 15:21; 1 Timothy 2:5); he possessed all the essential elements of human nature, a material body and a rational soul. Remember he said, “My soul is ex-

ceedingly sorrowful. . .” (Matthew 26:38), and he spoke of his body and blood when he instructed his disciples about the special Supper (Matthew 26:26-28). Again, he experienced normal human development in both body and soul (Luke 2:52). Further, he showed normal human feelings and pangs: hungered (Matthew 4:2), thirsted (John 19:28), wept (John 11:35), loved (Mark 10:21), sympathized with compassion (Matthew 9:36), and cried with tears (Hebrews 5:7).

“Yet Christ was not all men in one, and he did not illustrate the development of all human powers. Laughter, painting, literature, marriage — these provinces he did not invade. . .the perfection of Jesus was the perfection of self-limiting love. For our sakes he sanctified himself (John 17:19), or separated himself from much that in an ordinary man would have been excellence and delight.”¹⁵

6. *Incarnation involved being subject to the Holy Spirit.* One remembers the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:16), and when his powers of miracle-working were questioned, it was considered blasphemy “against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:31-32). Evidently, this Second Person of the Godhead, therefore, did not use his own omnipotence to perform miracles; he did so by the power of the Holy Spirit. “The God-man, in his servant-form, knew and taught and performed only what the Spirit permitted and directed. . .But when thus permitted, he knew, taught, and performed, not, like the prophets, by power communicated from without, but by virtue of his own inner divine energy. . .”¹⁶ Another look from another angle at this relation with the Holy Spirit says, “The

limitations of Jesus in the realm of knowledge present an interesting study. . . he told his disciples he did not know the time of the end of the world. . . The Holy Spirit revealed to the human soul of Jesus many things concerning the future; but this was not among them.”¹⁷

7. *The Incarnation involved his death.* Every indication is given within the Gospels of the death of his flesh and blood body. He “yielded up his spirit” (Matthew 27:50), “gave up the ghost” (Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46), and “gave up his spirit” after saying “It is finished” (John 19:30). His blood was shed for us (Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19). He poured out blood and water when his side was pierced (John 19:34). And Paul argued the “death that he died, he died unto sin once. . .” (Romans 6:10).

The Incarnation Is Perpetual

One of the overlooked concepts in the sacrifice of the Son of God is that when he became human, it was perpetual, never-ending, throughout eternity. Once he humiliated himself, made the Kenotic sacrifice to become a dual-natured person, the Bible teaches that he will never return to the single nature known prior to his incarnation.

First, notice passages which so teach.

1. *The Judgment will be presided over by a man*, the one ordained of the Father, the one raised from the dead (Acts 17:30-31). Because of his peculiar relationship to both God and man, Jesus Christ is preeminently qualified to be that Judge!

2. *Later fruit is like the “firstfruits,”* which Christ is by virtue of his bodily resurrection from the dead (1

Corinthians 15:20). As men's bodies have been earthly, they shall one day bear the image of the heavenly, which Jesus became in his resurrection and ascension (1 Corinthians 15:49).

3. *Christians long for the day when their physical bodies will be "conformed to the body of his glory"* (Philippians 3:21). If Jesus is not in some heavenly body form today, then what could Paul have meant? Remember that pure Deity is "spirit" (John 4:24), but Jesus Christ is said to be in a glorious body.

4. *The work of Jesus Christ as Mediator involves his still being man* (1 Timothy 2:5). Paul affirms that while he is doing such mediating, he is still a man. He is gone to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 3:22), but there he serves us in his glorious body.

Second, do not fall prey to imprecise terminologies. Jesus may still be human today, but he is not flesh and blood, as ". . .such cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Paul added the statement he would no longer know Christ "after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:16), which perhaps refers more to standards of the world than to his physical nature. Understand, Jesus Christ is not in the flesh today, but He is still the God-man. He is "man as man will be" someday in eternity: changed, immortal, incorruptible, heavenly, and spiritual in body. To be "human" is not to say to be "flesh and blood."

Third, without such a concept of a perpetual sacrifice in becoming man, there would be many puzzling queries.

1. What happened to the resurrected body of Jesus?

After or during the ascension, did it disappear, cease to exist, suffer annihilation, or what?

2. What happened to the human soul or spirit which Jesus said he had? A human baby was born to Mary in all respects as all other babies. There was certainly one great difference, as this baby was also God. Now what happened to the human personhood, personality, soul, of this one born to Mary? If Jesus returned to heaven to the single and pure state of Deity from whence he left, this humanity disappeared. What happened to it? Annihilation does not answer the problem. Has there been the creation of one human person that has somehow, somewhere disappeared for all eternity? Such is unthinkable.

3. Would Jesus be man's example only for time, not for resurrection and eternity? How could he be the "firstfruits of them that are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20)?

4. How could David's seed be on the throne "forever" (2 Samuel 7:13; 1 Chronicles 17:12)? If Christ somehow gave up his human nature, then David's seed would no longer be on the throne. It would be God on the throne, certainly not the seed of David.

5. Why use the name of the Son of God which refer to both his natures: "Jesus Christ"? "Jesus" was the human, earthly name for this One (Matthew 1:21), while Peter affirmed this One was "made" to be "Christ" (Acts 2:36). Jesus refers to his humanity; Christ refers to his Deity as God's Anointed Messiah. If he is still Jesus Christ today, and if it be proper to refer to him by both names, then he must be the God-man today.

It is therefore affirmed one of the major aspects of the sacrificial "mind of Christ" is that the dual natures existing in Christ Jesus on the earth, begun at the birth of Mary, will continue perpetually for eternity. This is the true climax of his humiliation: when he left glory for the earth, he can never return to the former state. He will be all the more exalted (Philippians 2:9-11) but his sacrifice in the incarnation is immeasurable.

"In his glorification he rose above the limitations of time and space. . . he was glorified not simply as divine but as human also. . . When he went back to glory world, he carried with him the human nature he had assumed. In him humanity was glorified. In him humanity sat down on the throne of the universe."¹⁸

"The union of humanity with deity in the person of Christ is indissoluble and eternal. Unlike the avatars of the East, the incarnation was a permanent assumption of human nature by the Second Person of the Trinity."¹⁹

"Christ is still incarnate but no longer in the form of a slave which he took for his redemptive work. The slave's form he dropped but not his human nature to which God gave a glorified form."²⁰

"According to Eph. 1:20,21, the man Christ Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come. From which it appears that no creature of God is so far exalted and so glorious as the man Christ Jesus, human nature being in him dignified infinitely beyond the angelic nature; and that this nature has an authority and preeminence which no being, either in heaven or earth, enjoys."²¹

Conclusion

Many are the sacrifices of our Lord in his incarnation. Climaxing it all, of course, is the suffering and innocent death on the cross for the sins of the world. Yet, deeper concepts add a richness to this knowledge when one considers the eternal verities of such incarnation.

That God could so love this world to give His Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10) for sinful man (Romans 5:8) and that the Son could so sacrifice as to accept humanity for all eternity staggers one's imagination of what love and sacrifice might be in actuality.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

“He who was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the spirit,
Seen on angels,
Preached among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16).

¹Walter Thomas Conner, *Revelation and God*, (Broadman Nashville, Tenn. 1945) pp. 182-186

²Conner, pp. 194-195

³Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion In Its Doctrinal Expression*, The Judson Press, Philadelphia, Penn., 1949) p. 182

⁴Mullins, p. 182

⁵Mullins, pp. 184-185

⁶Lorraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957) p. 196

⁷Boettner, p. 202

⁸Mullins, p. 186

⁹Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (The Judson Press, Philadelphia, Penn., 1946), p. 683.

¹⁰Strong, p. 685

¹¹Strong, p. 689

¹²Boettner, p. 190

¹³Albert Barnes, *Notes On The New Testament, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1950) p. 172

¹⁴Barnes, *ibid*

¹⁵Strong, p. 674

¹⁶Strong, p. 696

¹⁷Boettner, p. 185

¹⁸Conner, p. 205

¹⁹Strong, p. 698

²⁰R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minn. 1961) p. 780

²¹Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, A commentary and Critical Notes*, (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, New York) Vol. II, p. 496

The Mind of Christ

Marvin Phillips

To Seek and Save the Lost!

Our text is from Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost!” The context is Jesus’ talk with Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Jesus had a profound affect on his life. And as salvation came to his house that day, Jesus reminded us all that His total purpose in coming to earth was “to seek and save the lost!”

Jesus was a soul winner! There were lots of causes which might have prompted Him to leave Heaven and come to earth. There were hunger problems, race problems, slavery problems, marriage problems, and many other problems. Yet the one that tore Him from the skies, and gave us “earth’s only visitor from outer space,” was a “sin problem”! Jesus was concerned about our sins! He knew the eternal consequences. So “God so loved the world, that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) show Him reaching out to all men. Whether male or female, rich or poor, they were all subjects of His ardent search. He was “not wanting anyone to perish, but that everyone should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). We were called to follow in the steps of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21), and you could not follow Jesus two steps without being a soul winner!

Soul Winning is the Mission of the Church!

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10). This may be taken in two ways. First, the very appearance of the church brought to light the plan God had originated before the world was formed to save man. With its beginning, the angels and prophets of old could sigh, “Oh, so that’s the way He was going to do it!” Taken another way, it is the purpose and mission of the church to take the “manifold gospel to the world”!

At least this shows up in the Great Commission, the “marching orders” of the church.

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15,16; cf Matt. 28:19,20; Lk. 24:47).

Churches must never get sidetracked from their sacred mission. And it is easy to do so. There are so many good causes; so many needy people. The church will be found involved in benevolence. It will forever be sending food to Ethiopia, helping Poland through long and cold winters. God’s people will be on the scene in every national disaster. In fact, wherever there is a “hurt,” the people of God will want to be helping heal that hurt. But such work is the “character” of the church. We do such things because that’s the kind of people we are. That’s the kind of life Jesus lived.

But I repeat, the “mission” of the church is “soul winning”! It is the only thing for which Jesus died.

Churches need to constantly examine themselves to see that “saving the lost” is the foremost thing in their thinking and actions. It is the reason behind doing everything we do. We go to camp, have Vacation Bible schools, go on retreats, have picnics, and everything else we do, in order that it might give us opportunities to reach some who are lost, and bring them to salvation! Churches that do this will grow! Churches who forget this will die. It is “reach out” or “fade out”!

Attitudes That Make Soul Winners!

But what are the attitudes that make soul winners? You see, soul winning isn’t something you do; it is something you are! It is not simply the talent of some Christians, but the nature and desire of every Christian. Someone has said, “If you don’t have enough religion to save another, it is unlikely you have enough to save yourself!”

I want to suggest first of all that you have to know you are saved! A “hope so,” “maybe so” situation won’t do it! The Bible says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Scripture was given to us so we would be sure of our salvation! Why aren’t more of us sure? I saw a little tract with the title, “If I’m So Saved, Why Do I Feel So Lost?” That might express the sentiment of a good many Christians today.

Too many of us have based our salvation on our works. If I do enough, I may feel saved! But the truth is evident. There isn’t enough you can do to feel

“worthy” or “saved”! We’ve got to understand grace. Obedience is required, but it is not “sinless perfection.” It is God saving undeserving sinners, upon their turning to Him and committing their lives to His cause! Grace is the only basis one could ever feel “saved and on his way to Heaven”! When knowledge of this “Amazing Grace” hits your soul, you will want to share it with others.

Secondly, you’ve got to believe that folks are lost! You will make no attempt to save anyone you don’t really believe is lost! It is difficult for us to look at our neighbors who live good moral lives, and with whom we have friendships, and feel they are lost and on the road to Hell! But we need to analyze the reason folks are lost. Jesus did it clearly in the story of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). Simply put, it is this: those who hear the words of Jesus and respond to them are saved! Those who hear His words and do not respond are lost! Many of our good neighbors, loved ones, and friends simply have done nothing about Jesus. That is the basis for eternal condemnation!

The Bible tells the story of God’s sending Jesus to die for us. The story includes His coming, His gospel, and His church. To fail to respond to Heaven’s invitation is eternally fatal! We’ve got to recognize such people are lost. Until we do, we won’t do much to save them!

Thirdly, we’ve got to care! Remember the cliché, “No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care”? I am convinced that one of the reasons more are not won to Jesus is that we have simply not cared enough!

Paul cared! Pick that up in the following verses.

I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit — I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel! (Rom. 9:1,2)

Christian friend, do you care about your city? Do you care about your own family and close loved ones? Does it trouble you if they are not yet obedient to Jesus? Some have called this a “burden for souls.” We’ve simply got to have it! No great steps in world evangelism will be taken until that burden is felt!

And then fourthly, you’ve got to care enough to act! Lots of people care. We talk about how bad it is that folks are lost. We express our concern for those overseas (and at home) who are without the Lord. But it’s like so many church business meetings. Unless that talk is translated into action, folks will remain lost! Care simply must be generated into action! We must plan the work. And we must also work the plan! Holy lives are not substitutes for locked lips!

A Modern Story!

Frank and Elizabeth Morris only had one son. Ted was eighteen, and finishing his first semester of college. He was home for the Christmas holidays, and was out seeing old friends again. He was driving his car home late one night. There was a brief flash of light as an oncoming car crossed the median. They hit head on,

and Ted was instantly killed. It was Christmas Eve, 1982!

Tommy Pigage was only twenty-six! But he was the drunk driver of the car that hit Ted. He, the newspaper story reported, had had a drinking problem since he was sixteen! He was a problem drinker. He had lost jobs and sat at home a lot with a whiskey bottle at his side. He knew, the night of the party, that he had had too much to drink. But he refused a ride home. "I'll be all right," he said. And he almost was. The accident happened about one mile from home.

The accident almost destroyed young Ted's parents. After a terrible time dealing with it, they came to the conclusion that they were going to have to meet the "killer," and come to terms with their emotions. To be sure, there were gains and setbacks. But it eventually led to his being paroled into their custody. They took him into their home and eventually baptized him into Christ. They gave life to the one who dealt "death" to their son.

All of which reminds us of a King a long time ago Who had only One Son. Folks in His Kingdom violated His law and ungratefully abused His blessings. Because of His love for them, He eventually sent His Son to forgive and save them. Would you believe, they killed His Only Begotten Son? They had Him crucified on a hill outside Jerusalem.

The king grieved for His Son; but He kept on loving the people. He longed to forgive them and even adopt them into His family. He even longed to make them heirs of His entire Kingdom. And He still does today!

Christ and the Bird Cage!

Let me try to put it another way! Paul Harvey told (and it is retold with his permission) the story of a preacher, who took an old rusty bird cage into the pulpit with him one Sunday morning. He told a story that seemed at first to have no point. That week a small boy was seen from the window of the preacher's study hurrying down the alley between the church building and the classroom wing. He had this rusty bird cage, and in it, some little birds. Said the preacher, "What do you have there in that cage, son?" "Just some old birds I caught in the field," replied the boy. "And just what are you going to do with the birds, boy?" said the preacher. "Why, I'll just play with them. I'll tease them and scare them. I'll have lots of fun with these birds."

"You'll get tired of that soon, son," said the preacher. "What will you do with them then?" The boy replied, "Oh, I don't know. I've got a cat at home. He likes birds. That's it! I'll just feed these birds to my cat!"

"How much do you want for the birds, boy?" asked the preacher. "Mister, you don't want these birds. These are just old field birds. They're ugly. They can't sing. They aren't worth anything!" But the preacher insisted, "How much for the birds, boy?" So the boy, with head cocked to one side, replied, "How about two dollars?" And to his surprise, the preacher pulled out two one-dollar bills and handed them to the boy. As the boy disappeared down the alley with his newly acquired wealth, the preacher took the cage to the window of his study, opened the door, and tapped on the side of the

cage until the birds had all flown to safety!

At this point, the preacher spoke to his congregation about another story that began to tie in. God and Satan met up one day. And Satan had a cage called sin. And God said, “What do you have there in that cage, Satan?” And Satan replied, “I’ve got a whole world full of people here. I’ve trapped them in this cage. I’m going to have a fine old time with all these people!” And God said, “What are you going to do with those people, Satan?” Satan said, “I’m going to tempt them and lie to them. I’m going to get them cheating and stealing. I’ll get them fighting one another. I’ll have a lot of fun causing them all kinds of trouble!” And God said, “You’ll soon grow tired of fooling with all those people, Satan. What will you do then?”

“Damn them! That’s what I’ll do! I’ll send them to Hell. That’s what they deserve anyway!” And to his surprise, God said, “How much do you want for those people, Satan?” And Satan said, “You don’t want these people, God. They’re not worth anything! They’re ingrates. They won’t appreciate you. They’ll curse you; they’ll spit on you. They’ll drive nails into you, and kill you. They’re not worth buying!” To which God insisted, “How much for the people?” And Satan said, “All your sweat and all your blood!”

And Jesus paid the price, took the cage, and opened the door!

Oh, that the whole world may understand the love of God, and what He has invested to get us saved! And may the church of God burn with the same love to get the gospel to the whole world, to every creature, to get

as many as possible out of darkness, and into His marvelous light!

The Courageous Life

Randy Mayeux

For Jeri, times were already hard. She had gone through one painful divorce. She was now enmeshed in a marriage that was not working. Not working?! It was a daily battle just to survive. But the events of this day made everything else pale in significance.

She had just kissed her nine-year-old son goodbye. He was going on a short outing — down the street to a friend's house. She watched him as he walked away. She lived for her son! As he started down the block, a truck careened around the corner. She watched in horror — helpless — as the truck hit her son full speed. He died instantly. She wanted to. She almost did.

The accident was the final blow. It launched her into a nine-year ordeal with psychiatrists, anti-depressants, prescribed, yet addicting, drugs, social fears — a life that was little more than death.

How could she go on?

Going on. That is the call of courage. To keep going. To keep putting one foot in front of the other. To never give up. It is the life that *lives*. It is “a stubborn courage that if need be will live through endless disappointment and lifelong delay, and still hold on.” Or, as Dag Hammarskjöld put it. . . “It seems so much more difficult to live than to die.”²

The courage to live was the courage of Christ. The Courageous Life — is the Life of Christ. He never wavered in His courage. He never quit. He never gave up. He never abandoned His call. And He stands as the model for us all.

What did His courage lead Him to do?

First, Jesus Christ has the courage to *trust*. It is a risky courage — the courage to trust. Someone comes up and says, “Trust me. Do what I say. Let me lead you. You won’t regret it.” It requires absolute confidence in the trustworthiness of the one beckoning you. Jesus trusted His God. And so, when God proposed the riskiest of journeys, with a destination of full manhood, Jesus took the plunge. He became a baby — a vulnerable baby. And with that initial leap of trust came a lifetime of deeds of trust. The courage to trust led to the courage to leave — to leave the security of HOME — to launch out into the unknown, where, at a risk, was the possibility of never returning. The ancient hymn describes the journey downward:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8).

This initial act of courage was not only the first, but the foundational act. In so doing, He set His face squarely in the direction of the promises of God. God called — He trusted — He acted.

Such courage resulted in many individual moments of courage — and some character traits that ultimately proved to be fatal.

Second, Jesus Christ had the courage to *serve*. Such courage permeated His life — it is one of the words that

He chose as a virtual title: "Jesus Christ: Servant." As He stated during a discussion of who would have the most prestige: "The son of man came not to be served, but to serve" "I am a servant. . . .and thus, I serve!"

Pick your spot in the Gospel, and you see the SERVANT Christ at work. One moment, a leper is hopelessly crying for someone, anyone, to help. Jesus reached out, and placed His clean hand on the open, leprous sores of the man. An act of risky courage — and a leper was healed. On another occasion, a woman made the lonely walk out to a well — alone. She had been divorced five times. An outcast of outcasts, she was not even permitted to walk to the well with others. All hope had been drained from her. But on this day, the Saviour of the world had the courage to speak to her — to serve her — to ask for her help — to elevate her to the rank of human being. His courage to serve was always present because the people were in such desperate need. He served — He saved!

Third, Jesus Christ had the courage to *keep at it* — to keep putting one foot in front of the other. The temptation to quit was enormous. And yet *he would not yield*. He was *persistent*; he *persevered*. He had the facts staring Him in the face: opposition from the religious leaders (vigorous, plotting, ugly, harsh opposition). He had the indifference of His "followers." At one point, when He spelled out the demands of the call ("unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"), the followers abandoned Him until just a handful remained. And, even when He was at the height of His popularity, His

followers tried to sidetrack Him. Thus, as always, He had to “resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem.” He would not quit! He kept going. And, because He did, the Cross occurred — the will of the Living God was fulfilled, and a world was saved — all because He didn’t quit.

In April, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested in Birmingham after violating an injunction forbidding demonstration. On Saturday, April 12, a letter signed by eight clergymen appeared in the Birmingham *Post Herald*, calling the action of King and his colleagues “unwise and untimely.” Martin Luther King responded to their charge in an epistle — the “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In it, he stated: “One of the most agonizing problems within our human experience is that few, if any, of us live to see our fondest hopes fulfilled.” . . . But, in a spirit of perseverance, he re-affirmed his decision to keep going. “I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. . . Just as the apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the four corners of the Greco-Roman world, so I am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call. . . .”³ He kept going. Such is the courageous style of perseverance.

But, fourth, it is in Jesus Christ’s willingness to *speak courageously* that we come closest to the need of this hour. We have our legions who need to muster the courage to trust, and to serve, and to keep going. But that courage is most often born in listening to the passionate appeal of a preacher/speaker. History demonstrates the importance of powerful, courageous

speakers. Churchill rallied Britain. Roosevelt rallied the U.S. Preacher after preacher has rallied congregation after congregation. Such is seen in virtually every encounter of Christ with the downtrodden, on the one hand, and with the religious leaders, on the other.

Let's examine his willingness to speak to His audiences.

1. *To the "sinners,"* He was willing to speak a word of acceptance, *a word of hope*. He turned to the sinful woman who anointed His feet with perfume, mixed with her own tears. The religious leaders were offended at such an act, but He looked her in the eye and said, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you: go in peace." (Luke 7:48,50). When He sought to communicate the characteristics of His God, He told stories like the waiting Father — the Father who waited for his wayward son, ran to embrace him, and threw a party upon his return. There was no rebuke — no angry lecture. (The boy had clearly seen the futility of his trek into the country so far from home.) This daddy was simply overjoyed to have his son back from the dead. So, too, is our Father. And Jesus spoke of such a God.

Even this compassionate, loving speaking was costly — because it received such opposition. His life frequently confronted the pride of His self-righteous opponents — a judgmental pride that wants no part of accepting "sinners." And so, the courage to speak up for the downcast is the same courage it takes to confront the blind leaders tied to the mistakes that enslaved them.

2. *To the religiously smug,* he spoke His most courageous messages — the messages that so confronted

them that they conspired to do away with the spokesman.

The courage to speak in this way is the courage of the prophet who says “yes” to the clear call of God. It has a rich and consistent heritage.

— When David committed adultery, and then murder, God tapped the shoulder of Nathan and said, “You are the man that I choose to speak.” And Nathan went to David, masterfully weaving that parable of the simple man who had his beloved sheep stolen and killed by the selfishness of the man who had it all, but wanted more. When David erupted with anger, Nathan said: “You, David — you are that man.” A prophet spoke. And David was convicted — and changed.

— When the people of God had neglected the pursuit of personal holiness, and allowed their worship to become just an empty ritual, (God has always demanded and expected the life to match the claim), He again tapped the shoulder of a man — a man to speak with courage. This man believed that the call to speak was “non-negotiable;” when he heard a message from God, he was compelled to repeat it to God’s people: “The lion has roared — who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken — who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8). And his most graphic message came against the emptiness of the lives of the people of God: “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a

river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:21-24).

— When Jeremiah felt the lonely pain of the prophet’s task, he longed to bail out. But His God had said: “Do not be afraid. . .for I am with you.” And so speak, he must—regardless of the cost. Because the deepest truth of his life was that he *had* to speak: “The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:8-9)

Jesus clearly carried on this painful yet essential task. Many passages come to mind, but the clearest is Matthew 23. It is worth another hearing. He begins by describing the tragedy of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees: “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. . . .Everything they do is done for men to see. . . .They love the place of honor. . . .They love to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’ ” And then, He turns His gaze toward the culprits themselves. He is pointed. He is direct. He is soon despised.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one,

you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Woe to you, blind guides! You say, “If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.” You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, “If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.” You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees,

you hypocrites! You build tombs for prophets and decorate the grave of the righteous. And you say, "If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

At the very end, He wails in deep pain: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . .how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. . . ." (vs. 37).

Throughout His ministry, He was the model of courage. It became apparent that He would not back down from His Father's agenda — He had the courage to love the unacceptable; He had the courage to serve; He had the courage to persevere; He had the courage to speak out clearly, without hesitation or compromise, to see that the will of God was heard. Such a model was

absolutely essential to the future of Christianity. A cowardly founder would have left *no* following. A cowardly spokesman would have moved no one to similar courage. And if there is a trait that is clearly seen in the early church, it is the trait of courage. Courage will always create a future; fear will always be enslaved to the past.

But What About Today?

What about today? It would be a mistake of the highest order to assume that today's church has no need of courage. You know the alarming trends. We have been in decline (those in Abilene may not see it, but it is painfully evident in Los Angeles!). We all know people who have left the church for other religious groups — or for no new group at all.

We are in desperate need of courageous churches, filled with courageous members, led by courageous elders, listening to the challenging and convicting word of God spoken through the mouth of courageous preachers.

The call of Christ is to live the courageous life wherever you are, in whatever ways you can. It is the call to make a difference in someone's world. It is the call to elders to be elders with great courage; to rise above the petty, and listen to the clear call of the living God alone. It is the call to teachers to serve your students with courage; to go beyond teaching them just the facts, and loving them into Life! It is the call to moms and dads to love each other courageously, and thus to love their children. It is His call to you — personally — to be courageous, rising above the mundane,

making a difference in *your* world. And, most of all, it is the realization that Christ alone was the man of courage. And so it is the call to let Him continue to live a courageous life *through* you, in your world.

But that kind of courage is so rare. What has drained away so much of our courage today?

1. *We see little of the need.* We are so “satisfied” that we become oblivious to the pain in the eyes of our people. People in pain seldom have the courage to cry out, “Will you help me?” And we have not trained ourselves to look behind the smiles to the pain in the eyes. And so we wring our hands at the devastated aftermath: this person leaves the church, that person divorces his/her mate, this person dries up spiritually. We could see it coming if we only had the courage to notice — but, especially for those of us who are leaders, to even notice adds to our guilt. We are afraid of failure, afraid of rejection — and so we close our hearts as well as our eyes.

2. *We grow tired.* I understand this one clearly. Maybe we have served in our church for so long — we have seen programs come and go, preachers come and go, ideas come and go, “That’s just the way it is,” we conclude, and we have no courage or energy to address the malaise and to invest ourselves in dreaming and working toward a new future.

3. *We remain silent.* The silence is deafening. This is where the need is the greatest, because this is where the solution is to be found.

Every step forward, without exception, is taken following the courageous call of a spokesman for God.

A reminder of some victories is helpful:

— In Acts 4, Peter and John were “commanded not

to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” Their response was one of great courage: “We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.” No one who has truly seen and heard can ever keep silent.

— In Acts 15, there were some who wanted Gentile believers to enter Christ through Moses. Had they won, the church would have died at that moment. But Peter had the courage to stand up and speak: “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (vs. 10). The outcome of the Jerusalem conference assured the very future of Christianity.

— In Galatians 2, Paul described how Peter had compromised, “fearing the party of the circumcision.” And then Paul spoke: “I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” (vs. 11). Again, pure Christianity was greatly threatened, and God raised up this man to speak with courage.

In each case, the church was threatened, and a person, filled with Christ, had the courage to speak. Such courage is the life of the church — not the courageous person himself, but the way God uses the message, and the act itself, to renew His people.

This truth continued through the ages. Martin Luther nailed the cry of his heart to the door at Wittenberg, and the Reformation was started. Alexander Campbell held his baby in his arms, and said no to the call to baptize his infant — and obedience became a way of life for a movement.

In this century, the list of courageous speakers and sermons is a long and significant one.

For example, in 1960, Carl Spain addressed this Lectureship on the theme “Modern Challenges to Christian Morals.” It was a bleak period. Our brotherhood had racist practices as deplorable as the rest of the South. Though there were exceptions, Blacks were basically treated as inferior, and were not allowed even the basic freedom of membership in certain congregations, or admission to some of our colleges. Dr. Spain stated:

I feel certain that Jesus would say: You hypocrites! You say you are the only true Christians, and make up the only true church, and have the only Christian schools. Yet, you drive one of your own preachers to denominational schools where he can get credit for his work and refuse to let him take Bible for credit because the color of his skin is dark!⁴

This courageous address paved the way for Blacks to be admitted, and was the catalyst for numerous people to come to grips with their own sinful attitudes. No one compelled Dr. Spain to speak in such a way — no one but the living God, who called him to courage.

We could cite others. In each, the pattern is the same. A need is recognized. Christians have neglected to fill the need; preachers have been silent. But God raises up a courageous spokesperson who speaks with passion, and people are changed.

Such courage is not without its painful price today. The courageous are always opposed, and frequently attacked. And sometimes, it may take years for the changes so desperately needed to be implemented. But who would doubt, with the perspective of history, the

need for change? Should Carl Spain have remained silent? Or, hasn't the pain of his courageous speech been worth the price? What about the E.R. Harper's and the James Willeford's and. . . the list is endless; men and women who fought for our Christian colleges, our orphan homes, our radio and T.V. ministries, all against enormous opposition. But they spoke with courage. And orphans were housed. And the lost were saved. And the students were taught. And God was glorified!

It is true of people of every generation that they want men to preach the message they want to hear — and as a result, they remain deaf to the call of God for their own lives.

But God has some messages to speak to this generation. None of us have yet heard them all. But, we can easily begin to discern some of his concerns. He might state them this way: “You have been a movement of restoration. That’s what I wanted. And you have restored so much. But, there has been a narrowness in your restoration. You have tended to tithe mint, dill, and cummin. . . .You know the right things to say about prayer, but you pray so little. . . .You know the right things to say about worship, but a spirit of praise is so rarely found in your assemblies. Your concerns for ‘rightness’ have too often trampled over the hearts and dreams of people. I want you to be right. I want you to keep going back to the Scriptures. But look through them to Me. We have work yet to be done.”. . . .But it is tough to hear such words. We so quickly point to others, and say, “see what He says to you.” Our fellowship, and this generation, is not exempt from the

warning: “The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth. . .” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

And what is the truth? It is that today’s church must say “yes” to the call of God for today - holding to the ancient truths, but not perpetuating outmoded approaches for the sake of tradition. It is that today’s church needs courageous speakers who speak the truth, regardless of the cost. And today’s churches need to be filled with people who keep going forward, even in the midst of painful opposition. And, most of all, it is that people need to be told the ultimate truth: that God will grant power to put one foot in front of the other.

What about Jeri? God raised up a courageous servant and spokesperson — her sister. She reminded her of God, and His love, and His power. She did not condemn! She served. And she spoke a word of hope and *encouragement*. And Jeri is alive — and working. She is not always “joyful.” But she is putting one foot in front of the other. And that is the most courageous act of all!

May He grant us a generation of such courageous people!

¹Arthur John Gossip, “God’s Love of Gallantry” in *From the Edge of the Crowd* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 38 George Street, 1924), p. 166.

²Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 32.

³Malinda Snow, "Martin Luther King's 'Letter From Birmingham Jail' as Pauline Epistle," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 71 (1985), pp. 318-334.

⁴Carl Spain, "Modern Challenges to Christian Morals," *Christian Faith in the Modern World, 1960 Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures*, (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian College Student's Exchange, 1960), p. 217.

The Portrait of Jesus In The Book of Revelation

James O. Baird

Introduction

Winston Churchill has been quoted as saying, “He who sets the agenda wins the battle.” The greatest of all battles on earth is the church’s battle against Satan and his forces. ACU’s leadership theme this year, “The Mind of Christ,” was thoughtfully chosen to encourage the brotherhood in the fighting of this battle.

Right at this point, I find myself wishing we could take some kind of an audience poll of your favorite scenes involving Jesus. Our lists would vary but there would be much overlapping. My list would include raising the son of the widow of Nain, calling Zacchaeus down from the sycamore tree, feeding the 5,000, and conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Each of these scenes encourages us to become more of what Jesus is—more compassionate, more loving, and more sensitive to teach.

As lectureship themes direct our attention to major needs, rightfully they reoccur. Several years ago we had a lectureship on “The Mind of Christ” and it was one of the most helpful we had conducted. By exploring the person of Jesus, God become flesh, there was laid before us with particular power what man might be.

When Brother Breechen’s kind invitation came to take part in this series and to feel free to suggest, within the theme, a topic of my own choosing, I selected “The Portrait of Jesus in the Book of Revelation.” Not that

such subjects as “The Compassion of Jesus,” “The Zeal of Jesus,” and “The Love of Jesus” are unimportant. On the contrary, my thought was that the fullest significance of these Christ-demonstrated qualities in the gospels are most appreciated when studied with the background of certain pictures of Jesus set forth in Revelation.

It is no accident that the same John who saw Jesus feed the 5,000, heal the blind man, raise Lazarus, and who reclined in Jesus’ bosom on the occasion of the last Passover was, in the Book of Revelation, privileged to see Jesus in a way no man had ever seen Him previously.

Furthermore, John was specifically commissioned to make known to others what he had seen. The Holy Spirit must have wanted us of the on-going centuries to appreciate more deeply the mind of Christ revealed in the gospels through the nature of Christ revealed in Revelation.

“I saw” is John’s favorite phrase in this book, and, of the many things which he saw, I am selecting three visions of Jesus for our lesson. There are other scenes, of course. It seems to me we need the impact of these three in a special way at this time in our lives, personally and collectively as a brotherhood.

The First Scene: Christ Among the Churches

You are acquainted with the record beginning in Revelation 1:9. John is in the spirit of the Lord’s Day. He hears behind him a great voice like a trumpet saying:

What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus and unto Smyrna,

and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

When John turns to see who has spoken he sees:

. . . seven golden candlesticks and in the midst of the candlesticks one like the son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about at the breast with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Those of us in the western world probably have more difficulty with this type of figurative description than the people of the East. Our minds are too much attuned to the material and the here and now to shift gears very rapidly to the message of such powerful imagery.

We might be mistaken to try to assign a specific meaning to every detail of this vision of Christ and perhaps should let the general significance of this vision fix our attention.

When John saw the Christ of Heaven, he, who had been relaxed enough in the presence of Jesus on earth to rest in His bosom, fell at His feet as one dead. Jesus laid His hand upon John and said, "Fear not." Jesus then told John to write to the seven churches. These seven

key cities in what we call Asia Minor were linked by what was then an interstate highway. In each of these thriving centers was a church. These churches were the seven golden candlesticks and Jesus was in the “midst of them.”

The letters to those seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 have much to say to the churches of which we are members.

First, Jesus was standing among the churches—not the world; not the nations; rather, the churches. By special right and special destiny Jesus stands among the churches.

Not long ago I was glancing through a copy of *Foundation News* and came upon an article entitled “Looking for Leadership.” This reported on a gathering of the heads of 1,300 philanthropic foundations in which they were receiving tips on where to give their money. I have done enough fund raising for that kind of situation to make my nose twitch. Not visions of sugar plums but prospective dollars for OCC danced in my head.

The key item under discussion was a book entitled *Habits of the Heart* written by Robert Bellah, a University of California professor. Basically Mr. Bellah said the only way to provide social leadership in the face of growing individualism and selfishness in the U. S. today is to help those social entities which involve people where they are. He mentioned (1) grassroots organization, (2) the family, and (3) the church. Not as a Christian, but as a social analyst, Mr. Bellah concluded that the churches can do something to change America which nothing else can do.

Christ stands among the churches for even greater

reasons. Not only is the church the greatest changing agent of any society, the church is made of those rescued from the eternal consequences of sin by Christ's death. If Jesus rightfully stands anywhere, He stands by right among the churches.

Second, Jesus knew *everything* about each of those churches. Early in each letter Jesus says, "I know." Sometimes we elders have a matter of great seriousness brought to our attention and we have to confess that we knew nothing at all about the matter. In contrast Jesus knows everything about every church. He knew the toil and patience of Ephesus and the tribulation and poverty of Smyrna. He knew Pergamum dwelled where Satan's throne was and the last works were more than the first at Thyatira. He knew that at Sardis they had a name that they lived but that they were dead and that the church at Philadelphia did keep His word and did not deny His name. Everything about the quality of these churches He knew thoroughly and completely.

As Jesus stood among the candlesticks of over nineteen centuries ago, so He stands among the churches of today. Furthermore, He stands in absolute completeness of knowledge. He knows thoroughly the churches in Oklahoma City and Omaha, Abilene and Albany, Tampa and Tokyo, Sydney and St. Louis, Bombay and Brazilia, Port Arthur and Port Harcourt, Vienna, Austria, and Venice, Florida. Jesus knows the churches. Whatever is there, that is exactly what Jesus knows.

Third, Jesus knows not only where each church is but the direction each church is going. I have had people say to me about a certain congregation, "They are exactly

like they were thirty years ago.” Actually that is not true. No church is exactly where it was thirty years ago. It may be meeting in the same building at the same time and doing many of the same things, but a church is like a train moving on a track. It is never like a train stopped at a station. A church is not as much a product as it is a process. In these seven letters Jesus knows the direction of each and points out what will happen to each if it continues in that direction.

Fourth, I am impressed that as Jesus stands among the churches He continues to place the responsibility for the church’s condition upon the church itself. I understand there is a major school of counseling which, instead of focusing on past reasons for behavior, insists that the counselee accept full responsibility for his own actions. Jesus certainly does this as He stands among the churches. The church at Ephesus had to assume responsibility for the fact that it had left its first love. The church at Pergamum had to assume responsibility for those in its midst who held the teaching of Balak.

Fifth, Jesus has great feeling regarding the church. The rush of His words reminds us of an Old Testament prophet and his intense feeling for the condition of Israel. Jesus said to Laodicea, not as a casual observer nor as a cold-blooded analyst, but as one whose heart was brimming with an urgent message, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.” (Rev. 3:15,16.)

In Philippians 2:5 Paul wrote of the mind of Christ as an essential quality of His character, that which is fun-

damental to His nature. Applying this to what John saw in Revelation, there is an essential quality fundamental to the nature of Jesus which causes Him to stand in the midst of the churches. He is there because that is where He wants to be. In one sense that is where He must be. As Brother Earl West put it, the Christ we have on this earth is His body, the church.

What is the meaning of this for us today? Let me make some suggestions.

There is no other occasion among us when members of so many different congregations come together in one place as at these ACU lectures. Many who come are leaders and have an extraordinary responsibility for what is happening in the church which they serve. What does Christ see as He stands looking searchingly at the church of which you are a part?

Does what He sees give Him anguish or cause Him joy?

On a congregational basis are we seeing what He sees?

In the book, *The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth*, David Womach made the observation that churches tend to level off their growth at specific plateaus. He noted these plateaus as being 35, 85, 125, 180, 240, 280, 400, 600, 800 and just under 1,200. Why is this true? Womach's conclusion was that once a church is large enough to care for its own members, pay its own expenses, and establish a favorable image in the community it often loses momentum and is lulled into religious passivity. Applied to ourselves, this suggests self-expectations or community expectations furnish the agenda by which we see the church. How hard are we praying that we may be enabled to see the church as

Jesus sees it?

We are learning more and more that demographics affect congregations. Population shifts and declining neighborhoods make differences, and we often point to these factors to explain what is happening. Jesus knows these circumstances. However, Jesus in Revelation was looking at qualities of the churches more fundamental than these. He looked at works, toil, and patience as well as the church's willingness to reject evil men and hold fast to its first love. These things which Jesus values in churches are available to all regardless of demographics or any other circumstances.

In the brotherhood today we are having a discussion regarding the Restoration Movement and the restoration principle. That should be wholesome for us as long as we continue to appreciate that the restoration principle is inherent in the nature of all true Christianity and consequently do not abandon the restoration plea or the Restoration Movement. As we trace a mighty river to its precious source, the beginning point of the working of the restoration principle for us is what Jesus sees as He stands among the churches. Restoration is not based on what man likes to see; the restoration principle is man devotedly and ardently desiring to see the church as Christ sees it and the church working to become what Christ would have it be.

The Second Scene: The Lamb Which Had Been Slain Now Standing

John's second vision of Jesus we will deal with rather quickly, but not because it is of less importance. Actually it is of supreme importance, enabling us to under-

stand properly the first and the last of the three.

You recall that John saw the throne of God surrounded by the thrones of the twenty-four elders, and in the midst of the throne were the four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. In God's hand was a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. John wept much because no one was worthy to open that book until one of the elders said,

Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. (Rev. 5:5.)

When John looked, he saw

in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. (Rev. 5:6.)

Again figurative language stretches our understanding. We can think of a lamb slain, but to think of a lamb slain, now standing, has a fuller meaning. The idea is clear. The One who is worthy has been slain but now He lives.

The four and twenty elders and the four creatures fell down before the Lamb and they sang to Him a new song, saying:

Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every

tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth. (Rev. 5:9,10.)

From this time on in the book, the word “Lamb” is used more than any other to describe Christ. Any vision of Jesus which is revealed is shaped by the figure of Jesus as the Lamb. The figure immediately leads us to think of the Passover lamb and its sacrifice for the good of the Jewish people. From that John sets forth the vision of humanity’s Paschal Lamb. In the song of the elders and the four living creatures which are about the throne there are several points which impress us:

1. The Lamb was slain to make a purchase unto God. We used to sing at a person’s baptism, “Tis done, the great transaction’s done.” Of course the consummate transaction was made at the cross—not to purchase from Satan, but to be the price which God paid to Himself in the light of His own perfect holiness.
2. A great number were purchased. In Revelation 7:9 John saw “a great multitude which no man could number out of every nation and of all tribes and people and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”
3. The Lamb takes the people of the earth and transforms them into a kingdom which is triumphant over the earthly. Most of us have shaken our heads in dismay because Satan seems to be winning so many victories: homes are destroyed; lives become empty; innocent children are victimized for life by unthoughtful parents. Almost

every form of evil is gaining social acceptance. We ask sometimes, "Will the tide of battle never change?" The kingdom seems to be beleaguered as at a Dunkirk, not as a triumphant host at some spiritual Normandy beachhead. We must never forget that in ways we cannot fathom the slain Lamb is standing. He stands to win millions to Himself through the gospel.

The Third Scene: Christ Treading the Winepress

As I begin this last section, I would like for you to go back with me in your minds and recall those scenes of Jesus from the gospels which drew us to Him so powerfully—the One whose tender love hurts in compassion for the widow who has lost a son or for the short, spiritually hungry Zacchaeus. If you will, let those scenes of such a loving, compassionate Jesus form a picture represented by my left hand.

With this in mind, listen to some other scriptures:

And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Rev. 6:15,16.)

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast and his image and receiveth a mark on his forehead, on upon his head, he also shall

drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (Rev. 14:9,10.)

And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems; and he hath a name written which no own knoweth but he Himself. And he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood; and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure. And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. (Rev. 19:11-15.)

These verses picture another side of Jesus. This is a Jesus of wrath, of vindication. This is a Jesus of eternal punishment. Let this picture of Jesus be represented by my right hand.

Why is the kind, gently loving Lamb now pictured in the last book of the Bible by expressions which seem so harsh? Because above all Christ is God's revealer, the Word. These pictures of Jesus are necessary to completely reveal God. God is altogether holy. He can know no unrighteousness of any kind. From this absolute

holiness comes both the love and justice of God. It is God's love which moved Him to do so much to redeem man. In His justice, those who turn away from such a loving gift must endure the eternal consequences of sin in all its enormity.

Keep in mind when we talk about the punishment of god we are not talking about corrective punishment, nor are we speaking of punishment which flows inherently from the impersonal working at certain spiritual laws. We are speaking of the personal, deliberate act of God through which He is justly vindicated by pronouncing eternal condemnation upon certain beings. It is a judgment of retribution.

When we think of eternal punishment, the winepress of the wrath of God, let us keep in mind God's judgment will be completely fair. Paul in Romans 2:5 calls it the "righteous judgment of God."

I am just getting around to reading Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Being of Scotch descent, I do not read these important three inch books until I can buy them second hand, in paper back. My present timetable for Michener's *Texas* is 1993. There is not a great plot in *The Gulag*. It deals almost solely with the plight of certain Russian citizens. Its gripping message is the terror which civil government can wrest from its subjects by a system of justice which is fundamentally unfair. This type of justice turns the whole world upside down. No one will raise a whisper of protest about the nature of God's judgment. Everyone will say, "It was completely fair."

Do you know what Satan wants us to do with this hand on the right? He wants us to forget it. He entices

the world to remove this as a reality.

In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the rebel, Winston Smith, is captured and subjected to torture. He is lectured by his tormenter, O'Brien,

You believe that reality is something objective, external. . . . But I tell you, Winston, that reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind. . . . only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the party holds to be truth is truth.

O'Brien holds up four fingers. "How many fingers, Winston?" he asks.

"Four."

O'Brien turns a dial and an electric current flows through Smith's body. "How many?" asked O'Brien.

"Four," gasps Smith.

O'Brien turns the current higher and higher until finally he holds up four fingers and asks, "How many?"

Smith, half crazed with pain, says, "Four, five, six—in all honesty, I don't know."

"Better," says O'Brien.¹

Satan says, "Better." He has pretty well removed the picture of Jesus treading the winepress of the wrath of God. He knows that with the picture of Jesus on this right hand out of the way, man is going to distort the picture represented by the left hand.

I have a long-time acquaintance who has written saying there is no eternal punishment, just eternal oblivion. This friend is a great believer in God's grace. In fact, I

personally believe he wrote his book because he cannot reconcile a God of grace with a God of eternal punishment. One day we were sitting in the car talking and I felt close enough to him that I said, "I believe what you have written weakens the doctrine of the grace of God." He looked shocked. I believe I was right. Only against the backdrop of the eternal consequences of sin can the preciousness and importance of God's grace be fully understood.

Not only has Satan pretty well removed this picture of the Jesus of the winepress from the thinking of the secular world, he is doing a tremendous job toward removing it from what we call the "Christian" world as well.

In religious thought the "death of God" idea did not last too long. The view of the death of Satan is doing much better. Kenneth Hamilton in 1965 wrote a book entitled *Revolt Against Heaven* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids). The real revolt is against the reality of hell.

This is why we have so much emphasis today upon annihilationism, reincarnation, and universalism in religious circles. In each of these views, one picture of Jesus goes out of sight. Our understanding of Christ has become seriously distorted.

The Anglican bishop who recently stated, "As far as I know there are only two things which are always sin; rape and child abuse," was contemporary but not Biblical.

Even in evangelical circles the view of the Christ of the winepress is greatly diminished. Dale Moody's significant *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Chris-*

tian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981) had 628 pages but no section on eternal punishment. He believes it. He just does not mention it. A recent study of evangelical literature showed 85% did not deal with sin and guilt but with introspective themes, loneliness, and marriage.

Furthermore, I believe the view of Jesus as represented by my right hand is beginning to slip beneath the line of vision among ourselves. As an experiment, let me say certain words and as I say them I would like you to be aware of how you feel: "eternal damnation"; "fire and brimstone"; "hell." Be honest with me. As I said those words, did any of you have a sense of embarrassment for me? It is not that we do not believe in hell anymore; it is just poor taste to talk about it. It is like a one-inch tie with a four inch lapel. When Bill Banowsky was preaching so effectively at the Broadway Church in Lubbock, he came to a certain western city for a meeting. This was a solidly upper middle-class congregation, and one outstanding lady asked Bill one morning what he was going to speak on that night. "I think I will preach on hell," he answered. She was horrified and replied, "Bill, surely not at _____," naming the congregation. Of course Bill preached on hell.

If the picture of the Jesus of the winepress is weakening in our thought, there is no way we can escape radical theological shifts as a consequence.

I heard a good man relate an apocryphal story about Jesus to a group of college students:

"Why do you speak so much about love?" the disciples asked.

“Because that is all there is,” Jesus replied.

This man’s story is a distortion of the nature of God. God is love, I John 4:8b; He is also a consuming fire, Heb. 12:29. Both God’s love and justice flow from a quality even more fundamental, His absolute holiness.

I recently enjoyed a discussion with an outstanding young man regarding the fact that the Bible does not give us as much information on some subjects as we wish it did. He made the point that after we have studied carefully we should always interpret the texts of Scripture in terms of the love of God for man. That is not quite right either. Used by itself, we come out with a man-centered theology, one that does not tremble before the august nature of deity.

Part of the reason for this, not to justify it, was that we have been faced with some tough choices. We had to accept the missionary society or go through the agony of rejecting it, and in this we reject a position held by men our forefathers respected. As a matter of harsh reality, we either had to accept, as Biblically authorized, or reject, as not authorized, the mechanical instrument of music in worship. Rejection of any type invites harsh negativism. By the grace of Christ, rejection does not have to be harsh in an ugly sense, but in reality that is what it often is.

Grant me in this closing moment, for the sake of discussion, that our historical experience, in which we were forced to make difficult doctrinal decisions rather than accept an easier, more comfortable accommodation with what was not authorized by the Bible, has now created a powerful mood among us. This is a mood which is saying we will not be doctrinally confronta-

tional. Rather, we will be loving and kind. This mood causes us to feel that, if a person's intentions are right, God is really not too much displeased with what we believe and, consequently, with what we practice.

My point is that when a religious group becomes so strongly insistent that it will only be negative about the negatives it places itself in one of the most vulnerable of all positions. Then it is subject to anything doctrinally which, colloquially speaking, comes down the track.

We have a grandfather clock in our home. The fascination of it for our grandchildren is the pendulum solemnly swinging from side to side. It is great to watch. I like it, too—on a clock—but not of ourselves as a brotherhood. As Christ stands among the churches, we want Him to see us drawn to the Lamb who has been slain and kneeling in reverence before Him whose eyes are as fire and from whose mouth proceedeth the sharp two-edged sword.

My two hands can interface. God intended for the Christ of the gospels and the Christ of Revelation to be one picture.

¹George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949), pp. 252,253.

The Mind of Christ: Dying to Forgive

Michael L. Lewis

You already know the person I'm about to describe. He or she has hundreds of names and places. The person has made a mistake. It began as a series of small mistakes leading to a big one. A giant mistake. Intentional sin. Knowing better, yet nevertheless. . . sin. The consequences were so public; its shame cutting through the person's life like an exploding bomb spattering his foolish, rebellious mistake all over himself and the lives of those who know him. The "innocent bystanders" are shocked at the very thought such a mistake could happen and mad. . . because it did. You know the person of whom I speak; everyone knows such a person. Some of us. . . have been the person, ripped open by the ugliness of Satan's lies and then so sorry; embarrassed for what has been done to God and to those close to us who have been let down.

There is a common desperate dream among the rebellious who are so sorry and ashamed: "Oh, if things could just be good again." That is the dream. What becomes of this person and his dream?

Here this common tale of failure and sorrow breaks down into scores of different possibilities depending upon the names and places. Some will hide for many years, perhaps the rest of a lifetime, from a church who has heard of their sorrow but would only question their sincerity and never understand their dream. Some will

become bitter and hard from an arms-length acceptance that suggests their dream was as foolish as their mistake. Some will even learn never again to dream or to admit to a mistake. Then for some, the dream will become real, and the joy of Godly forgiveness will be experienced. What makes the difference?

Not all who makes mistakes and are sorry come to know the fullness of forgiveness. *Why?* Is not forgiveness close to the crossroad of God's will for mankind? Did not Jesus empty himself to become one of us, even to die, so that we might know forgiveness and reconciliation? Are not the people of God an extension of the purpose of God, desperately committed to all people, knowing the life of joy and forgiveness in Christ? So, why are there people who believe they are sinners and want to be forgiven, yet feel so empty at what they have received from God's people?

Becoming a forgiver is painful for people in a debit and credit world. George Bernard Shaw described forgiveness as "A beggar's refuge." There are *few* people who enjoy being a beggar. There are *fewer* who enjoy helping beggars forget who they are. There is an outrage that grows inside us all when we are brutally and unfairly treated by others. After all, why shouldn't people who rip into lives, hurt us, and leave us bleeding, pay deeply for their deeds? Then before they even have the opportunity to feel our justifiable anger for their cold cruelty, they speak of sorrow and request our forgiveness. Now forgiveness, too soon, too easy, also seems unfair. And while we are trying to scrape together some obligated form of forgiveness, the same people turn around and hurt us again. Then a few days later

there is more sorrow and more requests for forgiveness. How often? How long? How many times must we face such pain? Perhaps such questions were on the mind of Peter in Matthew 18.

How Often?

In Matthew 18, Jesus is describing the important, yet sometimes painful, process of helping each other see the reality of sin and the reality of needing to turn toward the Father. The responsibility to confront individually, then, if necessary, collectively, is often avoided out of selfish fear. However, it is a process in which we must involve ourselves with love and courage, if we are to take our calling seriously. Perhaps after hearing Jesus describe some of these confrontational responsibilities, Peter was reflecting on the potential emotional pain of such a process and wondering about its limits. . . .how long? So the text says in v. 21:

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (NASB)

The Jewish tradition seems to have been to forgive a person three times before drawing the line (this teaching was probably based upon passages in Amos 1:3, 2 and Job 33:29). Peter has been around Jesus long enough to know he was not the typical rabbi, so he doubles it, plus one for good measure. He asked, “Seven times?” Peter was being extremely magnanimous given his cultural mindset. Imagine the look of self-approval turning to shock upon his face when Jesus responds in v. 22, “I do

not say to you seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

Of course, Jesus is not saying forgive someone 490 times, but on the 491st occasion your obligation is over. Jesus is saying if people are going to understand what it means to be a forgiver, a dramatic change must occur in the way people look at forgiveness. Here is the point: *When your forgiveness has limits, you think more about the limits than the forgiveness.* Jesus is talking about a confrontational process that hopefully leads to reconciliation. After all, the ultimate goal of confrontation is forgiveness. Peter’s mind has already wandered into thinking about the purpose and goal of confrontation, but no sooner does forgiveness cross his mind than he begins considering its limits. Thousands of years have made little difference in the way people think.

People are obsessed with limits. When the speed limit was 65, most of us drove 66 or 67, bumping and pushing the limit. Now with the limit 55, we drive 56 or 57. We’re fascinated by limits. Every parent of small children knows the routine. My son says, half way through the weekly shopping trip, “Dad, if I’m good, can I have a piece of candy—just one piece of candy?” The reply, with my best parental look of noncommitment is, “I’ll think about it.” At the end of every aisle, the hint is subtly dropped again, “Just one piece of candy?” I assume the question is rhetorical; the only response is a smile. Finally the check-out point is reached and I’m glancing through the checkbook assessing the damage, when a familiar little voice with impeccable timing whispers, “Just one?” “O.K.,” I say, “One piece will be fine.” Every parent knows exactly what is

next. “How about two pieces of candy—just two?” The limits consume us.

I suggest that in Matthew 18 Jesus not only describes confrontation, but he now confronts Peter about being a forgiver. Peter needs to be confronted with what it means to be a forgiver without limit, and perhaps so do we.

In the minds of some, adultery may be grounds of divorce, but if adultery is the limit of your forgiveness, I suggest you don’t understand the forgiveness of Christ. Whenever we use the past like a club to beat people down, never allowing them to be our equal, we are people who have designed limits into our forgiveness and do not have the mind of Christ. When we keep track of the wrongs of others, equating sinning less with being best, we limit forgiveness and do not know the mind of Christ.

A Story About Limits

Against this backdrop, Jesus confronts Peter with the challenge of forgiveness and says, in essence, *every time you’re tempted to limit your forgiveness, Peter, remember this story:*

(V. 23 ff) For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

The slave, therefore, falling down, prostrated himself before him saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.” And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him saying, “Pay back what you owe.” So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him saying, Have patience with me and I will repay you.” He was unwilling, however, but went and threw him in prison until he paid back what he owed.

So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?” And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he could repay all that was owed him. So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

I don’t know what Peter thought on the spot, but I find the story compelling. It has a grabbing power that is everlasting.

First, *the debt*. Ten thousand talents is what he owed. It was immense, more than ten million dollars by a fellow who was fortunate if he could earn a dollar a day.

Then, *the lie*. How does it feel to be on the brink of having your wife and children sold? Everything would be gone, so in desperation the plea was, be patient and I will pay back everything. It was a lie. He owed too much. He had to work for over twenty thousand years to take care of the principle, but no matter how deep the debt, people cling to the work ethic. . . even when it becomes a lie.

Third, *the mercy*. His lord took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. Isn't that the essence of God's forgiveness?

Despite the fact some of us stubbornly hang on to the idea that we can somehow work ourselves free and reduce our spiritual debt by human strength, in our cries God has compassion on us, cancels our debt, and makes us free.

Finally, *the response*. This is what the story is all about. How will we respond to the compassion of God, the cancelling of our debt, the joy of true freedom? The next time we're tempted to limit our forgiveness, consider how we respond to God's forgiveness for us. Consider the servant's response to his lord's mercy. In his response there are several warnings to us about forgiveness:

Forgiveness Warnings

Warning one: *We cannot be forgivers if we want to hurt people*. The debt of that second slave was 100 denarii (about \$18). The plea was the same, "Have patience with me; I will repay." But the lord's slave grabbed his brother by the throat and squeezed. Was he concerned about helping, about right and wrong, or did

he just reason that he deserved \$18 of flesh? Sometimes we see a speck in our brother's or sister's eye and we go in with a hatchet. . .and we get it. Unfortunately, what is left isn't too pretty. We can't be forgivers if we are more interested in getting even than in reconciliation. We cannot forgive when people are treated like an emotional punching bag instead of wounded people in need of God's grace, whom we love deeply. It is hard to extend a helping hand when you have a person by the throat.

Warning two: *We cannot be forgivers if we are unwilling.* The servant heard the cries of his fellow for mercy, but Jesus said, "he refused (v. 30)." It is possible that some of us are not more forgiving because we don't want to be. Most of us are very familiar with another parable of Jesus about two brothers (Luke 15). It has become known as the parable of the prodigal—prodigal meaning "wasted living." I always supposed the term applied to the first son who left home to waste himself in wild living. Now I wonder. The younger man saw the reality of his need to depend upon his father, so he came home to be united and restored. Then the older brother, the one who had never physically left home, the one who always performed his services faithfully (as some measure faithfulness), he could not stand the thought of restoration for his brother who left and returned. Encased in bitterness and suspicion, the more "mature" brother stood outside, refusing to allow or celebrate the renewed equality of his brother. We never learn if the older brother came inside even after his father's appeal. Perhaps still many older brothers stand apart in their unwillingness to accept the patient.

Who was the greatest waste, the one who realized his need for mercy and came home to ask or the one who refused to give mercy? Who is the real prodigal?

Pride and forgiveness do not mix. Hellish human pride has little room for loving acceptance. You cannot make people forgive; if you could, it wouldn't be forgiveness. However, it is important for all to remember that the hope that everyone can know forgiveness and reconciliation is God's greatest desire. How willing, how eager, are you and I to intensely share in that desire? What is stronger, our willingness to forgive or our suspicion that people are getting off too easily? What's more important to us, that people know God's grace or get what they deserve. . . .aren't you glad we all don't receive what we deserve?

Warning three: *We cannot be forgivers when we forget the consequences for living unforgiven lives.* I know it's possible to read too much into a parable, but it seems important to note this parable is not an eternal judgment scene. It is set in the course of a person's life—a servant who refused to forgive and, as a result, was handed over to the “torturers” (some translations, “jailers”) and his forgiveness was cancelled.

The most unforgiving people I know are tortured by resentment, a negativeness that can never give the benefit of the doubt. And as bad as that kind of tortured existence is, the second part is worse than the first.

On the mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).” In teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus said, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who sins against us (Luke 11:4).” Then here Jesus tells a story about a man who forfeits

his forgiveness because he would not forgive. It is a great hypocrisy to think God's forgiveness is deserved by us, but it is nearly impossible for others to receive. God will not be used in that way.

The Lesson

I pray to God that each of us will understand more deeply the implications of our forgiveness of others as a response to God's mercy to us. I wish to say nothing that diminishes the importance of repentance or the importance of Biblical confrontation. However, I challenge the human limits placed upon forgiveness. I challenge the bitter lifestyle that is so insecure and competitive that the only way a person can stand tall is to tear down others, thus preventing an offender from ever knowing restored equality. I challenge the human pride that says those who cross me can never be sorry enough.

Do you know what it is like to be a question mark: to be a sinner whose foolish mistakes are exposed and known by many of the most important people in the world to you and to have your private shame on public display? The pain is necessary because you were wrong, and it is time to face reality, confessing and repenting. Immediately after the fact there may be a few "thank you for your courage" comments, but quickly the "thank you" of Sunday can become the silence of Monday. You may sense you are the topic of conversation for many, but people will rarely speak to you about matters deeper than the weather. You may see an uncertainty in the eyes of many old friends, but the uncertainty is never verbalized. You could conclude your sincerity

is doubted, perhaps some will never trust you again. Haunted by the ghosts of guilt, the question mark existence can be so depressing. . .so depressing.

Some say the Biblical idea is to forgive *and* forget. Perhaps we sometimes forget the wrong things. There are mistakes I have made I deeply regret. While I have tried to make them right, and I know God's forgiveness, I may never be able to forget them. Furthermore, *I do not want to forget them*. For to forget is to lose part of the reality of who I am, of God's rich mercy and grace. I am helpless apart from God's compassion, to forget that is to lose the most important factor necessary in being a forgiver.

I just want to be like Christ, who, with the last ounce of his being, among the last breaths he drew, among the last words he spoke, wanted all people to know God's forgiveness. From the cross he looked down at the people holding their hammers in their hands and said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing (Luke 23:34)." And we have the nerve to debate that because those people didn't ask for forgiveness, they didn't repent. We have missed the point! Many of those same people were among the crowd that was told to repent in Acts 2, but repentance is not the point of what Jesus said on the cross. It gives us an insight into the mind of Christ, the God/man who for years had been walking toward an appointment with death on a cross. He didn't look forward to the rejection and the pain, but for him the possibility of forgiveness for people was more important. He wanted people to know God's love and mercy more than he wanted to protect himself. He was dying to for-

give. . . *How can you and I claim the mind of Christ and not be the most merciful people on the face of the planet?* How can we begin to appreciate God's mercy for us, and not be known around the world as the people who love to show mercy?

God loves forgivers, because they are just like Him. . . He also loves those who can't forgive, because they need to become like Him.

In Jesus Christ, everything can be new. . . everything can be good. And when mistakes are made, by God's grace and mercy, everything can be good again. It's no dream. . . it's the gospel.

When They Looked Into His Eyes

Michael C. Armour

Have your eyes ever given you away? Have you ever tried to mask your innermost thoughts, only to discover that you were betrayed by your eyes?

Nehemiah knew that feeling. Grieved by the misfortunes of Jerusalem, he tried to hide his distress from the court. A sad countenance in the king's presence could mean certain death. But King Artaxerxes took no time in stripping away the pretense. "What your eyes reveal is not sickness," he said, "but sadness of heart" (Nehemiah 2:2).

Like the Babylonian emperor, we have learned to unveil hidden thoughts by watching people's eyes. I once asked a black civil rights leader how he identified latent prejudice. "I look in a man's eyes," he answered, "and watch what happens the first time I touch him."

Eyes are thus marvelous links to the inner man. They tell us what he really thinks, how he really feels. I must wonder, then, what the disciples saw when they looked into the eyes of Jesus. Not the physical qualities, mind you. I care little about the color of His eyes, or whether they set Him off as handsome or plain. What I long to know is the man those eyes revealed.

There was that day in Nain, for instance, when He saw something that tore at the pit of His stomach. Just outside the village a funeral procession crossed His path.

A dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a

sizable crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He felt *compassion* for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”

Luke 7:12-13

Luke’s word for compassion comes from the Greek term for “bowels” or “entrails.” It connotes that sudden tightness in our chest, that gnawing, empty feeling that sweeps over us at the sight of helpless bereavement.

Here is the humanity of Jesus in full display. One glance at His eyes and we see that a mother’s grief has become His own. He cannot remain passive or detached. An invisible hand tears at the pit of His stomach as torrents of emotion surge through Him. It is a gripping moment, perhaps paralleled only by the emotional agitation He felt when He saw the wailing of Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 11:33-34).

As much as I am moved by the scene at Nain, however, I must confess to being more deeply impressed by an incident in Mark 6, where this same sensation swept over Jesus as the result of something He saw. The story finds Him in Galilee, encircled by a pressing crowd. So incessant are their demands that Jesus does not even have time to eat.

Meanwhile His disciples have returned from their first preaching tour, excited about their miraculous powers. Given their propensity for misinterpreting the events of Christ’s ministry, one wonders if they have placed their new-found power in proper perspective. Jesus senses the urgency of answering that question for Himself. But he can hardly do so in the midst of this mob.

Consequently He suggests that the disciples join Him

in a boat and retire to some isolated spot.

The people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. And disembarking, He saw a great multitude, and He felt *compassion* for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Mark 6:33-34

Here is that stomach-gripping word for “compassion” again. As at Nain, He looks on the scene and profound pity overcomes Him. No matter that the crowd had disrupted His privacy and schedule. No matter that His urgent conversations with the Twelve must be postponed. No matter that we would think Him justified to greet this intrusion with frustration and anger. None of that seems to concern Him.

Instead, His eyes bespeak a sad realization that these people are sheep without a shepherd — in their own way just as helpless as that poor woman at Nain. Even in His exhaustion and hunger, He sees below the surface of their lives to the unarticulated confusion at the core of their being. And suddenly He feels for them what He felt for that grieving mother.

Now, it is one thing to be drawn into a mother’s bereavement, quite another to be moved just as deeply by the plight of those who do not even know they are hurting. Yet here stands Jesus, oblivious to the mob’s thoughtless imposition, ignoring the inconvenience they represent, grieving for them when they see no reason to grieve for themselves. Imagine what it would have been like to look into His eyes at that moment! What they

would have told us about the depth of this man's love!

But love that issues in deep compassion can, when circumstances differ, fuel fires of indignation. Not everyone who looked into the eyes of Jesus saw tears of sympathy. Some saw the outrage of an angry love. Mark records two occasions on which Jesus looked at something and responded with anger.

The first came in a synagogue, probably near Capernaum, early in His ministry. A man with a withered hand entered. The opponents of Jesus "were watching Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him." In an effort to disarm their critical spirit, He asked, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?"

The question was straightforward enough. Why should you religious leader hesitate to answer it? But they greeted His query with stony silence.

After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Mark 3:5

Mark describes the Lord's response as an interplay of anger and grief. From the text we know that His anger was no impulsive flash of temper. The Greek language easily distinguishes between that type of anger and what Mark here describes. His term suggests deep-seated, lasting indignation, not a sharp outburst that quickly dissipates. In fact, the word is connotatively so strong that in other passages it is best translated "wrath."

Alongside this anger, Mark says, Jesus experienced “grief.” To translate the Gospel literally at this point, Jesus “sorrowed deeply within Himself.” Thus, Jesus was at once both outraged and profoundly saddened by the turn of events in that synagogue.

We can easily understand His outrage. We ourselves become angry at purportedly religious people who would leave a crippled man to His fate rather than violate their scruples about some cherished ritual.

But Mark’s narrative forces an interesting question on us. The objects of the Lord’s wrath were obviously those hypercritical by-standers in the synagogue. But who was He grieving for? At first glance we might think Him sorrowful for the man with the withered hand. Within moments, however, that man was to be healed. Why sorrow for him?

Besides, Mark tells us explicitly what caused Jesus to sorrow. His grief did not arise from the crippled condition of the man before Him, but from the hard-heartedness He found in that synagogue. It would appear, therefore, that the ones for whom Jesus grieved were the very ones who had sparked His outrage.

What an exceptional moment! Imagine the sudden confluence of emotions in the eyes of Jesus — in one instant a stern judgment against the unthinkable insensitivity of these men and in the next an overwhelming sadness at their failure to grasp the heart of God. While we, as men of smaller emotions, can only think of the punishment these self-righteous critics deserve, Jesus can only sorrow at their distance from the kingdom of God.

Had we looked into His eyes at that moment, they

would have vividly confirmed what Ezekiel proclaimed centuries before: "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live" (Ezekiel 18:32).

The Lord's anger at human insensitivity, however, was not reserved for His enemies alone. He could turn that same indignation on His friends. When He went into Judea and the Trans-Jordan, multitudes again poured out to see Him.

And they began bringing children to Him, so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was *indignant*

. . . .

Mark 10:13-14

Somewhat ironically, the Lord's indignation at His disciples is the same word which Mark uses elsewhere to describe how the disciples became irritated by others. He tells of their anger at James and John, who had asked to sit at the Master's side in the kingdom (Mark 10:41). Mark later portrays them as equally incensed at the woman who poured costly perfume on Jesus (Mark 14:4).

In both instances what aroused their ire was a threat to their own self-interest. None of them was willing to sit idly by while James and John pre-empted the best seats in the kingdom. And Judas, who apparently incited the complaint about the perfume, preferred to line his own pockets with the money this woman had spent (John 12:4-6).

By contrast, there was nothing self-serving in the indignation of Jesus. Consider the scene in Mark 10, as

parents line up to have Jesus bless their children. The Lord is already busy, encompassed by a demanding crowd, and pressed to complete His ministry in the few days left before His crucifixion. If anything, these children constitute a troublesome inconvenience. One would think the disciples had done Him a favor by keeping them away.

But here, as in so many instances, Jesus did not look at things the way we do. To us the children might appear a mere disruption, but to Him they symbolized the essence of the kingdom. How dare His men rebuke (literally, “threaten”) those who were so powerless and unassuming? With a fixed stare He backed His disciples down. Tersely and to the point He said, “Let them come to me. Stop interfering with them!” And then, imposition on His schedule or not, He stopped everything to give the children undivided attention.

The rapid alteration of emotions in His eyes must have been striking to those who stood nearby, His look of aggrieved disapproval as He turned to His disciples, rapidly yielding to the playful love that greeted the children who clamored into His lap. I have no trouble imagining the expression in His eyes as He played with the children. But what would we have seen in those eyes a moment earlier when He rebuked the disciples?

We could easily imagine a fiery, condemning glare. He was, after all, indignant at their behavior. But He had been equally indignant in the synagogue when His opponents thought it sacrilege for Him to heal a withered hand. There His anger was tempered by deep sorrow that these supposed religious leaders had completely misunderstood the heart of God.

Can we not therefore assume that the disciples saw that same disappointment in His eyes? Had he not frequently said to them, "How long must I put up with the paucity of your faith?" And have we not felt the broken-heartedness which underlay that question? Now, with His death drawing near, He must confront the bitter realization again that His disciples remain unprepared for the mission before them. As upset as He was at their conduct, His eyes must have revealed even greater concern with their total misperception of the kingdom. He grieved for them as much as the children they had wronged.

In His eyes we see something the prophets never fully told us. Like Jesus, the prophets often raged at injustice, particularly injustice against the disenfranchised, the powerless innocent, and the social outcast. One scholar explains their rage by saying that they spoke not so much the mind of God as the heart of God. It was God who was raging in the prophets.

But outrage at injustice is only one aspect of God's heart. When we look into the eyes of Jesus, we see a God who, even as He damns injustice, grieves for those who perpetrate injustice. He weeps for the victims of the holocaust, but His tears flow just as surely for Hitler. Such love we can hardly fathom. We yearn not only for wrong to be vanquished, but for vengeance against the wrong-doer.

Perhaps that is why we are far less effective in making disciples than Jesus was. We give up on people too easily. He continued to hope for the best in them, even when they disappointed Him deeply. He could become just as angry as we can, even more so, for His sensitivity

to injustice far transcends our own. But even when He was angry with His disciples, they never saw rejection in His eyes—disappointment, yes; rejection, no. They could never grieve Him so deeply that He would want to toss them aside.

Peter learned that lesson in one of the most interesting episodes that refers to the eyes of Jesus. At the Lord's trial Peter warmed his hands just a few feet away. After repeated denials that he had been with Jesus, Peter finally swore with an oath that He did not even know the man.

At that moment, according to Luke 22:61, "the Lord turned and looked at Peter." As we envision that scene, how do we picture that look? What did the eyes of Jesus say at that instant?

Had I been on trial, I know how I would have looked at Peter. My cold stare would have left no doubt of my pent up fury that this man, my professed friend, the one who insisted just hours before that he would stand beside me, no matter what — that this man had denied me, and vociferously, in my time of greatest need. How I would have glared at him! How mercilessly I would have butchered him with my stare.

But what we have learned of our Lord leads me to believe that His look communicated something altogether different. I am persuaded that His eyes said to Peter, "I'm disappointed in you again. I needed a friend tonight, and you had promised to be my friend. And you've let me down. But that's all right. I hear the cock crowing, too. I know what is happening inside of you — I can already see the tears welling up in your eyes. Right now I think you may need a friend more

than I do. And I just want you to know, Peter, that I'm still your friend."

In that look Peter finally received the answer to the question he had posed weeks before in Galilee: "How much do I have to forgive a man?" The eyes of Jesus said, "If you love like God does, you continue to forgive, even when someone denies you in your hour of greatest need."

I am equally convinced that Peter never forgot that look. Years later it was still at the forefront of his mind, I believe, when he wrote to Christians of Asia, "Keep fervent in your love, for love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Love that emulates the heart of God continues to forgive, even when sinned against multitudinously. It cares profoundly for others, aching even for those who, like the multitude in Galilee, are oblivious of their own unfortunate plight. It never finds people an inconvenience, never thinks of anyone as insignificant, and always bristles with indignation at the sight of wronged humanity.

If we find such love impossible to envision, then we need more time in the company of the Lord. We need to spend long hours sitting at the feet of the Master. Most of all, we need to look directly into the eyes of Jesus and discover what those eyes tell us about the heart of God.

FEATURED CLASSES

We, God's Women

Three Talks, prepared for

Carl Brecheen, Lectureship Director

Anna M. Griffith

I. The Older Woman Shall Be. . .

I am excited. Among other things, I am excited with all of the discussion about women in the church and about the new measure of freedom which we are being granted in many sectors.

But I am concerned, too. I am concerned about our divorce rate. I am concerned over problems between parents and children. I am concerned about how casually some Christian circles accept marital infidelity; and I am concerned about such things as child abuse. I read about our society, and I am concerned.

The Apostle Paul has some answers for some of these problems. He had left a young preacher named Titus on the Greek island of Crete. The situations which Titus had to handle should not have to be faced by *any* missionary! Listen to the things with which he had to contend. . .

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they

are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

This testimony is true. . . . To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds, they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.

Titus 1:5, 10-16

Paul is telling Titus, "Fellow, be aware of what you have to work with. These people are lazy, gluttonous, evil, rebellious, and disobedient. Not only that, but they are liars; they will tell you **anything**. Nothing they say is trustworthy. They make the claim that they know God, but you can tell by their actions that they really do not. They cannot; their minds and their consciences are so warped that they have no base for relating to God. They are completely unfit for doing anything that is profitable."

We have the same problem today. The world's problems are great and overwhelming. Looking at the Cretans, Titus must have felt the same way. But Paul held the source of strength for him before his eyes, and that is our source today.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live

sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. . .

Titus 2:11,12

Paul knew the secret of that power. *He knew that God never gives any of His children a command without providing the direction and the strength to carry it out.* Paul tells him, “Now that you know where your strength lies, you start first with the older men (2:2); teach them what is in accord with sound doctrine. Then go to the older women (2:3); show them how to straighten up, and why (2:4,5); then leave the younger women in their hands. Now you yourself be an example to the younger men (2:7,8), and then teach the slaves (2:9,10). These people are pretty bad, but the grace of God has now appeared to all men, and that grace **works!**”

It works for us, too; the Holy Spirit is a very real and ever-present strength and help.

Titus had to straighten out the minds and consciences of these older women. What did he teach them?

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

Titus 2:3-5

I am excited about these three verses. Do you realize

that there are *eight* words in the Greek New Testament which are used in these three verses, and nowhere else? Paul pulled out his biggest lexicon to bring us this passage, and to me, that makes it pretty special. Let us look at these words.

“*The Older Women shall be. . .*”

This word is the Greek presbutidas (πρεσβυτιδας). You have heard sermons on the qualifications for elders, when preachers have discussed πρεσβυτας = older men. Well, *this* gives the qualifications for “older women.” Many sources think this was actually an *office* in the first-century church.

“Older women likewise are to be *reverent* in their behavior. . .” and *reverent* (ιεροπρεπεις: hieroprepeis) is our second word. This word comes from the Greek word for “temple,” and the original meaning was “to be consecrated or sacrificed to a deity.” It means “that which corresponds to the [temple], the temple precincts and ministry, the sacred action, the religious, and finally, the deity. It thus means that which is sacred or reverent. . .consecrated to the divine . . .we take it to refer to the fact that we truly belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ. . .The simple meaning is that we must take seriously the fact that we belong to God. Dedication to God is **to be taken seriously.**”¹

Whose are **you**? You are God’s! Bought by the precious blood of the Lamb, you are holy, set apart — you belong to Him! This is not something to be put on one day a week, and thereafter, only when convenient. Your dress, your speech, and actions, your entertainment choices, what you read — examine these things, even the most trivial details in your life. Are these in

subjection to the will of God?

“. . .reverent in their behavior. . .”

Our next special word is the one which the NASV renders “behavior.” There are other Greek words thus translated, but this is unique in the New Testament. What did Paul mean using this word?

Behavior (*καταστηματα* *katastamati*): Personal appearance, mien; deportment; carriage, wardrobe, demeanor. This word carries with it the entire lifestyle of the older woman — what she says and does, her body language, her dress — it means all of the nuances of her extended influence. Coupled with “reverent,” it comes to mean that by the time we reach the status of “older women,” we should be so practiced in the lifestyle of Christ that our entire nature has been dedicated in a very special way to God.

The third thing on Paul’s list for older women is “slanderers,” or “gossipers.” Why is this so bad?

1. It makes the gossip and his/her audience part of an elite group. If Sheila, Mary Jane, and Jeannette know something juicy about Sherrie then they tend to feel cliquish about that knowledge.

2. It makes the gossip feel elevated because he is putting someone else down. It implies, “Here is a fault that Sherrie has of which I certainly am not guilty.”

3. Gossip is harmful because the energy and focus of the gossip is directed way from positive action.

The core of this prohibition is the human heart. The older woman must not simply avoid gossip; she must be of such a gracious spirit that she is **not** a gossip, is not even tempted in that direction. When a younger woman comes to her, she must meet her with a loving, sym-

pathetic heart, not one which is judgmental or prone to pass on the shortcoming. She must meet her with a heart ready to help, support, counsel, and work through. The older woman's freedom from slander must serve as a model for the purity to teach the younger as well.

The fourth qualification for the older is that she is to be "not enslaved to much wine." Yes, it says "*to much wine.*" I wish I could prove from Scripture that it is wrong to drink, but I cannot. Drunkenness is wrong; sustained alcoholism is wrong. Broken homes, abandoned children, wasted paychecks, abused human resources - all are wrong. It is also wrong to cause another to stumble and to handle one's own reputation casually.

Look at your influence.

Who is watching you? Your children? Your friends? Your students in your ladies' Bible class? Are you influencing your husband? If he is a non-Christian, is it easier to join him? Why did Paul direct this verse to older women? Who is to be **directly** under your charge? These younger women need **you** with all of your resources, and with your clear head. Will they learn by your example that drinking is a suitable option?

Finally, look at your Lord.

Whose are you? You are the most valuable person in all the world because the greatest price ever paid for anything in all of heaven and earth was paid for you. That payment was the blood of Christ, and what He bought was your soul. When you were baptized, His grace made you pure, holy, and clean. His sacrifice made you His; He bought you. Why dabble in something that is at best a temporary crutch and at

worst potentially lethal to mind, body, spirit, and environment? Who needs it?

Our fourth “rare” world: *Kalodidaskalous*: “Teaching what is good.” There are many times that the word “good” (*kalos*) is used in the New Testament. The same can be said of the word, “teacher.” However, this is the only place where the compound word, **kalodidaskalous, is used. It literally would mean to be a “pleasant-things” teacher.**

Ladies, we are to be these other things — holy in behavior, not gossipers, and not given to drinking, in order that we can be teachers of good things. There is a reason for this special kind of dedication. In the first-century church, “teachers” by their very nature were in positions of shepherding and guiding, more so than they are today. These older women were given the responsibility of leading the younger into good things. They were to teach them what is beautiful, good, useful, profitable, pleasant, and delightful, and so are we today.

This brings us to Paul’s reasons for the “reverent behavior” of the older women:

“. . .that they might **encourage** the younger women. . .”

Here is our fifth rare word:

σωφρογῆω (*sophronidzo*).

The relatives of this word are used throughout the New Testament, but this particular form is used only here in Titus 2:4. It literally means “to make someone a *σωφρων*, i.e., to bring him to reason. . . .In Titus 2:4, a worthy walk is demanded of older women [in order]. . .that they spur on the younger women to a similar walk, which is then set forth in detail.”²²

This was a very common concept in Greek culture. Sensible, rational, reasonable, self-controlled behavior was a much sought-after quality in the Greek personality, and the philosophers all spent much time in thinking about what influenced a person in these directions. Paul in this book was addressing a predominantly Greek society — a decadent one to be sure, but he used words and concepts familiar to his hearers to reframe the best within their experience into the Christian system.

This “training” has often been confused with “teaching”—i.e., getting up in front of a class and lecturing. Perhaps in our society that is involved, but that was not the norm then. Their way of “bringing one to reason” was by day-to-day leading and training. With their multi-generational households and their Christian communal living it does not take a great deal of imagination to see how the younger women could be conditioned by the older.

And, older woman, in what are we to encourage the younger?

Our sixth word: φιλανδρους (philandrous):

“. . . to love their husbands . . .”

φιλος (philos [love] + ανηρ [husband]): husband-lovers.

Some commentators seem to argue that this passage is not particularly relevant today. None blatantly assert that the passage is outmoded, but it has been implied. From A. T. Hanson: “**to love their husbands:** This was a necessary reminder in societies in which brides did not choose their husbands.”³ Of course! It is a necessary reminder in societies where brides **do** choose their own

husbands, too. When they choose their husbands in eros and discard them without knowing of friendship or agape love, they need to be taught better.”

One of the myths of marriage is that a good marriage will just naturally “work out” if two people “really love” each other. But those of us who have stuck it out for 20 years or so know that a good marriage is *hard work*. It does not happen by accident. When I was twenty, I did not think I needed any help in learning how to “love” my husband. When I was thirty, I learned that I did, and the answers were sometimes hard to come by.

But 2,000 years ago, Paul knew that these things were not automatic. “Teach these young women to be husband-lovers.”

“Teach them . . . to *love their children* . . .” brings us to our next rare word: Philoteknous (φιλοτεκνους: philos [love] + τεκνος [child] = children-lovers).

Again, the commentators minimize the importance of this injunction.

Donald Guthrie states, “It seems hardly necessary for Christian women to be trained in loving their own **children**, but again the exhortation may pinpoint some special weakness in the Cretan character.”⁴ On first thought, one would agree with the initial part of his statement; one would think that training in parenting **would** be unnecessary for Christians. However, for Christians more than any others, parent training is essential. Pagan parents, in order to rear pagan children, need no training. This “weakness in the Cretan character” is universal.

He goes on to instruct us to train these younger women “to be sensible.” That takes in *so* much; what a

task! To me, that means learning how to set goals and determine priorities—sorting out the serious from the frivolous. It means guidance in time and money management. It means discovering talents and getting involved in ministries. Today, one of the things this means is that young Christian mothers are led away from the guilt that seems to bear down on them when they stay home to care for their families. The following poem appeared recently in a Christian women's magazine:

Some very ordinary day
While I am waiting for
 The clothes to dry
 The meat to cook
 The baby to awaken
 My husband to come home
 My telephone to ring
 My Lord will come.

And I'll forget
These hitherto
Important things
To go with Him.

How I will wish
That He had found me
Witnessing
Or winning souls
Or deep in prayer
Awaiting Him.

Forgive me, Lord.⁵

What a beautiful poem! But how sad! She *is* witness-

ing. She *is* winning souls. She is doing the most important work in the world, which is forming a stable home for at least three people, making a warm, happy corner in an often cheerless world. A *sensible* young woman who can construct a happy home for her husband and children because she is free from guilt is indeed a *rare* and precious commodity, and these young women need to be aware of it.

“Teach them. . .to be *pure*. . .” What a task! Almost every element in our society prevails against purity. The pendulum *seems* to be swinging the other way; but must we wait for the swing? Let us *hasten* it! Purity in speech, in dress, in demeanor - little wonder that the older woman must be “reverent in behavior,” else how could she lead in an example of purity?

Our eighth rare word is rendered “keepers at home.” I am **not** one of the world's great housekeepers. On a scale from 1 to 10, I probably would rate about 6.71. I **like** a neat, orderly, tidy house; when I **clean** house, I enjoy it. I get a great deal of satisfaction from meticulously organizing drawers, cupboards, closets, and file cabinets. But once I get it perfectly organized and clean, I am usually content to let it go until we have to move to another state, or until I cannot stand it anymore. Then I lapse into a state reminiscent of Baba Yaga when she needs a new broom.

I was glad that Paul put this injunction toward the end of his list. I, like the topic itself, wanted to put it off as long as I could. When I did finally get into it, though, my initiation was one of hilarity. Starting with the NASV: “. . . to be **workers** at home. . .” Oh, dear; maybe one of the others is a bit more gentle.

NIV: “to be busy at home”

KJV: “to be keepers at home”

RSV: “domestic”

A. T. Robertson: “workers at home”

Goodspeed: “domestic”

Amplified: “homemakers”

Phillips: “homelovers”

A rule of thumb for translations: If you have six versions of the Bible, and there is a verse or section of a verse where there are six different readings to choose from, you can hang your hat on it that **here** is a very unusual, rare, or near untranslatable Greek word. After consulting these different translations, I scurried to the lexicons.

The word is οικουργους (oikourgous). It sounds **awful**, doesn't it? It is a compound word, made up of two Greek words: οικος (oikos): house; and εργον (ergon): work = housework. It sound awful in English, too.⁶ I thought, “Surely somewhere he softens this a bit . . . Timothy; there's something in Timothy. . . Housework. . . the very idea. . .”

1 Tim. 5:14. . . NASV: “. . . keep house. . .” But Paul, is that the same word?

οικοδεσποτειν (oikodespotein): Ah! Now there's a word I can really get into: οικος (oikos: house) + δεσποτες (despotes: despot): Lord, master, especially of slaves (that's the part I like!). All right! A “House despot!” Who was it who said that men were the heads of their houses?!

Society has dumped on housewives. We think we have to earn money or we are worthless. We reason, “Well,

anybody can clean a sink (or make a bed, etc.)” and that’s true: *anybody* can learn to do these things; but the point is that just *anybody won’t!* Cleaning sinks, making beds, and sweeping floors puts us in a serving role, and we dare not do that. We could not possibly be like Jesus who thought that being in the very form of God was not something that He desperately wanted to cling to, so He emptied Himself, and He took the form of a servant - not of someone who is a paid servant, but the form $\mu\omicron\rho\phi\eta$: the essential, unchanging nature) of a slave (Phil. 2:5ff). But he did not clean my sinks and sweep my floors. He wrapped Himself in the filthy putrid rags of my sins and hung there on the cross clad only in those rags.

When I serve - whether it is my husband, my in-laws, my children, the little rag-a-muffin next door, my church, the sister in a hospital, the brother in a nursing home - I emulate the glory of that cross.

Our society sees no glory in service; but that glory comes, not because society bestows it, but because *God* bestows it - and it is a powerful witness.

“Teach them . . . to be *good* . . .” I guess commentators hand these gems down from their ivory palaces:

Hanson also states, “It is difficult to believe that even the author should be so banal as to demand that Christian wives should be ‘good’ ” With indecency and immorality making such inroads into today’s church, we could all do with a hefty word study on $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\varsigma$ (agathos). Paul’s “good” takes work. Agreed, telling a Christian wife, “Now you be good,” is a little far-fetched of Paul; but training a young Christian woman in agathos is a completely different, thoroughly rele-

vant, matter.

As always, Paul is completely up to date. We desperately need these topics taught today. There is nothing out of date or irrelevant about Titus 2:3-5. It is a *very* precious verse indeed, with eight words found nowhere else in the New Testament:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

Titus 2:3-5

The Younger Woman's Prayer to The Older

Older women, take us with you to the hospital, to sick beds, to those who are lonely and in need. Tell us how you would rear your children if you could do it all again. Share with us the ways that you pulled your marriages back together when the going got rough. Teach us once more how to can food, how to knit, to crochet, to make quilts, and lace, and bread. Help us to see the beauty in a child's childishness, in his curiosity, and his innocence, rather than the inconvenience of his immaturity, his questions, and his naivete.

Above all, point us to God. Help us to measure the subtle differences between

- ▶ the important and the unimportant,
- ▶ the permanent and the impermanent,

► the holy and the appealing.

Help us to see that God can even use selfish motives, and likewise that “pure” motives can be wrong.

Show us how to put our lives ever more completely into Heavenly hands.

In His name,
Amen

II. . . .To Be Subject To Their Husbands. . .

From time immemorial, mankind has faced the problem of submission. Every man has a boss; every boss has a boss. Just about the time a man becomes “his own boss,” he finds that he must become increasingly submissive to the rules of self-discipline and morality, leading finally and ultimately to submission to a just and loving God.

Wives are in double jeopardy; they are to submit in word, deed, and heart, both to husband and to God. Submission to husbands is no easier for wives in general than it is for any one segment of humanity to any other. How can we wives possess heart-felt submission? How can we be deeply and spiritually subordinate, not merely rendering lip-service, but being sincerely submissive to the loving leadership of our husbands?

The most complete submissiveness must come from total surrender to God Himself, for the condition which always accompanies submission is risk: only in God's hands can a human being be assured of perfect, gentle treatment. But complete surrender to God is conditioned on death to self — a death to the old things (2 Cor. 5:17). This death to self cannot be accomplished

until one comes to a vision of his true identity - that ideal self attainable only through Christ. Precluding this, we must have self-love, which issues from self-forgiveness. How can we forgive ourselves if we have not first been forgiven by God? This amnesty is granted because of His grace, found at the foot of the cross of Christ. But to go there, we first need cognizance of sin. Let us start at the beginning.

I. The Problem Of Self-Esteem

The Fundamental Problem

Scores of books have been written, hundreds of seminars held, and countless sermons and lessons delivered on how to restore a flagging self-esteem. All agree that to be whole and functional in this life, one's view of oneself must be both accepting and optimistic. All viewpoints concede that a child's image of himself begins at birth and depends on the degree to which he perceives that he is loved and valued as a person. Likewise, all agree that kinks in the image come about when human parents fail human babies. We all bungle to some extent. Because children misinterpret as well, the kinks become more imprinted. Parents react to the kinks, and then are left to puzzle as to whether the child's shortcomings are due to heredity or environment.

However, the Apostle Paul by inspiration unerringly detects the pulse of us fallible creatures: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

All are sinners.

We all were mistreated (or misjudged, or misguided) to some extent by our parents. We rebelled and fought for our own interests, perhaps mistreating our own children in the process, and we are all hopelessly mired in sin, unable to see and direct our ways clear of it.

When Adam and Eve were in the garden, there was a period of pristine purity before their sins came between them and their God, but that relationship was soon shaken. Their sins accumulated; others were added to theirs; mine were thrown in, and yours were part of the gross accumulation — that “sin ball” — which separated us from God. **All** have sinned; other than Jesus Christ, there has never been a single human being who has not contributed to the sin ball. No one is immune from that scourge. Each of us, no matter how good, how beautiful, how correctly reared, how lowly, or how educated is hounded by his own horrible catalog of sins against mankind, soul-debts committed in moments of weakness. Those we are the closest to — parents, spouse, and children — are most likely to be recipients of these hurts because they, through love, trust, and openness, are so much more vulnerable to our betrayal. A stranger is far less likely to feel the sting of my transgression because he knows no debt of trust between us.

No wonder the pictures we hold of ourselves are so plotched and blurred! We war against our loved ones, they react, and a tarnished image of ourselves reflects itself in their eyes. We come to expect less and less of ourselves in our own. How could I have done such a

thing? How could I be such a bad person? I am created in God's image, but I sinned so thoughtlessly; has He deserted me too? I do not like what I see; I am in a hopeless state; I cannot help what I do, but I do what I hate (Rom. 7:14-24). I cannot get back on the right track by myself. *We cannot do it ourselves.*

The sin ball covered the face of the earth, hiding it from God. Man was too sinful and finite to remove it; but God had a plan, even from the beginning. This infinite God chose a part of Himself to become finite, dwelling on the face of the earth. He showed us many things; some of these were. . .

. . .**how to live a perfect life.** In communion with the infinite part of Himself, He drew so much strength and sustenance from the source of all strength that He did not contribute to the sin ball, but by the power of an incorruptible life, removed it.

. . .**what God is like,** how much God loves us, how He yearns for us, and how He longs for us to be reconciled to Him. After telling us in the Old Law what pleases and displeases Him, He showed us in the New. . .

. . .**how we should love each other;** indeed, what love itself really is.

. . .**how powerful God is,** and how He makes that power available to His children.

. . .**how horrendous sin is.** We never knew the ugliness of sin until we beheld it on a cross.

The Cross

. . .**how ugly the worst of man is, and how beautiful the best of man is.** Because of His beauty, the best of

man, we beheld the ugly in its true colors. In Him, we beheld our potential, and realized our shame.

His life proclaims, "You, who are in God's image, can you see your beauty? your potential? Can you see, now, had bad sin is? Do you now understand that you need no longer to be shackled by that? Come to Me; kneel at the foot of My cross; for I have taken away the sin ball and you may stand cleansed, in the image of God, once more."

The Efficacy of Grace

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ dies for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Romans 5:8,9

The Most Valuable Thing in the World

Think of the most valuable material possession in your own home, possibly the item for which you would run in a fire. In terms of your own financial worth, that item probably represents a proportionately substantial investment. Now think of something even more expensive which you have seen and thought of acquiring, but really are unable to afford now — maybe later, after a raise or after saving for awhile.

Then there are the luxury items which you may never consider at all — completely out of your range; even more expensive are the "one-of-a-kind" items which appear only in museums, the prices of which could be

paid only at the expense of depleting the national treasury — items such as the Pearl Throne in the National Treasury in Istanbul, the Taj Mahal in India, or the Hope Diamond in the Smithsonian.

On an even grander scale, think of the expense of some of the large-scale endeavors of mankind. At the time of its construction, the Alaskan pipeline was said to be the most costly project ever undertaken by private enterprise. Saving the Abu Simbel monument, threatened by the rising backwaters of the Aswan Dam, was most expensive, drawing an international effort.

But in thinking of the money spent on a structure, an item or an effort, be assured that the **most** costly thing in the entire world belongs to **you**. It was bought at the highest price ever paid for anything in history, and it was given to you. That item is your salvation, and its price was the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the only son of God. He bought you, cleansed you, and placed you into His church, pure, whole, and beautiful. How lovely and precious you are in God's sight!

Who are you?

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I Peter 2:9-10

You were nobody. Since you were “not my people,”

you were separated from God. You, made in God's image, could not bear His image, so you had no image. But now you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a person for God's own possession.

Whose are you?

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Philippians 3:12 (NIV)

What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.

Matthew 18:12-14

Christ Jesus laid hold of you. He went into the depths of the sin ball, to the very den of Satan himself, taking on the mantle of sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He bound that strong man, plundered his house, emerging victorious. (Ref. Mt. 12:29.) In so doing, He made it possible to lay hold of us — to go into the wilderness to bring us back.

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the

glory of His inheritance in the saints, . . .

Ephesians 1:17,18

Most of the time we hear preachers tell us of our glorious inheritance, but it does this verse no theological injustice to say that we are God's inheritance. He has invested the most priceless treasure of Heaven into us. He has put all of His marbles into the church pouch. We are His stocks, His bonds, His compounded interest. At the end of time, we will be His inheritance. Can we afford to see ourselves as any less — to settle for a second-best effort or attitude? That plan which God made for the church is miraculous and incredible, and that makes us most special.

Self-Forgiveness

In his book *Forgive and Forget*, Lewis Smedes tells us that one of the hardest people to forgive is oneself. Indeed, if one does not have a sense of *being* forgiven, it is very hard for one to forgive — himself or others. But God has forgiven you, if you are a Christian. Not only that; He Himself has exalted you to the position of son or daughter of God. This head knowledge should at least pave the way for a heart-knowledge of justification. And this should clear some hurdles of self-forgiveness.

One needs courage to forgive himself. There are those in the self-righteous crowds who want to see you grovel, to see you never lift your head again. You also need to be concrete. Just exactly **what** are you forgiving yourself for?

One of Smede's principles is that in forgiveness one

now has the power to say, "This incident is now a product of the past, which no longer affects me today. It does not affect the way I look at myself, what I do, what I say, or how I live. Because God has forgiven me, I can forgive myself. I am freed from the effects of this action."

Self-love

With self-love, we are closer to submission. Part of the reason why so many wives fail in this gentle art is that, in the beginning, they are ill-equipped for the task. They are too guilt-ridden to feel forgiven, thus loving themselves. But once one passes through self-forgiveness, he is ready for self-love.

The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:31

One who loves himself is usually branded arrogant, selfish, egotistical, or any one of several other designations. But Jesus obliquely stated the principle in Mark 12:31: if a man does not love himself, he is scarcely able to love his neighbor.

What of this enabling love? I had always seen self-love as equivalent to egocentricity; but psychologists, counselors, and theologians alike tell us now that one cannot love another — spouse included — if he does not first love himself. Fine; I accept that; personally, loving another with God's agapic love has proved difficult in the past. Now it is easier; a self-love of sorts has come to be mine. But why must self-love be prerequisite to lov-

ing all others? What is the mechanism?

In order to love self, one must have forgiven self, that person hardest of all to forgive. To forgive self, one must have forgiven his secret motives, grudges, and hates that no one else even knows about. In order to forgive my secret temptations and greeds, I must be assured of the forgiveness of God. For this, I must be "in Christ," as Paul so correctly emphasizes, which means that I have access to His power to live triumphantly. I can therefore love with **His** brand of love — both myself and others. Self-love does not mean loving self **only**; it means loving self **in addition to** loving others, seeing oneself in relation to the whole. Loving my neighbor as myself becomes easier because I see Christ as loving us both. And loving my husband becomes easier (more on that later; back to loving self for now).

The legitimacy of self-love is beautifully explained in another book by Smedes entitled **Love Within Limits**, a precious study of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. He too reinforces the principle that this apparently limitless agapic love which is to bear all things, believe all things, etc., will play out in a shallow way without the deeper wellspring of self-love.

In *The Secret of Staying in Love*, John Powell treats us to a beautiful and rewarding search for self-esteem as a prologue to loving another. Rather than retrace the careful and helpful steps of these men, let us explore some side paths to self-love.

1. *Comparing oneself with others*

For we are not bold to class or compare

ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

2 Corinthians 10:12

Comparison with others is a hazard to self-esteem. If in one's own insecurity, he seeks to emulate someone who is greater in some field, he will be forever discouraged, for there is always one who is "better" than he. Indeed, **everyone** he meets is better than he in some way. All persons who are bilingual are better than I. All person who can lift 100 pounds are better than I. All persons with a sense of absolute pitch, who can sing very low, or very high, who can drive an 18-wheeler, or ride an ostrich are better than I, and there are thousands of other things I do not know or cannot do. So, in this sense, everyone is better than I because everyone can do something I cannot do, knows something I do not know, or feels something I cannot feel.

On the other hand, if one refers to others of lesser stature than himself, casting himself in a very favorable light, this is a false sense of strength. He then has neither the inspiration nor the motivation to grow to his own potential.

The key then surfaces: he must quit both "showing off," and "giving up," and begin to "lose" his life by growing into his own capacity, maturing in his own field of expertise. . .so that he can grow to his own fullest capabilities, in his own unique way.

2. Appreciate your own uniqueness.

It has been said that everyone has a book inside them waiting to be written. As an author I can feel threatened by this: What would happen to **my** audience if everyone wrote a book?! However, not to worry. This principle is true because each person has a completely singular background, a unique-to-him set of genes, a special place in his family, friends, etc. He sees the world slightly differently from anyone else, and certainly knows himself better than anyone else knows him.

He should learn to see himself therefore as a resource special to God, because he is. God can use him in ways peculiar to him because no other soul on earth comes to God with just that particular combination of resources. God can even use sins. If Alex, for example, works through kleptomania, God can use him to reach kleptomaniacs. Whatever your resources, or lack of them, your uniqueness is valuable to God. Love yourself for it.

3. Appreciate your own position.

Just as you have a special character profile, so you hold a special position in life. You are acquainted with an entirely different set of people than anyone else. You share a neighborhood with others, but your neighbors at home are not the same as your neighbors at church or at work. Thus your sphere of influence is unique. God can use that, too. **Love yourself for it.**

4. God's Molding

Finally, accept that you are a special servant of God, and that with that knowledge He can help you to become what He had in mind when He made you in the

first place.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Phil. 1:6

II. *SUBORDINATION*

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it."

Matthew 16:24,25

A. Submission: A Matter of Love

Now that I have a healthy self-esteem, manifested by love for self and love for others, it seems that I am to give it up! I am to deny that self, "lose my life" to one of submission — submission to Christ and to husband. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to submit to someone or some system if the submitter does not love in some sense. The profile of any given submission must have a comparable profile of love. For example:

I submit to my governing authorities because I love my country.

I submit to my children's own best interests because I love them.

I submit to my elders because I love Christ's body.

I submit to my husband because I love him and am committed to our marriage.

Without love, any one of these is acquiescence. The

characteristics of the submissions are different because the profiles of all of these loves are vastly different.

The precedent for this tenet is Jesus Himself. He is our love-submission model.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

1 John 4:10

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Phil. 2:5-8

Because He loved us, He submitted His own best interests to us. Because He is my model, I can be loved, be loving in return, and am able to submit to my Christ and husband.

B. Submission: A Matter of Faith

Have the faith that:

1. **He will mold you into your image.** We have examined scriptures assuring us that God will mold us, but we need the concept that God is molding us into our own image. We are told that man is made in the image of God; but we are **all** so different! How can each one of

the untold billions of people who have lived and died in this world be made in the image of God when each is so uniquely different?

Do you know what infinity is? Do you know that a small "part" of infinity is still infinite? Because our God is infinite, there can be an infinite number of different people made in His images. There is therefore an image for you. If God is to mold you, your image will reflect Him. Would you rather reflect a loving, merciful perfect God, or yourself?

2. He will lift you up.

It is not necessary for a Christian to go around beating his own drum, pressing for his own advantage, struggling for his own place in the sun. Trust God for that. Be God's person; do His will; love His saints; reach out for His lost sheep. Trust God for the reward.

3. He may not lift me up.

If my motivations remain self-centered, or to be seen of men, God may not lift me up to the prominence I seek. God's honor might damage either or both of my relationships with man and God. It may not be in the best interests of others. He may be strengthening me for some really difficult times. Trust Him to know. His timing is inerrant; His wisdom, infallible; His promises, irrefutable; His grace, sufficient.

C. Submission: A Matter of Strength

In this present discussion, we have almost come full circle. By "submission," did Paul really mean that we must be the meek, mild-mannered little mice, the "yes-women" of the twentieth century?

We need to examine a fundamental paradox before

submission easily becomes an act of free will, a simple progression. In Mat. 16:24, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, etc.” He coerces no one; He presents the truth of the matter, the way of salvation, the invitation to come; but the decision is left to the individual. The Christian system is a matter of free choice. Therefore, when a precept just does not make sense to us, we must, at that moment, trust. This choice to follow Jesus, this position of submission, is a position of strength.

He knows that the way to strength is through weakness; the way to might is through meekness; the way to magnitude is through servitude.

Phil. 2:5-8 portrays the ultimate example of submission. Jesus gave up deity - the very essential nature of God - to submit Himself to death. He became our slave, our own servant, humbling Himself to our own best interests. If a wife’s submission to her husband makes no sense to her, how much more senseless for Jesus to submit himself to the brutality of man — but He did!

D. Submission: A Matter of Trust

The final step:

. . .and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ, also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Ephesians 5:21-23

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to

your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be external only — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

I Peter 3:1-6

I give up; I give in. I'm yours, Dear. But: it is **easy** to submit to a husband who loves me as Christ did the Church. This man is going to lay his life down for my own good, gently leading me into things far better for me than perhaps I could ever see for myself. I am in submission to a man who himself is submitted to the Christ's leadership, both of whom are looking out for my own best interests.

But just suppose that my husband is a pagan, barbaric, immoral man? Suppose he is dictatorial, self-seeking, perhaps even brutal?

This is where submissive trust yields its strength. Peter tells us that a wife is to be submissive so that an unbelieving husband "may be won by our chaste and

respectful behavior. . .the hidden person of the heart . . .the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit.” Do we **dare** to trust inspiration that these qualities will ever win over a husband? It is a fearful thing to make oneself vulnerable to a person likely to be insensitive, to one not allied with Christ.

This, finally, must be the link between self-esteem and submission. “. . .Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham . . .and you have become her children if you do what is right **without being frightened** by any fear.”

Your security is in God. Because you have first, with faith and trust, placed yourself into His gentle, kind, and merciful hands, you see yourself as doing His will, being His person, with the strength He makes available to you. This is the ultimate position of the unequaled strength of spiritual meekness. The Hebrew writer described Jesus’ function as an appointed priest, “who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.” Submission to God and husband, coupled with a secure self-image in God’s strength, should give you that “power of an indestructible life,” without being “frightened by any fear.” His hand will protect, guide, and strengthen.

Regarding your husband, however, always remember:

1. Each person is given an uncoerced choice by God. Coercion by you is not one of your options.
2. You cannot be responsible for your husband’s choices or actions. The only person you can be responsible for is yourself.
3. Glory in your life. A person who is interested will

be interesting. A person who lives gloriously and fully will be emulated.

A Better Me

I was lost. And behold, I looked to see that I was strong in certain ways, and woefully inept in others. I looked to see if I could be a better friend, to see if those about could "like" me more, or if I could be greater in their sight.

I looked to see how I might win the adulation of the crowds around, to see if I might make a mark from brilliance, strength, or beauty crowned.

But there was always one more strong, more wise, more grand as worldly standards go. These little triumphs empty were, for I was still a hollow shell, less rich, less lovely far than those of whom I sought acclaim, from whom I still felt low.

And then I chanced to read:

"Dear Child, if you would find your life, then lose it; follow Me, for I am life. And if you'd truly live, you'll give your life for others, with my lead."

"Oh, no!" I cried. "If I care not for me, then no one will. Besides, I know ambition, drive, and all the things I want until my life be filled with all that's good."

"Well, pardon **Me**," He said. "The choice is yours:

... a quiet soul—or restless heart;
... a peace within—or war without;
... the stewardship of all that's Mine — or
ownership by all that's yours;
... a burden which is light — or one which does

consume the one who bears.

“Take all those ‘I’s’ of yours, and lift them up to Me; for I alone can fill that God-sized void that’s built by God into the heart of every man.”

And so I found in Him the promise true, the peace that none can understand:

His strength — far greater now for me than ever
dreamed,
His work — far nobler than my deepest drive;
His children — far more precious by His blood
redeemed, to be His church, His vineyard,
where I lost my life — and He alone could find
it once again.

I will never want again to be like him, or her, or someone else; for all I want is simply now to be like Christ — and doing so, I will finally be a better **me** than anyone I know.

III. The Two Faces of Women’s Role

Lest you think I am striving to throw Christian women back 200 years, I am not. There is no way I can come out looking good with these presentations. Defining women’s role the way *God* wants it is not an easy task. If it were, there would not be so much confusion about it in the church today.

There *are* two faces of women’s role. Most church leaders emphasize the traditional one and run from the controversial side. Many young women invest their hopes in the controversial and shy away from the traditional. This present consideration is an attempt to examine both, separately, and then to fuse the two into a

workable pattern.

I. Traditional

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the younger women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

Titus 2:3-5

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external - braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses, but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

1 Peter 3:1-6

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves

with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.

1 Timothy 2:9,20

You have all heard and read these passages many times. As a young woman, my feeling was, “Oh, no; not again. That’s so old-fashioned. We don’t need this. We’ve grown beyond this. That probably applied at one time in a less sophisticated society than ours, but it can’t *really* apply to us.”

Two years ago, worried about the Christian divorce rate and young Christian drug users and Christian infidelity, I started reading Titus 2:3-5 a little more soberly. “Older women. . .”

“Hey Anna, that’s you now.”

“Uh, God?”

“Yes? You. Older woman.”

“I’ve been trying, God.”

“Okay. Remember the divorce rate? Teach them to love their husbands. . .”

“Oops! I’ve been teaching everything else -”

“Right! And to love their children. . .”

“But Lord, Christian women know how to love their children. . .”

“Wait a minute. Did *you* know how to discipline, train, and guide *your* children? Do they know how to prevent their kids from going into drugs or promiscuity or homosexuality or alcoholism? What kind of help did you have when your children got into some of these things? And what about the little kids? Do mothers

know what it means to *love* these little kids? When they are little, mothers don't have enough experience to know that *this* action today will produce *that* kind of behavior three years down the road. *Teach* them!"

"I confess, Lord; it seems more relevant all the time."

"Now: about teaching them how to be sensible. . . are they wisely using *My* time, *My* money, and the talents *I've* given them? What about keeping the home? Do they know what the main functions and goals of homemaking really are?

"Look, Anna. Don't you really think that your society has lost touch with some of these basics?"

"Yes, God, we have. Help us hang on while we get back our priorities."

"I'll be there."

* * *

And submission. Nobody knows what that means anymore. What about "purity" and "goodness"? We are to *be* these things and then to *teach* them.

Nowhere, however, did Paul or Peter say that women are not to work outside the home. Men have construed this to be the meaning of these passages. Many women *do* not have to work now, for all kinds of reasons. But let us not throw the baby out with the bath. These passages are not optional - they are foundational. The values expressed are not old-hat - the mere products of a society 2000 years ago; they are the bedrock of any society. Let us hear it for being all we can be as women! But we are neglecting the basics now, and we cannot last

long if we continue to do so.

Now, a warning. In 1 Tim. 2:9, for example, catch the essence of what Paul says. In his society, if a woman went around with braided hair, gold pearls, and costly garments, she was a very wealthy lady; and she was lavishing an undue amount of her wealth *and* her time on adorning herself. Paul forbide this. So, some groups have said that a woman cannot cut her hair, and cannot wear makeup, jewelry, or stylish clothes - by so doing, she will be righteous.

In v.9, Paul *endorses* clothing and adornment which are becoming and fashionable. He says, "I want women to adorn themselves with *proper* clothing. . . ." "Proper" comes from the Greek work, *kosmeo*, from which we get our word, "cosmetic." He means that women are to dress with modesty, sobriety, and appropriateness. God wants us to look good; don't insult your Christian status by being frumpy! You are God's woman!

So what is the *heart* of the teaching? Adorn yourselves by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness. We are to be godly, holy, set apart, and our appearance is to reflect that inward beauty.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external - braiding the hair, and wearing gold

jewelry, and putting on dresses, but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

1 Peter 3:1-4

What is the core of what Peter says? Mostly the same; he is *not* saying that women should not look nice (Please *do* put on dresses!) but make sure that you are adorned with that quiet and gentle spirit which is the inner adornment of the heart. Do not get so dolled up that your beautiful inner self is overshadowed. That is *God* who needs to be shining through you!

II. The Other Role

What of the role of women in the *church* - a controversial subject today? There are more scriptures which deal with women:

But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

1 Corinthians 11:5-6

Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a

woman to speak in church.

1 Corinthians 14:34,35

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

1 Timothy 3:11

Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who has first created, then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Romans 16:1-4

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I

ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Philippians 4:2,3

The stories of Lydia, of Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos, and of the leading Greek women, tell much of early Christian society. What of the picture of service, teaching, and even leadership which these women contribute to the first-century church?

Again: If the question of the role of women were straightforward, we and every other religious body in Christendom would not be struggling with it.

Time prohibits the exploration of all the nooks and crannies of all these verses, so this treatment will be a general overview and summation.

The church as pictured in Acts gives a great deal of leeway to women which, according to contemporary secular sources, they did not enjoy in culture in general. Jewish culture forbade women to teach men, but Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos, and were co-teachers with Paul. Some Greek history portrays proper women as never stepping outside their homes, but certain leading women in Greece and Asia Minor in either case either helped or hindered in the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 13:50, 17:12,34). Philip had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. Lydia was no doubt the patroness of a housechurch. There are at least nine women mentioned in Romans 16 as being co-laborers with Paul. And, according to 1 Corinthians 11:5,

women prayed in church—however that word is defined in that context. What did these women do? What activities brought their names to the forefront?

Praying and Prophesying

We have mentioned that Philip's four daughters prophesied. In Peter's first gospel sermon, he quotes Joel 2:28-32 in which Joel says that "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy," and answers that "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." The issue in 1 Cor. 11:5 and following is not whether a woman can pray or prophesy (for she is clearly doing this), but whether or not she is suitably attired in deference to her married state. There are two problems connected with this:

1. Were these women praying and prophesying in the assembly? 1 Cor. 14:34,35 would seem to prevent them from doing this. Were they then praying and prophesying out on a street corner somewhere? This we simply cannot know. Some would say that they were confined to their homes for this activity, but if so, why then, in the privacy of their own homes would they need a veil? It was clearly in a meeting of some kind apart from the formal worship, but beyond this we cannot say more with accuracy.

2. The second problem occurs with 1 Cor. 14:34,35 where women are to be silent; they are forbidden to speak. Either passage by itself would be comparatively simple to explain, but Frank Pack stated in private conversation that the reconciliation of these two scriptures was one of the more difficult passages of NT exegesis.

He is not the only one to say this.

A consideration of 14:34,35 must include the fact that *three* groups are enjoined to silence: If there is someone prophesying and another receives a revelation, the first is to be silent and allow the second to speak (14:29,30). Only one tongue-speaker must speak at a time, and that only if there is an interpreter present (v. 27,28). Is it an inconsistency that we have given the prophet and the tongue-speaker over to another time, place and culture, but retain the total silence of women? Might Paul, in 1 Cor. 11, have been speaking of maintaining that sanctity of their marriage relationships (going into great detail as to the husband being the head of the wife and how she is dishonoring him by discarding the veil, much as a married woman today might cease wearing her ring and assume her maiden name), and in 1 Cor. 14 of maintaining the sanctity and decorum of the worship service? The heart of his message to the charismatic immature Corinthians was in the nature of first aid. Their abuses of their Christian freedoms did not seem to be emulated by other churches. In 11:16, he implies that the other churches let veiled women pray and prophesy.

Many scholars hold that the special injunction to women in 14:34,35 was given because women were inordinately disrupting the worship by prattling, or by interrupting their prophet-husbands by asking questions in the middle of their prophecies. Can you imagine the pandemonium in that church with several tongue-speakers at once, prophets holding forth, and women disrupting all of it? Paul says, "Cut it out! Let everything be done with decency and order."

Teaching

May women teach adult mixed Bible classes? Again, much has been written and much as been said concerning this function. Considering our NT examples, it *looks* to me as if they can.

Prisca taught Apollos along with Aquila. Euodia and Syntyche, Paul's sunergon (fellow-laborers), apparently taught. Some consider that they even filled generally the same functions Paul did (see CSC, 1985, Phil Ware), although that is stretching the point. Women certainly are commanded to teach other women.

We simply cannot be completely certain what Paul meant in 1 Tim. 2:12. In the first place, our teaching situation is not the same as theirs, largely because we do not know exactly what theirs was.

Second, why would Paul permit a woman to **teach** (and perhaps teach men) under his nose, but forbid it thereafter for all times and cultures?

Some scholars contend that Paul stated two principles, the first being, "I forbid a woman to teach;" the second, "I forbid a woman to exercise authority over a man." [Quote from Oliver Howard, CSC, 1985.] But if he forbids a woman to teach here, he then contradicts himself in Titus 2:3-5.

Oliver Howard's position in all of these passages is that "man" should be translated "husband" and "woman," "wife." Therefore, all are taken out of the "men-in-general-over-women-in-general" category and put into the "husband-over-the-wife" context. I like that! Except if this were totally true, and Paul said, "I forbid a woman to teach her *husband*," then the only

time I *could not* teach would be if my husband were to be present - and that would contradict the Aquila-Priscilla example.

I see 1 Tim 2:9-15 as being in a similar context as 1 Corinthians, however. These Christians were living in a very pagan environment, in the shadow of the Temple of Diana, in a city where there were many shrines to lesser gods, where the path to houses of prostitution were marked by footsteps carved in the marble on the streets (which guides delight in pointing out today). The entire context paints the efforts of the Christian community endeavoring to live a pious lifestyle in the face of pagan influences.

Considering the entire context, from v.9-15 one could possibly conceive that the Christian wives of Ephesus, living in a society which valued learning, had seized upon their newfound Christian freedom to learn, probably with a great deal of enthusiasm, and then to teach. In the process they were "exercising authority" over their husbands and shunning their domestic responsibilities. Paul says, "No way! Your first duty is to your husband and to your children. Your *whole* duty is to be an exemplary Christian woman in a pagan environment." Her role - *in Ephesus* - was quietness, submission, and domesticity - a model for that culture. Paul could well have written this quote to them:

Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from

their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18

May women teach? Our scholars and commentators are about equally divided. One may look up any number of opinions for him or herself. My personal opinion is that Paul was addressing a specific cultural problem in Ephesus, and that if a man wanted to sit in my class for some reason he would be welcome. I would not be exercising authority over him by any standard, nor would I be forsaking my domestic responsibilities. My surest conviction is that a husband and wife can certainly team-teach.

Counseling

At the moment, one of the things that is eating our church lunch is the problem of infidelity among our ministers. In the midst of preparing this essay, I heard of one more case, this of a minister who was involved in affairs with eight women in his congregation, six of whom were deacons’s wives. Nine marriages are in jeopardy. Fourteen children have the potential of being deeply hurt. The influence of the church in that community is deeply scarred, if not destroyed. The preaching career of this minister will be cracked if not totally shattered. And this case is not unique. It happens all of the time. Why?

A *partial* answer lies in problems with counseling.

The minister is perceived as having both compassion and insight, and many people go to him for counseling. As his load increases, he spends less time with his wife and family so that his marriage becomes strained. At the same time, he is counseling women who trust him with their marriage problems. This is just one step away from intimate involvement.

Part of the solution lies in training Christian women counselors. Women who can counsel women, who could be available to several congregations in the community, would alleviate much of the counseling burden of ministers while at the same time dissolving potentially volatile opportunities for intimacy. Young Christian women are not being trained to go into these fields, but as yet, churches do not seem to want to look in this direction for these solutions. Let us hope that the tide will soon turn.

Deaconness

Face it, one and all: the church has deaconness! The word means "servant" and every congregation has them. That congregation's very lifeblood would be drained if she were to lose her deaconesses. They minister to the sick, comfort the bereaved, often administer the benevolence program, assist new mothers, take food where needed, often oversee and teach the primary Sunday-school classes—and a thousand less noticeable things. Now, for the women reading these words, I want you to fill in the first blank with your name, and the second blank with the name of your congregation:

“I commend to you our sister, _____, who is a servant of the church which is at _____, that you receiver her in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever manner she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.”

Does it fit? It feels good, doesn't it? If one reads the early church fathers, there is scattered indication that there was an order of deaconness in the church. Our scripture in Titus 2:3-5 gives qualifications for older women who would teach the younger. There is another scripture which lists qualifications for women:

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

1 Timothy 3:11

If one were to “list the qualifications” for these women, one's list would look like this:

Reverent in behavior	Not malicious gossips
Not enslaved to much wine	Teachers of good things
Dignified	Faithful in all things
Temperate (sober: NEB)	

Have you ever heard a sermon on the qualifications of women for something? Paul certainly included them, although he did not specify exactly what that function was to be called; perhaps his readers were well aware of the function and did not have to be told. At any rate, if you reach these qualifications, Paul could well send the same letter of recommendation to your elders which he

sent to the church in Rome concerning Phoebe: "She's doing the work anyway; she meets the qualifications. Call her what she is and give her the help she needs because she will continue to do the work, and she will do it well."

Areas of Concern

Someone is bound to ask:

Would you go in, without your husband, to teach a class of married couples in their late fifties and up?

No. I would think that some of them would be offended and ill at ease. However, I think these feelings will probably be modified within twenty-five years in most places. And, twenty-five years from now, I will be greatly modified myself!

Can a woman lead prayer in church?

In I Corinthians 11:5 she was praying and prophesying in some type of public gathering although today we simply cannot be precise about the situation. Her culture as such forbade her to speak in a public assembly of any kind, but in her newly-found freedom in Christ, some sort of participation apparently was authorized (cf. v. 16) as long as she was properly attired and was in submission to her husband. She was never to disrupt the assembly or bring outside criticism on the body. Perhaps her praying and prophesying activities were in small groups such as found in Acts 12:1-9.

* * *

Taking the Christian examples and injunctions of the first century, we may correctly summarize thusly:

1. Prayer: Women were voicing prayer in mixed gatherings of some sort in the early church.
2. Teaching: They taught, under what precise circumstances we cannot be sure, but certainly one woman taught with her husband.
3. They served: In many and varied ways, and they received at least the moral support they needed for their service.
4. They were not elders, but the older women were to take an aggressive role in guiding the younger women.
5. They were never to shun their marriage vows or show disrespect to their husbands in any way.
6. They were never to exercise authority over men, but they could certainly exercise the authority entrusted to them by men.
7. Men and women were never to disrupt the worship service.
8. Men and women were never to bring reproach upon the Church.
9. Men and women, in exercising the freedom which they have in Christ, were never to cause a weaker brother to stumble.
10. Men and women were to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ (Eph. 5:21).

Conclusion

Ask yourselves, “What is the very heart of Christianity for me, a Christian woman, as I face the twenty-first century?” I think that Satan has steered us away from the real issues. It is far more critical that we be con-

cerned with what we teach than to make an issue about whether we teach men. It is far more critical to be concerned with the fact that we pray, for what we pray, and before **whom** we pray, than where and in front of whom we pray. It is far more important that we solidify the unity of our homes than it is to precipitate a split in the church.

¹Kittel, Gerhard (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), Vol. III, p. 253f.

²Luck, TDNT, VII, p. 1104.

³A.T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles (The New Century Bible Commentary)*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), p. 180.

⁴Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles (The New Century Bible Commentary)*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957, p. 193.

⁵Name withheld.

⁶This is the only place this word is used in the New Testament.

⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 180.

What Really Needs Restoring?

A Fresh Look at the Early Church in the First Six Chapters of Acts

Rick Atchley

It is a great honor for me to participate in the ACU Lectureship in this way. I trust and pray my contribution will be helpful. Let me begin by saying that I truly believe in the foundational principles of our movement. I do believe we need to return to the Word of God as the only standard and pattern and authority for the church today. Also, I might add that I am optimistic about the future of our movement. I sense a great yearning in our land for undenominational, nonsectarian Christianity. I have dedicated my life to seeing that yearning fulfilled. I know many of you have as well.

Our movement has done much good in its attempt to restore simple New Testament Christianity. For that we should all be extremely grateful to our forefathers in the faith. But restoration is a process, not an accomplished fact. In the past we have concentrated especially on restoring the forms, structures, and doctrines of the first century church. We have not emphasized so much the character, virtues, and zeal of the first century Christians. That we should have done, without leaving the other undone. So that will be the major emphasis in this class. My basic premise is simple: In order to restore New Testament Christianity, you must reproduce New Testament Christians. After all, the church is not forms

and patterns, but people.

I intend to illustrate this basic premise by looking at various texts from the first six chapters of Acts. This is ground we have all covered many times, and I do not claim to have insights that no other has ever had. I just hope that a fresh look at old truth will be encouraging and spur us all on to love and good works. If it does, then let God have the glory!

Day One — Encouraging People

Evolution of Revolution

Acts 1:12-14

Nechayev, a 19th century disciple of Karl Marx, was thrown in prison (where he died) for his role in the assassination of Czar Alexander II. Prior to his death he wrote: “The revolutionary man is a consecrated man. He has neither his own interest nor concern nor feelings, no attachment nor property, not even a name. All for him is absorbed in the single exclusive interest, in the one thought, in one passion—revolution.” Acts is the account of a revolution. It is not a book about meditations. It is a book about actions, not reactions. And yet it is about the least likely looking bunch of revolutionists the world has ever seen.

If anything ever began from small beginnings, the Christian revolution did. The 120 Judean believers present represented less than 1 in 30,000 of the population of Palestine. There were no halos in the bunch, just struggling disciples like you and me. But what they did was most uncommon. Perhaps if we consider the evolution of their revolution, the uncommon might become common again.

Let us consider their preparation for revolution. First, realize that they were in a time of waiting. Why did they return to Jerusalem? Acts 1:4 says, “And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised.” The “go” order was second to the “wait” order. God is never off schedule, and the people who share his movement in history must dare to believe that. The promise of the Father was, “. . . for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now,” as is found in Acts 1:5. In John 14:26 we read, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,” and in Acts 1:8 we read, “. . .but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses. . .” You cannot do the work unless you have the tools. So they returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promise.

Second, remember that this was a time of transition. You must realize that they were not yet living in the Holy Spirit age. They were at the moment in that unique period of time between Calvary and Pentecost. They are the only group that ever might legitimately have prayed for the coming of the promise. This side of Pentecost, we do not need to talk God into granting us His Spirit. We see in Acts 2:38 that God keeps his promise when we identify with Christ in baptism. Today many are asking for what they already have. Our duty is not to get the Spirit but to let the Spirit fill our lives.

Also, we must realize that with the promise came a task. The purpose of His coming was to empower the

disciples for witnessing. Many today want the Holy Spirit for their own needs. These “Holy Spiritites” want experiences, but not responsibility. But the disciples desired his coming so they could start going. There was a revolution to begin, and there is a revolution to continue. Standing poised on the brink of a new dispensation, that little band of revolutionaries was characterized by some things that ought to characterize us.

What are the prerequisites for revolution? First, there must be a demonstration of obedience. Their return to Jerusalem was a sign of submission and faith. It would have been natural for them to flee the city since their homes were in Galilee and their enemies were in Jerusalem. But they went where they were sent, not where they were safe. In Luke 24:52 we read that “they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” They were thrilled—not because Jerusalem wanted them there, but because Jesus did. The issue is not where can the witness be most comfortable, but where can the witness be most effective. Indeed, all but one of those who returned would die at the hands of enemies. That is part of the price for starting a revolution.

In Acts 1:14 we can see their devotion to prayer. That is the second prerequisite. It reads, “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.” By the way, this is the last reference to Mary in the New Testament. Notice that they prayed with her, not to her. Mary is never exalted in the scripture above other believers. Here she joins the others in a ten-day prayer meeting. This is how time in waiting should be spent. It is significant to note that you never find them praying in the gospels. More and more they are starting to act like

Jesus. What this band of revolutionaries is doing is declaring their dependence. Could that explain why there are so few prayer meetings today?

The final prerequisite for revolution is a desire for unity. Notice that the brothers of Jesus were present. These are the same ones who derided the disciples for three years for following their “sick” elder brother. Now they believe, perhaps through the influence of James. What thrills me is that they were immediately accepted. Remedial healing had to take place as a part of the prelude to power. A revolution is doomed unless the soldiers all realize who the real foe is.

Let me suggest two principles that grow out of all this. First, His power is available, but often not wanted. We believe the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, and is the third member of the Trinity, etc. But do we really believe God’s Spirit empowers and enables us to witness? We tend to think the Holy Spirit is just a doctrine. To get the job done will take brains, money, and hype. So we run an organized, advertised, powerless revolution. Think about it.

Second, His people are wanted, but often not available. God does not use angels or buildings or computers. He uses common people with uncommon courage. This is the problem. It is easy to find church members, but it is hard to find real revolutionaries.

The Way We Were

Acts 2:42-47

“The church is the boringest old thing around,” said Margaret Mead. It is easy to realize why many who want Jesus do not want the church. But the New Testament

knows nothing of solitary religion. The only problem with the church is what men have done to it. Progress at the expense of the basics is not progress. Let us spend some time considering the way we were. We must restore not just the doctrine, but the life of the early church.

In particular, I want to focus, in this lesson, on the fellowship of the New Testament church. To do that we must define it. Perhaps it would be helpful to begin by saying what fellowship is not. For example, fellowship is not just church dinners. Sharing meals together is a result of fellowship, not a cause of it. When it takes a committee to organize fellowship, something is wrong with the church. Nor is fellowship church communism. Acts 2 is not a proof text for Christian socialism. The criteria was need, not want. This suggests that their actions were meant to be a supplement and not a substitute for individual responsibility.

The original word for fellowship had two meanings: sharing with somebody and sharing in something with somebody. In short, I define fellowship as the spirit and action of sharing that results from our commonness in Christ. At Pentecost a new humanity came alive. It was the Lord's prerogative to add new members to His own community. It was the duty of believers to receive those God had added. Fellowship was not an option, because this new society was not their creation, but God's. Is this sharing because of our commonness in Christ alive in the church today? Someone has said, "To dwell above with saints we love; Oh, that will be glory! But to live below with saints we know, now that's another story." Another has described Christians today as por-

cupines on a cold night. In other words, they need to touch, but they are afraid if they do they will get hurt. Let us allow the Jerusalem church to illustrate what fellowship should be.

I think three ingredients are essential. First, fellowship demands consecration. Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” “Devoted” connotes a steadfast and single minded fidelity to a certain course of action. Notice that fellowship is not just sharing with brethren, but sharing in some things with brethren. For example, we should be devoted to the apostles’ teaching. Realize that at Pentecost the cradle was still rocking. There were 3,000 accidents waiting to happen. They were teachable because they wanted to know what God wanted them to be like. Fellowship divorced from concern for teaching is not fellowship. Our business is not to make the church so palatable it makes God sick. The apostles’ teaching was the account of the life and words of Jesus. Being saved is the business of learning Jesus. Fellowship includes sharing in a devotion to learn Christ.

We should also be devoted to the breaking of bread. The Lord’s supper is a symbol of an historical event, not a memorial to a philosophy or a theology or an ethic. Some who partook had actually seen his body on the cross.

We should also be devoted to prayer. The context implies corporate prayer. The text literally says, “they were continually devoting themselves.” Nowadays it takes a committee organizing “prayer groups” for it to happen. Why is it that we will pack our buildings to

come hear some Christian superstar, but not for prayer? It is impossible for fellowship between my brother and me not to be improved after we have prayed together. A community that is not consecrated will never be close.

Second, fellowship demands contribution. "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and good, they gave to anyone as he had need." (Acts 2:44-45) Their new relationships in Christ transcended material concerns. Realize that many of these new Christians were from distant lands and were only planning to stay in Jerusalem until the end of the Pentecost celebration. However, they were not ready to leave Jerusalem until they had been grounded in the apostles' teaching. Since they stayed longer than planned, their resources soon ran out. The Christians from Judea offered assistance, because the charge of the Lord was not just to get converts, but to make disciples. Fellowship demands making any sacrifice to help your brother grow.

Third, fellowship demands celebration. Every day with glad and sincere hearts they were meeting together in the temple to praise God, and they were meeting together in their homes to share meals. They were not just enduring one another, but enjoying one another. Grimness is not a Christian virtue. The daily lives of these believers was the truest proof of Pentecostal power. The way we were was anything but boring.

Brethren, we must restore that kind of fellowship today if we are serious about our task and our plea. Two powerful implications must be considered.

First, if fellowship is provided, effective discipline is possible. I believe this kind of sharing is a great incen-

tive to holiness. It is no incentive to holiness to threaten to withdraw what the person has never experienced. You cannot take away what you have never given. Second, if fellowship is divided, effective testimony is impossible. The church in Jerusalem did not give the community the impression that it was narrow-minded and hated everybody. Indeed, the very nature of the body had a converting influence: (v.47) “. . .enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” The church was not always favored, but it was because of their dedication and not their division. Today it is often the other way around. The scripture will always stand: “All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another.” (Jn 13:35) Beloved, let us make the way we were the way we are.

Day Two — Establishing Priorities

Making Change

Acts 3:1-10

Thus far, the labors of the early church have met with nothing but success. But the church should never make its goal good press. Acts 2:43 relates that “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miracles were done by the apostles.” One of these miracles is now related by Luke because of its particular consequences. It began a series of events that resulted in the first serious opposition to the church.

We meet the main characters in verses 1-3. Notice that even after the Holy Spirit had come the Galileans made no effort to return home. Jerusalem was of central im-

portance to the early church. We need to understand that the break between Christianity and Judaism was very gradual. The early Christians did not immediately nail the law to the cross. They did not use their new faith as an excuse for license to break the law. Instead, their new faith walked hand in hand with the old discipline. Acts 2:46 states that "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts." The ninth hour was one of the three set times for prayer that all pious Jews observed. Such discipline would be good for all of us.

Now, there were three chief places where you might expect to find beggars: 1) at a rich man's gate, 2) on a chief highway out of the city, and 3) at the gates of the temple. It is hard for us to relate to a beggar's existence. He never knew things we take for granted. He spent his entire life doing all he knew to do, for that culture had no use for cripples. Imagine how diminished his expectations were of what life could be like tomorrow. He did not even look up anymore as he held out his hand, since few ever bothered to look back. But the change he wanted was not the change he needed.

In reading Acts 3:4-6 notice that Peter and John try to restore personhood to this beggar. We do not like to even look at beggars, much less talk to them. We can be good at treating people as just a piece of the scenery. I am glad Peter and John did not say, "We're on our way to prayer meeting." Imagine his surprise when they said, "Look at us!" Imagine his disappointment when Peter said, "I have no silver or gold." Forty years of begging had convinced him that money was the only thing that could help. Haven't we, too, given ear to the gospel according to Wall Street? "No gold? No silver?

No future!” But the change he wanted was not the change he needed.

Peter said, “. . .but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” I wonder if for a brief moment the beggar thought that Peter was mocking him. In fact, the text implies that the man just sat there.

Now, however, we come to verses 7-10, and the beggar finally receives the change he really needs. Notice that no prominence is given to the faith of the beggar. But as Peter raised him up, the man immediately felt a sensation he had never experienced before. Actually, two miracles are recorded in the text: there was a sudden socketing of the bones and joints in his ankles, and no one had to teach him to walk. Now this was not because of the power of Peter, but because of the power of the name Peter used. The main participant in Acts 3 is Jesus of Nazareth. Luke is showing us that the reason the authorities will get so upset is because they are still having to contend with the one they thought they had eliminated. In fact, the “name of Jesus” is referred to eight times in the next two chapters. Does that imply anything about what our priorities should be?

Now dignity is scarcely an issue when you are able to walk for the first time. Notice how the beggar behaves. He did not know you could not celebrate in church. God deals in joy. Maybe today too many are trying to find their joy in the wrong kind of change.

I believe the church is to be in the change-making business. That must be our priority, and it is a demanding one. First, making change demands that you be poor in spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit was meant to make

you a gift. The church was born to be a blessing. Notice that the apostles no longer see a theological question, as they did in John 9, but a need. How many do we fail to notice on the way to worship? When will we learn that only people will be in heaven? We must start seeing them on earth.

Second, making change also demands that you be rich in faith. I think we believe more in giving change than making it. We say, “Those people are hopeless” or “There’s no way to help that guy” or “You can’t do anything after a person’s forty.” So to salve our conscience, we toss a few coins in their direction. Nothing is more bankrupt than a person or a church who can do nothing with life’s problems but throw money at them.

Maybe we do not believe anybody else can change because we have not changed. The church needs faith more than money. I believe people can still change because the source is still alive. He cannot be bought or sold—just shared.

Recognizing Real Religion

Karl Marx taught that “religion is the opiate of the people.” As most people know it, religion does have a certain numbing effect. “Many are cold, but few are frozen.” Satan has from Cain to this day endorsed religion, and most of the people in his kingdom are religious. But because he is a liar, any religion he endorses must be counterfeit. Real religion will always clash with the satanic variety. The problem is that most people do not know how to distinguish the genuine from the imitation. Let us examine one of the earliest con-

frontations between Christianity and religion. Read Acts 4:13-22.

I believe there are three characteristics of counterfeit religion. First, it always values reason over revelation. Counterfeit religion never takes seriously the claims of scripture. Earlier in the chapter Peter had made two powerful arguments for the resurrection: 1) the fact of the miracle and 2) the teaching of scripture. But they had no desire to honestly entertain his explanation. Counterfeit religion will always emphasize precedent. Notice that they took no action to refute the resurrection. This is further evidence that the tomb of Jesus must have been empty. But they would rather promote tradition than think in new ways. Are we ever like that? Have you ever wondered why so many preachers' views come out like the power structure? The disciples of discoverers are often the enemies of discovery.

A second characteristic of counterfeit religion is that it values elitism over evangelism. Verse 13 says that "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished. . ." Education does not make one bold. How did such men so dare interpret the Old Testament? The only explanation was their association with Jesus. Verse 13 says, ". . .and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." Jesus taught with an authority they could well remember. The Jews asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (Jn 7:15) Throughout history religious hierarchies have opposed teaching of the people by the people. It particularly bothers the professionals when what they are doing is not working. "But to stop this thing

from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name," they said. Counterfeit religion will try to reserve speaking for the elite. But when you limit the messengers, you impede the outreach. The hope of the church is still a bold community of witnesses.

Finally, counterfeit religion will always value the institution over the individual. In the beginning, any movement must look outward to survive. But as the movement grows, the focus often becomes inward and the goal often becomes maintenance. The Sanhedrin was more concerned with preserving the status quo than in learning how to change lives. They had lived so long in the cells they had built that they were afraid of liberation. Is any of this sounding familiar?

Happily, however, our text also supplies three characteristics of real religion. The first is confirmation of the Bible, and that means two things. First, it means submission to the authority of scripture. The apostles' courage can be attributed in part to their confidence in God's Word. No church will ever move forward with boldness armed with nothing but their subjective opinions. And second, it means not being afraid of challenging past interpretations. Any church that would rather preserve tradition than study and think has ceased to be a body and has become an institution. Restoration is always a process. I do not envy the man who has not changed his views on any subject in his adult life. The great obstacle to progress is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge. The question must never be, "Is it radical?" but "Is it biblical?"

Another characteristic of real religion is proclamation

of the gospel. For the first time in the history of the church, preaching Jesus has been forbidden. It is worth mentioning that Calvary had proved that the threats of the forbidders were valid. But the apostles could not remain silent for fear that it might be construed as assent. Peter and John said, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." They virtually declared the church to be independent of the Jewish state. This was the first step in the development of the church from a Jewish sect to a universal brotherhood.

Real religion has a message it must communicate. What was their message? — "What we have seen and heard." We must not allow the rationalist to shape our message into a quagmire of philosophical and metaphysical theories. The Christian faith is based on certain historical facts. We must never accommodate the gospel by deleting what offends somebody. The early church had to be commanded to be quiet. Too often the modern church has to be commanded to speak.

A final characteristic of real religion is transformation of the people. The Christian is the best argument Christianity can make. Abundant life is the one undeniable argument that Jesus is real. The Jews could not explain the lame man. They said, "They have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it." Nor could they explain Peter and John. These were the same two who used to run away and cower in fear. "They took note that these men had been with Jesus." The character of the Lord is contagious. Real religion makes a difference in people's lives. You are the finest Chris-

tian somebody knows. There should be something about your life that they can see, even if they cannot explain it.

Let me close this session with two important lessons. First, any movement can become a monument. Second, the world needs a savior, not a structure. The two are related. What we do with the second will decide the first. God help us to restore the priorities of those first Christians.

Day Three — Encountering Problems

You Can't Hide Your Lying Eyes Acts 5:1-11

The first four chapters of Acts reminds me of the first two chapters of Genesis. As you start reading chapter five, you can almost hear the hiss of the serpent. Even in her greatest days, the church has always been a mixture of wheat and tares. Through the centuries, the church has persisted not due to the brilliance of its members, but because of the faithfulness of the God who has pledged himself to it. So, before you knock the church, realize that you are one of the reasons it will never be perfect. The church has always had to encounter problems, and often they have been from within.

“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife, Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.” Now it was not wrong for a Christian to own property, nor was it wrong for them to do whatever they wanted with the money. What was wrong was their try-

ing to dupe the apostles with regard to their generosity.

That was not just a miscalculation of their checkbook; their deed was premeditated. It was done with his Sapphira's full knowledge. Peter asked, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" They did not stumble into sin; they planned it.

It was a sin of pretention. They wanted to be considered in the same league as Barnabas. They got their name in Acts, all right. But they failed to understand that you cannot externally match someone else's commitment. The privilege of discipleship does not come without a price. Pretention has long been one of the devil's favorite devices. Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16 teaches, "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, to be honored by men. . . . When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." Fittingly, "hypokritos" means "one who wears a mask."

When are we tempted to be pretentious? Every time we lead a prayer, or every time we sing "I Surrender All," or every time we say "I'll be praying for you," or every time we step into a pulpit? If God still dealt like that, we would need a morgue in every building.

Peter accused Ananias of being under the influence of the adversary rather than the advocate when he said,

“Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit. . .” (v.3). I was intrigued to discover that many scholars rebuked Peter’s attitude toward sinners. It should be remembered that Peter did not strike them; God did. Peter said, “You have not lied to men, but to God.” If he seems harsh, perhaps that is because lying is not as serious an offense to us as it is to God. Perhaps we should concede that God knows how to run His church better than we know how to criticize.

You may wonder why God does not still deal like that today. Often in scripture the first event or the first person in a new situation assumes a representative character. (Compare with the story of Achan in Josh 7.) Both acts of deceit interrupted the victorious progress of the people of God. To learn in the very beginning that the Holy Spirit could be deceived would undermine the whole operation. God paid too much for His church to see it become a tool of Satan. As a result of these happenings, “Great fear seized the whole church. . .” (v.11). Psalms 111:10 says that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Some genuine self-examination took place that day. The “called out” must not drift back.

Three principles stand out that will help us deal with the sin of pretention. First, the church must stand for authenticity. “No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” (v. 13, 14) Luke is not saying that no one else obeyed the gospel, but that no one else like Ananias and Sapphira was inclined to.

The lines became clear. When the church gets pure, the world gets convicted. We cannot be perfect, but we must be genuine.

Second, the church's leadership must stand for accountability. People today do not want anyone calling their hand. They say, "I answer only to God." When leaders allow that attitude to intimidate them, they betray their calling. Satan's purposes have been accomplished when a church learns that the leadership cannot recognize and will not confront external religion.

Third, our Lord will not stand for duplicity. It is true that Jesus dealt tenderly with open sinners. But He condemned no group more bluntly than the religious hypocrites. He called them snakes and vipers. No act of righteousness carries any merit if the motive is not right. Pretention is no less offensive to God now than it was in the days of Ananias and Sapphira. God will not fail to punish, in His own place and time, all who imitate them.

Our good works are to be done in secret. It is our sins that we are to confess before men.

Organizing An Organism

Acts 6:1-7

From the beginning, Satan has been opposed to the success of the church. He has unsuccessfully tried to destroy the church in several ways.

He uses poverty. Acts 2:44-45 says, "But the disciples pooled their resources to meet needs." But poverty did not decrease their numbers. Acts 2:47 says, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Satan used pretention, but the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira was met with exposure and discipline. This did not deter people from Christ. Acts 5:14 says, “Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

Persecution was also used by Satan, but the disciples only rejoiced that they had been considered worthy of suffering disgrace for Christ’s name. “They kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42).

So the devil resorted to his most insidious tactic: the promotion of division. Even in the early church, unity did not demand uniformity. There were two basic groups in the Jerusalem church, and the house churches reflected this by worshipping in two different languages. There was the “Aramaic-speaking community.” These were the descendants of the exiles who returned under Ezra and Nehemiah. They had lived in Palestine all their lives and were Jewish to the core. There were the “Grecian Jews.” These were Jews who had lived outside of Palestine most of their lives for one reason or another. Their heritage was Jewish, but their linguistic and cultural trappings were Greek. Upon retirement, many of these Hellenistic Jews would relocate that they might die and be buried near the Holy City. This explains why there were so many widows in Jerusalem. Now the early church took material needs seriously, and a program was begun to take care of the daily needs of the elderly. Naturally, as the church grew, the oversight of such a program became more cumbersome. Those widows with no extended family to represent them, and who could not speak Aramaic, most naturally might be over-

looked.

Because of this, there was complaining. Notice the spirit of the complaint. They did not threaten to withhold their money. They did not threaten to start a new congregation. They did not gossip or back-bite. Instead, the Grecian brethren took their complaint to the apostles, who were still apparently supervising the program. (Acts 4:34-35) The slight was no doubt unintentional, but the apostles did not dismiss the matter as unimportant. Rapid growth does not excuse unmet needs. When needs are not met, the attrition rate is very high. Also, the apostles knew that if the problem was not addressed tensions could mount and suspicions of prejudice could be raised, and the next thing you know you have two churches in Jerusalem. Strong leadership does not let little problems become big problems.

Their solution was an administrative one. Now it must be remembered that the church is an organism, not an organization. Lifeless superstructure has so burdened modern-day religion that people cannot be blamed for being down on the idea of "church." Still, organization is not necessarily inconsistent with concern and piety. The apostles recognized that an expanding community demanded some delegation of responsibility. Remember, even a body is organized. "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables," the apostles said. Does this mean that waiting on tables is less dignified or spiritual? James says that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows. . ." 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, "Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to

serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

Every need should be met, but not by every person. In every body there are members with speaking gifts and with serving gifts. It is not a question of importance, but of responsibility. In fact, the same Greek word is used to describe the different responsibilities. Just as the seven were to serve up the food, the twelve would continue to serve up the Word to nourish the soul.

On the matter of qualifications, verse 3 says, "Brothers, choose seven men from among you. . ." The apostles made the proposal, but the church made the decision. They had confidence in the wisdom of the community.

The kinds of qualities they were looking for were: 1) Integrity, "men of good reputation" which was necessary since the task involved dealing with people who had been slighted. 2) Sagacity or "full of wisdom" was a necessary quality. Good common sense was needed to manage complicated affairs. 3) They also sought spirituality in the men, or men who were "full of the Spirit." These men were not just to handle a task; they were to model a lifestyle. Notice that the requirements for a deacon in 1 Timothy 3 all have to do with lifestyle. After all, even mundane tasks are not to be done by mundane men, if they are done in the name of the Lord.

That everyone was pleased with the proposal is a miracle in itself. Notice that all seven men had Greek names. That gives us some insight into the spirit of the

early church. The laying on of hands was a sort of ceremony of endorsement.

Two things are worth noting: First, they were appointed for a task, not a title. Second, they were granted the authority to do their task.

This unity brought the awe of the outsider. Verse 7 says, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem grew rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Satan was foiled again.

This text can provide us with insight on how to deal with church growing pains. Four principles are implied. First, strong leadership does not guarantee an absence of problems. Growth guarantees the attack of Satan. Do what the apostles did with problems—admit them. Second, complaints should either be solved or silenced. Do not let little problems become big problems. If the complaint is legitimate, address it. If the complaint is not legitimate, squelch it. But if you ignore it, you will reap division. Third, ministry is not an office, but a service. They were not appointed to rule, but to serve. We need to start practicing what we preach with regard to every Christian being a minister. Fourth, the purpose of organization is to better serve people. Church organization is not to preserve orthodoxy, protect the status quo, keep cliques in power, or to stifle dissent. The purpose is not to maintain norms, but meet needs. If no one is being helped, it is time for an overhaul.

Conclusion:

I hope these lessons have been helpful. If they did anything, I hope they did this: Cause us to realize that New Testament Christianity has not been restored until New Testament Christians have been reproduced. Do you agree? Then join me, and let us give our lives to doing—and being—exactly that.