

All Rights Reserved By HDM For This Digital Publication
Copyright 1995 Holiness Data Ministry

Duplication of this CD by any means is forbidden, and
copies of individual files must be made in accordance with
the restrictions stated in the B4Ucopy.txt file on this CD.

* * * * *

GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE PREACHER

By W. L. Boone

* * * * *

Digital Edition 07/21/95
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

Foreword

In this book the author has presented a clear, uncompromising, straight forward description of individual stewardship. The presentation is in beautiful language, is very thought provoking and mind developing and is soul enlarging.

The author has set forth his thinking and convictions relative to several pertinent questions and conditions involving Christian stewardship responsibilities. His deductions are both reasonable and scriptural. They are set forth in well chosen words which are placed in comprehensive sentences, all of which reveal wide study and responsible thinking.

This is not a book written for apathetic minds but for those who have trained their minds for concentration and reason. It is for those who do not quickly reject the thoughts of others, and who do not believe a thing is wrong just because it is new, or right just because it is old.

I feel sure that any person who will take the time to honestly, carefully, prayerfully and thoughtfully peruse the truth embodied in the writings of this book will be enriched in both mind and spirit.

R. G. Flexon

* * * * *

Preface

Many years before entering his personal ministry, a "brother of the cloth" discovered his sweetheart in the rolling prairies of Nebraska. Distance, long work weeks, and few resources for

anything but necessities, refrained him from the constant courtship that natural inclination and desire normally afforded.

When he did have the time and necessary gasoline for the long trip, most often there were no extra means for lodging, even for meals at times. I've heard him tell, without the slightest hint of regret, of spending each Saturday night in his old car, curling up as comfortably as possible on the lumpy, narrow, restrictive seat cushions. It didn't matter. The discomfort was hardly realized in the glow of having been, for a few brief hours on Saturday night, with his loved one. And that was not to be the end! He could see her again tomorrow as they attended church together.

Sometimes his last waking thoughts of her face and their most recent conversation were accompanied by the familiar twinges of hunger, for occasionally the flat wallet was "thinner than a tick in February." Those lean times of missing "supper" meant a repeat for breakfast the next morning, and there were even a few instances when it wasn't convenient for friends to have him over for dinner after church.

Missing two or three meals and sleeping in the old car didn't injure or kill him, but it was certainly a sacrifice. It is questionable, however, that he would have considered it so, and the reason is obvious. He was in love. Inconveniences greater than those would have been quietly and repeatedly endured for a few precious hours together.

Creatures of all time have wept, expended, sacrificed, suffered, bled and died because of love. Love motivates when duty and courage lose heart. Love perseveres when mere desire seeks repose and reinforcement. Love loathes remuneration and reaches beyond reciprocation. It gives and goes and graces endlessly.

Undeniably, all love found its zenith, its highest meaning, in Calvary. The most profound and graphic explanation of love for all time is discovered in the most well known Biblical text, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (SEE John 3:16). That says it best. The eloquence comes from the meaning.

The purpose of this small book is single. It seeks to stimulate or recover, as the need may be, devotion to Jesus Christ and His body, the church. The church is unique in that the only force capable of energizing and sustaining it is love. When love is absent or waning, death is coming. The obvious burgeoning flacidity of spiritual vitality in the body must necessarily be laid at the feet of a flickering flame of love.

Jesus said to the Ephesian church, "... thou hast left thy first love ... repent, and do the first works [love Me like you used to] or else I will come to thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place ..." (SEE Revelation 2:4, 5).

It looks like the Church has an energy crisis, but not because of any shortage of fuel sources. The oil is available. Please, Jesus, let it burn! In my heart! In many hearts!

W. L. Boone, Th. B.
Pastor of the

Coeur d' Alene, Idaho
Wesleyan Church

* * * * *

Contents

- 1
Good Enough for the Preacher
- 2
Church On Wheels
- 3
"If That Were My Child"
- 4
Sour on Sunday
- 5
Do We Want Any Heat in the Church?
- 6
A Graveyard Or a Garden?
- 7
Church Martyrs
- 8
They Didn't Cry
- 9
You Can Throw "Cherrith" at Me!
- 10
Fifty-fifty
- 11
How Many Masters?

* * * * *

CHAPTER 1

Good Enough For The Preacher

A knock at the parsonage door can lead to experiences of innumerable variations. Some are sad, some are funny. Some are desperate, some are ridiculous. Some are enriching and some are frustrating, but all are immensely interesting.

This knock introduced one of the characters of the church family. She was a quaint, sometimes a bit more than quaint, maiden-lady school teacher. Characteristically, her hair was a mess and vintage eyeglasses perched precariously near the end of her oft-wrinkled nose. Her wizened, pinched face supported a scrutiny that tolerated little mirth. She wore an ill-fitting dress rescued from rejects that couldn't be sent to the mission field and "sturdy, serviceable" work shoes. Anklets worn over the top of brown, cotton hose correctly identified her rejection of most social conformities.

In her outstretched hand was a wrinkled, well-used brown paper sack instantly supporting her frugal life style. With a powerful grimace that exposed her few remaining teeth and caused both eyes to close, she tried unsuccessfully to push the old eyeglasses back into place. In genuine sincerity she benevolently decreed, "These aren't very good, but they're good enough for the preacher. " The invitation extended to her to come in was politely declined with the comment that "There was much work to be done. The goats had to be milked and the garden hoed."

An inspection of the bag's contents revealed two recently deceased Bantam chickens obviously having lived long, full lives. Viewing them was more pitiful than humorous suggesting a funeral rather than a feast.

Dutifully, the pastor's wife plucked pinfeathers in excess of an hour, finally skinning them both. Even the pressure cooker failed to tenderize that stringy meat so that it could be eaten, but at least we tried.

Though that experience has provided laughter at that time and many times since, overtones of serious proportions are to be observed by the thoughtful Christian.

Without any irreverence intended, it is there suggested that most churches have an unlisted, unseen, unannounced society within their organizational structures. The name it rightly should have is Cast Offs For Christ. Those who belong to it are the people who give to the church such items as have no more use in their lives or homes. **WHAT WE THINK IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE LORD IS A CORRECT MEASURE OF OUR LOVE FOR THE LORD.**

To lay ten or fifteen dollar a yard carpet in our homes or businesses and insist on five dollar a yard material for a Sunday school room is not only glaring inconsistency, but a certain display of our love factor. We can try to explain this by reasoning that a living room carpet is used much more than one on the floor of a Sunday school room, but the real reason will be discovered in a "brass tacks," honest analysis.

When clothing or food donations are being assembled to assist a burned-out, illness-plagued or otherwise worthy person or family, is our contribution usually something that we don't like or of which we have become tired? Why?

When we are assigned a special task by the pastor, Sunday school superintendent or church board, do we perform sloppily, carelessly, or do less than our best? Would an admission be forthcoming that it would have been done better if it had been for our home, for ourselves, for our family, for our business, or for our employer? If so, why?

Do we secretly reserve the most talented, most gifted, most comely youth of the church for the professions, the arts and sports? Is there an ulterior idea unspoken but in the back of our minds that those who are not so well proportioned or well accepted socially would more readily fit into a remote mission compound or the "drabness of parsonage life?" Why?

Why are the second-hands, sub-standards, shop grades, seconds and rejects "good enough" for the Lord when we would use new or better grades for ourselves? I fear that such reasoning has been so widely and historically accepted that its practice has been cunningly woven into the general pattern of Christian philosophy.

What does the Word of God say about offering less than our best to Him and for His service? God names such attitudes evil. "And if ye offer the blind for a sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 1:8). Jesus backed this judgment up in Luke 14:26 when He said, "If any man come to me, and hate not [love less] this father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." If words have meaning at all they are clearly establishing in both the Old and New Testaments that God desires and requires the very best from his children. Anything less is rejected. In the area of love it must be one hundred percent.

It is well to be once more reminded of the Indian mother who threw her healthy, well-favored twin to the hungry Ganges crocodiles while keeping the sickly twin to her bosom. Twins were considered a curse and one of them, therefore, had to be offered in appeasement to the river god. When startled Westerners asked why she had sacrificed the well baby and kept the sickly one, she sadly but quickly replied that their god deserved the best.

Undoubtedly every culture of all time would concur with this, that is, that their gods were worthy of their best possessions, even of their personal lives if it were so required. But so often the church of the living and true God, Who is the only God, habitually holds back the best for itself and offers the seconds, the left-overs, and the unwanted.

The hypocrisy and contradiction are that we who have been given in abundance would offer less than the best. And uncultured, uneducated, unsubsidized, famine-ridden, poverty-stricken heathen will offer a sacrifice of gargantuan proportion to a non-entity, a helpless object of tangible but futile imagination. It is a picture of paupers offering priceless possessions while the wealthy cast off their clutter.

In the area of such unequal and masqueraded benevolence, an enlightened Church is drunk on the heady wine of dollar dominance. Affluence breeds selfishness and greed. Standards of living, pay raises, cost of living increases, fringe benefits and salary scales are making mammon mongers out of the saints. Security is usually of greater concern than sacrifice. Comfort and luxury

are the gods of the apostasy imperceptibly establishing themselves as parasitical icons in the church. When such attitudes are discovered, they must be treated with a severity reserved for idolatry.

When God purposed to redeem the human race, He gave His only well-beloved Son. When Jesus Christ gave His life for all mankind, it was in full measure. What is good enough for God? Nothing but the best. Anything less is unacceptable for Him and unfulfilling to us.

Christian commitment must ever be measured in view of the cross. If it is not, two disparities occur. One, a substitute method of measurement is used, which is usually the commitments and contributions of surrounding Christians, and two, the proper method, which is the measure of the cross, is forfeited. Making such an error in judgment will inevitably diminish the caliber and amount of Christian service. Repeated renewals of Calvary consciousness will periodically stimulate deeper and more effective commitments of service.

One cannot keep from wondering how the apostle Paul could have continued his redemptive activities in the midst of such intense persecutions, frequent personnel defections, plaguing physical infirmities and discomforts, repeated disappointments, oppressive administrative burdens and lonely imprisonments if he had allowed himself to compare this lot with those of other Christians. He triumphed through it all because his concept of service was understood in the dimensions of Calvary.

To Paul, Gethsemane was not a catastrophic Messianic collapse, but rather a bonded blueprint that expensively structured the course of the Church and extravagantly guaranteed the salvation of every human soul who would accept and believe. What happened there would make the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Common Market and all other global financial institutions look like penny arcades in comparison.

Jesus Christ may have appeared to be a helpless, penniless, forsaken, idealistic visionary to the Jerusalem masses and Judaistic officialdom on that historic day, but in the view of a determined Deity He was the Arbiter of the ages, the single Sacrifice for sin's scourge, the only Hope for the hellbound humans, and the adequate Atonement for a wasted world. In God's eyes, the eyes of actuality, the rejections, revilements, hatreds, cursings and punishments to His Son were viewed as incalculable wealth, universal emancipation and honorable reconciliation.

How important it is for us to see God's redemptive provisions and our subsequent involvement from His viewpoint. Once at conversion is not enough. We must go to the cross again and again. We are beings locked into a continual re-education process in every area of our living that necessarily extends into the commitment part. Accordingly, the vitals of devotion must be frequently stirred or we are found to be lacking. The absence of such inner "checks and balances" introduces attitudes of supposed overwork, unfairness, partiality, self-pity and desires for easier assignments. These attitudes, unless quickly acted upon, automatically produces an inferior, selfish, half-hearted service to Christ that has lost its luster, glow and enthusiasm.

What we have to offer the Lord in the pursuit of His likeness and service may not equal that of our fellow kingdom workers, but may we never be thus intimidated to render to Him less than our best.

Answering the door some years ago revealed a stranger with this hand congenially outstretched toward mine. He quickly identified himself as the representative of a certain Christian college. His shoes were shined, trousers clean and neatly pressed, a well-cut, wine-colored jacket, this hair neatly combed and a smile so broad that his eyes could scarcely be seen.

But this teeth? Oh, my! Irregular would be the most complimentary adjective that a conscientious person could use. The two eye teeth were very high up in the gum while two others crowded behind them and lower, as though they were carrying the eye teeth, which in this position were actually more in the way than a faculty of use.

Most certainly our visitor was acutely aware that his teeth resembled the skyline of a mountain range more than the usual symmetry of well-spaced teeth. Regardless and intuitively, this warm and friendly nature exceeded the boundary of propriety by producing all of the smile that he had.

What a profile of selfless gratuity! Most would cleverly clothe such a "hideous mouthful of teeth" in the garment of a sensitive sobriety and commensurately shackle a warm and sunny friendliness in the prison of self-consciousness.

How destructively does Satan induce many of us to withhold our best just because "our way" is irregular, not appropriate or "not according to Hoyle." Thus intimidated, highly productive blessings of disposition lie latent within the lives of the saints impounded in the traitored embrace of timidity.

The ill-regarded streetwalker conquered this intimidation and boldly came into Jesus' presence. With a reckless and lavish abandon that startled and disdained the propriety of household guests, she broke the alabaster box and spilled its entire contents of fragrance and value upon the Person Who had won her lasting love. What was regarded as a useless waste by onlookers was received by Jesus as a tribute of the highest sort. She rendered her best. She refused to offer a measured devotion for it exceeded her source of supply. If she had possessed the amount of oil to match her love, it would have flooded the room. Somehow our dear Lord is satisfied when we give Him all we have.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 2

Church On Wheels

Observe the wheels of the church. This is not an introduction to its officers (so-called "big wheels") or is it a reference to its organizational machinery. It is rather an invitation to consider the just plain wheels of the church. I refer to the automobile wheels, camper wheels, motorcycle

wheels, 4-wheel drive wheels, and trailer wheels for horses, boats and snow machines. What are these church wheels doing and where are they going? The people who operate these wheels quickly inform us that they are all dedicated to the Lord and His service. Yessirree!!

*Liz and Bob were Christians of many years, had recently moved to our community, had both found good jobs and immediately begun to faithfully attend church services. In one particularly moving service, Liz rose and expressed tearful appreciation for the church, the evident blessing of the Spirit of God upon it and her desire to become a part of it. She said that she and Bob felt a kindred spirit, compatible purposes, that they felt that God had indeed sent them to the church, that they loved it and were interested in doing anything they could to contribute to its growth and ministry.

That made the bells ring and the lights come on at the shepherd's switchboard. The head of every church board member unisoned in the speaker's direction while the Sunday school superintendent's eyeballs bugged out. The shock wave measured five skipped heartbeats, three bated breaths and one incredulous "praise the Lord!"

The Sunday school superintendent lost no time getting to her at the conclusion of the service offering her a Sunday school class, but her somewhat stunning refusal was that, "It wasn't exactly what I had in mind." She said that she couldn't be tied down on the weekends. There were too many out-of-town relatives to visit. Apparently the reasoning was that wanting to work was as good as actually doing the job. "It's the thought that counts, anyway," so it is said.

This rather sadly sets forth the service pattern of today's church. It is frequently discovered in weekly schedules of five day's labor (?) and two day's vacation. Further the idea is that we "accommodate" the pastor and fulfill our ecclesiastical responsibility by attending the Sunday morning worship services and paying our tithe (when we are there). It is enough of a sacrifice to crawl out of bed at the "unearthly" hour of 9:30 a.m.

At the beginning of my personal ministry a quarter of a century back there was much preaching that correctly identified office seeking and position desire as un-Christian, carnal and selfish. The well-touted struggle for supremacy at the organ, piano or choir directorship was properly labeled as jealousy and covetousness. There was adequate reason for decrying competitiveness and rivalry among Sunday school teachers, musicians, officers and staff personnel in general. How the complexion of the church and her workmen has changed! Gradually the need for workers has increased and escalated. Accordingly, the preaching has changed to correct the problem of noninvolvement.

I know of churches with large memberships, many of whom are competent, professional people, that cannot fill their board positions. At one annual business meeting a mere seventh of the membership was present to conduct the business, elect the officers and be eligible for election to office. The most common reason for deferring is: "I've served for years. It's time for others to serve and let me rest awhile." Another that is toward the top: "My job and family increasingly requires more of my time." No one would argue that more and greater demands are being placed upon an already over-burdened family and social structure. What alarms this pastor as I view the

decisions made by many Christians when establishing time and duty priorities is that the church usually gets the first cut.

Avidly supporting close, constant family relationships is a pastoral hobby of mine. Insistence that Christians are the most energetic, dependable and responsible elements of our social work-force is also a frequent and vigorous assertion. So what is next to be said is not a minimizing of parental and occupational responsibility. Statements that "job and family requirements" refrain one from church service is usually an excuse and not a reason. Because of its personal and very critical nature, however, it is a very effective one. Few pastors or Sunday school superintendents or choir directors will risk the possibility of contributing to a family failure, so they will say little or nothing to change such a decision. These excuses are generally smoke-screens. The real reason is something else, and that something else is usually a waning of love for Jesus Christ.

One wonders how our godly forbears, parents and grandparents, worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, raised larger families with less resources and fewer conveniences and still found time to pray more, call more, fast more, sing more, conduct and attend longer revivals, and in general, do more for God and the kingdom. They indict and judge us without a plea. We are reminded that we will stand, at the judgment seat of Christ in the company of these people whose love and devotion to Jesus and His Church exceeded their personal desires and topped the list of their priorities.

When we obviously have more time to be spent in work for the Lord and discover that we are, in fact, doing less in both time and interest, what is the matter? There can only be one answer. Greater amounts of time and energy are being expended in self-indulgences, self-enjoyments, pleasures, recreation, self-gratifications and the accumulation of more "bucks" to pursue them all. An honest appraisal of sick Sunday schools, empty board seats, second or third best workers and half-hearted service to the church will place its finger on the real sore: SELF. Selfish, indulgent, reservant, thoughtless, carefree, unresponsive, carnal, smelly, rotten, self. It needs the renovative cleansing of holy fire!

The Jones' were farming people and the members of my brother-in-law's church in Kansas. Now they were an odd pair. They had this peculiar idea that they should be in attendance at every one of their church services unless drastic circumstances prevented it. Their "funny" actions relative to church loyalty were consistent and genuine, not just occasional or for "pastoral points." They have acted like this for more than forty years with each of their pastors.

Their children living some two hundred miles away didn't keep them from arising early at three or four o'clock on Sunday morning so that they could be back to their home church in time for the opening of Sunday school. Let's remember that he was a six-day-a-week farmer. They never harvested on the Lord's Day.

When muddy Springtime conditions forbade car travel, they came in the truck. When the truck couldn't get through, Brother Jones would hook the tractor on the car and pull it, with Sister Jones steering, through the mud out to the paved highway, leave the tractor there and come on to

church. Going home the process was reversed. Were they fanatical? No, I think not. They were just in love with Jesus Christ and dedicated to His church.

We must somehow jar the jocularity out of so-called contemporary "dedication." There must be some stout stirrings around the vitals of stewardship. Somewhere the separation that has occurred of love for Christ from service to His Church must be repaired. The double talk must be identified and classified for the disinterest and backsliding that it is.

It is impossible for one to love Christ and not love His Church. One cannot serve Christ and not serve His Church. He seeks to please whom he loves. He communicates and fraternizes with whom he loves. He spends time with and money on whom he loves. Nobody believes that John loves Mary when he spends more time with Jane. Neither does God.

That there is a difference in Christians and their service to Christ and the church is undeniable. It is also very difficult to explain. It is especially so when newly-converted people see the wide disparity of love and devotion factors in older, professed Christians. Another "high effect" group are the young people. Satan is bidding high for their souls during the impressionable adolescent stage of life when everything is "debatable" anyhow, (including the Christian faith) and they are critically vulnerable to those "who say and do not."

Right here is an appropriate place to hoist the teenagers to the church's shoulders. Characteristically, they are followers. With few exceptions, young people are the first to rise to challenges, the first to admit if they are wrong, the first to forget the hurts and slights and the first to walk in the light of God's Word. Unquestionably, our society has produced a sad lot of the younger generation who have their hands out. The church youth also have their hands out, but not palms up! Their hands are out to lift a fallen or less fortunate one, young or old. Their hands are stretched out to say, "Come with us and we will show you a better scene than booze, drugs and sex." Their hands are stretched out to say, "You're forgiven. It's okay. We're brothers." Thank God for the resiliency of youth!

That resiliency and teachableness however, will be almost always structured in the direction of the greatest force, the greatest influence. A church whose young marrieds and parents are backsliding, who are caught up in the "big bucks" fever, and have become acclimated to the "have wheels, will travel" prevailing craze, can hardly expect to produce sacrificial, committed, and faithful youth who know how to carry spiritual burdens.

It isn't what we are saying at the testimony meetings in church that affects the course of our children's lives. It's more our "speeches at the testimony meetings at home" that they are hearing. If making more money to buy more "goodies" to eat better, look nicer, have more fun and go more places predominates parental word and action, one may as well "kiss goodbye" any expectations of children who will put the work of God first. If the job or the house or the club or the soap operas are "king and queen" to Mom and Dad, one may as well dig the grave and say the committal prayer for any hopes of young hearts yearning over lost souls and burning in love and zeal for Jesus Christ.

We often hear older Christians ask, "What is wrong with our young people?" The obvious answer is the same thing that is wrong with us. They are watching us and we raised them. With rare exceptions, children will follow eventually in the footsteps of their parents. This is equally true with the youth of a church. They will follow the examples of their elders.

The appeal of the cross is either discovered or discounted by proxy, that is, it is seen through us. Jesus passed the torch of redemptive illumination from His heart to ours. As there was no other way for man to be redeemed but by the cross, so there is no other way for the message to live and be known but by Christian influence. The gravity of this truth must not escape us. Loved ones, friends, school mates and fellow workers go to hell because so many lights have been carelessly covered by a bushel.

The "bushel" of the twentieth century is that of pleasure. It is not sinful pleasure as such, but the kind that keeps believers from a consistent, meaningful place of prayer. How can there possibly be revival when most professed saints cannot honestly claim even one single hour a week in prayer? By that is meant one hour in total for the week, not an hour at a time. Think of it! Just one hour a week out of one hundred sixty-eight of them! In comparison, how many hours are spent relaxing, reading, watching television, working at hobbies, knitting, engaging in other diversions, or just daydreaming?

It seems that the very minimum required of Christians would be to spend the Lord's Day in pursuit of godliness and spiritual interests. When such questions arise as, "What can I do all Sunday afternoon? Just lie around?", there is a clear absence of spiritual life and hunger. Unfailingly, when spiritual hunger wanes, the fleshly appetites arise and assert themselves. Every saint of God should view this as a definite danger signal. These honest questions should accompany each conduct decision: Will what I am doing or about to do stimulate my spiritual appetite or my fleshly appetite? Is this in which I am engaged just now having a godly influence upon those in my company? Can I properly determine that it is making me and them better Christians?

My Sunday school teacher, in company with many other persons, had a profound influence upon my life during the teenage years. It was not so much what she said that drew me to the cross, it was her life. In the opinion of a contemporary society, she would be considered stupid. To me, and countless others who watched her life year after year, she was not only sagaciously wise, but the epitome of angelic sainthood. Sister Berry lived with a drunkard husband who openly opposed her living for Christ. Not frequently, but more times than once, he would physically abuse her while in a drunken stupor. He would further emotionally abuse her by mocking her Christian faith. Those who knew her personally attested that she was never cross or vengeful, but patiently suffered his abuse for Jesus' sake.

If you think that this was highly unusual, so did I. I don't suppose one person in the church or community would have blamed her a bit to have left him. On one Sunday morning I, with all of the other worshipers, observed an ugly, black bruise under her eye freshly received from a blow on the preceding night. There was the unusual, unmistakable aura of God's holy presence in the service that morning, as one by one the saints responded to the Spirit's urging to praise and honor the Lord publicly.

When Sister Berry stood, a holy hush fell upon the congregation and her face shone with an unearthly glow. I cannot recall anything else of her testimony that morning, but it all fit into her opening line that was as free of sham as it smacked of the divine. She said with a heavenly smile, "The Lord has been so good to me." Think of that! She gets a beating because she is serving the Lord and yet says sincerely that He is good to her! It would all have been received as mere bravado and sanctimonious double talk if one, we hadn't known that it was consistent with her life and, two, if it had not been punctuated by an attendant, holy atmosphere. I said fervently to my unsaved heart that morning, "Lester, when you get religion, that is the kind you are going to have; the kind that works!" I didn't find Sister Berry's religion, but I found her Savior and, thank God, He (not it) works.

Today's church must also have its Sister Berrys. We must have saints whose lives are so Christlike that it creates a hunger for reality. They must be imitators of Jesus who make the way of the cross appealing and glorious.

LIKE A TREE

Gentle or furious the winds through her blow,
A stately lodging where birds can go.
Tranquil setting for winter's first snow,
Picturesque beauty for mortals below.

Gnarled roots to hold the shifting soil,
Shaded repose for the weary who toil.
Yielding fruits or nuts or sugar to boil,
For the humblest cottage or a palace royal.

To many its use and beauty attest
That living a tree is at its best.
Maturity's growth took years to invest.
Concluding a hygienic and esthetic quest.

But, alas, a fallen tree often produces
Far more items of practical uses,
Other than reds, golds, and chartreuses
And amenities such as color introduces.

Lumber for home, industry and store,
Furniture, paper, clothing and more.
Ships of all sizes intended for
Indulging in pleasure or a business chore.

For all a tree's uses since time began,
One stands paramount, beneficent to man.
It would seem all so useless to us, other than

The fact that it is a divine plan.

Wood cut to size and placed in its turn
On dying embers will cause fire to burn.
Its visage and beauty will never return
While eliminating someone's cold and concern.

And so, to be used, one must die like the tree
In self-crucifixion, if only to be
Fuel for consumption, to burn and then see
The wonder of Jesus revealed in me.

* * *

*Names are substituted for real persons.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 3

"If That Were My Child..."

"... he would not be acting like that. I would not allow it." Perhaps most of us have made such remarks, and if not vocally, we have thought about them. Misbehavior, mouthiness, rebelliousness, selfishness, meanness or the throwing of temper tantrums observed in other people's children seems always to appear worse than in one's own.

A pastor friend of mine repeatedly, and honestly, stated that he loved church member children as much as he did his own. Either he had the affections of an archangel or else he was using measuring methods different from most of us. We try to be impartial to family members, but it is nearly, if not entirely, impossible.

Our very competent optometrist told us, while describing the optic nerve as God's back yard, that there were literally thousands of separate nerve endings in that single visual cord transmitting as many images constantly to the back part of the brain. Those thousands of nerves banded together in a cord scarcely the circumference of a lead pencil are so many, so intricate and so intertwined that the optic nerve is still a medical frontier.

The love relationship between parents and their children is similar. The cords of thousands of experiences intertwined with hundreds of hopes, bookfuls of instructions, buckets of tears, and a million sighs and smiles combine to effect a psychological "umbilical cord" that is as personal as it is unique. "Untying Mother's apron strings" is as fanciful as it is impossible. Every child is a "chip off the old block" in some sense whether he likes it or not.

Most of us learn the hard way that "blood is thicker than water." Every veteran pastor and police officer quickly learns to handle spouse squabbles with so-called "kid gloves," very

carefully. Most often, in the eyes of the squabblers, the helpful arbiter becomes the villain, even at times the cause of the fuss. Loyalty to one's own family becomes a difficult chain to break, even when the offending member is deserving of correction. The negative comments that family members make about other family members are not for other-than-family observations. If they say it, it's alright, but if someone outside the family says the same thing, even in the same way or in a more favorable way, it is then labeled criticism and is decidedly out of place. We have definite, innate, special attachments to those we love. It is as normal as breathing.

There can be a hundred band or orchestra members performing at a concert, but what member gets the most of our attention? There can be a thousand marching soldiers in a parade, but only one receives our heart-pounding, searching, eager surveillance. His head seems held higher, his step seems smarter, and his uniform seems most illustrious. When the band strikes its marshal airs discipline, propriety and a sense of equity causes us to observe the principle players and the featured soloists in the various sections, but like water flows down the path of least resistance, our eyes repeatedly revert to that familiar head. Again, common courtesy orders our attention to the director and mentally admires his ability to teach, to inspire and coordinate. But before we know it and without conscious assent, there we are again staring at that same familiar head, straining to pick out his (or her) instrumental contribution. We really do support and compliment the entire group, appropriately omitting any concession to individual preferences, but all of us knows that if our Johnny or Suzie were not participants, the chances of our attendance at the concert or parade would be negligible.

We form interests in that that holds the interest of a loved one. Window shopping for instance, is in my judgment one of the most boring, unprofitable, disinteresting wastes of time known to man, but I do a lot of it uncomplainingly (most of the time). Likewise my incessant reading is sweetly and quietly tolerated (also most of the time). Very commonly our tastes adjust to those of our loved ones. The reason is not so impressive as the fact, for often it happens without our even realizing it. Love is the catalyst of mutuality and compatibility.

If the church needs whipping into line, let those who love her do the whipping. Paul said that, "Ye have ten thousand instructors but not many fathers" (SEE 1 Corinthians 4:15). Solomon said that, "... the wounds of a friend are faithful" (SEE Proverbs 27:6). There are many to line up the church, but so few to love her. To set the record incontrovertibly straight let us recall the words of Ephesians 5:25 where Paul states that, "Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it., Loving the church is therefore tantamount to giving of one's life for it. It means pouring out one's lifeblood for it in action and attitude. It means being willing to subserviate one's own feelings and desires for her well-being. This is really "putting your money where your mouth is." Those who callously and dispassionately lay out the church as all "gone to the dogs" and complain that "I only am left who is true to God" are in poor company. To love the church is to be on the side of Jesus Christ.

This is not to suggest that the church, even as a child, does not need correction and a bringing into line. The giving of correction and instruction in righteousness is as much a part of the church's ministry as the telling of the good news of salvation. Indeed, the tolerant, soft soap, soothing, indulgent philosophy in many church circles has produced spiritual spoiled "brats" that reaps the same painful harvests as do family units who dote upon and placate selfish offspring. The

manner and the spirit in which correction is given is as important, and in many instances more important, than the act of chastening.

I am willing for any godly "father or mother in Zion" to correct the saints if their attitude and deportment bears out a genuine love for them. But here is one shepherd who becomes instantly defensive of those saints, even if what they are doing stands in need of correction, when the chastening is done in a vindictive, castigative manner. It is a good place to apply the golden rule and treat as you would want to be treated.

When these "sour saints" (if there are such people) start their caustic crusades, I often wonder if they are really miserable and unhappy in their own relationship with God (regardless of how happy they say that they are) and are knowingly or unknowingly attempting to shackle the church with their same somber sickness.

A father's chastening is purposed to correct and train, not merely to punish. His motives are constructive and positive. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth" (SEE Hebrews 12:6). Let chastening and love never become strangers one to the other. Jesus said, "... on this rock I will build My church ..." Building is erection, construction, addition, and progression. It is a positive process combining good, strong materials and prescribed planning and labor.

Some time ago we had poured some fresh cement into sidewalk forms on the south side of the church. As the parsonage was situated to the north of the church, past experience dictated that a periodic checking be made until the fresh, smooth surface had hardened. When three teen-aged boys were observed walking in the direction of the fresh concrete, past experience again summoned an immediate inspection. Surely enough, there were conspicuous footprints to behold, the barricades were knocked down and left in disarray.

I hollered at them, by now a half block away, in a commanding voice, "Hey, you guys, come back here!" and wasted no time moving in their direction. To the question, "Why did you do that?" a self-conscious smirking at each other and shrugging shoulders was the reply. "Look, I want an answer," I stated firmly, but not angrily. "What caused you to destroy something that took hours of hard work to produce? How long do you think it will take me to repair the damage you've done? Would you have done this to a sidewalk that your Dad had poured and trowelled?" "no." "Then why would you do this to a sidewalk that belongs to somebody else?" Two of them, suddenly and intensely interested in the ground and kicking futilely at imaginary pebbles, said, "I didn't do it." That left the other miserable lad considerably abandoned and embarrassed. There was no overflowing of loyalty in that trio for sure. When the pressure was on, it was every man for himself.

The "huff and puff" all fled along with the fancied loyalty and one red-faced lad faced the music all alone in resignation. He actually had little to fear, for unknown to him, under the stern exterior of the interrogator was a firm commitment to the education ethic of teaching and learning. I wasn't interested in scolding or punishing or letting off steam. I wanted them to learn. I wanted to guarantee all future freshly poured sidewalks an immunity from at least three pairs of feet if possible. I wanted them to learn to associate action with personality. I wanted them to learn that our actions affect other persons whether they are present or absent.

What an important lesson to be learned by even "big boys and girls"! Every action, however unobserved and impersonal in intention, is affecting and influencing other persons. Someone else is being helped or hindered by what one does and says, usually directly, though not always immediately. In any case there is the ultimate effect on others because of what that deed is "pumping" into one's own character building. What we do, seen or unseen, is affecting us, changing, altering what we are, and therefore, telescoping its effect into the lives of others.

How different our thoughts and actions are when we assume personal interest in or contact with another person or project! This is what makes the difference in parental relationships with children, and this is what makes the difference in church workers.

Years ago I heard of two young men who began railroad careers at about the same time. Forty years passed and one was still working at a turret lathe in a greasy, smoky machine shop while the other had become the President of the Board. At a company dinner, the hourly employee said to his friend, "Jim, you and I started working for the Company together, we have similar educational and social backgrounds and you know that I am a hard and efficient worker. Why am I still a lathe operator and you are President of the Board?" "I think," said Jim kindly, "it is because your interest was in a paycheck and mine was in the Company." Without question Jim was right and the same thinking is evidenced in the work of the Lord. I have repeatedly observed people who at one time were really happy to spend and be spent in God's work, but today other activities take precedence in their lives or they must be paid to do what used to be a joy. Now whatever is done obviously is a chore and an obligation, not a delight.

One outstanding characteristic marks every successful church worker. He loves the church. Churches succeed because of those who love them. Churches fail because they have no one, or too few, to love them. While I write these lines there are ten thousand congregations who exist solely because of the love of a few. It is stubborn, unconquerable love. Yes, in some sense it is even a blind love, but with an object. The object is viewed also in the eyes of Another, the One Who loved the Church.

There are dozens of reasons to stop fighting against the difficulties and just close the church doors, but one reason out-polls, out-influences and out-weighs them all: love for the church; love for her Savior; love for her message; love for her power, her purity, her passion, her position and her mission.

I have been privileged to pastor laymen who mildly "bugged" me by their unswerving, consistent loyalty to every pastor, a few of whom were not worthy of that loyalty. I wondered why they did not join in the chorus of "stinker" and label him for the poor example that he was. Analysis of such magnanimity uncovered an important and heartened motive. It was love; love that didn't want the family name sullied. It was love that understood human frailty and reached out to recover the backslider. They exhibited love that built bridges instead of barriers. Oh, seeking Shepherd, strike Thy image upon the template of our hearts!

One of my most memorable childhood experiences centered around my father. Though small of stature compared to his three strapping sons, the combination of Dutch ancestry, steely

blue eyes and a lumberjack physique guaranteed appropriate awe and respect. Long hours of hard work, the care of a growing family and low financial returns left little time for fun and frolic. Life was not as casual and carefree as it is today. Orders were obeyed without question and discipline was quickly and sternly administered. There were no appeals or reprieves or meaningless threats.

On this memorable occasion, whatever I had done (or failed to do) demanded punishment. This was a period in my life when, at least it seemed to me, I was averaging at least one paddling a day. I clearly remember sitting on the woodbox one day giving considerable thought to probable reasons, but never did come up with an answer worthy of presentation to the "discipline committee." It seems strange now, with children of my own, why the answer was so illusive.

Mother had promised the spanking, and when he arrived home from work, Dad warmed up my shirt tail and sent me to my room to think things over. After a bit he called for me and, telling me to dry my tears, beckoned me over to where he sat on the divan. I shall never forget that scene, because it revealed a side of my father hitherto unknown. He put that big, muscled arm around my small, heaving shoulders and said what caring fathers have said from time immemorial, "Son, I don't enjoy spanking you. Your Mother and I want you to be good, true and strong. This can only occur as you learn to obey and respect authority. If we didn't love you we would just let you go and be selfish, disobedient and willful. Now are you going to do as you are told from this time on?"

It is so true that the church has many instructors, but very few fathers. It is also true that the church needs discipline. Let it be done by the fathers. Let no man raise his hand against the church who is not willing to die for the church. We need to apply this to local bodies in Christ and not just a vast, nameless, faceless, personalityless, ideal, mystical body of believers way off somewhere else. He who loves the church enough to lay down his life for her, then, ah then, and only then is he qualified to discipline and train her.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 4

Sour On Sunday

My pastor brother-in-law tells of the lady who stood and submitted the following Sunday testimonial: "I wish you would all pray for me. I don't know whether I am under a heavy burden or just have an upset stomach." This statement was spoken in a public worship service and I have some cogent perceptions to offer concerning it. (1) Her problem was undoubtedly an upset stomach. (2) She obviously knew very little about the matter of carrying spiritual burdens. (3) She lacked discretion in the area of public propriety. (4) She needed prayer AND understanding. (5) In spite of her real or imagined problems, she was in attendance at the house of God at worship time.

Many who would laugh uproariously at this dear woman's expense might have often allowed conditions of far lesser degree refrain them from faithfully attending God's house and honoring His holy day.

Early in my Christian walk with the Lord, He reasoned with me about the various do's and don'ts relating to the day of worship. It came across to me like this and has guided my personal Lord's Day department all along the way. My employment (this was years before entering the ministry) was essential to the maintenance of physical life, both mine and those dependent upon me. Accordingly, my employment was of such import that it received the lion's share of my total time, energy, and ability. Whatever was required of me in its maintenance and execution was vigorously expended. I needed a job. I was thankful for it. My world revolved around it. That is how important it was. I worked hard and did the very best I could to please my employer and do a good job. I tried to learn all I could about the job and the company as rapidly as possible. It was second nature to do this. I was always a few minutes early to work and stayed over a few minutes after quitting time. Only an illness that put me to bed kept me from reporting to work. And, incidentally, these purposes are still operative to this day. This is the reasoning that all good workmen have towards their jobs and their employers.

This positive attitude toward my secular employment fostered a similar one in labor for the Lord. It seemed reasonable to employ the same guidelines that supported physical life to the spiritual aspect. The value we place on the life within will largely determine our conduct and priorities relating to the Lord's Day.

This introduces a plethora of modern Lord's Day considerations that range from the reasonable to the ridiculous. Woven throughout it all is the infamous intrusion of pleasure and play.

The historical reason for a day of rest was because God knew that we needed it. He made us that way. Clearly, as long as He designed the human body anyway, He could have made us so that we could function in our environment without one day in seven required to rest and recharge. Obviously, there were divine designs for the day other than physical cessation of labor alone.

"Six days shalt thou labor ..." (SEE Exodus 20:9). Six days of each week were designated as the time needed to fulfill all of the tangible needs of man and beast. The seventh day was designated to fulfill the spiritual needs. It was a time to think, meditate, ponder and consider. It was a time to recreate and reflect upon the events of the past six days. It was a time to introspect, that is, turn one's thoughts inward, to consider the thought patterns, the attitudes, the motives. It was time to worship, to consider God's plan and purposes, to receive directions from Him about any corrections or changes that were needed in conduct or action.

Jesus said that the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath (SEE Mark 2:27). This does not mean that God set a day aside for man to spend in any way he chose -- a day of freedom and personal use, so to speak. The statement is, in fact, quite the opposite. God has specific and built-in designs for man on the established day of rest. When we fail to use that day as God intended, significant and irretrievable loss to both body and soul is sustained.

The resting of the body has, in effect, a piloting purpose, a channeling cause. It is primarily a means to an end. The resting unveils deeper, Divine goals. Its quieting, slowing down nature introduces the real reason for a sabbath. It is communicating with God and He with us. If this fails to occur, the entire intent for a day of rest has been sacrificed.

No wonder that God laid down such stringent rules relating to the sabbath. When men prostitute the sabbath, they steal from God. They steal time from Him that he designed for set purposes. They steal necessary rest from their bodies. They steal periods of communion and fellowship with Him. They steal listening times from Him where directions are given, strength for service is imparted, and upcoming traps and snares are revealed. They steal opportunities from Him to bless and encourage a fellow worker. They steal possibilities to become better people, to enlarge one's concept of the Lord, to accelerate faith and to threaten the power of darkness. All of this and more is stolen from God and lost to His cause when the Lord's Day is turned into a play day.

One hears much defense relating to the "wheeling" and running around. "When I get way up there in the mountains, I feel so close to God. It's so quiet and worshipful." "There's so much hustle and bustle the rest of the week that I need to get away from it all." "I need to get away from people. The doctor said the crowds are bad on my nerves." "Feeling the breeze in my face and getting away from it all is my only means of relaxation."

A pastor friend of mine had heard so much of this that it moved him to drastic measures. When Sunday school began on a given Lord's Day, he was late. Classes began and ended and the pastor still hadn't arrived. The worship service was about to start when the music director asked the pastor's wife if the pastor "were ill or what?" She then went to the pulpit and told the congregation that he (the pastor) had heard so many declare the closeness of God and the worshipful environment in the hills, on the lake and by the streams that he wanted to try it out for himself. So, the last she saw of him, he had left in the car with his Bible, a song book, and a sack lunch, stating that he would try to return in time for the evening service if he weren't too tired. That was drastic and unwise, perhaps, and more punishment to his wife than the congregation, I'm afraid, but the message came through loud and clear.

Often the Lord's Day is profaned on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon rather than at the scheduled service times. When this occurs, those so involved received only the rest they discovered during the worship services. With rare exceptions, church sleepers are sabbath desecrators. Those who sleep or yawn through a Sunday morning sermon because they watched a late television program or "yakken" to friends past midnight Saturday evening are the same who wouldn't think of doing a repeat on Sunday night. The reason is obvious. They just couldn't be sleepy on the job Monday morning! Of course not! Likewise, the headache or the backache that kept many away from church didn't keep them from going to work or school.

I heard about the preacher sermonizing on the bad place. He said, "Why, nobody wants to go to Hell. If there's anybody here who wants to, stand up!" The startled church sleeper heard only the emphasized last two words and, thinking it was benediction time, stood up. Seeing that only he and the preacher were standing he said, "Well, I don't know what we are voting for preacher, but at least you and I are for it." I think that awakened both of them.

A lovely couple with four beautiful children were saved some time ago. Following church the first Sunday after their conversions, they stopped by the grocery store for some laundry soap. For them, Sunday afternoon had customarily been the laundry day. As she stood in the checkout

lane waiting to be served, she stated that, "A darkness settled over my soul and I was made to realize that I shouldn't be doing business on the Lord's Day." Though I had said nothing in their presence from the pulpit about such considerations, God had spoken to her and she promised Him that she would never again buy commodities on His day.

Many storekeepers attest that their busiest time on Sunday is after the morning worship services. One groceryman told me that most of his Sunday customers were church people.

I realize in this era of "business as usual" on Sunday, Christian buying and selling is "heavy stuff" even for the evangelical community, but there was a time when it was not so. We stayed closer to what God's Word says about it (SEE Nehemiah 13:15-18) and were blessed in so doing. Refraining from "business as usual" has the effect of speciality and sanctity in itself, and the witnessing world around such Lord's Day keepers gets a "salt flavoring" one day of each week.

Mosaically, the breaking of the sabbath was punishable by death (SEE Exodus 31:14). The profaning of the sabbath was the determining factor for seventy years of Babylonian captivity for the Children of Israel in Daniel's day (SEE Leviticus 26:33-35; 2 Chronicles 36:21; Jeremiah 25:11).

Admittedly and gratefully, the church lives under the "law" of New Testament grace and not Old Testament legalism. Such references as the afore-mentioned do bear the mark of importance, however, that lays its shadow into Christian conduct for this dispensation. An unsaved world will never honor and respect a holy day that the church does not. We may not totally, or even appreciably, stop social abuses in many instances, but we need not contribute to them.

No man, or group of men, or organization is wise enough to establish a set of "thou shalt and thou shalt nots" for keeping the sabbath holy. Some general observations can help us, however, and it is kindly suggested that these considerations be meditated upon and not quickly run over like one would a shopping list. The best method of assuring retention is to read the matter over once and then reread the material again, one item at a time, honestly and thoughtfully.

- (1) How do the most godly and devout Christians I know treat the Lord's Day?
- (2) Would Jesus go where I go and do what I do on His Day?
- (3) Does my sabbath activity draw me closer to Him and does it make me a better Christian?
- (4) Am I engaging in sabbath activities now that I didn't previously?
- (5) If so, has it made me a more effective worker? Has it improved my prayer life? Am I doing more for God than before?
- (6) Does the church and the pastor depend on me?

We must constantly remind ourselves that it is not in the light of contemporary social conduct that our faithful Lord will judge us for how we have ordered our lives, but rather it will be by His Word and character.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 5

Do We Want Any Heat In The Church?

How about lights? Restrooms? Piano, pews or an organ?

Such questions make me think of the car salesman listing to a prospective customer available optional equipment on the automobile he was selling, such as: steering wheel, radiator, headlights, etc.

It would seem ludicrous to ask if heat were needed in the church except that there are church people who say as much by their actions and attitudes. Many saints can get all fired up and starry-eyed over sending missionaries to the heathen or supporting starving orphans (and they should) but grimace and moan over utility bills and insurance premiums as though they were a necessary evil.

Among the many fine laymen I have been privileged to pastor was one of the kind who felt that his tithe was to go in specific areas of need as the Lord would lead him. He said that he tithed faithfully, even often exceeding his tithe, and placed much of it in the local church (storehouse) but still reserved the right to send part or all of it at times off to other needy Christian works if he felt so directed of God.

Neither was he secretive about this practice, for he forthrightly explained his actions and the reasons for them. I wasn't persuaded or in agreement, but the Spirit checked my making any observations relative to the matter when my brother first informed me about it.

Years passed during which I faithfully and periodically preached the biblical method of storehouse tithing and he would always smile and nod his head, silently getting this message back to the pastor. "Amen, preacher, amen to tithing. Some are led to carry the financial obligations of this church. I'll do my part when God leads me to. But there are other great needs in God's work, such as, this faith missionary, that faith orphanage, this faith school, that faith radio or television program, this faith literature crusade. They have no one to underwrite them and depend solely upon God's people for support. (I wanted to interject at that point, 'Neither do we have anyone underwriting this faith church!') Now, Preacher, we've discussed this already and you know how God leads me to give my tithe. Amen to storehouse tithing for those saints who are unimaginative, routine and restrictive in their thinking."

The idea espoused is that most saints don't live close enough to God to receive specific directions in their giving and therefore they must tithe to their local churches and let them care for the distribution. Such thinking is narrow and borders on selfishness.

The entire issue revolves around control. Who should control the tithe? Should each individual control the disposition of God's ten percent or should His ordained body of believers do it? Did Old Testament tithers "do their own thing" so to speak, or did they all bring their tithes to a central ordained body for use and distribution? Were New Testament tithers Spirit-led to individually distribute or did they all pool, or "lay by in store," their tithes for distribution by church leaders? We know their patterns, of course. Offerings were sent by individuals or congregations to relieve various distant needs, but it can't be proven that these offerings were tithes.

Again it is suggested that the "bare bones" reason for any Christian wanting to "tag" his tithe is control. He wants to personally say where it goes and for what it is spent.

It must be noted that control requires accountability. If I earmark my tithe, I must be ready to assume responsibility for the accuracy of my understanding the directions of God in its placements. Since all of us are notoriously fallible, the chances of our missing the Lord's leading in hundreds of benevolencies is great. It must be strongly assumed that every time I misplace some of my tithe, a double wrong has been committed. It went to the wrong place and it didn't go to the right one. When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, I must answer for both. All of this is avoided by storehouse tithing. The most competent persons of a local body, in consort with a God-ordained shepherd (pastor), is charged with the fiscal responsibility of that church. The judgment of many heads is usually better than one or two. Prayerful discussion and consensus is a powerful argument for corporate tithe distribution. As to the safety of our tithe? Seldom, if ever, do we hear of a church board or board of deacons absconding with church finances. I think my tithe is safer with a co-laborer who I can "eyeball" and watch his walk than with distant organizations or persons who are beyond any method of accounting. Besides this, we can hardly expect a local church board to effectively operate the financial affairs of the church if we take some of the tools away from them.

This is a place to let my heart overflow a bit, for God's churches are full of faithful, consistent saints who have their fingers on the pulse of the church and their ears are tuned to the beating of the heart of the Church's Lover, Jesus Christ. They would no more think of sending their tithe out of their local church than they would pay a personal utility bill with it, for they love the church, love its heavenly-ascended Head, and believe that the biblical plan of storehouse tithing can't be improved upon. One of the most impressive proofs, if any is needed, that all of our tithe belongs in our local church is that God pours out His blessing upon the saints who place it there.

Let us return to the narrative of my friend who felt that he could designate and distribute his tithe at will. Eventually, he came to form high opinions and lasting appreciation for his young pastor and was most generous in telling him so. His warm-hearted, sincere praise was unnecessary, but certainly encouraging. Everyone likes to be appreciated. On one such laudatory occasion, the Holy Spirit punched me in the mental rib. With a disarming and friendly smile I observed to him that if every member in the congregation paid their tithe with his irregularity, the pastor he thought so much about would get little or no salary and there would be no local congregation of saints and therefore no pastor.

The widening of his eyes as realization set in was worth a dollar or two of that misplaced tithe. A slow grin accompanied his surprised exclamation, "Why, I never thought about that!" From that moment on he was an inveterate storehouse tither. His special interests outside our local needs still received some of his resources, but no longer his tithe.

He was a good and honest man. Some months later he said, "Pastor, now that I am paying my tithe regularly into the storehouse, I really wonder if I was paying the full ten percent before." That's a good question and another plus for storehouse tithing.

To many people, caring for the "nuts and bolts," nitty-gritty operation of a local church is unfulfilling. The absence of splash and brilliance and notoriety finds them casting their eyes about for greener pastures. If there are no brass bands or bouquets, they hear the "Arizonian or Floridian call" to come over and help us. The twin ailments of arthritis and itchy feet precipitate a modern day exodus to the southern "mission fields" where the sojourners discover fifty other arthritic "missionaries" in the same church. It would seem that God is more interested in the big churches located in warm and pleasant surroundings if we are to judge by the hundreds of saints getting "divine directions" to go there. In comparison, how many are being led to small churches, rural churches, or those located in hard winter climates? The jolting truth is that most so-called "divine direction" amazingly "just happens" to fit into our wishes and plans. Waiting on God and praying through is a term and practice nearly foreign to the modern church. Twenty-five years of watching the "botched-up, gone-awry" excursions of the saints has just about made me a skeptic when I hear the words, "God told me to do this." I usually smile, pat them on the back and get prepared to pick up the pieces. That's the reason for the smile and pat. If you give them a lecture, it will not only fall on unlistening ears but will preclude your involvement in any future ministry to them.

This introduces a strange, but important, observation about counseling. Those who come seeking advice usually do not want the counselor to tell them what they should do. They just want your approval in what they have already decided to do.

A pastor friend of mine, ready for retirement, bought a sight unseen, Southern lot from one of his friends. A subsequent inspection of the property assured him and his wife that they had indeed made a sound investment in pleasant surroundings.

When they went to Sunday school and church in the community of their anticipated retirement home, there were about a half dozen children in the assembly of nearly two hundred, and they were all grandchildren visiting their grandparents during the summertime.

Now I must tell you that my pastor friend has been an achiever, a "gung-ho" go-getter, all of his pastoral career. His is a built-in "go system" that passing years has thankfully failed to stigmatize. He returned from the southern climes spluttering something like, "I'm not ready to congeal yet!" There were thirty or forty preachers in that congregation and most of the rest were D.S.'s (displaced saints).

The absence of personal liability to God's kingdom health and welfare is the modern malignancy of the soul, almost imperceptibly destroying vital functions. People who freeze to

death hardly know that they are dying! Surely God would want us once again to ask ourselves, "If all the members of my church were just like me, what kind of church would my church be?"

The tragedy of the modern church's mobile citizenry is the proliferation of non-involvement. The death of loyalty, faithfulness, and usability is certain. Estrangement from responsibility is as foreign to a true saint as life is to the cross. The cross means death and loving Christ means loving and serving His Church. Casual, spasmodic, transient, rootless, hedge-hopping attempts to fit into two or three or a half dozen local church programs creates an unreal, disconnected complexion on the Sunday sojourners that necessarily hangs a huge "just visiting" tag around their necks, however vigorously they try to remove it.

At a church leader's conference some years ago an Arizona pastor shocked many of the rest of us by telling us that we could keep those members at home who were wanting to move to his sunny state. He said that most of them went to other churches to discover what they were like without even attending one of their own denominational congregations. Those few who did come on their own or were heroically intercepted before getting settled into other churches did not want to get tied down. They had taught classes, sat on boards and committees, paid the bills, and participated in calling programs "back home" and had come to Arizona for some rest and relaxation. The majority wanted to "get lost," so to speak, in a large church program where they could eat and enjoy but not contribute too much. Friends, it is as much a Satanic farce to be a part-time laborer in the whitened harvest fields as it is to be a part-time wife, a part-time husband, a part-time parent, or a part-time son or daughter.

What causes Christian workers to leave posts of duty in local congregations for the greener pastures of supposed freedom from responsibility? It is the same fanciful unrest that puts wanderlust in the eyes of the so-called "unliberated" housewife who is supposedly "tied-down and inhibited." Being a good, efficient mother and wife has become an unappealing drudgery. What was once a delight has become a drag. Her world was her husband and family and pleasing them was adequate reward for a lifetime of labors. But she becomes weary of it all and yearns to be free. Almost immediately she notices inadequacies and shortcomings and failures in the family that previously she had ministered unto. Now she is highlighting them as impossible to cope with. She feels the need to get away from the routine and responsibility. Something new and different, just a temporary change, will fulfill that longing, she reasons.

And so, the change is made, but as soon as the new cases, new faces and new places wear off, the same unrest is there, and the only remedy now is to be off and running again. It is a love problem in both instances, or perhaps better put, a problem of the lack of love. Also in both instances, even if the mistake is recognized and the one running around determines to settle down in a family situation once again, irreparable damage has occurred and seldom are the feelings of confidence, trust and mutuality as strong as previously.

An integral part of Christian character is sacrificed when the need to be depended upon is cast aside. Being needed is the root of faithfulness and faithfulness is the spring of integrity.

Those who think they can maintain spiritual health and estrange themselves from redemptive responsibility are deceiving themselves and commensurately causing pain to God's

family. It is as futile a pursuit as having a sweetheart in every port. The gad-about is receiving maximum immediate privilege while yielding a minimal contribution. There are only brief and superficial commitments to relationships in both instances that require, by their very natures, constant and wholehearted ones.

The ones left behind suffer the immediate pain of loneliness and separation, but bravely carry on the home responsibilities while the lighthearted roamers pursue the bright lights on the other side of the hill. There they court and engage another "lover" appearing for all the world a faithful, caring, dependable "homebody." The new "lover" is greatly impressed until the word "marriage" is introduced, and suddenly the relationship cools down, for a marriage would require the very involvements, such as permanency, residency and responsibility, that the roamer sought to evade when leaving home.

It is true that "you can't have your cake and eat it too" in spite of the many assertions to the contrary. The choice is between settle down or run around, whether it is building a home or a church family. This thinking precipitates some biblical reasoning taken from the experiences of a very wise man and set to a few lines of poetry.

A CLEAN CRIB

No corncobs, cockle-burs, fodder or fumes
Or waste material from hay or legumes.
The Bible says, it is to be seen
Where no oxen are the crib is clean (Prov. 14:4).

Even so, a house with no blocks on the floor,
No dolls or Teddy bears in front of the door,
The absence of tiny clothing and toys
Is mute evidence of no girls and boys.

She who fears her love will be lost
In a marriage that certainly levies some cost
Can have independence in action and mood
With attending years of solitude.

He who freedom from restriction requires
His own way in all choices and desires,
Alone he lives and dies, how sad
To forfeit the joy of being a Dad.

To build a home, a life, a business
Requires attendant adjustment and mess.
Clutter, refuse, strain and stress
Are needful ingredients assuring success.

Even so, the church is not meant to be

Limited to saints at maturity,
But sanctified parents in the nursery
Readying the family for eternity.

Building a home or a church is a chore
Requiring the same efforts o'er and o'er.
Finding fulfillment in the pursuit is the goal
Whether raising a family or saving a soul.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 6

A Graveyard Or A Garden

The inscriptions on cemetery headstones verify the identity of whose remains were interred and the span of their lives while here on earth. Epitaphs are usually, though not always, meaningful and signify some outstanding characteristic or accomplishment of the deceased one.

Among many observations that can be drawn from a graveyard, the most notable is that it is a depository of memories. All of the inhabitants have ceased physical and mental functions within their former environment. All rational contributions to society are held only in the frequently distorted shadows of dim recall. The reconstruction of those actions depends more upon the caprice of the one doing the recollecting rather than the actual happenings.

All of us have attended funerals wondering if we had inadvertently come to the wrong funeral home or perhaps at the wrong hour, while listening to the flowery eulogy or the laudatory sermon. For some reason the valedictorian adjectives did not seem to match our remembrances of the departed.

That brings to mind the occasion of Mose's funeral oration. The colored Reverend proceeded to decorate Mose with copious qualities of responsible manhood. He graphically sallied forth with the following aggrandizement: "Mose was a powerful good man, the hard workin'est man I ever did know. He'd bust his shoelaces and sweat a ton to put bread and butter on the table for his wife and chilun'. Nothin' was too good for his family. His love for them was absolutely outrageous and superficial! He was kind and gentle to the tenth degree. What an example of dependability! You could plumb set yore clock by his punctuation at the job and comin' home, too. He exemplifies what a husband and Daddy should be in the home. Helpful, thoughtful, patient, and curtly. All of us should gloriate and reverate in the remembrance of this son of nobility and totalitarianism!"

Mose's wife sat wide-eyed and awestruck through it all. Suddenly she punched the son sitting next to her and directed, "Sam, when he's through talkin', you just waltz up there to the front and make sure that's yore Dad!"

By and large, memory is characteristically kind to the dead. Perhaps that is as it should be if the existent chasm between fact and fancifulness is not forming standards for living conduct. This is the danger. Putting the best construction on another's actions is charitable and Christian if it is not clouding reality or concealing dispositional malignancies.

Much of our own past experiences, actions, and decisions tend to become clouded and indistinct with the passing of time. We want neither to be overly concessive or unduly critical of personal history. It cannot be totally dismissed as unimportant, however, for as history is the only link to the present, so yesterday's decisions and actions are the rungs on the ladder of living. One can neither retrace his steps to mount the ladder anew or can he somehow discount the existence of the steps already taken. This is not to suggest that regrettable decisions cannot be corrected. Thank God, they can be! One of life's most valuable endowments is that we can start again. But we must recognize the sobering fact that decisions once made and committed to the keeping of history cannot be disinterred, resurrected, and processed anew. If this consciousness is enlisted to aid in the making of our present choices, they properly receive the mark of increased importance as well as the insurance of sober analysis.

In a sense, burials of various natures occur every day in each of our lives. The pages of time turn one by one, each word and sentence, like each act, thought, and decision, having woven its own special sense and meaning into the unfolding of the whole. Then as it is laid to rest, word by word, thought by thought, choice by choice, and act by act, all are eternally cast in the obdurate die of experience and committed to the whimsical repository of memory. We are all writing the story of our lives, not with letters and punctuation marks arranged grammatically on paper with ink, but in inscriptions of thoughts and deeds on the parchment of character.

The entire story is to be discovered in each thought and act. The plot is plain from the beginning, for the author himself destines the character and finale. What we are going to be we are now becoming. The design and the designer are inseparably one.

This is not to suggest a preclusion of either Divine or satanic influence upon our lives, but rather a sobering reminder of rationality's immense weight. The power of each individual to think and decide is a divine endowment peculiar to humanity, and the residence and use of its unique authority peculiar to humanity, and the residence and use of its unique authority must certainly carry the requirement of accountability. God does influence and convict us. He intervenes redemptively and personally on our behalf through the Lord Jesus. We cannot know just how much He aids and assists us in the directing of our motivations, but we can be sure that the twin bestowals of individuality and rationality will exact incisive and infallible examination when the books of eternal record are opened.

If marching through the musty mausoleums of one's memoirs or hiking through the dusty pages of personal history can inspire and motivate present, positive improvements in our decision making process, we are immensely benefited. If history has proved anything at all, however, it is that few profit from it.

One wonders how many Christians are living in the graveyard of their memories? Many envision themselves as they were, transpose that image to the level of subconsciousness, and then

fantasize themselves into a satanically-oriented dream. They exist in the present but live in the past. It is a tragic paradox of diabolic design, this seeing of ourselves either as we were, but presently are not, or seeing ourselves as we wish we were. In either case, genuineness, the basis for a divine relationship, is forfeited outright or else vitally imperiled.

There are many Christians whose relationships with God are only ghosts of past experiences. They live in the reverie of a holy holocaust while actually huddling about a pile of dying embers. It is the literal fulfillment of the Apostle Paul's stark warning that, "... in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves ... lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof "(SEE 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

This condition is one of the most dangerous of all spiritual deficiencies for it occurs deceptively, imperceptibly, gradually, and progressively. One of the first things the drifting Christian must do to correct this powerless posture is to recognize the condition. He must admit that pleasure, self-seeking desires, affluence, ease of living, and a lack of discipline has stealthily stolen the first-love blaze and power and passion out of his Christian experience.

For many years I had read various reports, with more than casual interest, relating to proper diet and exercise in the care of the body. This information received immediate but passing attention until God spoke to me about the matter. When He speaks, we listen. It's not parents, spouses, or the preacher talking at that point. It is the Lord.

On this occasion I was reading a well-documented medical report from a widely distributed publication relating to details of the heart functions and also various "do's and don'ts" as to proper heart care. There was a simple pulse rate test that identified the probable present condition of one's heart organ. I was lying on the bed while reading and, now curious to know how the test would rate my heart's condition, laid down the magazine, turned to observe the second hand on the clock radio, and confidently placed my fingers upon the appropriate wrist position for pulse rate determination. I felt well, not more than ten pounds or so overweight, and have always been more than moderately active. In answer to any question as to my present physical condition, I would have honestly and immediately answered, "Excellent."

To my amazement my pulse rate was twelve or fifteen counts higher than average. I can't even accurately recall the exact overage because it so unnerved me to discover that I was really that far out of shape. After two more tests to verify the first and discovering that it was right, I turned over, doubled up the pillow so that I could read with clarity and concentration, and started right back at the very first word of that article! A transformation had taken place! I was no longer a casual, pleasure reader. My senses had awakened and were in full uniform. The information was no longer for all those "fatties and pencil pushers out there." It was for "old number one" this time. My heart was beating out caloric cadences of dirged crescendos and I needed to discover how to slow the tempo down. The baton was in my hand.

That this medical data, combined with divine urgings, produced alterations in many of my activities became readily noticeable, but such changes as using stairs rather than elevators and the elimination of heavy food salting was only the tip of the iceberg. Awareness of the problem was

essential to its correction, and the awareness in turn, unveiled the cause. Skulking in the background, fully exposed to the noonday sun of understanding, was the infamous culprit of stealth. Little by little, subtle change by subtle change, the easy life and palatable delicacies afforded by increasing affluence had placed growing demands upon my body.

Perhaps any one of the deficiencies in itself would be so inconsequential as to be overcome by other organic strengths, but the accruing extra demands eventually would register a decided weakness in the system.

The corrections to be made were simple to discover, for information about body care was readily and widely available, but putting that information into practice required a commitment to a lifetime of consistent self-discipline. Statements to the effect that it is "simply" nourishment combined with proper exercise has to rate as one of the greatest understatements of all time. It would be so easy to forget the whole business if the end result, that is a shortened lifespan, were not so costly. It is one thing to decide to forfeit a few years of your life from yourself (which, incidentally, sounds selfishly silly when put before oneself plainly like that) but quite another matter to deny those same years to others, such as spouses, children, parents, friends, and more importantly, to God and His kingdom work.

Just as poor health habits steal heartbeats from a lifespan, similar stealthy degeneracies occur spiritually and with far greater destructive results. Spiritual sickness is like its physical counterpart in that a serious condition can develop with few or hardly noticeable symptoms. Although the care of the spiritual body requires daily attention and discipline too, one or a few day's negligence might fail to register any obvious negative results. One thing is certain: either growth and development are occurring or the organism is deteriorating.

The life of the child of God parallels, in many ways, a garden of flowers. The one time lovely and vibrant flower gardens in their Godward relationships have become somber cemeteries for many saints of God. An experience in Jesus that used to fairly splash color and permeate fragrance all over the countryside has been quietly and methodically replaced by eulogized tombstones. One reads like this: "This monument is erected to the memory of my first love. A lavishly lovely red rose once grew where this monument now stands. Its rare beauty was a symbol of an equally rare affection to my Saviour, Jesus Christ. It symbolized my single and total happiness just to be with Him and do whatever pleased Him. The cause of death was a fragmentation of interests."

Another bore this message: "This monument is erected to the memory of a powerful prayer life. A satin petaled lily grew and blossomed here. Its distinctive aroma and beauty resulted from a daily attention and communal tears, the mingling of human and Divine interests. The cause of death was lack of care and watering."

Another: "This monument is erected to the memory of peace. In this place once grew crimson carnations that soothed disappointments and calmed the ominous spectre of trouble. Here anxious fears subsided and bleeding wounds were healed. Here sorrow was quietly absolved and grief's starkness neutralized. The cause of death was abstention."

Another: "This monument is erected to the memory of faith. In this place once grew a persistent daffodil. Its rugged disposition would break through and bloom at the least encouragement of warmth. Here originated the awakening of spring and the inception of the growing process. Here is heralded the newness of life, a new birth. Here heroic and fearsome battles were waged when unbelief's winter repeatedly covered this daffodil bed completely, but always life was there and came breaking through again. The cause of death was doubt."

Another: "This monument is erected to the memory of a passion for souls. In this place grew a massive dahlia. Its solid beauty was characterized by giving and caring and serving. Here fervent intercessions broke the shackles of sin and crushed the power of evil. Here refusals to let souls go to Hell were common. Here Satan was repeatedly bound by the overwhelming forces of the precious blood of Jesus. Here reverberated the shouts of mastery as chains were broken and prisoners freed. The cause of death was loss of compassion."

Another: "This monument is erected to the memory of joy. In this place once grew a most exquisite iris. Its variegated shades of splendor reflected its disposition to embellish any circumstance with happiness. Here frowns were turned to smiles, tears to laughter, sighs to shouts, and grimaces to grins. Here heavy loads were laid down, anxieties quelled and strength renewed. Here drudgery was turned to delight, and weary plodding to triumphant marching. The causes of death were misplaced affections and temporal pre-occupations."

What a transposition! What had been a fascinating, fragrant, captivating, flower garden had become a graveyard. A living, pulsating, invigorating, heartening, and contributing collection of beautiful characteristics had been replaced by cold, dead, unmoving blocks of stone. Now they are only memories of things that once were alive and functioning.

This question must come to every Christian. When others walk into the orbit of our lives, are they refreshed, invigorated, and challenged by a living garden of sacred virtue and grace? Or must they grope from tomb to tomb peering wistfully at burnished but desolated headstones; vacant, hollow witnesses of a life that was?

* * * * *

CHAPTER 7

Church Martyrs

This very day I heard a radio documentary relating the story of the heartless machine gunning of an entire group of Ugandan Christians. The local church elders had just concluded administering the sacraments to the congregation when the service was rudely interrupted by revolutionaries. They demanded an immediate retraction of faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ. The church answered their demands by singing together the closing lines of the hymn they had just finished. Stuttering blasts of machine gun fire ushered them into the immediate presence of the Lord.

They were husbands, fathers, brothers, neighbors, and friends to their community just like those with whom we live and labor. Their earthly lives were cut short for no crime or social wrong-doing. To the contrary, their attitudes and actions were influencing Ugandans to be more productive citizens, better workers, and to live at peace one with the other. What a shameful waste of moral resources! The very influences that could bind the wounds of a strife-torn social structure were being sacrificed to the sanguine gods of savagery!

Recent missionary conferences report that there have been more Christian martyrs in the last forty years than the combined total up until that time. Even if a considerable margin for error is granted for such statements, the trend is unmistakable and the Church is once again spreading the gospel with blood for ink and bodies for parchment.

Just what is a martyr? Mr. Webster defines the words as: "One who sacrifices his life, station, etc., for the sake of principle." Are there not many methods of dying? Must one die instantly or violently to be classified as a martyr? Would not a death by a tropical fever, or the lack of proper medical attention, or an accident brought on by overwork, sleeplessness, or an improper diet rank as a missionary martyrdom as decidedly as a spearing or a shooting? Of course, we would agree. In all cases life, or a part of it, has been sacrificed for the cause.

How many months or years of one's life must be cut short for him to be placed in the category of life forfeiture? Thirty years? Twenty years? Ten years or one year? Must the sacrifice of one's life occur in a country other than his native one to be considered a martyrdom? Again we would say, 'not necessarily.' As already noted, and in numerous other contemporary instances, hundreds of Christians in their native lands have sacrificed not only their lives, but much of all that life held dear to them, for Jesus' sake.

How many believers sacrifice their lives will never be known on this side of heaven, for thousands die prematurely in full view of both their peers and their unwitting executioners. When a saint of God passes to his eternal reward, causes for death as ascribed by the attending physician are drawn from the full range of known medical terms, but the real reasons as God sees them might be quite different. Many would be found to be heartbreak rather than heart failure, misunderstanding and not malignancy, stress instead of a stroke, and pressures more than pulmonary failure. It is unfortunate in too many cases that the gravity of such assassinations is unrecognized and, therefore unrevealed.

The purpose of this consideration is not to place crowns on the heads of saints past or present. Only the knowing and faithful Judge of all can rightly do that. There is even an inherent danger of some overly sensitive believers making martyrs of themselves by the very suggestion. It is a risk to be taken however, in the discussing of some methods whereby Christians are actually martyred but are not recognized to be such.

God only knows, and the judgment will certainly reveal, those whose usefulness in the service of the Lord, and their very physical lives in many cases, have been cut short by the verbal, emotional and social wounds inflicted upon them by others. When we are thinking along this line the most frequently recognized evil is that of open and personal criticism. It is such an obvious assassin of reputation that most who are guilty have psychologically insulated themselves against

exposure. Such persons seldom see themselves as criticizers. Whenever messages are preached against gossip and slander, those who need it the most are usually unmoved and are likely the heartiest supporters of the preaching. They are the ones who will smile and nod their heads and glance knowingly at a hapless spouse or some other worthier brother or sister. Some are even brassy enough to remark, "That was really a good sermon, Pastor. They really needed that!" Though it is about the most damaging weapon an individual can use to destroy other persons, there are other hurtful ones than just the most obvious one of open criticism.

Noted here is a strange, almost sadistic trait of human depravity. Those who know each other well, spend the most time together, and are engaged in similar pursuits, can hurt one another in the greatest measure if they choose to do so. They know best the areas of weakness, sensitivity, and agitation, "pulling at the place where the hair is short," so to speak. Exploiting another person's weaknesses is childish and cowardly, for its intent is to make the exploiter look better at the expense of the other's fault. Such actions are not just unholy, they are criminal. A law has been broken and a penalty will be paid.

The renowned "royal law" is the one that has been broken (Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ... James 2:8) and two inevitable penalties will be exacted, one upon the victim in his suffering and the other upon the perpetrator. The suffering of the victim is present, immediate, and normally recognizable. Penalties received by the one causing the suffering are not always so immediate. Because retribution for such damages to the spirit is frequently far in the future, many falsely assume that it is unknown, forgotten and, therefore, unimputed. Such naive reckoning! One of the strongest legal assertions in all of holy Writ is that we shall reap what we sow. Yes, hurting hearts, maiming minds, sabotaging spirits, weakening wills, coercing consciences, multiplying miseries, and cultivating criticisms will most certainly require accountability and punishment.

Jesus said that one of the most outstanding indicators of Pharisaism was their eagerness to bind heavy, legalistic requirements (burdens) upon people while at the same time exhibiting an odd unwillingness to lift small, obvious burdens from off them that could be very easily done. How paradoxical to refrain from removing a small burden while adding to it a heavier, unnecessary one! But that is a church crime of immense magnitude that demands loud censure, bold exposure and stern, punitive action!

How heartless it is to know that a brother or sister is struggling under a delusion and remain silent about! For example, a mistaken report may have come to him in a roundabout manner and he is mentally and emotionally crushed. He thinks that what he did or said was an offense or injury to another person when, in fact, we knew the opposite. A sentence or two in a conversation or letter or a brief telephone call could ease hours of mental anguish. It could eliminate countless struggles encountered while trying to differentiate between responsibility for an unwise act or only a satanic accusation. It could release energies thus impounded to positive, kingdom building pursuits. It could diminish emotional pressure and mental stress that were actually subtracting heartbeats of life. In this manner, time from a lifespan has been sacrificed for a cause. It is probable that the spears of supposition and the arms of assumption have caused more untimely deaths than any made of wood, stone or steel.

It could be reasoned that everyone suffers from the stresses of suppositions and that it is each person's own problem as to how he handles it or how he allows it to affect him. Such reasoning lacks both maturity and compassion. Surely there are more than enough psychological pressures and spiritual battles for all of us to accommodate without allowing a single one to unnecessarily exist!

There may be a further reason why burdens are allowed to squeeze the very life out of the bearers. Those looking on may judge that "he needs to sweat a little" for alleged inconsistency or truancy. Perhaps it is because "he did something unkind or injurious to me once, so now he is getting what is coming to him." Also it could be reasoned that, "The Lord may be chastening him, so why should I interfere?" All of this kind of thinking, whether actively summoned on our part or passively presented and accepted in our minds, is not only unholy but, in effect, places such persons who reason that way in league with the devil. When he thinks like this, such a person is against his heavenly family and for the powers of evil that determine to destroy it.

How can any child of God fail to correct, if it is in his power, misconceptions that are causing suffering and grief regardless of "whys and wherefores." If a person is physically injured in an accident, we don't stop the rescue effort to determine if she is the mayor's wife or a prostitute; whether he is a senator or a drunk. Misconceptions that injure spiritually should be treated with equal concern and impartiality.

The reasons for correcting or not correcting misconceptions center around the ideas of truth and stature. One usually corrects them because he is committed to the concept of truth. How he feels personally about the one who is oppressed or "under a cloud" is subservient to the truth, or what was actually the case, and not what appeared to be or what the accusation was. To leave the matter as it stands, uncorrected, is an affront to reality and a boon to deception. An honest person cannot allow another to be wrongly maligned.

The second reason for allowing a false impression to remain uncorrected is that of stature, his and ours. Some are so concerned about how they appear to others that to correct a bad impression of another person would be tantamount to elevating them in the eyes of their peers. Either there is more stature consciousness among professed Christians than among those people of the world or else there just seems to be because of the unsaintly reprehension of competitiveness. Status symbols are opposed to saintliness, and chronic stature measuring in the church is carnal. It seems that the more worthy and successful a kingdom worker is, the less he is praised, encouraged and aided. Any church leader has risen to his office through both the fiery darts of the enemy as well as the rapiering, wounding tongues of the saints. This ought not to be. Accordingly, if a poor image of a brother or sister is allowed to remain uncorrected, it is a passive, but effective, way to reduce his stature.

How imperceptive! How small! How carnal and selfish! One of the most prominent witnesses of a holy, Christlike heart is the characteristic of servanthood and brother hood that places the well-being of others above that of one's own. This is beautiful as a discipline but profoundly glorious as a virtue. It is the spirit of Jesus Christ Who made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself to the death of the cross. It is His disposition operative in one's

consciousness that causes him to gird himself, even as our Master exemplified, and serve his subordinates and contemporaries with genuine humility and grace.

Nothing but Satan and self is served when unwarranted weight wearies our brother. Why let him cry in the night or sweat in the sun? Why withhold the message of relief that would bring him rejoicing? Why allow silence to be the stealthy bandit of his life's longevity? Some solid thinking needs to be done here. If one member of the body is injured, all members suffer. A life cut short, not by Divine design, but by our selfish inattention, will forfeit essential manpower as well as demand accountability from those responsible for the loss. We must never suppose that "death by default" or "incrimination by abstention" is any more acceptable to God than verbal, hostile criticism. It may be more lightly treated by men, but not the Lord, for the destructive end result is the same to the individual and to the corporate body.

Perhaps only one Peter was crucified. John alone may have been scalded to death in a caldron of boiling oil. With Paul and John the Baptist hundreds have had their heads chopped off. Thousands were burned, drowned, speared or shot. More than all combined methods of execution in the church historically, however, is that of verbal death -- death by criticism, or the converse, death by the lack of support, encouragement or vindication.

Paul's voice is joined with James' in declaring the authority of the royal law relating to care one for the other. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (SEE Galatians 5:14, 15). Is it not significant that of all the various methods Paul could have drawn out as harmful conduct to other Christians he specified the one of verbal injury? He could have advised them to refrain from excessive borrowing, interference with family disputes, disagreements over property matters, over-familiarity with the opposite sex, inaccurate claims to abilities or possessions, fairness in business dealings and endless other matters that are generally provocative social issues. But the caution not "to bite and devour one another" immediately following the statement to "love thy neighbor as thyself" seems to set forth, in the Apostle's mind, the most imminent threat to its fulfillment. Unquestionably, generations of Christians living and working together corroborate his fears and warning.

The way we use our tongues in conversation with others about others is a correct measurement of our love for others. You may quickly ascertain the degree of love for an absent person by the manner in which you represent him, either actively or passively. If by this analysis we can see more negative observations made of the absent individual than positive ones, there is little or no love in us for them, regardless of how much we say to them or others of our great love for them. We need to ask ourselves if they are really so unworthy as to preclude our support and defense of them? Is the image we present, or allow to be understood by others, about them consistent with their lives? Are dozens of useful and beneficial contributions by them to God's kingdom being omitted or ignored when compared to each of their failures aired or inadequacies noted? The greatest percentage of talking about other Christians is negative. That ought to speak volumes to us.

I watched two small boys playing the P-I-G game with a basketball in the church parking lot. The object of the game was for one to spell, or refrain from spelling, the word "pig." He who

spelled "pig" first lost the game and, at the same time, won the dubious distinction of becoming the "pig." If one's shot could not be duplicated by the other, he "earned" a letter in the spelling of the word and so on. I noted that when one boy succeeded in making his shot, he invariably indicated with his toe a position somewhat further from the basket than where he had stood. It was petty cheating to be sure, but measured the lad's sense of fairness regardless. One sees much of the same in professed religionists. They expect others to perform what they cannot or do not, and then condescendingly guarantee appropriate "news releases" about the failure. Often it is carried out in the guise of pity, embarrassment or shock. "Did you hear about how her weaknesses got the best of her again? The poor dear." Oh, for builders among God's people who are committed to the health of each member! The church needs construction workers who care about the quality of his brother's building as well as his own!

* * * * *

CHAPTER 8

They Didn't Cry

All people cry. Some just don't show it. Others do but not much or frequently. Weeping is an indicator of fear, pain, anger, disappointment, frustration, pity, joy, pride, pleasure or excitement.

At times, we don't know why we cry. Occasionally, just observing our wives, husbands, parents or children triggers involuntary and inexplicable tears. Seeing a friendly, courteous young man arise in the presence of an elderly person, or observing a pleasant, young lady move with unpretentious poise; watching an arthritic, white-haired grandmother painfully stoop to retrieve a carelessly discarded bit of trash, or a polite grandfather stand quietly in the midst of unmindful, milling crowds; viewing the anxious care of a mother as she watches sleeplessly over a sick child, or witnessing a small son's tiny hand in his dad's as they walk, each trying to match the other's stride; receiving a wilted buttercup or a smudgy, crayoned "portrait" from a child with shining eyes and grimy hands; these sights and many others of similar nature evoke unbidden and unexplained tears.

Weeping can represent various emotions ranging from selfish, indignant peevishness to heart-broken self-sacrifice. It has the capacity to astronomically deceive or heroically prove. It can be highly meaningful and productive, building bridges and inciting action, or it may cause one to flounder and thrash in a sea of self-pity and futile indulgences. It can compliment and excite faith to courageous new attempts or it will drum the march to the fickle fissures of failure. Tears can soften the spirit, soothe the mind, and strengthen the will, or they can harden the heart, confuse one's reason, and destroy purpose. They can release or imprison, uplift or depress, cleanse or defile, tenderize or harden, mellow or embitter, build or destroy. It is trite to think or state that weeping is weakness, or the converse, that not weeping is a strength. The fact is that a person's fortitude is not primarily determined by his emotional structure. The bravest of persons will run the full course of emotional traits and back again. The same can be said of the weakest. Courage is discovered to rise and get the job done regardless of how one feels. He who succeeds in any endeavor learns to use his emotional system as tools, rather than be enslaved and controlled by

them. The decision making process especially must exert as dispassionate an influence as possible. Those choices made in the heat of emotion are usually unsound, premature, and injurious.

Emotion in general and weeping in particular have great value if they are harnessed and utilized. The God-man wept, and it is highly significant that no explanation is given as to why He cried at Lazarus' grave. This means that He cried just because He felt sorrow. He empathized with the grief and loss of His friends, Mary and Martha. There need be no studied search for underlying, metaphorical, theological meanings. He was feeling the separation and pain that death visited upon the human family and was responding characteristically. Someone He loved had died and others He loved were suffering and grieving, so He wept. He didn't weep to prove that He was human, He wept because He was human, and that act forever vindicates the worthiness of weeping, if indeed it needs vindication.

Weeping rises to its fullest dimension and fulfills its ultimate purpose when it becomes the testimony of compassionate concern. As the Son of God looked upon a milling mass of people during His days here on earth, He was moved with compassion, for they appeared to Him as scattered, drifting, vulnerable, sheep having no shepherd. They were more to Him than just masses of humanity. They were eternity bound individuals who were ignorant of safety and inexorably lost. They were unwarned and unprepared for the unseen imminent danger and certain destruction.

Hundreds of pairs of eyes witnessed the same multitude, but His eyes caught the full import of ten thousand lost souls moving seventy-two heartbeats a minute to incalculable disaster. It drew on the concern element of His nature and a selfless response was in the making. Immediately was set into motion determinations to effect corrections and assistance. It never occurred to Jesus that the people may not welcome His intervention; that they might resist any attempt to change the pattern of their living; that His interest in their well-being might be misunderstood and misinterpreted. His reaction was summoned from an authority that was as intuitive as it was irrepressible. That authority was compassion. It exceeded the boundaries of propriety and ignored the possibility of hostility or rejection. A need was in evidence and the ability to meet that need issued its own insistent authority.

Compassion moves where courage fears to go. It knows no limitations, needs no underwriting, requires no reserves, is unflaggingly indefatigable, does not know how to quit or retreat, and demands no reward or praise. It conspicuously springs from guileless motivation. Any benevolent act emanating from selfish intents did not find its source in compassion, for compassion and selfishness are mortal enemies. Compassion is divine while egotism is carnal. It, as one of love's many faces, "seeks not her own" (SEE 1 Corinthians 13:5).

God's Word incontrovertibly establishes "love one for another" as the foremost test of Christian identity (SEE John 13:35). It is not great preaching, profound teaching, astute administration, harmonious musical presentations, liberal financial contributions, powerful personal witnessing, or faithful church attendance that certifies Christian genuineness, but love one for the other. It is that kind of love that seeks the well-being of his peers and fellowlaborers over his own. It is love that feels, that reaches out, that searches for service, that quests for involvement, that lends and gives and dies.

Oh, for a reinstatement in the church of the "sacrificial altar" where lives are lost to the will of God and committed to redemptive expediency! The popular practice of apparently "giving all to Jesus" and still obviously living worldly lives is paralyzing the church. Self-indulgences have produced a spiritual sterility that necessarily limits, and at times entirely eliminates, redemptive productivity. Pleasure seeking, with its lecherous impotency, that has been historically rejected by the church as debilitating, has gnawed fatal wounds into the vitals of commitment and dedication. Satan through Hollywood, has often succeeded in causing the church to think that she can be glamorous and glorious at the same time; that she can be popular and powerful too; that she can be rid of reproach and still remain redemptive; that she can indeed partake of carnal substance and still produce spiritual strength; that she can bring to birth effortlessly, painlessly, tearlessly, and without sacrifice or cost.

Alas, it is empty euphoria, and amazing anesthesia, and a damning dream! The law of life is forever established as product by pain, realization by rigor, subsistence by sacrifice, success by suffering, and winning by weeping. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (SEE Psalms 126:5). A tearless people are powerless and without advocacy, for only those who importune and persevere are the recipients of divine intervention. "God shall avenge His elect who cry day and night unto him" (SEE Luke 18:7).

In Gethsemane, Jesus delivered. He carried through. This was no dress rehearsal or dramatized prelude to history in the making. In reality, the battle for mankind's redemption was won when Jesus Christ finally rose from His knees and simply stated to sleeping disciples, "... the hour is come ... rise up, let us go ..." (SEE Mark 14:41, 42). In a sense and in the Father's eyes, the crucifixion, though necessary to the finalizing of human atonement, was anti-climatic. The Calvary that followed Gethsemane was an act predetermined hours earlier. The earthly issue of what had to be done and that it would be done, was settled in the will and mind of the Son of God at a point in time and place known only to the Father and His Son. In the everlasting annals of infinite consciousness, it is recorded for creatures of all time to eventually witness and reverence.

It is of no small note that such a portentous determination was supported by Jesus' tears. The atmosphere of our eternal salvation was that of sweat, groans, and tears -- the effectual embellishments of intercession. What a contrast to the modern concept of perfumed, propitious religious posture! We can sweat to play, but not to pray. We can cry over lost lovers, lost income, lost health, and lost possessions, but it is viewed by many as embarrassing emotionalism to weep over lost souls! Weeping and groaning is viewed by the contemporary church at large as emotional impropriety, unnecessary, and extreme. It is unique, to be sure, for there is little of it, but it is far from unnecessary and extreme. Jesus said that the hard cases could only be corrected by prayer and fasting (SEE Matthew 17:21). That illustrious army traditionally known as "prayer warriors" has been replaced largely by "devotion-time warriors," "prayer cell warriors," "prayer retreat warriors," and the like. More seems to be spoken and written about prayer than ever before, and that is good, but agonizing needs to fill the various forms of prayer with life and power and practice.

Paul draws out of the Gethsemane scene (SEE Hebrews 5:7) a definite reference to the soul cry of Jesus as He sought the Father's face in the universe's fiercest struggle. Listed is an interesting comparison of that experience from five different paraphrases and translations.

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" (KING JAMES).

"In the days of His flesh, when He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and Who was heard because of His piety" (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD).

"Christ, in the days when He was a man on earth, appealed to the One Who could save Him from death in desperate prayer and the agony of tears" (J. B. PHILLIPS).

"Yet while Christ was here on earth He pleaded with God, praying with tears and agony of soul to the only One Who could save Him from death" (LIVING BIBLE).

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One Who could save Him from death" (NEW INTERNATIONAL).

Some would conclude that since Jesus is our intercessor in heaven, and since He has already paid the horrible price of soul agony in the garden, and since no one else could possibly suffer and endure the degree and burden and concern as He did, such weeping and travail by any other human is unnecessary, out of place, and, in fact, futile. If such reasoning is true, Paul must have been very misguided then, for tearful intercession was clearly evidenced in his life and ministry.

He said, "... from the first day that I came into Asia I have been ... serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears" (SEE Acts 20:18, 19).

His ministry among the Ephesians was often accompanied by weeping. "Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears" (SEE Acts 20:31). Paul evidently was moved upon as he taught and preached. He punctuated his messages with tearful pleadings and passionate warnings.

His writing also was accompanied by weeping, as he says in 2 Corinthians 2:4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears ..." Anguish of heart! What words of description for concern! Paul, the prince of writers, his great heart breaking over the carnality, immaturity, and instability of the Corinthian Christians, was weeping as he wrote.

Again, in writing to the Phillipian church, he refers to accompanying tears as he teaches, preaches, prays and warns. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (SEE Phillipians 3:18).

Clearly, in both the lives of our Lord and the Apostle Paul, concern and compassion surfaced as weeping. It was a positive, valuable force in the pursuit of accomplishing tasks of incalculable dimensions. When choices and enactments of universal proportions were encountered, the resolutions were effected by a powerful brokenness of spirit and in an agony of

soul. Theirs was not the crying of confused consternation or distraught despair, but that of bleeding bravery that overcame solitary sieges and triumphed in the brutal battlefields of finite frailty.

A weeping will controlled by the Holy Spirit is a fearsome fighter. It does not blindly beat the air all the while rapidly depleting measured strength in futile fusillades of shadow boxing, but rather repeatedly and effectively assaults the damning legions of wicked spirits. Such persons refuse to let friends and relatives go to Hell uncontested and make it their business to discover and disarm the demonic captors who bind the lost in their blindness. Intercessors cannot break the chains of sin that shackle their loved ones, only the Deliverer of captives can do that, but they can relentlessly rattle the chains with which they are bound. They cannot be denied admission to the death-row of lost souls where the prisoners await judgment and penalty. It is admittedly territory controlled by Satan, but creatively and provisionally reclaimable by Jesus Christ and His church. Hallelujah!

At every point where the precious blood of Jesus has been exposed, there is a pleading place. Jerry McCauley, the redeemed alcoholic of New York's Water Street Mission, vowed that he would build a mission at the gates of Hell if it were possible. Physically that is an impossibility, but vicariously the saints can set up intercession stations all the way from Hell's gates to Heaven's, for there is a trail of efficacy in the blood of the Lamb spanning that entire distance. Until human destiny is settled by death or reprobation, there is reason for and value in intercession.

When such possibility of maximum loss or gain is starkly obvious, how can so few Christians be thus involved? How can the provisions of atonement and reconciliation fail to inspire consistent and passionate pleading in behalf of perishing people? There can only be one answer and that is disinterest by preoccupation. We are what we think and we do what we love.

It seems that God's eyes search out every generation, every nation, every congregation, and every family for some individual who will "stand in the gap" and "make up the hedge." The weepers are so few and the criers so rare. "Who will go for us?" is not a divine query limited in its presentation just to preachers and missionaries. The call to spend hours and days and nights and mealtimes in agonizing prayer is to every Christian. Who will go to his secret closet? Who will make it his life's calling? Who will spend and be spent without regard for reward or recognition? Who will love as Jesus loved?

RATTLING THE DEVIL'S CHAINS

I stooped and peered in the gloomy cell,
Discerning the occupants was hard to tell.
When my vision adjusted, I could see
That they were people just like me.

Restlessly moving with sad, vacant eyes
Were persons varied by age and size.
Why were they there? Why not come out?
I wondered, and suppressed a shout.

A closer look revealed that they
Were bound and shackled in such a way
That getting out could never be
Accomplished without great ability.

Each one had tried himself to free
By personal effort and energy.
But every try by might and will
Caused the shackles to tighten still.

It was clear to see as I walked in
That the fetters tight were those of sin.
What fear and helplessness met my stare!
Those blind and bound imprisoned there!

"They may be helpless, but not I!"
Rang out my fervent, swelling cry.
"I have no power to release these men
But I can yell and shout 'till when.

"Almighty God will visit this tomb
And illuminate both mind and room.
Together we will break this spell
Originating in sin's dark Hell!"

A way to freedom can be paved
For captives who want to be saved.
The saints can powerfully open the way
If they will intercede and pray.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 9

You Can Throw "Cherrith" At Me

This lisping invitation came from the orchard foreman's young grandson, who was nearly hidden by the foliage and branches of a nearby cherry tree. The sincere request was both sincere and unusual, for the negative aspects of cherry throwing had been unhappily evidenced in all of our recent conversations.

My two older sisters and I had encountered considerable displeasure from other young cherry pickers who delighted in laughing and poking fun at those "holy roller" Boone kids. At that time it seemed that anyone who left the old life of sin and lived a vital, effective, separated Christian life was commonly termed a "holy roller." Because we didn't attend moving picture

shows or the school dances, we were thus classified. If that is some of the price of holy living, it is a small matter, but at the time to three teenagers, the mockery was hard to correlate with "doing the right thing" by following the Lord and the church rules.

Those with whom we worked were mostly Junior and Senior high school acquaintances who individually tolerated our friendships but now they, being all together, were discovering mutual enjoyment by calling out slighting insults. Alone, or face to face without the intervening cover of limbs and leaves, they would have lacked the courage for such unkind mockery, but we were not mature enough to perceive that. What did register in our minds was that we three "goody-goody church kids" had been selected as targets for unpleasant heckling. Neither did mere taunts seem to satisfy their desire for fun, for soon cherries began to pelt our trees. There was no physical injury involved, for few if any cherries penetrated the leaves and branches of the trees in which we were picking. It was the insults and derisions that hurt, and Satan really knew how to "rub the salt" into the adolescent wounds being opened by over-sensitivity and the desire for acceptance.

Whether we reciprocated in the cherry throwing or not, I don't recall. I do remember that my older sister approached the foreman at lunch-time, explained the situation and requested that we be allowed to pick in a separate area of the orchard. He wisely agreed and assigned us to a distant section with row after row of colorful Bing cherry trees. The immediate problem was solved, but the hurt and unhappiness remained in our minds and pointedly dominated our conversation. We were embarrassed and insulted at the animosity demonstrated by their throwing cherries at us. We had been hired before most of them and had been doing our work well and diligently. They were not only deliberately being mean to us but were getting others to think badly of us and, in the process, were failing to do what they were being paid to do, as we all were being paid by the hour. You can't get many cherries in the bucket while cunningly positioning and repositioning the ladder in an effort to carry on a fascinating fruit warfare. All of this and lots more was being "hashed and rehashed" verbally and openly, assuming that we were far from any listening ears.

It was at this point that our young, lisping friend called out of an adjoining cherry tree, "You can throw 'cherrith' at me. I don't care." We all three assured him that it wasn't our desire to throw cherries at him or anyone else, for that matter. He eventually came over to our tree, passed the time of day a bit and merrily went on his way after realizing that we were not going to stop working in order to play games with him.

During the ensuing years since that experience I have often recalled the uniqueness of the lad's willingness to become a target for flying cherries. His motives were not hard to determine, for a long summer was ahead of him to be spent in the company with a very busy Grandma and Grandpa who didn't have much time for play. The young men and women who were employed by his grandfather were working (supposedly) while at the farm and, even if they hadn't been occupied, were at an age when they generally ignored kids, for they were too much like little brothers and sisters. This resulted in the boss's lisping grandson being more of a pain in the neck than anything else. Consequently, he was courting attention and involvement even if it came in the form of conflict and unpleasantness. His debatable reasoning must have been that a fighting fellowship was more desirable than a safe solitude.

His willingness to be used for punishment and malignity, if not prudent, was at least admirable. It was impressive to me then and remains so today. His motive was no doubt selfish, for he sought companionship at the expense of comfort, but his action to become a willing object of discredit in the place of someone else must be viewed as courageous and noteworthy. Few will tolerate being misused, much less deliberately invite it.

I have heard a few professed Christians say, "I don't think God expects me to be a doormat for anyone. I won't let them wipe their feet on me!" I have observed hundreds of others who didn't say the express words, but certainly revealed them in their eyes, countenances, and reactions. It is increasingly uncommon to discover saints who willingly discount slights, irritations, disagreements, discomforts, and insinuations with grace and magnanimity. The adage, "If looks could kill, I'd be dead" too often finds expression and, shamefully at times, acceptability in the body of believers. How sad it is for such actions to be considered Christian! It is an error of great consequence, for if redeeming grace does not relate to these very moral inadequacies, there is no reason to commend it to sinners who act in the same manner. A person must be offered something better than he has or he will understandably keep what he has.

One of the significant pluses for salvation is the change that it effect in our attitudes towards ourselves and towards our acquaintances. Typically, most decisions are made in the light of how it will favorably affect us or our loved ones. "What's in it for me?" is easily the most frequent mental consideration when a decision is to be made. That is changed when Jesus Christ truly comes into a life, and the law of love becomes the basis for all relationships. Love for God, then others, and lastly self emerges as the declension of grace's outflow. The children's chorus, "Jesus and others and you, what a wonderful way to spell JOY," is much more than an idealistic jingle, it is a Christian characteristic. Where Christ is, that nature is evidenced. Where it is not operative, He is either absent or has been dethroned. When our feelings, our opinions, and having our way predominates our thinking, God and others are set aside and that is as far from righteousness as Satan ever gets. His sin was pride and his dam nation was the failure to seek a divine correction. Christians should abhor pride as they would the devil and submit it in believing haste to the cleansing adequacy of Jesus' blood.

When pride is eliminated, there is found the will to be a "second mile," "turn the other cheek" follower of Jesus. Without a crucifixion, a death to self, (SEE Galatians 2:20) such sweetness in response to undeserved unkindness appears to be foolhardy, unreasonable, and impossible. An answer to the oft-asked question, "Does this mean that a Christian has no rights?" is then unimportant, for what is important is that our response to any given situation is in the character of Jesus, that His interests are served, that a brother or sister is uninjured, and that an unsaved observer or participant is influenced Godward. How differently we react when these considerations form the criteria for response! It is borne of real love for His way and a genuine concern for the feelings and development of others.

Accordingly, differences of opinions that arise among God's workmen must be treated to the rule of relevancy. If a moral principle is not involved, there exists no "right or wrong way" in the issue, and can conceivably be accomplished in as many ways as there are opinions without any evil commissions on anyone's part. The color of paint for the sanctuary, whether the new pews are

padded or not, the name brand of the new church organ, and a thousand other similar decisions that local congregations must make are issues that have no "rightness or wrongness" in themselves and can be determined by majority decisions. The wrong occurs when someone doesn't get his way and proceeds to brand the decision wrong just because it didn't conform to his judgment. From that point, trouble abounds. The malcontent seldom nurses his displeasure in solitude, taking it to God in prayer and intercession. If he did, most of the time, it would discover resolution at that point and progress no further. Instead, such persons usually show their unhappiness by (1) the silent treatment, or (2) the martyr complex (you all hurt me), or (3) the self-pity syndrome (I see that I am not wanted or needed), or (4) the get even attitude (I'm resigning), and these inevitably lead to (5) the caucus crusade, that is, the surrounding of themselves with those of similar temperaments. They gravitate to one another like flies to rotting flesh, glutting themselves on carnal carrion that smells of death and extends the decomposition to others.

After a quarter century of pastoring, it is my unhappy conclusion that ninety-five percent of all so-called "not compromising" and "Bless God, I'm going to stand up and be counted if I have to stand alone!" are contentions for "my way" rather than ones for the right. Another four percent is properly motivated but ill-advised, improperly executed, and poorly-timed, and the remaining one percent is conducted wisely in a Christlike manner, out of genuine concern for the health of the body and is a valid contention for right based on truth. Dear God, give us many more such one-percenters!

How desperately each local body in Christ needs more long sufferers, more who are "kind one to the other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (SEE Ephesians 4:32), those who in the image of Jesus love to the degree that it "works no ill to his neighbor" (SEE Romans 13:10), more who strives to "please his neighbor for his good to edification" (building up) (SEE Romans 15:2), those who "seek not his own, but his neighbor's wealth," and who "in lowliness of mind esteem others better than himself" and looks "not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (SEE Ephesians 2:3, 4).

In the view of an unsaved world, "giving in," surrendering so-called rights, letting others have their ways, relating to others in an humble, unassertive manner, and going the "second mile" are all considered to be intimidation, stupidity, and weakness. More and more the church is acting and reacting like the world it seeks to save. If there are few or no philosophical differences between them, why should anyone consider a change? It would be like two political candidates, one a Republican and the other a Democrat, supporting the same platforms. In such a case, the entire political system becomes suspect and the voters wonder for whom they should vote or if they should bother to vote at all. The Christian way of thinking is different from the surrounding world social structure, especially in the area of fairness and equity.

Perhaps the greatest attraction to the cross is the seeming injustice of it all. The Giver of life was dying. An almighty God was allowing Himself to be manipulated by human hands. A Creator was being killed by His own creation. Injustice was apparently triumphing over justice. Innocence was suffering. Holiness was being sacrificed for the sins of the world. Pain was the reward for purity, truth was traded for treachery, and the greatest Right of all time suffered the greatest wrong.

In the light of such Triune tolerance that cried from a breaking heart, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," it seems that the least His followers could do is to find patience, understanding, forbearance, and conciliation in their hearts, "especially to the household of faith."

An educator friend of mine related the following incident that occurred during the closing activity of a University's sociology class. The instructor had planned for the last week a class outing combining a hike with a picnic. He had chosen as the outing site a small, but beautiful nearby mountain, and on the appointed day the group gathered at a pre-selected staging area chattering and joking in happy anticipation. All class members were properly prepared for both the hike and the picnic carrying various assortments of interesting looking food baskets and vacuum containers. Each was correctly briefed as to the course of the trail and the point of meeting at the top of the mountain in the event that the group became separated during the climb. With considerable eagerness and good-natured challenges of "I'll beat you all to the top!" the climb was begun.

This sociology class was typical in that the members were from different backgrounds, varied in sex and age and were at different levels of academic development and physical condition. Some of them were young, consistent joggers and some were older, clerical and instructional people whose pursuits were predominantly mental and not physical. Obviously, there existed a wide physical variation that resulted in many "jack rabbit" starts quickly \ dissipating to the "tortoise-like" trudging.

When the last student, one who was underactive and over weight, arrived at the top nearly two hours later than the first comers, there was a great "hurrah" to the success of their hike and it was time to enjoy the picnic. When all were rested and filled to capacity and ready to retrace their steps to the cars waiting below, the instructor had a surprise for them by stating, "Tomorrow we are going to do this again, for today, as a class, we miserably flunked. The attainment of a goal is important, but not all important. The methods we use to get to our goals are important, too. Some of us raced to the top with comparative ease and exhilaration, while others struggled up with great difficulty. Let's see if we can correct our thinking and methods tomorrow.

A pensive and subdued class assembled on the morrow for a second hike and picnic. Another purposeful start was made, but this time they moved forward as a group. None surged ahead, but the stronger and faster of them urged and helped the less athletic and conditioned along. The encouragement and "esprit' de corps" placed new determination into the efforts of the slower ones. Strong arms and helping hands pulled and boosted over the hard to negotiate places. The pooling of scouting procedures eliminated backtracking and discovered the shortest and easiest routes to travel.

In great jubilation they burst together, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart upon the top of the mountain. What a surprise it was to learn that it had taken only an additional half an hour to reach the top on this climb over the time used by the fastest hikers the preceding day! To make the victory sweeter was the realization that they were all here, no one was left behind, no one had been left alone, no one had been frightened or embarrassed or put down, no one was first and no one was last. They had reached the top together and everyone was happy!

Many church people could profit enormously from that sociology teacher's lesson. Are we running the Christian race to claim the prize in solitude? Is it possible for a saint to "breeze by" a stumbling, struggling brother and ignore his rate of progress? It is not, for we are a body, a unit, and when one member suffers, all members suffer. Furthermore, when one member of the body is weak or injured, the other members support, strengthen and fight for it. The love of Jesus causes love for His church. It causes us to strengthen, not magnify and exploit, one another's weaknesses. It tolerates, understands, sympathizes, minimizes, and ministers to the infirmities and inabilities of its co-laborers. It bears long and is kind.

Jesus pronounced a blessing on the peacemakers (SEE Matthew 5:9) and said that they would be called the children of God. The unspiritual do not perceive the difference between peacemaking and compromising, and therefore do neither. Contrary to popular opinion, there is more personal cost and sacrifice in peacemaking than in so-called "standing for the right." This is, of course, a personal conclusion, but has been reached after witnessing many experiences in both areas. Most often those who vigorously and firmly state their intentions to stand up and be counted on certain controversial church issues and problems, have strangely faded into obscurity when the pressure was on and the count was taken. The aggressive, vocal type who are quick to brand and expose and categorize are usually as quick to "leave the ship" and "jump on another bandwagon" when the pull is on and when dogged, unheralded faithfulness is required.

When there is a genuine call for standing alone, these most often quietly slip away and very often mysteriously appear on the majority side after all, having reversed themselves and are found to be shouting against the very banner they had previously supported.

Strangely, this is the very charge laid against the peacemaker. It is said that he will do anything to avoid a fight and to spread oil on troubled waters. Such is not the case at all. The difference is to be discovered in which issues are worth fighting for and which ones are not. It is here firmly stated that most issues that engender fussing are seen in review to be so unimportant that they are quickly forgotten, and the fussers themselves will admit it. Again it is stated that the primary reason for squabbles, condemnations, assertions, and "finger pointing" is more supportive of "my way" than it is the right way.

The peacemaker says, "I think my way is better, but let's do it your way. The important matter is to get the task accomplished." He understands that kingdom building is bigger and more important than personalities or preferences. In such a frame of mind, he is committed to any concession and conciliation insofar as it does not violate the Scriptures or offend the operation of the Holy Spirit. In the same manner he finds it neither objectionable or demeaning to fill a servant's place in spirit and in action. Giving in to another person's point of view or method of operation is more Christlike, if it does not violate a moral principle, than the stout, unyielding maintenance of one's own way as "the best way or the only way."

When Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples feet, He said, "Know ye what I have done to you?" (SEE John 13:12). He then explained the unique, unilateral relationship of servanthood that would exist characteristically among Christians. He showed that each would be serving, honoring, and seeking to please one another. None would make the other his servant.

Each would be the servant to all. That is the standard of Christ for His Church for all time, and it is heavenly.

WE SELDOM KNOW

Behind the face with a wide, cheerful smile
And an exuberant, pleasant look,
Is often a hurt growing all of the while
As concealed as an unopened book.

The outside appears very colorful and bright
Suggesting great excitement and cheer,
While down underneath is a sorrowful sight
Aching heart with many an unshed tear.

We seldom know from the appearances we see
What is really being felt down deep,
The well-being that undoubtedly seems to be
Covers sorrows that never can sleep.

At the very moment a smile appears
Failure can be rending a soul,
Just because there are no flowing tears
Fear can still be levying its toll.

A pleasant bearing and a "happy way
Doesn't always signal "no pain,"
But rather has trained itself to say
Good things in sunshine and rain.

When all on the surface seems to be well
No suffering, disappointment or loss,
The truth discovered oft could tell
Of bearing a heavy cross.

The laughter and mirth so easily made
Often covers sadness and sighing,
That quietly assumes the debt to be paid
On dreams shattered and dying.

The confident faith, solid and true
That speaks of great trust and rest,
May at the moment be experiencing
Its greatest ever test.

The step that is firm, the arm that is strong

Always helping you,
Is often battered all day long
And sleepless the whole night through.

Even the one who most successful appears
In support, stability and control,
Often sheds deep, unbidden tears
In the heart of a burdened soul.

So as our mutual lives are spent
Through all life's changing years,
We seldom really know what's meant
By all the smiles and tears.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 10

Fifty-Fifty

"But it isn't fair that I do most of the giving and she gets her way most of the time!" These words that pastors hear so often came from a weeping, frustrated, young lady who was not only highly gifted and splendidly spirited, but was rapidly developing into an effective kingdom builder. Her immediate co-worker was equally gifted and highly motivated, but was the kind of a "high roller" who typically had a project, that should have been corporately designed and effected, all planned, mapped out and nearly executed before it ever came to the level of discussion or consultation.

My "weeper" was every bit as capable, as is always the case, much more so in certain areas, but her thought processes were slower, she was dispositionally easy going and pleasant-natured, and wasn't as meticulously organized. It was clearly a "Mutt and Jeff" relationship, the kind that, though opposites, complimented one another while at the same time constantly "rubbing the fur the wrong way."

Some very wise person observed that if two people agree in everything, one is unnecessary. That point is certainly well taken, but since such totally agreeable persons are rare, if not completely nonexistent, means of discovering mutuality must be ardently and repeatedly pursued. Compatibility can be achieved in at least two basic ways. One way is by mutual consent, and the other is by the one partner making continual concessions to domination by the other. The ideal is for an equality of yielding to one another's wishes. The problem with idealism is its nearly total estrangement from practicality.

Multitudes of individuals would be completely overwhelmed with the responsibility of making decisions half of the time. Theirs is a "pick up the pieces and put them back together again" temperament that, in spite of envisioning and desiring leadership roles, finds comfort in and works the best in supportive assignments. Conversely, the energetic achiever would be dismally

frustrated if he would be limited to making a mere fifty percent of the decisions affecting him and his activities.

Frequently it is not a matter of one person being better, smarter, or more experienced than his companion, but rather one of temperament. Some minds operate in advance or in anticipation of circumstances, while others are programmed to cope with developments as they occur or even after they happen. It is not only by wise, Providential design that we are all different so that we can complement one another's strengths and weaknesses, but we need to fix that realization in our minds and never let it lapse. Many very valuable workers are sacrificed to the greedy god of the "superlative" as they become burned out nervous wrecks trying to equal parental or peer standards of achievement. There is a place for constantly striving after excellence and there is a time to recognize one's limitations. Unfortunately, the person is yet to arise who can properly define and communicate that illusive, appropriate, and delicate balance. However, there are some time-tested observations and conclusions that are meaningful if we will apply them.

One can be best explained by a report I read some year's ago about a college registrar who had compiled statistics from answers by parents to this question, "Do you consider your child a leader or a follower?" Only one of the nearly two thousand parents polled considered his child a follower. All of the rest judged them to be leaders. That's a real insight into the disparity that exists between actual and supposed abilities of offspring by their parents. It would be interesting to know what the students themselves thought about their leadership qualities. The fact is that most of us are very ordinary with only marginal differentials in a total points comparison. It would be a victory of infinite magnitude if the rivalry that egotism generates could be laid to rest in a common grave of Christian comprehension, so that all men could see themselves really as equals, differing only in temperaments. We should not need to be reminded that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (SEE Galatians 3:28). One need only be thoughtful to recognize that abilities are endowments, not wages. They are stewardships, not ownerships. One cannot accrue credit merely because he is gifted. The very nature of benevolence requires humility on the part of the receiver, not self-esteem. The only challenger or competitor individual saints should have in their minds is improvement. The purpose to be a better person for God's glory and by His grace should be his primary and sufficient motivation. His efforts should be directed toward being better than himself, better than the man he was yesterday, not better than his neighbor or co-laborer.

To depreciate the gifts of another, or even one's own for that matter, is to discredit the Giver. In a definite sense, we are not only the custodians of our God-given faculties and abilities, but also those of our co-workers in Jesus. It is true that we shall give an account of the deeds done in the body, that every work shall be tried by fire to see what sort it is. It is true that we alone shall be accountable for the degree of a gift's development. But so shall we be accountable for the effect our influence has had on the development of those with whom we have labored. Anytime we combine redemptive efforts, this "brother's keeper" factor lays the weight of responsibility upon all who are involved in the endeavor. When it is wisely recognized that what we do corporately necessitates a "measuring of minds," that is, a determining of "who can do the best where?", we are on the road to some fruitful teamwork. Add to that a personal interest by each member of the team in every other team mate's development and productivity, and a bumper crop is forthcoming. Powerful production is possible if who gets the credit is sublimated to team effort and operation.

Some persons have the capacity to give more to a relationship than the other involved member. When this is perceived, a limited fifty percent contribution is not only inadequate, but wrong. God brings into most partnerships persons so enabled, expecting them to do more of the understanding, more of the giving, more of the reaching out to the other participant, because he is dispositionally capable of doing so. When such persons refuse to go the extra miles, and to be the overture maker, and to be the "goat," and to spread oil on the troubled waters, he thwarts God's plan for his life and fails to fulfill his divinely intended role for his partner in the process.

Though this thinking is addressed to the co-operative endeavors of church workers, its application into the marriage relationship is obvious. Almost all marital failures could have been averted if this reasoning could have been understood and accepted. One partner nearly always has the capacity to reach out further to the other. This does not make one member of the team better or stronger than the other, it is a matter of dispositional capacity. He who by nature finds it easier to "start the conversation," or "open the discussion" or "build the bridge to communication" is the one who should do it. He should not assume that "I did it the last time there was a misunderstanding, so it's his turn!" There simply are no "turns" when it comes to the maintenance of a relationship.

Bible reading people have powerful validation for this important concept as portrayed in Jesus' answer to Peter's question, "Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (SEE Matthew 18:21). In Peter's mind that number "seven" was a display of major magnanimity and undisputed dimension. He was certain that "seven times" would doubly exceed propriety and requirement. Admittedly, seven times would be highly commendable by any social standard, past or present. How surprised Peter must have been to discover, that his proposed magnanimity was below par and unacceptable to Jesus!

Peter's concept of forgiveness unveiled its nature of mere humanness in the preposition "until." That placed a limit on the act. When forgiveness finds its end, the numbers of prior invocations become unimportant. What matters how many times I have forgiven if I cease to forgive? At the point of unforgiveness is the death of forgiveness, thus obviating any and all previous acts. Forgiveness is a spirit, a characteristic and is therefore as intuitive as smiling or laughing. This is to say that the act of forgiveness comes from a spirit of forgiveness that is constantly operative. Even a child recognizes that when Jesus placed the number of times forgiveness should be enacted at seventy times seven, He was in reality establishing an open end to the act. He was setting forth the character of forgiveness. He was revealing the divine quality of it. He was saying that forgiving operates every time that there arises a need for it. Praise the Lord!

And so it is much the same in our relating to one another's needs. To see a need is to be indebted to it inasmuch as it is morally in one's power to fulfill it. Accordingly, to assume liability for only fifty percent of the "give and take" aspect in a relationship is lowering one's conduct to a strictly sinner level. "And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same" (SEE Luke 6:33). Jesus is saying that more understanding, more patience, more interest and love is expected of a Christian than an unsaved person. If two Christians involve these attitudes toward one another as they work together, a general atmosphere of harmony and mutuality is certain to occur. It is only when we stop to calculate how many times

we have "given in" or "let the other person do it his way" that feelings of unfairness arise and assert themselves.

The truth is that rarely is there a right or wrong manner in which to perform a redemptive task compared to the many times that it seems to be that way. The problems most often accrue from the differences between "your way or my way" and not the right or wrong way. Having "My way" is most often the wrong way even if I am persuaded it is a better way when maintaining it would offend a co-worker or cause a strain in a relationship. This thinking may not fit into our feelings as much as it complements wisdom and manifests grace. In simple terms it is a matter of placing a brother's or sister's feelings of well-being before our own. Dear saints of God, isn't this a witness of a changed heart and crucified self?

One of my favorite passages of Scripture beautifully supports such a selfless disposition. "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (SEE Ephesians 4:32). Two more are, "Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith we may edify (build up) another." "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification (construction). (SEE Romans 14:19 and 15:2). And so it is that to have a Christian heart means to exhibit tolerance that is free from condescension. It is having the ability to tactfully concede without needing to treacherously capitulate. Concession, if a moral principle is not involved, is not so much a demanding of one's own solutions and opinions as much as it is an acceptance of the fact that his co-worker's contribution may be a better one.

Concession, for whatever the reason, is viewed by many sincere believers as a mortal spiritual anathema certain to result in the destruction of personal fidelity to truth. They envision every trying circumstance, every test of opinions, every consideration of options, as a life and death investigation into personal loyalty, and therefore face each decision with a pre-determined, abrupt, "no way." They perceive no difference in the making of a concession to a different method or change of ways than in a capitulation to carnal unwholesomeness. The conviction to stand firmly and resolutely in support of truth is both courageous and commendable, but carrying the "implacable" concept into every situation and decision will create a despotic, regimental atmosphere into them that alienates rather than unites the church. Conviction need not be cruel and fervency need not be ferocious. It is possible to be kind and firm simultaneously. It is possible to be ardently loyal to truth as one understands it and still sincerely allow concessions in hundreds of interpersonal circumstances that includes no infidelity and encourages corporate productivity.

This is not to suggest that small matters are unimportant or that a different moral measurement can be used in different relationships. We must see, for instance, that "giving in" to the variety of flowers that are to be placed in the church planter is not the same as a re-cataloguing of lying from sin to sickness. One is clearly a rejection of a biblical standard while the other is a matter of personal preference. All Christians should believe that lying is sin while there may be as many preferences of planter flowers as there are members on the flower committee. My choice would be roses, if I had a voice in the matter, but there have never been roses in the planter. I haven't even been asked to be on the committee so that I could state my preference, but the petunias are lovely and we all enjoy them. Just discussing this sounds childishly silly, but far lesser differences of opinions have brought alienation among God's people in the past for lack of a

simple, considerate concession to the wishes of a fellow worker. It needs to be repeated that most "not giving in is more a desire to have one's own way or being too stubborn to change than it is a Spirit-led contention for fidelity to biblical truth.

Some honest heart searching needs to be done here. We need to ask ourselves frequently, "Is doing it my way critical to the health and success of God's work? If it is not done my way, if my understanding of the situation is disregarded, will souls be lost? Will the resultant injuries (of a strong contention for one's way) to the other saints involved bring about a greater ultimate harm?" Brother and Sister, if it is just a matter of feelings and not fidelity, we had better humble ourselves, treat each other as the servants we are, take the heavy end of the load, "look upon the things of others and not on our own," "in honor preferring one another," and uncondescendingly allow, encourage, and facilitate our co-worker's plans and points of view. It is a time-tested fact that not only will the "machinery" run more smoothly, but such a conceding person's own solutions and opinions will not "die the death." They will often be strangely sought out and gratefully put to use.

INCREASE ME

If I can lift a brother's load,
Assist him as he walks life's road,
The act is more than charity,
Accruing strength and time's duplicity.

There's great value to be discovered
In deeds allegedly unrecovered.
When in the doing one soon finds
His own enrichment of various kinds.

One's own task done along with his friend's
Builds satisfaction that never ends.
Investment in others automatically pays
Dividends in unexpected ways.

What seems at the time given away
Turns up as peace the very same day.
An effort expended with a smile
Returns contentment all of the while.

Good is not lost, even though abused,
For in the heart of him so used
There grows the flower of willingness
Rooted in love and selflessness.

So if by working with someone
Two tasks at once can be done,
A double blessing is to be
Accomplished in good company.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 11

How Many Masters?

Twelve French rifles were solemnly shouldered, expertly leveled, and poignantly aimed at a central target. All but one bore lethal charges of powder encased by brazen shells and tipped with small missiles of destiny. Twelve pairs of eyes peered nearly breathlessly down the rear sights, to the front ones and on down the line of trajectory to the gentle rising and falling of a woman's bosom. The utter calmness of her manner lent an uncanniness, and unrealness to the scene. Indeed, the mocking smile on her face coupled with the confident refusal to be sacked (the placing of a black hood over her head), presented an atmosphere of composure and congeniality suggesting accommodation.

Crossing and recrossing the minds of the twelve riflemen composing this day's Parisian firing squad, as well as the officials and various other execution onlookers, was the nagging inquiry, "Can this beautiful, innocent-appearing woman really be guilty of espionage, or is it all a terrible mistake?" In seconds some well-placed bullets would sanguinely shatter the cameo-skinned rib cage and pierce the delicate heart muscle, leaving the residual only bits of quivering vessels and valves. The awesome spectre of instant and violent death honed some of the witnessing sense to a fine degree of detailed attention while the impending tragedy of it all seemed to strangely anesthetize others.

At the challenging age of forty-one, beautiful Mata Hari, the dancing "Star of the East," as she was flamboyantly billed, the sometimes mistress of wealthy lords, government officials, and military officers, stood manacled and shrouded before a French firing squad. The condemnation of espionage complicity in at least five European governments had been determined against her and the day of reckoning, October 15, 1917, had come. Her clandestine political and military involvements were so hopelessly international that she evidently supported just one loyalty, and that was only to Mata Hari, herself. So many revelations of official intimacies and indiscretions with her had surfaced at the trial that some important personages had "disappeared," others were disgraced for life, a few couldn't endure either alternative choosing to take their lives by their own hands, and all who had ever known and associated with her officially were permanently embarrassed. Still others joined in the "condemnation chorus" seeking by accusation to establish their own innocence in the relationship with Mata Hari.

Seconds after hot lead blasted her life away, a prison physician pronounced her dead and the warden gravely intoned, "Is there any person to claim the corpse?" Only the sighing of a gentle breeze breasted by distant animal sounds returned an answer. Not one of those persons who had received her body's sensual favors over a span of twenty years and from half that many nations would claim her body now. No funeral arrangements had been made and what remained of her smashed and bleeding body was lifted into a rough box for transportation to one of the Paris hospitals where medical students would cut it up and examine its various parts.

Margaretha Zelle, Mata Hari's birth name, was born in humble circumstances to a Dutch carpenter and his wife, but Holland's pastoral countryside was too dull and unglamorous for a young girl with the dangerous combination of extreme beauty, an intriguing mind, and a flair for excitement and bright lights. In short years her scheming mind had discovered wealth, extravagant living, attendants to do her bidding, and travel in style to many European and African cities teeming with interesting and exotic sights and sounds. Being a mistress, she was seldom courted openly, but what did that matter? She was the desire of scores of prominent officials and industrialists who rewarded her fabulously with her kind of fare -- fun, fashion and finance -- and that is what she lived for.

Mata Hari was not a spy in the strictest sense of the word. She had no covert grievances with any government. She had no interest in political or philosophical or economical matters whatever. Her philosophy was, "Make Mata happy" and her concept of economy was, "Put it in my paycheck." It mattered not to her whether the stipend was in pounds, francs, rubbles or marcs.

She died the violent death of a spy because she foolishly abandoned loyalty to the whimsical fancies of fashion and fun. Her nefarious motives were self-serving, her goals were no higher than immediate satisfaction, and her life's purpose reached no further than the glamorous present. She mistakenly thought that her well-being was guaranteed because her paramours were wealthy and prestigious. She reasoned that as long as they received what they wanted from her, she would get what she wanted from them. Evidently to her, the breaching of confidences that had been placed in her was secondary and inconsequential. Her only national partiality was to the government that opened the biggest purse.

Most thinking people would judge Mata Hari's double-dealing actions as very foolish. It should have been obvious to her that "playing both ends against the middle" would end in eventual discovery, and that such a discovery would demand severe retribution. That anyone would knowingly walk a pathway leading to certain destruction can only be understood in the recognizing of Satanic deception.

Long before Mata Hari's time, Jesus warned people repeatedly about the folly of seeking the best of both worlds. He said that it cannot be done. Trying to do so is not merely inappropriate or unethical or below standard, it is out of character. When Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [the power of money]" (SEE Matthew 6:24), He was not simply establishing a rule of Christian conduct as much as He was revealing a mark of Christian character. He was not merely saying that "it would be difficult" to struggle against the pull of temporal gain in the pursuit of godly living, and that sometimes we would allow God's supremacy and that sometimes we would, even in our best endeavors, be manipulated by worldly wealth. He was not lifting this statement up as a mere goal to be pursued or as a desired ideal. It is a statement of fact and a clear conclusion. No man can serve two masters.

In a social structure so prevalent with options and alternatives, thank God for biblical declaratives that do not leave us groping, wondering and reflecting! There is no need or room here for rationale. There is no possibility of misunderstanding or profundity or misinterpretation. In any

culture for all time it can only mean one thing. No person can serve two masters. He can't do it because it is impossible. He who tries will not only be frustrated, but unfulfilled and deceived.

The very first of the ten commandments is basic to the keeping of the other nine. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (SEE Exodus 20:3) is that grand commandment. It can be safely believed that if this first one is consistently maintained, the other nine will not be broken. Conversely, if the first is abrogated, others will be also, potentially all of them.

It is interesting to make a comparison of the two aforementioned passages of Scripture. When God gave to the world through Moses the ten commandments, He introduced them by the first, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." He then proceeded to identify the opposite, the false, the counterfeit, or substitute deity that would challenge the existence or worship of the true God. So the second commandment forbade the worship of graven images, idols made of metals, woods or stone. It forbade especially those emblematic of nature, such as the sun, moon, stars, the atmosphere, the earth, the water, or man himself. In short, men were not to worship anything terrestrial or celestial that had been created or made by the Creator.

When the Son of God visited earth for the purpose of man's redemption and addressed Himself to the same matter of idolatry, He said that, "No man can serve two masters" and identified the threat to God's sovereignty and supremacy as "mammon." In the Jewish culture at least, false gods had changed from "graven images" in Moses' day to "mammon" in Jesus' day.

If riches were emblematic of idolatry in Jesus' day, one wonders how much greater influence they are exerting upon the twentieth century church? Certainly the evil aspect of money love remains unchanged. Does increased exposure make one more wary or less of danger or threat? Experience in any circumstance of life certifies the latter. The more accustomed we become to a situation, whether negative or positive, the less we fear it.

Reverend Harry Enty, my college Greek professor, repeatedly emphasized this truth with the catchy quip, "Whatever gets your attention gets you." Whatever gets the most of our interest, time, energy, and wealth is our master. These are time-tested measurements that the youngest and simplest can understand and use to determine whom we serve.

Years ago I heard of an old man in the Kentucky hill country who lived in an isolated but comfortable cabin shared with his only close companion, a faithful yellow dog. His pedigree and parentage were of doubtful discovery, but his loyal companionship to the old miner was undisputed knowledge in the entire countryside. Each morning as the old man walked to work at the mines with his lunch pail under his arm, the yellow dog trotted along at his side. They were inseparable companions. Wherever the old man went -- to work, to the neighbors, or to the store -- the dog was in his company.

Dogs were not allowed at the work site, however, and each day as the two reached a fork in the road, they paused together at a certain spot by the side of the road. There they would part for the day after a pat on the faithful head or a ruffling of the ears. There the grass was worn and trampled down where, five days each week, the yellow dog would patiently wait for the end of another work day and the subsequent appearance of the old miner. On those occasions when

overtime work, a friendly visit, or after work business caused the old man to return later than the accustomed time, the dog never left his appointed watching place, even when the tardiness reached into the late evening or night hours. Rain or shine, stormy or fair, he could be depended upon to greet his master with a wagging tail and a wet-nosed nuzzle. Then the two of them were off to the pleasant cabin where food and rest awaited both man and beast.

On a certain day the old miner became ill on the job, eventually succumbing to his sickness. Friends cared for his needs and saw to his burial. Weeks passed and some neighbors began to wonder about the location and care of the old yellow dog. In all their concern over the old man in his sickness and death, no one had thought to look about the well-being of the animal. An inspection of the cabin revealed no trace of the dog or had any close neighbors seen him around their places. Then acting upon the remembrance of the two companions' daily ritual at the crossroads, the searchers made their way to the waiting place. Surely enough, the dog was there, waiting for his master, only he did not hear or see the approach of the searchers. Mutely testifying to his canine loyalty and faithfulness were some yellow fur and a pitiful pile of bones.

He had not left his post of duty. He had not deserted his vigil, even for needed food, but stayed and waited for the appearance of his master. His great heart beat out its final cadence looking, listening, waiting, and expecting. He did not know enough to reason that his master would want him to leave, to go find food and shelter and care. He was too dumb to preserve his life, but his loyalty leaves humans in awesome salute. Such unstinting faithfulness from a beast causes us to see just how far we have fallen from the character with which God originally endowed us. Animals portray by instinct many commendable traits that humans fail to exhibit with the comparatively lofty instruments of morality and reason. Only a fallen nature could place self-interest above fidelity to God's character and purpose.

The term loyalty, as such, is not found in the Bible, but the virtue of faithfulness is well-known and carries the same basic meaning. God repeatedly ascribed this quality to Himself and particularly in relationship to His dealings and covenants with men. It is significant that His faithfulness is one of the two reasons (the other being His love) why He chose to involve Himself with the human family. He said through Moses in Deuteronomy 7:7, 8, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and hath redeemed you ..."

The observation to follow is not to be considered authoritative, for I am far from a scholar or specialist in Israelism. This passage, in consort with many others, strongly suggests that the nation of Israel was not chosen because of any special biological or psychological excellence they possessed or would possess throughout their generations. God could have used any people of the various clans or tribes living in Abraham's time of history. He never planned to limit His redemptive offer to a small segment of humanity. If we are to view redemptive purposes clearly, the primary focus must be on the Lord and not on the human instrumentality He chose to use through whom to effect those purposes.

Paul said that, ". . . Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ... that no flesh should glory in His presence" (SEE 1 Corinthians 1:26, 29).

It is entirely possible that the people of Israel were the most naturally unlikely persons God could have chosen to effect His designs and will on earth. He told Moses repeatedly that they are "rebellious" and "stiffnecked." "Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you" (SEE Deuteronomy 9:24). It is not reasonable to suppose that God could have used a people more amiable, more teachable, more trustworthy, more dependable and believable? I think so. These people were by nature intelligent, shrewd, headstrong, self-reliant, proud, and ambitious. A look at the list of Jacob's twelve sons and their accompanying characteristics discovers considerable unworthiness, and this by their own father's judgment (SEE Genesis 49). Who better could perceive shadowy character traits than Jacob himself -- the usurper, the schemer, the heel-grasper?

This observation is not intended to demean or sublimate the chosen people of God, for unquestionably, His choice was the best one. These people are esteemed because they are the ones through whom would come the first proclamation of the everlasting gospel, and those who would bear to us the world's Saviour. Indeed, all Christians owe lasting gratitude to them, those "stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword, destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy" (SEE Hebrews 11:37, 38). The idea espoused here is that God wants the world to see His faithfulness rather than the marvelous qualities of men. This was best demonstrated by using a people most disinclined, most dispositionally unfit to yield to and obey His purposes. In the face of their repeated violations, trancies, infidelities and backslidings, He kept His covenants, manifested His love, and fulfilled His will. With earth's most unlikely instruments, God remained faithful.

When these chosen people rebelled against Him, replaced Him in their worship with idols, and turned their backs on Him and His prophets, He reproved, disciplined, and wearied of them, but He never forsook them. He never replaced them with another people or failed to honor a single promise made to them. How unlike humans and how divine! If we are snubbed, discounted, or unrecognized, our inclinations are to leave persons to themselves who act like that. If we have Christian hearts, we love them still and pray for them, but we don't often continue to pursue the relationship. The idea is if they don't want us around or if our presence is undesirable to them, we will accommodate their wishes. This is not so with God. When He makes promises to persons, they can be depended upon because of His faithfulness, a faithfulness that may be, but doesn't have to be, prompted by the possibility of a reciprocation.

The reason for this consideration of God's faithfulness is to lay some lines from it to His followers. How much of the divine character is transferable to human devotion and dedication? Can we expect appreciable, even noticeable, evidences of similar fidelity in the church? I think so, certainly not in dimension, but definitely in nature. The church was promised a "heart of flesh" replacing that old "stony heart" characteristic that was found surfacing so dreadfully and frequently in the Old Testament (SEE Ezekiel 36:26). God requires and expects a total fidelity, a total commitment, a total love and purpose to Him and His will. Men's faithfulness is not perfect like God's or does it have the capacity of His, but it can and should be full and pure.

Some thoughts surrounding faithfulness accompanied me to the church platform on a given Sunday morning early in my pastoral ministry. Recognizing the importance of the Holy Spirit's operation in the presentation of the gospel message while I viewed the waiting congregation, and once more experiencing the weight of "standing between the living and the dead," my heart cried out to God, "Blessed Holy Spirit, help me one more time to deliver the eternal truth that You have laid upon my soul this morning." As I prayed thus, a disquieting thought presented itself. He had so graciously and repeatedly poured out upon His servant needed aid so many times before. Could I expect Him to help me again this service? Perhaps today I would be on my own, using mere human tools. Near panic gripped my being while contemplating the probable results of endeavoring to present redemptive truth without divine assistance. Immediately I was aware of an inner response presented in the form of an unexpected question. "Where are you, Preacher? Aren't you here? Aren't you here every time there is a service announced? As long as you have pastored here, have you ever failed to show up and preach in a service in which you were scheduled to speak? Don't you think that I am at least as dependable as you?" How swiftly and effectively was I reprovved. That was one more time when the minister received a message while waiting to deliver one. What a wonderful, patient, and understanding God! Of course, He would be there to help me. He was unquestionably more faithful than my best human contributions.

An interesting aspect of the entire experience was the evident notice that the Lord had been taking of my personal faithfulness factor. Though I had been unaware of it, He had been consistently "marking my report card," so to speak. He is intensely interested in the degree and display of our faithfulness.

The Lord's approvals are not the "back slapping, shoulder hoisting" hurraing that is so common among men. God knows that such emotional fanfare would leave the human spirit not only disappointed, which is generally the case with such "people praising," but considerably skeptical. The praise of men is predominantly calculated to get something in return. Men usually only give to get, and since it isn't long before that fact is recognized, the genuineness of such praise is largely and wisely discounted. It is well to not get very over-exercised in the reception of accruing praise. The life of human praise tends to expire shortly after the one being praised leaves the company of the praisers.

All of this is clearly different with the honor of the Lord, for His approval is genuine and just. He doesn't prime egos, flatter pride, or manipulate reciprocations. Whenever the Lord measures us, we can take the result at face value and depend on its purity.

God seems to take special delight in those of His children who exhibit this exquisite trait of dependability. On the rare occasions in the Bible when He openly invites us to observe such persons, we onlookers are wise to carefully examine and imitate them. When God says, "Look at this person," we instinctively look closely and listen attentively.

To Satan God said, "Hast thou considered My servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth ...?" God testified to old Satan that Job was predictable. He said that he was perfect, upright, God-fearing, and evil-hating (SEE Job 1:6). He could be counted on. What a powerful testimony! God trusted Job!

Another predictable man was Abraham. God testified to Abraham's faithfulness when He said that, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord ..." (SEE Genesis 18:19).

Moses was also identified as a dependable servant of the Lord. When Miriam and Aaron wrongly assumed that they could represent God to the Children of Israel as well as Moses, God's response was both explicit and judicial. The selfish rift left Moses' sole authority unquestioned and Miriam a leper. Only by her meek brother's intuitive compassion and merciful intercession was she restored to wholeness. In the course of God's exonerating Moses before the assembled people of Israel, He said of him, "My servant Moses is ... faithful in all mine house" (SEE Numbers 12:7). It is exciting to think that God is investigating the virtues of men. It can also be quite disturbing.

Just how important is faithfulness to Christ and His Church? Since we see that God does indeed place honor and recognition upon it when he witnesses it in men, then the converse must be true when it is absent or receding. We must expect to reap what we sow.

One of the most sobering, and at the same time promising, instructions to the Church is set forth by Jesus in the Revelation 2:10 when He said, "... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The promise is that faithfulness to the very end will be richly rewarded. The sobering warning is that failure to be faithful will result in eternal loss.

I read of an early explorer who came upon a beautifully landscaped and well-cared-for estate hidden in the deep recesses of a vast wilderness. There were no prominent accesses or proximate populace that would provide attention to this obviously magnificent domain. It was totally remote and therefore totally unnoticed. "How unusual," thought the explorer. The buildings were maintained, the sidewalks and drives clean, the lawns mowed, the shrubbery shaped, the flowers groomed, the trees pruned, and the fountains bubbling and spraying with life-giving water.

His incredulous reverie was interrupted by the appearance of one who was attired in gardening clothes and held a hoe in callused hands. "Do you own this lovely estate?" asked the visitor. "Oh, no Sir," replied the approaching caretaker, "I am only the gardener. My lord, the owner, is not here," "I would like to meet him," said the explorer. "Will he return today or tomorrow?" "Oh, I do not know when he shall return," replied the gardener. "He has been away for many years and when he left he instructed me to take care of everything until he came back. This I have done, and you are the first person I have seen since my master left." In shocked unbelief the traveler said more to himself than to the old gardener, "Do you mean that you have kept this estate in such excellent condition for all these weeks and months and years in your master's absence? Why, it appears that you have kept all things in such a state of readiness so that he might come through those handsome iron gates at this very moment!" "You are exactly correct, Sir," replied the smiling gardener with a fervent, gleam in his eyes. "He just might come home today!

My heart is unfailingly lifted as I muse upon that story, for it portrays the attitude that must prevail in every Christian's devotion center. Jesus said, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that

servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (SEE Matthew 24:45, 46). Such a servant is counted faithful because he continues. He keeps on doing what he was instructed to do. He keeps on doing the right thing again and again, over and over. Such a servant is considered wise.

WHERE WERE YOU?

When light was needed to illuminate,
And weary feet began to hesitate,
When a heavy load started to shift,
And someone fell for want of a lift
Where were you?

When a thoughtful smile or word of cheer
Could have refrained that falling tear,
When a personal world fell all apart
In sobbing pieces from a broken heart
Where were you?

When faint and weary and torn inside
A brother's courage had all but died,
When fear and faith fought terribly
To gain his soul in mastery
Where were you?

Then broken bleeding he lies alone
Crying for aid with a helpless moan,
The priest, the Levite and church member too
Finds more important things to do
Where were you?

When spiritual battles are fearfully fought
Sanguinely waged and expensively bought,
Brave hearts the powers of Hell defied
And with flaming devotion suffered and died
Where were you?

When ease and comfort were stoutly spurned
And self-serving idols unceremoniously burned,
Where crucifixion found intense desire
In willing commitment to holy fire
Where were you?

To be in heart not hurt or abused
An accommodating vessel willingly used,
Is just reward both here and there

In total fulfillment everywhere.

* * * * *

THE END