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CLUSTERS FROM COLOSSIANS

By James W. Tharp

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Dedicated
To My Faithful Wife

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FOREWORD

I do not intend this work to be recognized as even a minor exposition of the Colossian Epistle. We have tried to present only seven practical messages clustered around seven select passages from the Epistle.

These sermons were first given from our pulpit in the New-Reformed Church at Bingen, Pa. Then, at the request of the Editor, they appeared by series in The God's Missionary Standard. After revision, we are now sending them forth in book form.

As these messages go out, it is our sincere prayer that God will bless His Word to the effect that sinners will find pardon, believers be purified and Jesus Christ receive preeminence. Should this be realized, we earnestly ask that the reader follow the writer in giving the praise to Him Who is worthy-Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord!

Yours in Christian love,
James W. Tharp

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INTRODUCTION

"Clusters From Colossians" will certainly prove to be a cluster of blessings to all its readers. It is a carefully prepared series of messages penned by one whose life and ministry are in direct harmony with the teachings of the infallible Word.

The short Epistle to the Colossians contains some vital contrasts, such as: the old life versus the new life; the old wardrobe versus the new wardrobe. It pictures man dead in sin, but it also gives him a glorious resurrection into a new life of holiness and righteousness.

Not only is it a book of contrasts, but it is also a book of discipline. Firstly, in our relation to our fellow-men. We are commanded to forbear one another and to forgive one another. Secondly, in our marital relations. It teaches that we are to submit and be congenial toward each other. Thirdly, in relation to children. Parents are to command obedience. This is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fourthly, in parental relations. Parents are not to provoke their children to wrath.

This book also presents a moral code of ethics. We are commanded to walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. It teaches us the importance of a well-seasoned speech, seasoned with salt. Salt is a preserver, a sustainer, and a necessity. Therefore, if our speech is holy, becoming our profession, we will be a preserver of society.

This book is an incentive to Christian perfection. From its lofty mountain peaks we can see not only the land of promise, but we can also ascend into the fullness of the blessing. Through its telescopic vision it lifts man from the basement of life and sets his affections on things above. then becomes disobedient to God. Thus, he is not only sinful, but he becomes a sinner. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). The Bible teaches that "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4). So we are forced to conclude that the natural man is lost, and unless God in His mercy provides a means of salvation, humanity is utterly hopeless!

But listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:4-9: "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened

us together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

God's unspeakable love for His fallen race caused Him to provide a costly provision for their salvation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

But God's justice is as sure as His mercy. Man became a sinner by choice. He must exercise his free will if he is saved. God gave His Son. The Son gave His life. But it still remains that man must accept God's Son by faith, or he will still be lost, regardless of God's extravagant interest in him. God's saving grace was manifested in His giving His Son as the Saving One. But we must still have saving faith.

God is extremely interested in saving humanity. He sent Christ to die in our stead, and gave us the promise that if we would believe on Him, we "should not perish." Not only did He send His Son, but He sent His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in the world today dealing with the hearts of men, drawing those to God who will be drawn, leading those who will be led. It is His office to convict of sin. When the natural man listens to the Spirit of God he is convinced of his sinfulness, and his need of a Saviour. But not all who realize their lost condition do any thing about it.

The conviction for sin leads to confession. The Holy Spirit will convict, but conviction is only a cleared path for confession. The Bible teaches that we must confess our sins. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," (1 John 1:9).

Conviction leads to confession. Confession leads to conversion.

1. Saving Faith. Faith is the presiding element that leads the seeker along over the road from conviction to confession, and on to conversion. Faith in God that He will do what He promised is what saves us.

2. Serving Faith. Christians are saved to serve. Previous to our salvation we were slaves to sin. After we are saved we become servants to God. "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." (Romans 6:22). It is a servant's business to please his Master. And as Christians, we must have a faith to serve the Lord. "But without faith it is impossible to please him:" (Hebrews 11:6).

The power of faith is so desperately needed in this generation! New Testament Christianity presents a dynamic, powerful faith that pushes the cause of Christ ever forward. Where are we today? Do we have this kind of faith?

What Christ began in the world He purposes to carry on through men made holy and dynamic by the Holy Ghost. One outstanding evidence of a Spirit-filled life is faith. The fire of faith burns in the heart of the Spirit-filled Christian. It will take a faith like this to carry out the

commission Christ gave to His church. God is looking for such men today! Someone said, "If there should arise one utterly believing man, the history of the world might be changed!"

One day while sitting beside his good friend in a Dublin park, D. L. Moody heard Henry Varley say, "The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and in, and by the man who is fully surrendered to Him!" This statement struck Moody's heart, and within himself he replied, "I'll be that man!" D. L. Moody was that man! He made his complete consecration, received the Spirit, and went out to sweep hundreds of thousands into the Kingdom.

3. Seeking Faith. Good Christians are good seekers We must learn to seek things from our Heavenly Father The Bible challenges the Christian to seek. But we must not only seek; we must seek by faith. "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:" (Matthew 7:7).

Not only should we learn to seek things from our Heavenly Father, but we should also learn to seek things for our Heavenly Father. Just as it requires faith to obtain answers from God, so it takes faith to attain objects for Him.

Every Christian ought to be full of venture for Christ Does it never bother us that we are so complacent and in active for the Kingdom of God? Believe me, Christians, this is a golden age of opportunity! If we would get ourselves on the altar of consecration, submit whole-heartedly to the will of God, we could arise with faith and vision to take mountains for the Master!

The fields are white. The promises are great. But our faith is weak. Souls need to be saved. Revivals need to be started. The gospel needs to be carried. There is much to be done. We should stir ourselves, and ask God to send us a revival of faith.

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01 -- CHRISTIAN QUALITIES

Love

Another outstanding quality possessed by the Colossian Church was that of love. This crowning virtue of Christianity penetrates the soul at conversion. Wherever there is definite conversion, there is genuine love.

Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40).

Christ taught that love was the supreme characteristic of the Christian faith, and that it flows in two directions: flowing upward it touches God; flowing outward, it touches humanity.

Our love for God is to eclipse our entire self. Dr. Harry E. Jessop points this out very clearly in stating, "Our love for God is emotional, dominating the affections. Regulating the realm of feeling, it brings all earth-love and all creaturely enticement into subjection to Him whom it honors as Lord. 'With all thy heart.'

"It is dynamic -- dominating the life. Taking possession as a driving force, it makes service a joy and sacrifice a delight. 'With all thy soul.'

"It is intellectual -- dominating the mind. The deep things of God are worthy of the attention of the finest intellects. Full salvation rightly understood, is not a mental repressive dwarfing the intellect; it is the crown of all mental culture. It is not a sin to think and to think hard, provided we learn to think with God. 'With all thy mind.'

Concerning our love for our neighbor, Jesus said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This means that if we really love our fellow men, we will treat them as we would have them treat us. We will think of them as we would have them think of us. We will speak of them as we would have them speak of us.

Love is a Christian quality that comes from God Himself. It is imparted to the new convert, but it is up to him to exercise it, feed it and let it grow. There are degrees in love -- love begun, love perfected, and love abounding.

Love begun is found in the newly converted. It is strong and bubbling, but only to become stronger and greater as he grows in grace. Love perfected is that love which develops in the heart of the saint who surrenders to God, and lets the presence of God dwell in his heart to the extent that love for Him drives out all fear and only perfect love remains. Love abounding is that processive continuity that ever springs forth as the victorious Christian works out his salvation. It abounds more and more till the day of Jesus Christ.

* * *

Hope

The Colossians had the right kind of hope, "the hope that is laid up." Faith and love are the spiritual parents of hope. Every one with a Christian experience that endures has this hope.

Heaven is not a myth, but a mystery that shall be unfolded to every faithful, hopeful Christian. It is a conspicuous Bible subject, and the most serious writers spent a great deal of time writing about it.

Before Christ left the earth in Person, He said to His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3). This promise from the departing Christ is the hope of the church.

Christians, let the world call us dreamers, but some bright eternal morning the shadows of night will flee away and the trumpet shall sound. Christ Jesus shall descend from Heaven with a shout and catch away His dreamers. This is our blessed hope.

* * *

Fruitfulness

The believers at Colosse had something to show for their faith. It is one thing to have the form, but another to have the force. It is not enough to have the shadow; we must have the substance. The Colossians not only had the ritual. They had the reality also.

Genuine Christians will produce at least two kinds of fruit:

1. Fruits of the Spirit. They are: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Maybe you have never noticed it, but these nine graces throw themselves naturally into three groups, each consisting of three -- first, love, joy, peace; touching our relation to God, they are experiential and emotional; second, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness: touching our conduct with our fellow man, they are social; third, faith, meekness and temperance: regulating our own Christian life, they are spiritual.

2. Fruits of Reproduction. Every Christian should possess the power of reproduction. If he doesn't he is like the fig tree with green leaves, but no figs. He becomes a disappointment to Christ and to the church.

Think of the thousands of church members who have never had the thrilling experience of leading a lost soul to Jesus Christ! It is sad, indeed, that we do not realize this to be both a calling and a privilege! Christ said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Again, Christ said, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . ." (Acts 1:8). It is every Christian's privilege and responsibility to be filled with the Spirit so that he may be a successful soul winner!

Christian reader, are you a soul winner? If so, what kind of soul winner are you? You can be an effective one! Did you know that the reason Christ wants you to be filled with His Spirit is because you cannot win souls without Him? You have no grounds on which to boast of being filled with the Holy Ghost unless you are winning souls to Jesus Christ!

There is a promise that Christ gave in His message on prayer that I wish every Christian of this Twentieth Century would grasp! Jesus said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" What a challenge! What a promise! What a responsibility!

Let us claim this promise, yield ourselves to God, allow His Spirit to baptize us, and then go forth to win the lost, lest we stand empty handed at the Judgment seat of Christ with "nothing but leaves."

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02 -- CONCERN FOR THE CHRISTIANS

Colossians 1:9-12 -- "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Having commended the saints at Colosse for their Christian qualities, we are able to notice a slight shift in Saint Paul's message. He now declares his unceasing concern for at least four things for his brethren.

* * *

Filled with Knowledge

"That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This was the Apostle's first concern for them. God desires His people to be enlightened. Scripture demands a clear knowledge of revealed truth. On this the maintenance of spiritual life depends. To swerve from divine truth is to suffer spiritual loss.

Christianity dispels darkness, ignorance and superstition. It makes us partakers of "the inheritance of the saints in light." Spiritual life depends on our knowledge of God.

Knowledge does four things: (1) It reveals truth, (2) It quickens desire; (3) It increases faith; and (4) It tends participation. These all have a relation to the Christian and his knowledge of divine truth. God has made two outstanding provisions for His children in their quest for truth. He has sent us a divine educator, the Holy Spirit. Also, He has provided us a great text Book, His own Word!

The Holy Spirit is the Christian's great Teacher. Jesus, in speaking to His disciples of the coming Holy Spirit, said, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14:16-17). Jesus went on to say of the Holy Spirit, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance." (John 14:26). "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth ... he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." (John 16:13-14).

Sometimes we Christians are prone to take an imaginary retrospect to the days when Christ taught His disciples by the words of His mouth. Then we think how wonderful it would be if Christ were here in Person with us. But, Christians, Christ does still teach us through His Spirit! Believe

it, the Holy Spirit directs us along the same lines that Christ would direct us, were He here bodily! It is the same voice that directs the Twentieth Century Christian as directed the early disciples! The very same Spirit!

Moreover, the Bible is our Text-Book. It is a live Book! It is God's Word to us. What more can we ask for? We have the teachings of our Saviour, the promise of His Return, the Holy Spirit living with us, and in us! What carelessness on our part if we are ignorant of the things of God!

The Holy Spirit uses only one text-book, and that is the Bible. What He teaches, the way He directs, and the instructions that He gives are all in concordance with the Word. Therefore, the Bible is indispensable to spiritual knowledge.

Some unknown author has paid this tribute to the Bible: "This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the reward of saints, and the doom of sinners. Its histories are true, its doctrines holy, and its precepts binding. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. It is a river of pleasure, a mine of wealth, and a paradise of glory. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and will be remembered forever. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy."

* * *

Consistent Conduct

"That ye walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Weymouth gives this passage a good translation -- "So that your lives may be worthy of the Lord and perfectly pleasing to Him, while you exhibit the results of right action of every sort." The Christian's conduct is very important, and grace will teach us how to conduct ourselves. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:11-14).

Grace teaches the believer how to live. The Christian is to live soberly. What has spoiled the influence of the church so much as careless, light-hearted, foolish living among professors of religion? The people who live such a life play right into the plan of the world.

Did not Christ Himself set us a perfect example of sobriety? His conduct reflected deep thought, profound piety, sincere reverence and holiness of heart.

The Christian is to live righteously. If we are unable to keep God's Commandments, we are in need of righteousness. The natural man finds it impossible. The born again believer in Christ can only live a righteous life as he denies self, and allows Christ to give him the power to obey.

The Christian is to live godly. He is to deny ungodliness, but admit godliness. We are commanded to "put off concerning the former conversation, the old man and put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4:22,24) If the Christian would deny the old man residence, sustenance, and existence, but invite, put on, allow entrance to the new man, his heart would be cleansed, the vessel purged, and he could live a life of holiness.

Grace teaches the believer how to love. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:18). Oh, what shallow, false substitutes for love that have found their way into the rank and file of professors of religion! Jesus declared that love was the acid test, the badge of true discipleship

Grace teaches the believer how to look. We are not to look to the world. It has no hope. Our hope is upward. Therefore, let us look up. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13).

* * *

Spiritual Fortification

"Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made is meet to "be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The Apostle sounds a note of warning to the Colossian Church that they have some spiritual defense in the spiritual battle. As we examine this passage, we find four mighty weapons of defense against Satan, sin and the world.

1. Patience. This is a Christian grace found among mature believers, hut one that all Christians are in the process of attaining. We are told that it is delivered to our hearts through tribulation. But somehow the process of trials and testings leave this precious element within the soul to season it and make it more complete. It is a great weapon that Satan cannot push down.

2. Longsuffering. Here is patience in action. We are coping with a religion today that is nervous, flighty and uncertain. Genuine Christianity can produce the spirit of longsuffering. Many times our friends aren't looking to see how we are acting under normal circumstances; but rather how we react under pressure.

3. Joyfulness. Joy is a tonic for the soul, a fuel for the spirit and a stimulant for the body. No wonder the devil would like to rob God's children of this great force!

4. Thanksgiving. Every day should be Thanksgiving Day for the Christian. This will afford a sure cure for grumbling and complaining. Satan delights in our being critical and irritable. Let us employ the great weapon of thanksgiving. It will afford constant victory. "In everything give thanks."

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03 -- CONSTRUCTIVE CHRISTIANITY

Colossians 2:6-7 -- "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up In him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Christianity is a field for great expansion. It is a continuous growth and development. Along with this passage of scripture, let us note also I Peter 2:5: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." These two scriptures blend beautifully in presenting the thought of a spiritual building.

There are four outstanding factors in any earthly building which must have the same consideration in the spiritual house of the Christian. They are: the foundation, the framework, the fashion and the furniture.

* * *

The Foundation

"Rooted and built up," form the thought of a two-way building. "Rooted" suggests the downward direction, while "built up" suggests the upward direction. But here we wish to deal with the "Rooted," the foundation.

The ever-important factor in our spiritual building is the foundation. To lay a foundation requires digging. Before elevation there must be excavation. There must be a going down before there can be a coming up. Abasement must come before exaltation. A solid foundation is the most valuable part in our great spiritual house.

In a day when so many spiritual buildings are crumbling, Christians, let us inspect our foundation. We cannot expect to build sky-scraping experiences on shallow, flimsy foundations.

Many of us have viewed the Empire State Building in New York City. What a building! They tell us that there are more than six thousand windows, ten million bricks, seventy-five miles of main water pipes, sixty-three elevators, and more than three hundred and fifty thousand electric lights in that massive structure. All in all, this great building weighs more than three hundred thousand tons. As the eye gazes at it -- up, up, up, -- the mind marvels at such a terrible building! But, I wonder if very many of us stopped to consider what the one great factor is in the success of this great building? The foundation. They tell us that the foundation for this skyscraper reaches down two floors, about thirty feet below the street level, and that its massive columns go down still deeper into the stratum granite, the bed rock that is the very body of the earth itself!

All this shows how important a foundation is in erecting an earthly building. How much more important is the foundation for our spiritual building!

There is one Rock, and only one, on which any soul dares rest his spiritual house. That Rock is Jesus Christ! There is no other foundation that will stand the test with the ages. In Him we can rest assured that our spiritual house will stand for eternity, and we can sing with the poet:

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand."

Dear reader, be sure that you have dugged past your own moral goodness, the church creed, philosophies of life, and the influence of friends and the world, to rest upon Christ as your eternal Saviour from sin unto righteousness! He is our foundation!

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The Framework

When our sins have been confessed, forsaken and forgiven, our hearts are changed, our lives rearranged and our souls assured of salvation. The foundation of our spiritual house is begun. Christ becomes Lord of our life. The world loses its hold on us, and we become servants to God. The Great Architect begins to unfold His plan for our life, and the spiritual building is on its way up.

"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and faith toward God." (Hebrews 6:1). The time comes for the Christian to begin his elevation, and there is no limit to the height.

The Apostle exhorted the Colossians to "build up." God wants us to build, and build high. We fear too many believers are content to live on a ground floor when God wants them to build up, away up where the Heavenly breezes blow, and some spiritual altitude can be realized!

However, there are some important things to take into consideration in putting up a building.

The kind of material employed in construction is very important. Remember, Christians, our spiritual building must stand the test of time and eternity! We cannot afford to use just anything; we must use that which is fire proof! We are the workmanship of God, and if we allow humanity to complete what Christ has begun, we will become castaways. On the other hand, if we submit to the specifications of the Divine Architect, we may be sure that no wood, hay or stubble will be inserted, but only the qualities that are ministered by the Spirit of God. His Spirit wants to furnish every Christian with holiness, truth and wisdom. These cannot fail. They represent the very nature of God, and God wants us to be like unto Himself.

Another important thing in building is accuracy. Regardless of the durable material on hand, the simple instructions given, or the pattern to be followed, our building will be condemned unless there is carefulness and accuracy.

We must be careful to follow God's leadings if we are to be acceptable. God wants full surrender to His will. There is no place for carelessness, presumptuousness and disobedience in erecting our spiritual house.

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The Fashion

The Christian should be concerned about the appeal or the looks of his Christianity. What kind of design or pattern does he present to other builders, or to those who have not yet started to build? What kind of an influence do we builders have? Just how are we going to fashion our spiritual house, anyway?

We must realize that Christianity is continuous fashioning and following after Christ. Having been divorced from the world, and set free from its entanglements, the believer is constantly fashioning his life after that of Christ. One of the sad things that the world is coping with today is worldliness. A cowering and courting the world's favor on the part of the church will spoil the Christian building. The Christian's style should not be that of worldliness, but godliness. "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation:" (I Peter 1:14-15).

Holiness does not tolerate worldliness. If we are fashioning our lives according to God's blue-print, it will be a holy life. A life of inward holiness will be reflected in our outward conduct and appearance. It is sad that a few Christians have tried to substitute the removal and replacement of worldly apparel for the experience of heart purity and a surrendered life. However, I contend that once our hearts are pure, there will be an evidence of it in our personal modesty. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible." (I Peter 3:3-4).

Yes, Christianity should be attractive. But please remember that the thing that makes it attractive is the beauty of Christ radiating our personalities. All our reformation, separation, and fashion is absolutely meaningless unless it is the result of a deep hunger and desire to please our Lord.

* * *

The Furniture

But that which is on the inside of a building is what determines its value and usefulness. I have driven past spacious, elaborate buildings and admired them. But on discovering that they were used for worldly and sinful purposes, their beauty faded, and their attraction became meaningless. The furniture inside the building is very important.

"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of the surrendered Christian to reveal Christ to him. He is God's furnishings for us. He is the bidden Man of the heart. He is the glory of the soul. He is the table of satisfaction, the fountain of refreshment, the chair of rest, the bed of peace, the wardrobe of righteousness, and the heat of comfort! The Holy Spirit makes all of these blessed experiences real to our hearts as we learn of our Saviour through His blessed teachings.

Let every Christian invite Him in to fill his life and soul, and furnish his heart with grace, truth and knowledge.

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04 -- COMPLETE IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:10 -- "And ye are complete in him . . ."

A great poet said, "Of the making of many books, there is no end." The same could be said of religions. There are thousands of cults, isms, doctrines and beliefs. There are almost three hundred thousand churches scattered across America. Statistics show that there are over two hundred and fifty thousand ordained ministers in our nation. Over sixty per cent of the American people are affiliated with some religious organization.

What does all this mean? It means that we are living in a religious age! But, we are afraid that religion alone is not the answer. It alone, is not enough to secure the blessing and approval of the Almighty. God requires more than theory, ritual or lip service. A religion that does not change a sinful heart to a pure heart is inadequate. The religion that knows only form, and no force, is not the kind that brings the blessing. The Bible presents a divine, transforming, living religion—the religion that is more than religion, the salvation which is by Jesus Christ!

But, dear reader, this religion must be experienced by faith, or it will do us no eternal good. We may talk of God and His Son, but we do not know God unless we have experienced His Son as our Saviour!

There are two classes of people in the world: those who are saved, and those who are lost; those who are spiritually dead, and those who are spiritually resurrected; those who are regenerated, and those who are degenerates; those who are believers, and those who have never believed. Jesus makes the difference!

* * *

The Incompleteness of Philosophy

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy..." We live in a philosophical age. All of us have some sort of a philosophy of life. This philosophy determines our action, and finally, it will determine our destiny.

Gerald B. Winrod once wrote, "One never rises above his ideals, but he often falls beneath them. A good philosophy of life means a good character. A bad philosophy of life means a bad character."

We live in an age when the tendency is to accept reason instead of revelation. When this becomes true, the philosophy is vain! Did you know that there are countless thousands of one-time-Christians who are grounded today because of the power of evil philosophies?

The Colossian Church had been invaded by the Alexandrian teaching. It was a form of legalism advocating spirituality by self-restraint rather than by the power of Christ. We could call this "suppression." This is a philosophy that is false. How many people today are holding this teaching!

* * *

The Incompleteness of Tradition

Tradition always has, and always will be, a stumbling block to the race of humanity. It has that element that eases the conscience temporarily. While philosophy pertains to the mental, tradition has to do with the outward, and the two together serve as twin powers to deceive the soul, and have certainly succeeded in this generation. They deceive and fence the soul from that which God calls each of us to.

But don't be deceived! No one will ever think hard enough to get to Heaven! Neither will they do enough to get to Heaven! Doing good will keep one out of jail, but it will not keep him out of Hell! But, thank God, there is something, or rather Someone, who will keep us out of Hell if we will let Him.

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The Completeness of Christ

Philosophy can never touch nor change the carnal heart. Tradition will never bring peace to the soul nor assure us of a right relationship with God. Man is not capable of helping himself along the line of spiritual salvation. He can never pull himself up by his own bootstraps. But, beloved, God has promised a cure for sin, and a salvation for Adam's race. This cure is His Son, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ! The Apostle said, "Ye are complete in Him."

We have a great Gospel to proclaim in this day. Saint Paul wrote the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" (Romans 1:16). The Gospel of Christ proposes freedom from sin. Freedom from sin implies several things:

1. Freedom from condemnation for sin. So long as the soul endures a consciousness of guilt, he cannot enjoy the peace that is afforded to the penitent by Jesus Christ. As long as a man is a criminal at the bar of his own conscience he must be unhappy.

But the Bible promises, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Therefore, there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1).

2. Freedom from the control of sin. The saving grace of Christ breaks the power of sin. When the sinner comes to Christ weighted down with sin, and confesses it, forsakes it, and by faith takes Christ as his Saviour and sin-bearer, he not only is relieved of the load, but the load loses its hold on the soul. The Spirit of God cuts the sinner loose from the load and he is free. This is regeneration! It comes through the blessed Christ of Calvary.

3. Freedom from the corruption of Sin. When the sinner has been pardoned his heart is regenerated and the soul is free from the control of sin. The graces of the Spirit are implanted within so that he can manifest a Christian conduct. But within the heart of the Christian there are remaining pollutions which prevent the Christian's development and spiritual growth. What God wants to do for all His children is to cleanse them, perfect them, and complete them. The Bible teaches the experience of heart purity, of sanctification. Through the atoning merits of the Saviour there is a perfect deliverance from sin. May we hurriedly point out some conditions for cleansing:

(1) Confession. As the Christian walks with God, reads his Bible and spends time in prayer, he soon discovers an inward foe to his spirituality. For a time, he may think it to be Satan, but it isn't too long until he realizes that it is really self, and not Satan! To be sure, Satan teases and aggravates this inward evil of the Christian, but really, the Christian cannot blame Satan for it. It is self! Self rises up and demands its own way. It is not spiritual self, but carnal self. Now, what should the Christian do? Cast away his confidence because he has discovered an embedded principle of evil for which he is not responsible? Indeed not! Confess it to God! Tell Him what you have found out about yourself! Tell Him you abhor it, and want it taken out. Is there any Scriptural grounds for asking God to cleanse the Christian from the carnal nature? Yes! "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:8-9).

(2) Commitment. After confession, we are clean. Christian, this is absolutely true, according to God's Word! Now, believe it! If you have made an honest confession, you are on grounds of good faith to believe that God has cleansed you from your sin. Then after the confession and cleansing, make your committal. Commit your all to Christ. Take up your Cross.

(3) Crucifixion. The purpose of a cross is to put to death. Saint Paul said, "Knowing this that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin For he that is dead is freed from sin."

Dr. Peter Wiseman points out, "The 'old man' stands for the organism of corruption, the old life with its source." It is this body of corruption that God wants the Christian free from. During the

time of Christ, crucifixion was the mode of capital punishment by the Romans. Christ was crucified on a cross. Paul refers to this cross. He not only speaks of the Cross of redemption, but also of the cross in our Christian experience.

Crucifixion leads to death. There is a process of dying. Then, there is also the crisis of death. The process must precede the crisis. The one is done in order that the other may be done. When we became Christians, we took up our cross. But the process of crucifixion may be slow and rugged. Finally, the crisis comes, and we are dead! "For he that is dead is freed from sin." Death is the instrument of deliverance. Not physical death, but death to the old self, the old nature, the carnal man!

John Wesley, in his book on "Christian Perfection," says that a man may be dying for some time, yet he is not dead. But the moment comes when he is dead. In like manner, he argues, the spiritual experience of sanctification. The process of dying leads to the crisis of death to sin.

Sin has no power over a dead man. When the principle of evil within the Christian has been crucified, and its power destroyed, the Spirit of Christ enthrones the heart, raising up a standard against sin from without. Temptation is rejected, Satan is resisted, and the world is rebuked. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which I am crucified unto the world, and the world unto me:" (Galatians 6:14).

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05 -- CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN LIVING

Colossians 3:1-2, 5, 8-9, 10, 12 -- "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

"But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

"And have put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;"

There is a black mark against those who are Wesleyan in doctrine which identifies them as "the crowd that loses their religion." It is sadly true that in almost all churches, there are a number of backsliders. This condition is not due to scriptural standards of the church, nor is it due to straight Bible preaching on the part of evangelists and pastors. But there is a reason for it.

The Apostle, having delivered his attack on the system of error inculcated at Colosse, now passed from the controversial to the more practical. There are many things in this portion of the Epistle that deserve our attention. We shall analyze this section into three parts for our convenience in studying the practicality of Christianity.

* * *

1. Placing the Affections

Evidence of a spiritual resurrection with Christ is seen in our death to earthly things and our interest in the heavenly. When Christ comes to take the throne of our heart, worldliness loses its hold, and our affections are set on things above. The true Christian life becomes a divine friendship, and our spirits actually become trained for Heaven until our hopes are constantly being lifted Heavenward. Our hearts are constantly being refreshed with the promises of the bliss of eternity when we shall ever be with the Lord.

True union with Christ kills our love for the world "If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him." (I John 2:15). As our Saviour has Personally gone to Heaven, so He has lifted our aims, hopes and love there. Our present spiritual life, the reality of saving grace, the communion with God through His Spirit, is but the earnest of our inheritance, the first-fruits of the Spirit. Such spiritual blessings only clarify the vision of the eyes that look Heavenward. No wonder the world fails to attract! It looks so cheap because we have seen something far more blessed, more satisfying, more real, more lasting!

The Apostle commanded, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." It is only from above that we can be raised. The earth spoils everything that it holds. Therefore, the "things" of the earth are not to hold our affections, but "things above."

* * *

2. Purging the Sin

The new convert is urged on to a life of holiness. He discovers his impure heart, and one great evidence that he has been born again is his hunger for heart purity..

The Apostle mentioned four types of vice as the leading features of sin -- impurity, greed, malice and falsehood. Jesus taught that these evils were native to the human heart. By habitual practice they take possession of the man, so that his members are made slaves to uncleanness and iniquity. When the human heart is ungoverned by grace, or not ruled by "things from above," the unregenerate heart becomes more and more an incarnation of sin. What a terrible "body of death" the believer finds himself coping with! Yes, the believer is joined to this, but thank God, he does not have to live with it. These sins are to be purged.

"Mortify (put to death) therefore your members. which are upon the earth;" The inward nature, working itself outward in the Christian, soon leads him to the discovery that he possesses something that possesses him, something which is uncomely to Christ-likeness. But as he walks in

the light, abhors his condition, reads his Bible, and prays, he makes another discovery-that there is deliverance!

In experiencing this deliverance, the first thing to be done is to recognize the sinfulness of the heart, and confess it! Then put it on the Lord to destroy it, to put it to death! If Christ reigns in the heart, the Spirit of Christ will mortify (put to death) the deeds of the flesh.. "He that is dead is freed from sin." (Romans 6:7)..

* * *

3. Putting on the New Man

Now we come to the positive side of Christian holiness. "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Again, Paul says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Notice several things that are to be put on:

1. Compassion. Not a high-headed knowledge after the Gnostic teaching, but a heart of compassion. This is a product of grace rather than an act of nature. It is too bad that the church cannot exhibit more of the true compassion as did the Master.

2. Kindness. This beautiful temper of the mind produces a sweet and happy relation with others.

3. Humility. This is a temper of the mind which affects our estimate of ourselves. Someone has said, "If you want to climb up, step down; if you want to be seen, get out of sight; and if you want to be heard, listen to others."

4. Meekness, Longsuffering. These qualities affect our outward bearing toward others, especially in the case of a quarrel, a misunderstanding or an injury.

5. Forbearance and Forgiveness. God desires us to possess within us the spiritual powers to live at peace with one another. How can we do this without these two virtues? We must forbear one another because we are full of infirmities. By the same token, we must forgive one another.

6. Love. Paul calls love the "bond of perfectness." What a blessed bondage! It binds the church together in unity. It is the badge of true discipleship.

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06 -- CHRIST IS ALL

Colossians 3:11 -- ". . . Christ is all . . ."

The words of our text is the testimony of the Apostle after his choice between serving the rulers of this world, and that of serving the Captain of our salvation. This is his praise for Christ after years of battle and suffering, as well as close brushes with death in his zeal for his Master. Yet, unlike many who had fallen by the way, Paul still declares Christ to be "all and in all." To every Christian who has made a complete consecration; to those who can stand when others are falling, who can keep pure while others are defiling themselves; to those who can lift their voices when others have been silenced by the influences of the world-to the victorious Christian, Christ Is All!

* * *

1. Christ is our Salvation

The human race is in great bondage, captured by the powers of sin, condemned to eternal punishment, awaiting the Day of Judgment. Is there no one who can deliver from condemnation, from bondage, from sin, from Satan, from Judgment, from death, and from Hell? The Bible teaches that there is salvation in only One-Jesus Christ! "There is no other name." No other Person! Turn the world up-side-down, but the answer comes back -- "No other Person."

One may trust in self, in friends, in parents, in the church, but remember, only Christ can save you! No one else has given his life for you. No one else suffered for your eternal salvation! No one else could qualify to be your Saviour. Jesus Christ has done this for you. He asks you to confess your sins, commit your all to Him, and let Him come into your heart and change your life. Truly, He will be your all!

* * *

2. Christ is our Satisfaction

Humanity has been seeking satisfaction ever since the fall of Adam. Men spend millions of dollars and years of worry trying to satisfy a longing. Many are deceived in thinking that their unrest is due to a mental or physical disorder; thus they seek that source of relief. Many, like the rich fool, try to feed their starving soul on material achievement, only to find that it doesn't work. If political power and prestige had satisfied Saint Paul, he would have been in glory with the Roman officials. If this kind of success satisfied the human heart, why do so many of our own government officials, statesmen, congressmen and leaders commit suicide? If money satisfies, why aren't all those millionaires happy?

One is only truly happy when his soul's hunger has been properly fed. Jesus Christ declared Himself to be the Bread of Life. He has proven it to every soul that would taste and see.

Look any genuine Christian in the eye and you will see a gleam. I'm not referring to half-hearted, miserable, unconcerned, backslidden professors of religion! I speak of those who have met Christ, confessed sin, and have forsaken all to follow Him. They have experienced satisfaction for their soul. He is their richest Treasure, One that fadeth not away. This kind of

Christian can walk with square shoulders, clear countenances and smiling faces. Their guilt is gone. Their sins are covered. They live good, look good, and die good!

* * *

3. Christ is our Security

We hear a great deal about security today. We hear of social security, economical security and national security. But all of these "securities" pertain to this present world. One of these days men will wake up to the fact that there is more to prepare for than just this life and old age. Worldly security is no security at all compared to spiritual security.

Do men have security against sin, against fear, against death against the Judgment, against Satan, against Hell? In general, No! In exception, Yes! Saint Paul had this kind of security! All real Christians have it! They have a security that the world knows nothing of. Only a few from the world turn now and then, to investigate the Christian's security.

When we glance at the world we become gloomy, disheartened, scared and nervous? Why? Because that is the nature of the world. It reaches its depth, and is exhausted. It climbs its height and is stalled. Then the world looks into bare space and without hope or help. Satan laughs in mockery; God's face is hidden; and the worldly man must pass on into eternity alone! The world and worldly friends don't understand. There's nothing they can do to help.

But this is not so of the Christian! He has a hope within. His heart has been transformed, elevated and raised above this world. In his heart lives a power called faith. This faith has brought Christ Jesus to him in His saving and cleansing power. This bears hope, and this hope does not fade, but grows brighter until the final day, the Day of all days, the Day when it needs to be bright, the Day when the world goes mad and knows not which way to turn, because there is no way for them! Thank God, the true Christian can face eternity with all its mysteries with the assurance that whatever it holds, Christ has it conquered, and the soul that follows is secure in Him! Many have risen to sing while on the very brink of the other world:

"I won't have to cross Jordan alone;
Jesus died all my sins to atone.
In the darkness I see,
He'll be waiting for me;
I won't have to cross Jordan alone."

Christians, one of these days we will realize how precious this statement of Saint Paul's is. When our soul departs this tabernacle of clay to take its flight across that mysterious realm into the unknown; when at the Judgment seat of Christ we find ourselves possessed of a calmness and rest of peace and liberty; when in the very presence of the King of kings, we feel a holy security, we shall cast down our crowns and join with the Apostle in proclaiming, "CHRIST IS ALL!"

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07 -- CONTINUING IN PRAYER

Colossians 4:2 -- "Continue in prayer . . ."

Before Saint Paul closed his Colossian Epistle, he urged them to "Continue in prayer." Perhaps we could not choose a more timely subject with which to close this book than that of prayer.

No Christian has ever estimated the value of prayer to be too great! No one ever spent too much time in earnest prayer.

* * *

1. The Necessity of Prayer

Our nation needs prayer. We are up to our necks in political confusion, and on the verge of atomic war. Our government agencies are so influenced and infiltrated with godless communism until our legislation is at the point of utter danger! We must pray! It is high time our President and national leaders called a national "class meeting!" We need more than a day of so-called "silent prayer." We need a season of confession, humiliation penitence, and returning to God!

Our churches need prayer. We believe that one of the deadliest perils of the day is the damnable social gospel that the modern Twentieth Century Church is propagating. Believe me, it is costing us something. I believe that it is worse than communism! It has done away with the evangelical gospel, and turned thumbs down on a straightforward, old-fashioned message of repentance restitution and conversion!

This social gospel has emptied the prayer meetings. It has turned our churches into social clubs, playhouses, restaurants and gymnasiums.

This modern play of religion has outlawed revival meetings, substituting fantastic campaigns that peddle foolishness, fun and folly. Satan has almost succeeded in casting away the mourner's bench and the prayer room. He is turning the modern pulpit into a forum, killing out the prophet and installing a promoter or politician, leaving the clergy void of spiritual power and soul-winning passion.

We have lost spiritual fire and power. The past few decades have found the church making money, courting the world, and busying herself with tasks God never called her to.

We have lost sound doctrine. Church leaders have sinfully neglected the preaching of Bible doctrines such as the New Birth, Sanctification, the Second Advent of Christ, and many other Bible teachings.

We have lost holy living. People have drifted presumptuously into apathy and complacency, and have excused themselves with the embrace of a "sinning religion."

We have lost our congregations. We have lost our youth. They don't cater to sad, dead, religious "put-ons."

We have lost the Sabbath. Men and women of the church have become so material-minded that they have lost all convictions against keeping the Lord's Day holy.

We have lost morality. A country that should be exalting the Name of Jesus Christ has no convictions against plastering the road-sides with bill boards advertising sex and liquor.

Surely, this is a perilous day, and we need to seek the face of God. This is not the cry of a pessimist, but a plea for a revival!

Our youth needs prayer. The youth of today live in an almost entirely different world than did the youth of two decades ago. They live in an age that is pagan in its standards. Its morals are rotten. Someone wrote: "This is a highly accelerated and an insanely reckless world. There is a multiplicity of gadgets. Speed and power are the gods of youth. Hot rods and horsepower are the scepters of might."

There is a multiplicity of religious voices; there are the extremes of modernism and fanaticism. There is a practical atheism which gives God a nod, but which lives as if He were non-existent. There is, in many places, an apathy toward vital religion. And yet, thank God, there are evidences here and there of religious life which does challenge and appeal to youth."

Let us pray for a deep spiritual awakening among the youth that will capture them from worldliness and return them to the church for active and useful service. God is challenging the Christian youth of our century. Let us pray that they will accept and submit.

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2. Hindrances to Prayer

Saint Peter in his first Epistle, warned against our prayers being hindered. (I Peter 3:7). Surely, there must be a lot of unanswered prayers today. Surely, folk are praying a little bit. I know that there are some prayers prayed today, but I'm sure that all of them could not be being answered, or things would be different. People pray for revival, and men get further from God. They pray to be healed, but grow worse. Parents pray for their children to be saved only to see them become indifferent. Churches pray for peace, but there are wars and rumors of wars. Families pray for financial help, but grow deeper in debt. Now, what is wrong? Either God doesn't answer prayer, or else there is something wrong with either the prayer, or the one who prays! Certainly we have hundreds of promises in God's Holy Word that assure us that God does answer prayer! Then, it is not God! Friends, it is us! Do not our unanswered prayers ever bother us?

It is our purpose in this part of the message to investigate some of the unanswered prayers and find the reason why they do not get results. I think in our investigation we are apt to find that there are some prayers that God just doesn't answer.

1. The unbeliever's prayer. The man who is unsaved, and still in his sins, finds no promise anywhere in God's Word on which to base any praying faith. The only time promised that God will hear the sinner is when he prays the prayer of asking mercy and forgiveness. Let no one who has never been born again think that God will answer his prayer. The Heavenly Father listens to the prayers of His obedient children, but gives no promise to the devil's children that He will hear them, unless they repent of their sins, and turn to serve Him.

2. The prayer of the disobedient. "If my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7). Disobedience kills faith. Without faith it is impossible to get answers to prayer. Faithless praying is discouraging to those about us. It is a disappointment to God, and stunts us in our spiritual growth. How sad that we are so faithless today! Ask! Believe! Receive!

3. The prayer of the selfish. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." (Proverbs 21:13). How about it, friend? Are you liberal with your temporal goods? If you are not willing to give, God cannot give unto you in answer to prayer. It may be that you don't need any more money, any more food, or any more worldly goods, but there are some things you do need and will need. Remember, God does not hear the cry of the stingy.

4. The prayer of the proud. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." (Matthew 6:5). Religious pride is an abomination, and God will not listen to the prayer coming from such a heart.

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3. Men of Prayer

Before we close this final message, we feel it important to mention some of the great warriors of yesterday and their relation to the great subject of prayer.

A statement by E. M. Bounds is in order at this point: "What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men-men of prayer."

William Penn said of George Fox, "But above all he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behavior, and the fewness and fullness of his words have often struck even strangers with admiration as they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living reverend frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his prayer. And truly it was a testimony. He knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men, for they that know Him most will see most reason to approach Him with reverence and fear."

Richard Newton confessed, "The principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write or read or converse or hear with a ready heart; but prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these, and the more spiritual any duty is, the more my carnal heart is apt to start from it. Prayer and patience and faith are never disappointed. I have long since learned that if ever I was to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, everything else is comparatively easy."

John Welch, the Scottish preacher, spent eight and ten hours almost every day in prayer. When his wife complained, he replied, "I have the souls of three thousand people to answer for, and I know now how it is with many of them!"

Brainerd said, "I love to be alone in my cottage where I can pray." He prayed for the perishing with a bleeding heart! No wonder his influence is still felt!

John Wesley would pray until his soul was on fire. "Then he would go out and preach until souls would fall prostrate. Prayer influences both God and men.

Judson advocated praying at least seven times a day. We may call this advice foolish, but here was a man who influenced an empire for God, and laid a foundation for Christ right in the heart of Burma!

Let us not think ourselves spiritual until we have learned to pray. "Continue in prayer."

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THE END