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THE PATH TO GRACE AND GREATNESS

By W. L. Boone

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INTRODUCTION

God does not strut -- and that aspect of Who He is, is so encouraging in a world that routinely rewards arrogance and ostentation. These chapters frequently address the grace and greatness of God's Person, especially in aspects of Who He is that are little known or not often discussed.

God is so great that our praising Him does not embarrass Him.

God is so great that our praises can bless and inspire Him without affecting His perfection (perfection cannot appreciate).

God is so great that His intrinsic humility exalts Him.

God is so great He can give His all and not be diminished at all.

God is so great that He can make His home in a human heart.

God is so great that, though He knows everything, He still wants to know what we think.

The presentations of this book in a Sunday morning message format is purposeful and without apology for it. Each message is in its uncut, unedited, "unsanitized" form so that a strictly pastoral effort will flavor each line, each thought, each illustration and each expression.

God gave me a shepherd's heart, and the care of the "flock" is paramount in my preaching. God gave me a pastor's heart, so nurturing is present in each throbbing, passionate beat of my heart. God gave me a father's heart, so preparation and provision and instruction are constantly

reflected. God gave me a warrior's heart, so I am fiercely protective of both satanic and human intrusive threats to the church!

Readers of these pages will quickly encounter numerous repetitions, especially about the nature of God, and that His purpose for it (His nature) is to be imparted and reflected in us, His children. This repetition is purposeful, for constant exposure remains our most effective teaching method.

One of the most heartening Divine revelations to the church of all time is that Jesus said that He "is the God of the living and not the dead" (SEE Matthew 22:23). He relates to and talks to His children TODAY, IF we will sit at His feet, and listen carefully, and knock at His door!

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Chapter 1 THE GOD OF THE LIVING

"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." -- Matthew 22:32

God does not want us to live in the past, and doing so, or trying to do so, is a common, human failure. We Remember times when God came in the past. We recall instances of His nearness. We talk about the experiences and deliverances and victories of other days. We like to read books and hear testimonies and listen to sermons of God's interventions and blessings and answers to prayer. BUT IF IT STOPS THERE; IF ALL OF THAT DOES NOT DRIVE US TO OUR KNEES; IF WE FAIL TO SEEK HIS FACE; IF WE DO NOT ACCESS HIS GRACE AND POWER FOR NOW! it results only in a dissipating and disappointing afterglow that dims and recedes very quickly.

WE NEED TO RETURN TO THE BURNING BUSH! REPEATEDLY, FREQUENTLY, CONSTANTLY, DETERMINATELY, COURAGEOUSLY! We need to insist on it, not so much to our spouses or our children or our brothers and sisters in the Lord, BUT TO OURSELVES! TO OUR OWN HEARTS! We need to climb the sides of Sinai on a regular basis and linger upon and within its sacred confines and be bathed in the environment of His presence.

I have never read about or heard of another follower of God, except Moses, who reflected so much of God's presence that his face shone to the degree that he had to cover it so that the people listening to him could look upon him. But I have often witnessed, and I am sorry to say that most of them are in my youthful past, scores of God's children who clearly and obviously had just stepped out of an encounter with heaven's God, It is a part of my church past that is far too rare these days, and I speak not just of lay-persons, but of preachers too.

Perhaps the highest tribute I could ever pay to any preacher, and I often refer to Reverend E.E. Meeks in my preaching, is a description of his personal ministry. Brother Meek's preaching reflected his down-to-earth agrarian background, and his illustrations (he always placed the accent on the second syllable instead of the third) generally described farms and farming. His speech was not eloquent and his thought processes would not be considered intellectual. Grammar and elocution and diction and syntax were as foreign to him as Greek and Latin, and none of these remarks are purposed to demean my dear brother and good friend in the slightest degree, for he was a very effective preacher. (Brother Meeks is retired now). Brother Meeks lacked a good many skills that the world and the church expect in a preacher, but he had one that elevated him into the ranks of the great preachers of all time. He understood that to say the words of God, he had to get them from the presence of God.

I am amazed at how few preachers have learned this! Yesterday's manna stinks both in a Sinaitic wilderness or at the dawning of the 21st century! Secondhand stuff smells! There is not a mother or wife hearing or reading this who prepares their meals for their spouses or family from the garbage can. The hard, crusty bread goes to the pigs. The moldy stuff and the rotting stuff gets thrown out. Nothing can take the place of fresh food and we all know it. We can it and we freeze it and we cure it and we concentrate it and we dehydrate it, but there is no way in this beautiful

world you can capture and retain the freshness of a ripe tomato carefully removed from its soft, leafy vine, lightly rinsed and salted, and joyfully consumed. Fresh, green beans have to be one of earth's greatest pleasures.

Freshness is the idea! Whatever other skills and abilities and charms and beauties any of us possess, what we Christians need to witness in one another is freshness. Husbands owe to their wives the freshness that can only occur from an encounter with heaven's God. We need to bless our wives and our children with that unearthly aura of heaven's atmosphere. You cannot buy it from Sears or Home Base or the Future Shop or Outdoor Outfitters. There is no wholesale or retail establishment on earth that sells God's presence. You only get it at the throne of grace. You ladies cannot discover it from any book club or devotional program or tape library or deeper life seminar or radio program or chat room or web site. You can only access the sweetness of His presence on your knees in your secret closets.

NOTHING can take the place of a personal encounter with the Lord. I repeat that God does not want us to live in the past. We live far below God's best for us as we try to feed our souls on stale bread when His table is spread with the Living Bread -- with fresh manna. What is so rich and blessed about this truth is that it is so personal. Remember the crippled man who waited for 38 years to get into the healing waters of Bethesda?, but at the stirring of the waters, those who were closer or more mobile and quicker reached the water first? Imagine his disappointment and heartache as he watched thirty eight (or more!) other individuals step into the waters and were healed and made whole! Others were being touched! Others were being healed! Others were made whole by the power of God. But not this poor man. Three incredible words from John 5:6 hold my mind in endless fascination: "JESUS SAW HIM". So often we allow our gaze to slip and wander to the "Bethesda around us, and I join us all in thanking the Lord for our "Bethesdas".

Thank God for human hands and human help and kind looks of sympathy and love. Thank God for lending institutions and medical and health providers, and insurance policies and safety nets. Thank God for loving and caring relatives and friends who reach out to us and lift us when we are down. BUT "BETHESDA" IS LIMITED. "Bethesda" is so selective. "Bethesda" is so restrictive. "Bethesda" is discriminatory. Our "Bethesdas" in 1998 have limits and restrictions and exclusions and exceptions.

But the scripture says, "WHEN JESUS SAW HIM"! Everything normal and average and regular and routine stopped when Jesus saw him! "When Jesus saw him" hope arose! "When Jesus saw him" possibility leaped! "When Jesus saw him" opportunity blossomed! "When Jesus saw him" his sun began to shine again. "When Jesus saw him" answers were forthcoming. It is better to know where the well is than to receive a drink from it. Bethesda, as wonderful and life-giving as it was, only offered one chance each season -- a "one-in-a-million" lottery-type long shot at best. Jesus offers unlimited access to the very vaults of heaven!

None of us who knows God needs to exist on secondhand glory; on used inspiration; of transferred anointing; on residual blessing; on left-over communion. It is God's plan and His privilege to communicate with us from first-draft material straight from His mind and heart that is as late-breaking as it is uncensored. You do not "get the spin" from God. It is the truth, and God never offers opinions.

Christians are impoverished and weakened and diminished when we fail to immerse ourselves in His presence. There is nothing we can do or in which we can engage that will take its place. I wish there were, but there are no courses offered or classes known or seminars conducted showing anyone how to access God, There are no mechanics to waiting on God. There is no technology in existence, on earth or in space, that can bring God on line. There are no radio waves or laser beams that can locate Him or arrest Him.

BUT I CAN TOUCH HIM IN A HEARTBEAT without E-mail or a website or a power source. Praise God!

Let our minds not forget! God does not want us to live in the past! He is the God of the NOW. He is forever and always and eternally the "now" God. And He intends to maintain contact with us on that basis. Knowing Him is perennial, and walking with Him is an exercise in unfolding continuity. History may be intensely interesting, but it is dead. The future is intriguing to contemplate, but it is completely uncertain. **THE PRESENT IS GOD'S INTEREST AND HIS ACTIVITY.** He is not the God of the dead, but the living.

The only reason in the universe why God left us a book that tells us about Abraham and His relationship with him **IS TO CAUSE US TO WANT THE SAME THING** to occur between Him and us!! Let us make no mistake on this! **GOD IS INTO CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS!**

He does not want us to know about Him. **HE WANT US TO KNOW HIM!** He does not want us to know about Who He was and what He was about with Abraham. **HE WANTS US TO KNOW WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE IS ABOUT WITH US!!! WITH YOU AND ME!!!** God is into current relationships! He is the God of the living and not the dead, and He wants me to keep saying this until we believe it! God does not have any second-class relationships. **THEY ARE ALL FIRST-CLASS!** He offers no preferential treatment to any one individual. **GOD VALUES NO ONE, HUMAN BEING OVER ANY OTHER ONE, PER SE,** that means "of itself" or "intrinsically". From Adam until the last of today's babies, God does not arbitrarily favor one person over any other one.

Now, follow this closely. He does favor one man, or one woman, or one youth, and even children at times, **BUT NOT ARBITRARILY.** It is always after the fact. God always favors persons who have interests like His own. In fact, according to 2 Chronicles 16:9, He routinely and constantly **SEARCHES FOR** such persons, and I quote:

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him." Any person of any period of humankind's history, **WHOSE HEART AND MIND HAS BEEN ON GOD'S WILL AND WAYS AND INTERESTS,** has been the loving focus of almighty God, **AND STILL IS TODAY!** Do you want to access God? Do you want to know God? Do you want to touch Him and appropriate Him and experience Him and discover Him? Do you want to know what it is like to have heaven's God run through your being and around the hallways of your mind and the corridors of your soul? Do you want to feel the tugs of the Divine and experience the power of His Person and sense the surge of Deity shared with a mere mortal? Can we grasp this truth -- that God is more interested in sharing

Who He is with you than you could possibly desire in your wildest imaginations? Believe the Word! HE THE GOD OF THE LIVING AND NOT THE DEAD.

If you believe that God gave special and preferential treatment to Abraham or Isaiah or Daniel or Paul, then the Bible is a myth and its God is a fabrication. God favors persons whose choices are towards Him, and whose will is aligned with His, and whose purposes move with His own.

You never can know God by contending with Him, and unless, and until, this bridge is crossed in the court of the human soul, none of us can even start to know Him. What I mean by the "court of the human soul" is that time and place where WE MAKE THE JUDGMENT ABOUT OWNERSHIP AND RULERSHIP AND CONTROL. We have to see that unbelief and doubt is the simplest, but most destructive, form of rebellion. OUR QUEST FOR GOD WILL NOT EVEN START UNTIL THE CONTROL ISSUE IS SETTLED. No person can discover God in rebellion. A born-again Christian is a follower, a disciple, a yoke-partner, a cross-bearer of Jesus Christ, AND NOT A REBEL!! I firmly and vigorously reject the contemporary preaching that you can know Jesus as Savior, but not your Lord and Master, and inherent within this erroneous teaching is the possibility of serving the Lord for a lifetime and still not have made Him the Lord of your life! What ever happened to "leaving all to follow Jesus", and "loving the Lord with ALL the heart, mind and soul", and "whoever does not leave all CANNOT be My disciple"?

Theologies come and go and become "in vogue and out of vogue", and relevant and not relevant, but the Word of God is steadfast and changeless, and I read something in my Bible from Matthew 16:24 and 25 as a teenager that was as clear-cut to me then as it is today. It reads the same today in 1998 as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century as it did in the 1940s and 1950s, and, Thank God! , the translators have left it in there though the theological mavens of neo-orthodoxy and new-agism have tried to water it down. Jesus said there, and I quote:

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life FOR MY SAKE shall find it.

You cannot misinterpret or misunderstand this. THE ONLY WAY TO ACCESS GOD IS TO LOSE YOUR LIFE FOR JESUS' SAKE, and it does not matter how religious a person may talk and act, we can never begin to know God until we have surrendered our wills and our ways and our lives to Jesus Christ TO THE DEGREE THAT WE HAVE DELIBERATELY AND INTELLIGENTLY AND CONSCIOUSLY AND TOTALLY DIED TO OURSELVES, AND OUR WILLS, AND OUR INTERESTS AND OUR PURPOSES. We holiness folk can talk about this happening when we are sanctified wholly if we want to, but I have refused to believe this even as a youth with little or no theological understanding. You cannot be a rebel and be a Christian, and if you are of a mind to debate this clear-cut biblical truth, the shards of disobedience are sticking up all over your heart.

Sometimes I have discovered in our searching after God that our hearts will outdistance our theology, and this is strangely satisfying and refreshing to me -- even mildly humorous! Millions of saints have found out about the wonderful ways of God alone and by themselves, just with the Lord and in company with the faithful Holy Spirit. I am so glad that we can access God without theology courses and that we can get into the yoke with Jesus and "learn of Him" without the sanction of the religious experts. Remember that the religionists of Jesus' day were repeatedly "offended at Him" when He "knew letters", that is, all the theological matters, without having jumped through their hoops, so to speak. The same religionists were amazed at the knowledge of the disciples because they "were unlearned and ignorant men", and yet they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."

Years ago, I read of a little, scrawny, tough-as-leather mountain climber coming down from the Matterhorn, a famed, 14,000 foot Swiss Alp mountain. The witnesses were agreed that he was indeed and in fact returning from that fearsome monolith, whose crags and crevasses had claimed so many lives in pursuit of conquering its towering summit. He had no support team, no entourage, no climbing companion, and not another person or agency had known of him or where he had been or what he had been doing, for Matterhorn climbing and climbers were strictly monitored. This is the reason what he had accomplished was completely substantiated. The only way this lone climber could be where he was at this time and place was to have climbed the West Face of the Matterhorn. It had never been done before, and when all the facts were computed and substantiated, the lone climber was saluted and celebrated with the pronouncement that, "The West face of the Matterhorn is unscalable." His simple reply was, "Oh, I did not know that."

Hear me now. Every day all around the world simple, devoted, hungering lovers of Jesus Christ enter into the heart and mind of heaven's God and climb the summit of Who He is. They sail into the placid ocean of His Being and soar throughout the limitless atmosphere of His Person, and stop anywhere and everywhere to load up on the goodies of Who He is. Oh, how I pray and hope we can get ahold of this! The Lord wants us to know Him much, much more than we can desire to know Him!

We make a terrible mistake when we assume that he stopped revealing Himself in the first century of the church, or in the third or tenth or fourteenth or even in the eighteenth century. Why would we think that God would want to just sort of stop revealing Himself to the church? All I can say is that some of us should at least have the inquisitiveness and the yearning -- if not the courage -- to bore into the nature and character of the Lord. In my humble judgment, the truly last frontier is the very first one! Discovering God is the quintessential journey into the unknown, and anyone can do it who has a heart for God.

When God appeared to Moses at the site of the burning bush, He proclaimed Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The obvious and direct reference was that He was not only the same God Who appeared and spoke to them, but He was continuing to make the approaches to humankind. And centuries down the pike, into the day and life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the same God was relating to those who wanted Him and invited Him.

That same God wants me to tell us that he is still open for discussion and revelation and manifestation to individuals today. He wants me to tell you that He does not communicate on earth

with Abraham and Moses and Daniel and David and Paul anymore, for He is the God of the living and not the dead. He loved Enoch, and had a good time of fellowship with him over a period of many years, and ultimately wanted him to be with Him in a better place. God loved Abraham and the two of them had wonderful experiences of trust and confidences, but the Lord was through with Abraham and called him to be with Himself. Moses and the Lord had a powerful and blessed time together, and Moses dug into the heart and mind of God unlike most men who knew Him past and present, but his work for God was done and the Lord took him to be with Himself. You get the idea coming to us here. I get blessed down to my socks when the Lord says of Daniel in no less than three different places that he was a man "greatly beloved of the Lord." I know of no other person in the Bible that the angels from the immediate presence of God made this comment about. But the point is that, as much as God loved Daniel because of his great faithfulness and commitment to God and His ways and causes, he laid his armor down and went the way of all the earth.

We have to see that there are no favorites with the Lord, and He will do His best to relate to whomever comes up to Him and knocks at His door. He will sit down and sup with them, He will chat with you and me as long as we will linger in His presence, or in my case, and maybe some of you also, until I can absorb no more and until my mental and emotional systems just cannot tolerate any more.

We have to see that God has a different and separate blueprint for my relationship with Him than for you or anyone else, God will develop and posture incidents and thoughts and concepts with you that He will not with anyone else. What God is doing in you is as unprecedented as a new galaxy. God plows new ground with you in your relationship with Him that is as personal as your own brain and eyes. Thank God for DNA!!! Thank God for whorls!! Science is bringing us closer and closer to God all the while trying to promote itself!!! My fingerprints and my DNA is unlike anyone else's who ever lived or ever will live, I look out over this congregation and see individuals -- not a group and not a bunch of people. We are separate and distinct and unique and individualistic -- each one of us. There are a million Lesters (more or less) in this world, BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE ME!!! and the God of the universe seeks to have a relationship with me. Think of the hundreds and thousands of persons in the world today whom we know personally, AND NOT ANY TWO OF THEM ARE ALIKE, even the twins and triplets and quads and quint, and on and on.

What makes the relationship we have with the Lord so special is that it is just beginning during this short lifetime, It is personal, but it is also eternal. What is going on between us and Him is just starting, and what we need to realize is that what we learn of Him in these days is the peeling off of the outside edges of Who He is.

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Chapter 2 THE FACE OF GRACE

This writing is about one descriptive word. What makes this word impressive is that it is self descriptive of a Person. What makes this word incredible is that, in a single word, God describes Himself.

From time immemorial, men have written a succession of literary attempts to describe God. He describes Himself in a single word. That one word tells Who He is. That one word describes to any intelligent being everything that there is to know about Him.

THE LORD IS GRACIOUS. That is the one word with which He described Who He was to Moses. In answer to Moses' intense inquiry into Who He was, God replied that He was "gracious".

Moses was the kind of a person I term a "borer", or a "digger". God loves borers and diggers. He seems to have special delight in the persons who openly and vigorously seek to discover Him. Moses said to God in Exodus 33:13, "...show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee."

Mankind has never produced a more daring explorer than Moses. The Phoenicians and Norsemen and Magellans and Columbuses and Pilgrims and Lindbergs and Yeagers and Glens and Armstrongs must all reverently bow before this meekest man of all men as he dares to present himself before the heavenly Holy of Holies, and boldly asks God to "show him His way! Show me Who You are. Show me what You are like! I want You to show Yourself to me! I want to know You! You tell me that I have found grace in Your sight, and yet I don't know Who You are! If I have found grace in your sight, reveal Yourself to me!"

Imagine that! Talk about nerve! Let it never be said that meekness and boldness cannot co-exist, for Moses obliterates such a myth at this point in his relationship with God. And there isn't even a hint of reprimand from God to Moses impassioned demand. In fact, in this instance with Moses and God, as with a good many others after it, God seems to invite and reward such bold excursions of questing spirits into His nature. I think that we need to draw a bold line under the statement that God portrays GREAT DESIRE TO MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN TO INDIVIDUALS. I like to reverently call Him "the God of the crooked finger"; the God Who ever beckons us to come closer; the God Who invites scrutiny; the God Who wants to reveal Himself; the God Who seeks to share Himself with man.

Look at the Lord's incredulous response in verse seventeen to Moses' request that He should "show him His way"; that He should make Himself known unto Moses. God replied that, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight."

It is obvious that this is a private dialogue between God and Moses. Can you beat that!? I don't know what an almighty God does as a regular matter, but it has to be wondrously complex and universal in nature. I say this as reverently as I can, but He has a universe to run and here He is hunkered down and locked into a private chat with a mere mortal who knew how to ring the doorbell of heaven's resident Deity. Sinai's Mountain groaned and writhed in a blazing, jolting, pounding, smoking, quaking cataclysm as He touched down on a fragile, trembling earth. The elements constricted in transformed convulsion as His presence arrived at this untimely summons from a yearning mortal. But He came ... and He stood ... toe to toe and face to face and heart to heart with a frail mortal who hungrily asked to know Who He was..!!

Whenever God communes with a mortal ... that is grace. When He stoops to communicate with us ... that is an act of infinite grace. When He allows our finite, limited minds to meet with His mind, and match our thoughts with His thoughts, and reason with Him ... that is an exercise of grace!

Everything about God relates to His grace. There is no aspect of Him that is not connected to His grace. Perhaps because we see Him primarily as a Creator, His power aspect usually moves to the forefront of our thinking anytime we consider Who He is. Any act of His that portrays the supernatural or the miraculous is of grace.

It's hard for us to think along these lines, for our displays of power are nearly always reactions -- reactions to thoughts, choices, circumstances or to other persons. A mother will use her power as a reaction to care for the needs of her family. She uses her power to bake a cake, launder clothes, push a shopping cart or vacuum the carpet. A father will use his power to earn a salary or wage so that he can pay for the creature needs of his wife and children. We use our power to meet any need of our physical and emotional environments that presents itself to our minds.

Strangely, what we use our power for, even in those activities that we would term humanitarian or altruistic, is almost always in response to a return -- a smile, a nod, a thank you, appreciation, gratitude, or a warm feeling.. Even when we move away from a reciprocal motivation, our acts of care and helpfulness responds to "the meeting of a need."

You see, grace has no motive! Where there is motive, it predominates the act. It would exceed, or be greater than, the act. Grace has no motivation -- no provocation. It is an outflow. It is an effusion. We humans find it difficult to conceive of grace because we must have a source -- a cause! It's hard for us to understand a causeless thought or a causeless choice or a causeless action, but that is God's realm. Nothing causes God to think or decide or do anything. He never reacts to anyone or anything. He is essentially generative in nature.

Whatever it is of God (which is grace) that results in creativity, involves Him with you and me, and that personal involvement is more generative and creative than it is historical. What I mean is that His relationship with you is unprecedented. It is brand new. Whatever is occurring between you and God is as unique as what occurred between Him and Moses. God "plows ground" with you that is eternally virgin. His dialogues with you are as creative as a new galaxy or a new solar system. I pray that we will allow this truth to grip our minds.

I need to emphasize and repeat the earlier statement that God's personal involvement with us is apt to be more creative than historical. What I mean by historical is that His gracious approach to you, personally, is not a rerun -- it is not a repeat -- it is not a replica. It is not predicated upon any previous dialogue with any other person. God's relationship with me is not the "cookie-cutter" kind where He sort of stamps out another one that He has used from a schematic a few million times already. **GOD DOESN'T ASSEMBLY-LINE OR MASS PRODUCE HIS RELATIONSHIPS.** It is as personal as personal can be. That is a shouting point if I ever knew one.

Heaven's God drafted a blueprint with my name on it! He lovingly and carefully drew in the lines for an eternal structure for me. With greater precision than any earthly measuring device could accomplish, He set down the specifications one by one -- detail by detail. Can you see it? Can you envision Him doing this? He drew in your and my unique temperaments with infinite detail and dropped each gene deliberately into place. You don't think so? I do, because He is God. He is a God of creativity. He is a God of uniqueness. He is a God of individual design.

I repeat without hesitation that each of us is an individual creation from the hand of almighty God. There never was an individual like you and me before and there will never be another just like us throughout the ceaseless eons of eternity. Individuality is at the same time a most exciting realization and a horrible responsibility. The greatest fact of humanity is potential -- what we can beg and we sit at the controls. We choose what we will be, that is, unless we recognize how much we need Someone wiser and greater to guide and lead us in our construction.

The dumbest parent in the world is the one who thinks and says that, "He treats all of his children alike." I understand what we mean when we say that. What we mean is that no one child will be preferred or loved more than another. The dumbest parent is he who gives "family addresses" as a method of parental guidance. We all know this too! Each child is a "one-room schoolhouse". Each child is an independent study whether we have two or ten. The rules of any household have to be uniform to everybody in it to maintain order. Every household must have a final authority figure to whom each member is finally amenable or there is contention, but neither uniform rules or ultimate authority must be allowed to destroy personality and individuality.

When wise parents encourage their children to express their views (as long as they are respectful in doing it), they develop in them conviction, resourcefulness and decisiveness. Questions are keys to discovery, and they must never be discouraged! Honest questions are rarely inappropriate. That is quite a thought, isn't it? When rebellion gets mixed into the matter -- whether of parents or of God -- education suffers, and usually stops, but no wise authority figure discourages honest questions.

God places that wisdom in the hearts of parents and He places that insatiable desire to learn and know into children. Learning and teaching is a divinely lighted torch and is one of the faces of God's marvelous grace. It is proof that He wants to share Himself with us. The desire to learn is basically within us so that we will eventually come to know Him. It is one of the streams that flows from the fountainhead of God's grace.

Our humanity and our mortality is the result of God's grace. I mean by that -- that when we realize how extremely different and opposing humankind is from God, we wonder why He has the slightest interest in us? When we view how we treat God, how we treat one another, how we treat ourselves (especially how we abuse our minds and bodies), how we treat our environment, and how we treat our potential, there just is no other explanation for our having being than the grace of God. No being that I know about is so selfish, so arrogant, so wasteful, so insensitive, so hateful and vengeful, so hurtful, so domineering and so repressive as mankind. We enslave the weak, impoverish the unsuspecting, take advantage of the trustful and poor, trash the planet and curse God all the while. Why would God -- why did God, give us being?

One thought is paramount. If we view the entire creative scene of man from our own point of view, God made a colossal blunder. Few would disagree with that conclusion. Humanly speaking, if I were God, I wouldn't want anything to do with us. The saintliest and the nicest and the wisest and the best of us are a sorry lot when we take an honest look at our myriad imperfections. I am consistently puzzled at how any person could call himself a god -- and then try to sell that idea to other rational beings. The smartest people I have ever known have done some very stupid things. All of us spend way too much time eating crow, getting feet out of our mouths and wiping egg from our faces to be gods. If mankind is God's crowning creation (and we are), we have to look beyond the present product to discover why God did it. From our point of view, we wonder how we ever got out from the "plan stage."

There can only be one answer -- grace. God did not give us being because of the product or because He would realize a return. He certainly didn't create us because of any need that we could fulfill within Himself. A perfect Being needs nothing, not even fellowship, as some theologians have suggested. God didn't and doesn't need anything that mankind can provide. Neither are we an experiment, as the philosophers have taught. Experimentation is our realm, but not God's. Experimentation is foreign to God, except that He is aware that we do it. We "try things to see what will happen", but God doesn't. God is never surprised or perplexed. A Being Who sees the beginning from the end -- and that includes mankind and everything occurring to and resulting from our being -- "experiments" with nothing. There is a specific, knowable, measurable design. Everything that has occurred to us right up until now, and everything that will occur in and through us throughout eternal ages is by conscious, specific design.

If we believe the Bible, it insists that each of us is a separate and unique creation, specifically planned in God's will and mind even before our conception and birth. This is quite a consideration, and I quote from three passages about three different individuals.

Psalms 139:13-16 "For Thou hast possessed my reins (inner parts) thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

"I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

"My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth,

"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

Jeremiah 1:4 and 5 "Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee..."

Galatians 1:15 and 16a "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, "To reveal His Son in me..."

I realize that it could be argued that David and Jeremiah and Paul were all specially chosen individuals who God called to accomplish significant tasks for Him, and, as such, were special instruments of God's interest and preparation. Do we really think that? Does anyone who even knows a tiny bit about the God of the Bible think that He prefers one person over another? Instinctively, we reject any kind of favoritism or preferential treatment! The Bible outright condemns such thoughts, and I think that each person feels that knowledge deeply.

God foresaw and foreknew every detail of every choice and thought and action of each individual human being BEFORE he planned us. He foresaw the density and magnitude of all that mankind's being would entail. Of course He knew it all and saw it all, or He wouldn't be God!! Just because such a concept is beyond understanding doesn't invalidate the fact. The idea is to help us recognize that our humanity is of grace.

The question is asked with painful regularity: "If God knew how much heartache and disappointment and sorrow man would bring, why did He create him? If he knew that he would sin and that that sin would require the death of His Son to atone for it, why did He do it? If He knew how few would accept His plan of salvation and how many would be eternally lost by rejecting it, why did He ever seriously consider man's creation? " IT IS ONLY DISCOVERED IN HIS GRACE. THE LORD IS GRACIOUS.

God is a giver. He is a sharer. That is what makes Him gracious, Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 that the heavenly Father makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends the rain on the just and the unjust. There is no better example of God's grace than this. The rays of the sun are unselective and mutual. The rain is distributed evenly and generally. His grace is like that, and I am certain that it is as unappreciated as the sun and the rain.

Just about all that we do is because we are trying to stay out of debt to others. I am continually surprised at the most common reaction to a favor or an act of helpfulness rendered to a friend or acquaintance. "I'll pay you back some day," is the response. Such thinking is built right into our system of ethics. Most of us either want to be equal to or exceed deeds and acts given on our behalf. I'm that way to a fault, and so are many of you. That is because we exist in an environment unaccustomed to and unregulated by grace.

God IS gracious, and when He controls our hearts, He starts pumping grace into them. This is a major reason for a Christian to have this matter of control settled with God. This is why Christians must die to self-will and self-interest and self-control. God doesn't want to control us simply so that He can control us, and that is not double talk even if it sounds like it is, God isn't interested in the slightest in power and authority. He has absolutely no concern for the subjugation and subordination of any creature, human or heavenly. Why should He? HE ALREADY HAS ALL OF THAT. HE ALREADY HAD ALL OF THAT before he brought into being the very first creature outside of Himself. The only reason imaginable why God gave the power of choice to any being that He created, which included mankind, was because of His grace.

I wish that we could see the specialty of this sovereign act. The ONLY thing that we have that we can call our own and that we can ever give back to God, in life and in eternity, is the right to choose. We choose to believe Him. We choose to obey Him. We choose to love Him. We

choose to give Him the control of our beings. VOLITION -- the authority to choose -- is the only unalienable right that is uniquely and personally ours. Everything else material and spiritual and mental is already God's. We just control the use of them -- just as Jesus pointed out -- as the sun and the rain.

If God can gain the control of our wills, then He will start making us like Himself. He will start placing His thoughts and His ways and His values within our minds. He will cause us to see and understand and evaluate like He does.. We will start to understand what Paul meant when he set down humanly contradictory standards to the Christians in Phillipi in Philippians 2:3-7.

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves-

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

"But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

The matter of who or what controls us must be of infinite interest to us, for no thinking, mature person would deny the powerful inner and outer forces that make us think and act in ways that are embarrassing and painful to us. Paul termed such powerful, insistent force "another law that wars against my members." The point is that we humans are controlled by higher powers, be they evil or good, and it is up to us to name which.

Graciously, God offers His way to us. It is not forced upon us like we were forced to be born into a sinful human nature. We had no choice in the inheritance of a carnal nature, but God comes to each of us and OFFERS us a way out. God doesn't need us, but we need Him.

It's grace that He doesn't need me for anything -- though I need Him for everything -- yet, He seeks me. He wants to let me know Him. He seeks constantly for my attention so that He may communicate with me. We need to take the time to ponder this. Perhaps we should put it in question form. Why would God relate to me when He needs nothing from me? Whatever He gets from my relationship with Him enlarges me and not Him. His relating to me is all of grace. He does it for me and not Him.

God's grace is not specific. It is general and comprehensive. It is not available in certain situations, but withheld from others. There are no restrictions or exceptions to its adequacy.

There are no circumstances in any human eventuality that are not covered by His grace. Every promise of God is inclusive and bears on any realm of our need

God never says that His grace and power are adequate for everything BUT this one certain kind of eventuality. There just are no categories that are out of or beyond the reach of grace!

There is hope in any human situation because of His grace. Grace is what brings possibility into hopeless circumstances. Grace is what brings meaning into misery and abjection. Grace is what injects potential into ruin and loss. Grace is what breathes life into the corpse of horrible failure. Grace is the heartbeat and pulse of resurrection. Grace is the green light to regeneration. Grace is the starting gun to trying again.

Grace is the indefatigable encourager. God's grace insists that we can make it -- that we can do it. It never gives up or in. Grace is the drumbeat of perseverance. Grace sees no mountains or valleys. There simply are no barriers or chasms to grace. It knows no impossibilities, considers no limitations and has no restrictions, for grace is born in the character of God.

God's grace misses nothing and identifies with everything. It does not overlook anything. It permeates. It saturates. It touches the tiniest detail and relates to every situational nuance. It even ministers to what we cannot understand about ourselves and our involvements! How great is God's grace!

Whatever aspect or variation that we can conceive of, grace has already been there and asserted provision. Grace is all over the place like a billion, little cheerleaders jumping and smiling and encouraging! You can't exclude God's grace if you wanted to or tried to. Grace is effusive and locomotive and pervasive and thermal. It is like the inexorable rising of the sun as it shatters the night and dispels every vestige of darkness.

Everything that comes to us is because of God's grace. All emanates from that. The start of everything is His grace.

John 1, verse 1 is the oldest verse in the Bible, predating Genesis 1:1 and separating that creative point in time with infinity. "In the beginning... was God" -- God, The Word, and The Holy Spirit. There was God -- but because He is gracious, He moves -- He acts. Something awesome and marvelous within Him searches for objects to bless -- so, "all things were made by Him."

Ephesians 1, verse 7 uncovers to us the base cause of everything: **THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE**. All things, and everything that comes to those "things", emanate from the riches of His grace. In verse three of Ephesians one, "all spiritual blessings" come from His grace. You and I could spend the rest of our lives, and beyond them, enumerating thousands of spiritual blessings -- and that is a single category resulting from the riches of His grace. They come to us and are experienced by us so randomly and constantly and unobtrusively that we use them as unconsciously as air, sunshine and water.

I mean no irreverence by the term, but Jesus is the "Transformer" of God's grace. He became a man so that we could appropriate God. He is not only God in every sense of measurement and dimension, but He transforms all that God is into humanly comprehensible terms and concepts. Jesus did not become a man so that He could identify with us in the sense of understanding us. Such thoughts are silly with the knowledge of His creating us. He Who created

every cell and nerve ending fully and instantly understands us, of course. He became a man redemptively to be our sin sacrifice, but practically so that WE could know He understands us.

The point is that God's grace is a river that flows endlessly from His fullness into our emptiness, bestowing countless blessings. No blessing from our gracious God is greater than that of "standing" referred to by Paul in Romans 5:2, when he says,

"By Whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand..."

No offer is more generous; no gift is more gracious; no opportunity is more available than this. Anyone can come into God's presence and be instantly aware that he is being received privately. No possibility known to man on earth is so valuable and rare. WE MAY STAND BEFORE GOD. It is not a dessert or a reward. It is because of His grace.

The significance of standing before God must not escape us. The more we consider the incongruity of this act, the more amazing that it becomes. Angels bow before Him. Seraphim cover their faces and feet when they are in His presence. Cherubim will not look upon Him as they attend His glory. Ceaselessly, day and night, living creatures describe His supremacy, His glory and His ascendancy. Demons and all of the minions of Hell cringe before Him, and Satan constantly submits to His sovereignty and authority. The universe and all creatures who fill it bow in humble abeyance before its Creator and Sustainer.

But when man steps into Redemption's room of saving grace, he stands!!! GOD'S GRACE STANDS MEN UP!! It makes winners out of history's sorriest losers. It makes saints out of Hell-bound sinners. It lifts a sin-scourged soul from the pits of hopelessness and elevates him to the highest heights of honor. GOD'S GRACE STANDS MEN UP!!!

This proclaims the supporting buoyancy of God's awesome grace. It emanates from His gracious nature. It is an effusion of the kind of Person Who He is, and it is as big and vast and generous as He is! It flows unendingly into our emptiness. It catches up the benighted lostness of our souls and suspends it in an ocean of care and love. The grace of God is so comprehensive that it fills the highest heaven and reaches to the lowest Hell.

We need to ponder this. This statement that it flows unendingly into our emptiness. The nature of the human soul is cavernous. We are, by nature, in constant need of filling. Without God we exist in a vacuum. Our emptiness is spacious and exists without limit. The human soul was created in hunger. Its appetite is a vast, astronomical openness by design.

We are receivers, beneficiaries, takers. We are made to be filled. "we have all received His fullness", John said in chapter 1:16 "and grace taking the place of grace." The only way that men can receive God's fullness is by being a willing and adequate receptacle. We have within us this gargantuan emptiness that requires fresh, new infusions of God's grace. And so we are filled and refilled; we are infused and re-infused. We are blessed and encouraged and strengthened and uplifted and elevated over and over by the Spirit of God.

When we are so very dry and bring to Him our pitiful, little measuring cups, He just lets His grace flow into them and they run over. That is the kind of Person Who He is, a "running over" God with oceans of grace and pity and mercy, Who is willing to open the windows of heaven and inundate us. Every correct view of Him is one portraying a God of abundance. All of heaven is programmed for giving. By design and nature the action of grace is benevolent. It flows into every crack and corner of our emptiness with His fullness. What a contrast for contemplation! Our emptiness -- His fullness!!

Because of the grace of God revealed through the life and death of Jesus, persons STAND in the presence of heaven's God! This act is without precedent in the order of God's relationships with other beings. No mind will ever understand this provision from the heart of God without deep and reverent contemplation of His grace.

God WANTED to give something special to mankind. He WANTED to share some of the greatness and love and depth of His being with other persons. He reached out to us in the Person of His Son.

No greater gift has ever been offered throughout eternity than the gift of salvation, for it not only saves us FROM sin (which is primarily separation from God) and death and Hell, but saves us TO a relationship with God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

If we know Jesus in full and free pardon from our sins through faith in His shed blood, WE HAVE EVERYTHING. If we refuse that unique, redemptive offer, WE HAVE NOTHING, in this life or in that life to come.

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Chapter 3 GOD'S RICHES

Ephesians 1:7 "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE."

This is obviously a continuation of last Sunday's message about God's grace, but seems to go a bit deeper into the thought and focus on the "riches" aspect more than the grace part.

Now, I did not say that God had riches. His Word says it here in this awesome and extensive verse. -- the RICHES of His grace. I do not know what you think about the recording of the Scriptures, but I personally am of the opinion that the Spirit of God was directly involved in ALL of its words and sentences that we call our Bible. I fully realize that this has been historically, and continues to be until this present day, a big controversy in the body of Christ -- even among so-called evangelicals -- even among so-called holiness groups. In fact, this has been one of the very few points of doctrine that has refrained the Wesleyan Church from merging with another major holiness denomination. I say this so that we may realize that good and holy people differ on the doctrinal point of the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures!

Allow me to give you my personal conviction on the matter, and it is not theological at all. It is theoretical, and downright practical in concept. If most of the Bible is inspired, but very small parts of it isn't, "why?". If God inspired the most of it, and I mean by inspired, the original writing of it, and the compiling of it, and the interpreting of it -- if God were "looking over the shoulders" of the men who brought our Bible into being -- if it were important to God to assure that "most" of it were what He wanted -- WHY NOT ALL OF IT? Why would He allow certain, small parts of it -- albeit even a little bit, or small segments of it -- to sort of "slip by Him" and get in the texts? I am not trying to be cute when I ask if He were maybe off doing something else or preoccupied or weary when Moses or David or Paul "got into the flesh" and inserted some things that were not from Him? I can believe that He oversaw it ALL if He oversaw and inspired most of it. WHY NOT?

So, when the Apostle Paul writes down these five words, "the riches of His grace", I take them as coming directly from the mind of God to Paul's mind. God has wealth. He considers wealth. He thinks about riches and He wants us to know and recognize His wealth, or He would not have referred it to Paul's mind. The reason is obvious. God knows that we humans place high value on wealth. Having and possessing has great value to us, so God lays this term on Paul's mind, "the riches of His grace", so that we may get a handle on what HE values and considers important.

At the start we understand that wealth to us and wealth to God is hardly the same. There is very little of human and Divine perspective that matches, and so the Lord introduces the Holy Spirit to us so that He may bring us more into line with His value system. To gain perspective here, let us consider a common question among us. "What do you get, as a present that is, for the person who has everything?" This is a good question as we think about God's riches. Most of us have arrived at the appropriate answer to the above question. You do not give "things" to the person who already has whatever they need in the way of comforts and sustenance and utility items. You "do" for such a person rather than "buy" for them. You learn to give of yourself and your time and your interest. It means much more to a parent these days to take them out for lunch or breakfast or have them over for dinner or take them shopping or drive them to see a relative than to write them a check! Often, a letter or a phone call or a visit has more value to a loved one or close friend than a hundred or even a thousand dollars. We all know that this is true.

Think with me just a bit. What could any being possibly give a Creator? Just ponder that a bit. What could you give a Creator? What would a Creator consider valuable? Things, possessions, monetary or temporal gifts do not even arise in one's mind as you consider the Lord's ability to put gold and silver and platinum and uranium into ore by the megatons. The One Who creates galaxies has no interest in accumulations and acquisitions at all. He has all of that.

We can easily conclude that God's riches are not tangible or monetary. Further, they cannot be power or position or authority, for He is almighty. I am sure that this sounds considerably trite, but what would you do if you were God? with the emphasis on "do"? If you were perfect and almighty and holy and glorious and knew everything, and was peaceful and happy and fulfilled and NEEDED NOTHING, what would you do? This leads us to a clearer understanding of why we humans are here and why God's Son became a human as we are and why He became a sacrifice for our sins, and why He has an eternal plan for us.

We are talking about God's riches. His grace is just one aspect of God's wealth, but in His grace the other aspects are held and flow. God is also rich in mercy and He is rich in truth and He is rich in integrity and He is rich in holiness and He is rich in love but all of these various aspects of His wealth ARE PRODUCTS OF HIS GRACE. IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE, all of the rest of His wealth WOULD HAVE NO BENEFICIARIES AND NO OBJECT UPON WHOM TO BESTOW IT ALL.

The reason why we are here, AT ALL, is discovered in God's grace. It is God's very nature to bestow and give and share and benefit and bless! What God does is an intuitive outflow. His wealth is in His characteristic beneficence. Wealth to God is exactly the opposite of our general concept. HE SEEKS TO GIVE, WHILE MANKIND'S GOAL IS TO GET!! GREED IS ALWAYS WANTING TO GET, WHILE GRACE IS ALWAYS WANTING TO GIVE. God SEARCHES for ways to bestow and bless. It is His nature to find ways to share Himself with any being who will receive. God is constantly looking for any person TO HARMONIZE WITH HIS WAYS AND WILL.

Please ponder this idea of harmony, for there is nothing in the entire person of God that is fractured or that is at odds with any other part. Everything about Him is harmonious and united and cooperative. You can see how natural it is for Him to identify with like attitudes and motives. God searches for individuals who share in His interests and values. This is why I have been persuaded for many years that Jesus sought out little children and blessed them and touched them and defended them. This is why He insisted that we must have their humble characteristics if we plan to get to heaven. JESUS SHARED IN THE SPIRIT AND INNOCENCE AND WHOLESOMENESS AND HUMILITY OF A CHILD. He was comfortable in their presence, for He found a harmony of spirit with them. Maybe it is the first time since leaving heaven that He had found a compatible spirit!

What we think about now are some of the certain marks of persons who have experienced the crucified life, and it is as regular and consistent as a heartbeat. You can anticipate an "other worldliness" and a Christlikeness among the sanctified. I have spend my life in the holiness movement and recognize the difference almost immediately. Persons who have experienced the crucifixion of carnal self, as Paul described in Galatians 2:20, can be expected to act and react in a selfless and non-self-serving manner. IF YOU ARE AROUND THEM AWHILE, THE MARKS OF SELFLESSNESS WILL BE EVIDENT, CONSISTENT AND BEAUTIFUL, and I promise you that it will not work as a discipline or a mere head belief. It has to be a spirit. It has to come from the heart. It has to be a characteristic or it will fail in the pressure spots.

One of my life's greatest disappointments is how few holiness people there are who live and practice a truly selfless life, and this is true even among so-called "conservative" groups. Our beliefs and our statements and our teaching and our preaching and our testifying is just about meaningless UNLESS IT GETS DOWN INTO OUR HEARTS AND UP INTO OUR MOUTHS AND ONTO OUR FACES AND OUT INTO OUR CONDUCT. God's rich grace will make a giver out of you every time. It will make you a servant every time. It will cause your thoughts and attention and interest to consider those persons around you, and their needs and their happiness and their concerns will outweigh your own. God's grace in us does not WAIT FOR NEEDS TO

ARISE, it searches for them. Please pardon the illustration, but grace is like the sniffing nose of a faithful canine, always sensing the need and testing the wind and checking out the environment for any sign of trouble. I repeat that God's grace does not respond. It flows.

You see, **SUCH IS WEALTH: SUCH IS RICHES**, and God sees it as such, and, I may add, so does every other person who truly experiences the crucified life. Investing in others becomes an active motivation, and looking for ways to help others becomes a normal source of thought and purpose. Jesus was so bold as to state in Matthew 20:25-28 that **THIS IS THE SPECIFIC REASON FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN**; for being a follower of His. Nothing is more clear in all of the New Testament than what I preach to us now, but it is truth that is largely and conveniently set aside by the majority of the church.

Our reason for being a Christian is to become a recipient of God's grace. It is to be infused with the gracious character of God. Remember that we were created "in His image, after His likeness", and whenever that likeness is recreated within us through the new birth and the crucified life, **IT WILL BE THE LIKENESS OF GRACIOUSNESS**. Jesus said in the verses referred to above, Matthew 20:25-28 that "the Son of Man came **NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO minister** and to give His life a ransom for many", and that significant preposition "even" that begins the verse just read to us makes it clear that Jesus was only using **HIS LIFE** and its purpose **TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT OURS**, as His followers, **WOULD BE**. Our reason for being a Christian **IS TO SERVE AND TO GIVE AND TO MINISTER**. I pray that this will not be lost to us, for I need to set down here some important information.

HEAVEN IS A PLACE OF GRACE. Heaven is programmed for giving and sharing and investing and bestowing, and anyone who goes there will be very much out of tune and out of place if he is not up to speed in the area of serving. My counsel is for us to gain experience in being gracious and giving here on earth among the saints, because serving is going to be the atmosphere of heaven.

I have been persuaded for many years that most of us will be greatly surprised when we discover the kind of a Person God really is and when we find out what goes on in His home and holy heaven. The truth is that references about it are dropped all over the Bible about both, but we are generally so absorbed in living our lives for ourselves and doing largely what we want from day to day that we miss the obvious right in front of our noses. If my repetition bothers you, I apologize, but I think we just plain overlook what should be clear to Christians who spend time in their Bibles. **GOD'S RICHES ARE NOT IN POSSESSIONS. THEY ARE IN CHARACTER**. And we need to emphasize in our minds that the same is true of us if we are scrutinizing and implementing Him and His ways into our daily living. Value and worth and wealth and success are so radically different in God's perspective than ours.

Oh! How powerfully different God's measurements are from ours! And this disparity is so clearly and frequently displayed and taught by Jesus! The surprise is that we miss so much of it! What we discover here and discuss here is not obscure at all, it is just that we are raised from earliest childhood to get and to own and to accumulate and to possess. To have is more important than to be! Human success is almost totally equated with ownership of possessions, **AND GOD**

TRIES, CONSTANTLY, TO GET US TO SEE THAT REAL WEALTH IS IN GIVING, NOT GETTING.

I urge us to look into any indication, biblically, that God and gold have any personal relationship. You ponder this with me and see if you can recall a single review of seeing God, like a Silas Marner, sitting on a throne of gold, with gold and jewels and temporal wealth of any kind or description, laying in piles around Him. Do you think that God has a deed to the universe or a title to heaven? Such thoughts would be funny if they were not so thought-provoking.

No! Those things are not God's wealth. His wealth is in Who He is -- the kind of a Person He is, and He very obviously is going to pass His nature and His value system along to those beings "who are made in His image." Those persons who get serious about being like Him will have a value system as His. It is a transformation of the highest sort to stay in His presence long enough to see the things of time drop off from us like a needless garment. It is like stepping into another world that counts wealth in caring and compassion rather than dollars and cents!

Where would we be without God's amazing grace? Especially when we recognize that IT IS ALL OF GRACE. God's sharing with us is so far beyond merit and deserts that there is no scale of measurement. None of what we receive from God is based on service or labor or obedience or surrender or love or even devotion. THERE IS NOTHING THAT WE CAN EVER DO TO DESERVE GOD'S GRACE. THAT IS WHAT MAKES HIS GRACE SO RICH!!! "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." (SEE Romans 5:6.) There is no payback for God's grace. It is unearned and undeserved so there can be no repayment. There is no debt. Did you hear that? THERE IS NO DEBT, for salvation comes of grace. Jesus canceled the debt. IT WAS TOO BIG FOR US TO PAY, so HE just canceled it. Our resources were too small. We have no buying power in the economy of grace. It is as free as the air and sunshine, and the wind in our faces. It is as vast as the starry heavens, and if we could catch and spend a star every day out of God's treasury, after ten thousand years there would be "no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun."

God's riches are in the kind of Person Who He is -- AND HE IS GRACIOUS. God wanted to do something completely and totally different from anything He had ever done before. He viewed every creature that He had ever brought into being, one by one! They literally filled His starry-gilded, glory-brightened, galactic universe in diverse ranks of strength, beauty, holiness and intelligence. Every one of them was perfectly formed to accomplish the specific purpose for which they were created. Every one of them functioned with an accuracy and perfection and facility that moved beyond human comprehension. AND EVERY ONE OF THEM FUNCTIONED IN PERFECT OBEDIENCE AND LOYALTY AND ADHERENCE TO GOD'S WILL AND PURPOSES.

God looked at seraphim who were beautiful beyond human conception. His eyes ran over their perfectly designed configuration and countenances of beauty and glory and facility to ascribe honor and raise to Him. They were not designed to praise Him necessarily. Now, think hard with me on this. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO PRAISE WORTHINESS AND HONOR AND HOLINESS. THEY WERE DESIGNED BY GOD TO BRING GLORY TO PURITY AND PERFECTION. God programmed seraphim to honor and praise ONLY WHO WAS WORTHY OF

PRAISE. Think mightily with me! Heaven would fall silent if there were even a hint of complicity or inclination to evil -- including God's throne. God created seraphim to praise what was worthy of praise -- SO THEY PRAISE HIM, CONSTANTLY, ENDLESSLY!

Perhaps God considered the cherubim who surrounds Him in ranked and silent witness to His holiness and the sanctity of personality. They are the guards of perfect holiness and represent -- not to God, but to every other creature of a vast universe -- that God and His throne are free of any moral contamination. They guarded the Tree of Life, which emblemized God's holiness, in Eden's Garden, and they guarded the blood-sprinkled mercy seat in the tabernacle, which symbolized God's intrinsic integrity. Cherubim were beings of silent wholesomeness and perfect integrity and absolute uprightness and unquestioned rectitude.

Then God looked lovingly into the eyes of Gabriel and Michael and Raphael! -- those devoted arch angels who had stood by His cause and His name and His Person when Lucifer CHOSE to mutiny and challenge His throne. They could have consorted with Lucifer and the other third of the fallen angels who conspired with him to question God's authority. We understand that angels, prior to Lucifer's CHOICE to rebel, had also been given the opportunity for such an option. They could choose to obey God and submit to Him, or not. Gabriel and others chose to love God and serve God. They yielded the control of their vast powers to the Lord. They GAVE BACK what God had offered to them. They CHOSE to align their wills with His own. THEY SENSED THAT THE GIFTED ABILITY TO CHOOSE WAS INDICATIVE OF THE GREATNESS OF GOD, and correctly identified it for the gracious act that it was.

God looked at Gabriel's heavenly visage that remained as intelligent and youthful and mature and vigorous and imposing as when he came from His creative hand five thousand millennia past. There were no diminishments or incapacitates or failures of imperfections in this mightiest of His arch angels. He was as alert and capable this moment as he had been when he had been God's "freshman" angel (and I have "freshman" in quotes). He was not wrinkled or bent or greyheaded or arthritic or grizzled or dottering or tottering or shuffling. There are just no retirees or pensioners among the angels. Glory be to Jesus! There are no "old angels homes" in heaven. There are no retirement centers for worn-out angels in all of God's vast universe.

Gabriel was of such holiness that he could stand in the presence of God. Gabriel was of such eternity that he will be an extension of God's will forever. Gabriel was of such power that he could singly slay armies of men like stalks of wheat before a combine! Gabriel was of such trust that he would tell the world of mankind's Redeemer. Gabriel was of such authority that he is God's spokes-angel to men and demons.

But when God wanted to create a being "in His image, after His likeness", He originated an entirely different kind of being. This creature would not be like the seraphim, or the cherubim, or even the angels. These beings would be more godlike than any and all of those orders of creation before or after. Think with me now! THEY WOULD HAVE PERSONALITY -- INDIVIDUALITY, like God does. There would be no two of them alike -- out of all the billions who would be born in time to come -- each individual would be different from any other. And they would be both created and born EACH TIME CONCEPTION OCCURRED. As mentioned in last Christmas' message, birthing was designed into mankind FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF

BRINGING THE SAVIOR OF EARTH INTO THE HUMAN FAMILY by that means, and not the other way around.

The sin cycle, that would blight, mar and injure the human race, would have no effect upon man's individuality. Each person would be a unique, unprecedented, unduplicated creation of Divine origin. Parents need to ponder this truth deeply and urgently, especially in these 1990s when deliberate abortion has become generally accepted as a form of birth control. The Bible has news for abortionists and those persons who employ them. That fetus is a person, born or unborn, and is not only a person, **BUT A TOTALLY DIFFERENT INDIVIDUAL FROM ANY OTHER WHO HAS EVER BEEN OR EVER WILL BE.**

Individuality is exciting beyond description, and at the same time, frightening when honestly contemplated. There seems to be no horizons to the development of human potential. I am afraid that most of us do not realize how truly special individuality is because we exist in a world of them. It is like any other circumstance that is viewed as common because we are surrounded by it. Our spiritual enemy will do all that is in his vast power to perpetrate such thinking, that is, that we are just nobodies going nowhere in this world. The soul of man is so precious and valuable to God that Jesus referred to it as beyond calculation -- more than the worth of the entire world.

I know how cheap and futile life can seem at times. All of us struggle sometimes with life's apparent injustices and seemingly senseless circumstances that are beyond understanding OR control. All of us wonder at times what possible good or value could come from events that seem to bring only heartache, suffering or damage? I know that you have thought about this, but I wonder why we even expect our lives to be 100% carefree and trouble-free? and why we consider anything different from that to be out of place? **COULD IT BE THAT WITHIN OUR DEEPEST SOULS, of all mankind and each individual, THERE IS AN INSATIABLE YEARNING FOR PERFECTION?**

The Apostle Paul addressed this very thinking and left us with God's own perspective. If we try hard enough, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I think that we get a clearer picture of the futility of life without God and the exciting hope of expecting better things ahead **THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.** Let us read Romans 8:18-39, starting with verse 18, and I am reading from J.B. Phillips' translation, a version widely used by Holiness students of the Word.

"In my opinion, whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has in store for us.

"The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.

"The world of creation cannot yet see the reality, not because it chooses to be blind, but because in God's purpose, it has been limited -- yet it has been given hope.

"And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!

"It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail.

"And it is plain too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that we have realized our full sonship in Him.

"We are saved by this hope, and let us remember that hope always means waiting for something that we do not yet see. For whoever hopes when he can see?

"But if we hope for something we cannot see, then we must settle down to wait for it in patience.

"The Spirit also helps us in our present limitations. For example, we do not know how to pray worthily, but His Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which cannot find words.

"He Who knows the heart's secrets understands the Spirit's intention as He prays according to God's will for those who love Him.

"Moreover, we know that to those who love God, who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.

"For God, in His foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of His Son, that He might be the eldest of a family of many brothers.

"He chose them long ago; when the time came He called them, He made them righteous in His sight, and then He lifted them to the splendor of life as His own sons.

"In the face of all of this, what is there left to say? If God is for us, who can be against us?

"He Who did not grudge His own Son, but gave Him up for us all -- can we not trust such a God to give us, with Him, everything we need?

"Who would dare to accuse us, whom God has chosen? God Himself has declared us free from sin

"Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ Jesus, and Christ died for us, Christ also rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, and Christ prays for us!

"Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, pain, or persecution? Can lack of clothes and food, danger to life and limb, the threat of force of arms?

"Indeed, some of us know the truth of that ancient text ' For Thy sake, we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. '

"No, in all of these things we win an overwhelming victory through Him Who has proved His love for us.

"I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of heaven nor monarch or earth, neither what happens today or what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below,

"Not anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

There is a constant longing deep within us for everything to be alright and nothing to ever go wrong again. Is that too much for which to hope? Is such an expectation too great? Is heaven possible? I believe so, not only because God's Word promises every bit of the above, and more, but because of the investment of God's riches in Christ!

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Chapter 4 GRACE IS SHARING Ephesians 1:1-7

I have said before that it is hard for us to understand grace, for it is not a response, and just about everything we do or think is in response. But grace differs in that it does not respond. It is an outflow. It is an impulse. It occurs without a prior requirement or demand. It is hard for us to comprehend because it functions without compulsion or motivation or provocation.

God's grace exists because it is a part of Who He is and not because a need for it has become apparent. Grace is never a reaction, or it is not grace. Grace never meets a demand. Grace is generative and creative and intuitive and arbitrary. It is not reactionary. It is important for us to think about this and try to understand it, for in its understanding, it explains much of why an unholy mankind is part of an otherwise morally unpolluted universe. If we do not get a handle on what grace is, any being, mankind being one of them, who is not holy and pure existing in this universe that is perfectly in balance, makes no sense at all.

When we can understand that the very nature of God is grace, or graciousness, and that His grace is a continual outflow of that nature, and that such graciousness actively and constantly SEEKS SOMEONE UPON WHOM IT CAN BE BESTOWED, THEN WE BEGIN to strip off the outer layer of grace. You see, if God were interested in a return -- of any kind, to any degree -- He would not have brought mankind into being. Mankind differs from any other being ever to come from the creative hands of God in that "he was made in His image." It is one of the greatest paradoxes of God's creative ability and design that mankind has the capacity to attain the highest and noblest elevations of personhood, and at the same time, can degenerate into a being morally inferior to Satan, himself. If you doubt that, let us talk about it privately some time. Be ready to prove to me that Satan was "made in the image of God" as we were. **SOMEHOW WE NEED TO REALIZE THE POTENTIAL OF MANKIND. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT MANKIND**

IS GOD'S CROWNING CREATION -- EVER. There is good reason why Satan was, and still is today, so interested in causing the downfall of the first human pair in Eden's garden. I remind us once again that

"THE GREATEST FACT OF HUMANITY IS POTENTIAL"

God in heaven (only) knows what we can be, and what we will be, IF WE CAN JUST HAVE SENSE ENOUGH TO PLACE OURSELVES IN THE CONTROL AND AUTHORITY OF THIS GOD WHO GAVE US SUCH LIMITLESS POTENTIAL. Satan will do everything in his power to get and keep us blinded to such possibility. IT IS HEADLINED ALL OVER THE NEW TESTAMENT IF WE WILL ONLY OPEN OUR EYES AND LOOK.!!'

The glory of mankind -- and we need to become acquainted with the idea and the function -- is not going to be discovered in himself, or in any result of who he is or what he has accomplished in his brief sojourn during his life on earth, or, for that matter, throughout an endless eternity. Oh, yes, there will be a special "glory reserved for mankind and humanity alone". It will be significant, observable, unique, wonderful, awesome, extensive, universal and eternal -- just for mankind. Seraphim will quietly stand, and cherubim will admiringly gaze, and angels will silently weep AS THE SAINTS COME MARCHING IN TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN THEIR SPLENDOROUS, BRILLIANT, GLISTENING, RESPLENDENT HEAVENLY HOME. "Glory bye and bye" is not merely a marvelous thought set to music by some battle-weary Christian romantic who had one foot in the grave anyway. The glory of the church will be unprecedented in the course of beings, earthly and heavenly. No other beings created and formed by the hands of God will experience such glory. No greater glory will be accorded any other creature (REMEMBER THAT GOD IS NOT A CREATURE -- HE IS GOD!) who inhabits God's vast realm, than redeemed mortals!

BUT THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH WILL BE REFLECTED GLORY. IT WILL BE TRANSFERRED GLORY. IT WILL BE A TRANSMITTED GLORY. It will not be resident glory, and every being in heaven and on earth will be aware of that fact. The redeemed ARE RECIPIENTS of the glory, and NOT THE SOURCE. Their glory will be bestowed and conferred. It is important for us to recognize the reason for the church's glory. IT IS GOD'S GRACE! There is no other reason. There can be no other reason, either biblically or theoretically. Nothing but grace makes any sense when the COST of redeeming mankind is considered.

You see, the COST of grace is beyond calibration or computation. Cost does not figure into grace. Results do not figure into grace. A return does not figure into grace. Appreciation does not figure into grace. If any of the above had tried to figure into the act of grace in the creation and redemption of mankind, then it would not have functioned at all. The cost of man would have scrapped the plan. The results of mankind would have burned the blueprint. The return on man's being would have destroyed the design. The possibility of appreciation from mankind would have ended his creation in the mind of God, for instead of appreciation, mankind does not give God the time of day unless there comes tragedy or death.

God's grace is unprompted and free of compulsion. I said earlier that it is generative and not reactionary. The grace of God even precedes and anticipates CAUSE, if your mind can

conceive of such a thing. We have to see the CHARACTERISTIC aspect of God's grace. IT IS WHO HE IS. "The Lord is gracious" (Exodus 34:6). Grace flows from His being like the unending rays of the sun. It is God's very nature to be gracious. God does not "try" to be gracious or "decide" to be gracious or "plan" to be gracious. HE IS GRACIOUS!!!

Almost all that we humans do is a response, a reaction -- even for as little a reward as a "thank you", a smile, a nod, or some sort of recognition or appreciation. Few of us continue to reach out to other persons in friendship or assistance or kindness if that extension is "cold-shouldered" or rebuffed. BUT GRACE DOES the reason it does is stated above. Grace does not need a response, nor does it seek a return.

What I have just outlined for us here is the very basis of heart holiness, but most holiness people fail to see it. They get so tangled up in holiness theology that they are careless about its practicality. I have lived among and witnessed the holiness people all of my life, and what is important to me is not so much the theology or the public testifying AS THE EVERYDAY LIVING. I WANT TO SEE IT WORK -- FIRST AT HOME, AND THEN WITH NEIGHBORS, AND THEN WITH CO-WORKERS, AND THEN WITH BUSINESS PEOPLE, AND FINALLY IN THE CHURCH. If heart holiness is not working in the prior places, especially in the home, then it gets very puny and flaccid and unproductive in the church.

WE NEED TO BE GRACIOUS PEOPLE!!! We cannot be gracious people on our own. We cannot live unselfishly without an infusion of God's grace into our hearts. I have been amazed at how much "grace" can be, and has been, professed in the church and so little of it manifested. I repeat that I WANT TO SEE IT WORK!!! If this comes across as too emphatic it is because of all of the damage to God's work that has occurred because of its lack. I did not have to have some preacher rub my nose in heart holiness preaching and teaching. Before I ever got into Bible college and took a class on the theology of holiness to train for the ministry I SAW THE UGLINESS AND UNSAINTLINESS AND UNCHRISTLIKENESS AND UNGRACIOUSNESS OF MY HEART!!! This is why I have never understood why any Christian needed to have a preacher or a church show him that he needed a holy and clean heart. Mine was with me every day in every bad spirit and every unkindness and every uncharitable act of my daily living. I need to tell you that this is why my personal ministry has never taken the form of "holiness evangelism", and what I mean by that, is any attempt to try to get people "convicted" over carnality. MY OWN EXPERIENCE WAS MOTIVATED BY A DESPERATE NEED. I needed Jesus to give me a selfless, loving, caring, kind, sensitive, Christlike heart. I needed a heart like His own, AND NOBODY HAD TO PROVE TO ME THAT I NEEDED SUCH AN EXPERIENCE. I guess what I am saying is that HUNGER SHOULD DRAW US TO CHRIST FOR CLEANSING

I think that I have witnessed, through forty some odd years of pastoring that nothing else is going to work anyway. You cannot preach or teach holy living into Christians any more than you can train the new birth into us. Both experiences of grace must occur in a heart change, or it will not work.

If our daily living is an effort to "measure up" to some creed or some church discipline or some church standards or some preacher's regulations, THEN IT WILL CHANGE WHEN THE CHURCH DOES OR WHEN SUCH A PREACHER MOVES OUT OF OUR RANGE OF

RELATIONSHIP. Keeping our eyes on Jesus and striving to be like Him and making His Person a constant example of thought and conduct IS WHAT CHANGES US INTO A PERSON AS HE IS. The Lord is gracious, and the more we hang around Him, the more gracious we become. THIS is why it is important for us to study carefully about what grace is. Grace is sharing. Grace is giving. Grace is reaching out and reaching into the needs of others, and forgetting about one's own needs. You can put genuine holiness of heart through the squeeze test and the pressure test, and the heartache test and the criticism test, and the rejection test, and the scorn test, and the ignore test, and the lonely test, AND, BECAUSE ITS BASIS IS IN GOD'S GRACE IT WILL WORK ANYWAY!!! There is not a person here who does not know that this kind of living absolutely will not work unless we have a heart like His Own. We are not naturally like that (I mean being selfless and gracious) but there is just no reason around us to be like that unless we constantly pattern after Him.

In Ephesians. 1:7 we can discern what I call "the base cause", or the basic reason for anything and everything that exists between God and mankind. I realize fully that such a statement sounds overly authoritative, and maybe even a bit grandiose, but it has been my perception for a good many years now, and until the present, I see no reason to think differently. Let me repeat for emphasis that Ephesians, chapter one, verse seven contains the base cause for everything that exists between God and man. If you have your Bibles opened to that verse, follow along as I read it, and as we go over it together I want you to try to identify that "base cause

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE." What do you see as the base cause for all that exists between God and man? What has caused it all? What has brought it all about? That is right. THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE.

I would quickly suggest to us that nothing else would, or could, be adequate cause for God's involvement with mankind! From almost the first days in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, our original parents, showed signs of weakness. Was moral failure built into human nature? It could not have been, for such a design would impugn both God's wisdom and fairness. If it were not possible for man to resist temptation and refuse evil, God must be blamed for creating that failure in the design of his moral nature. No fair-minded person would conclude that Eve, and then Adam, could not have passed their Edenic tests if they had chosen to.

But to believe that is to accept the opposing view, and that is that, in order for the test to be valid before a witnessing universe, they had to have the capacity to truly choose, extrinsic of any Divine influence OR enablement. It is critical for us to see this, for theologically and redemptively, Adam's and Eve's tests, and their individual choices, is exactly the same as ours and every other normal human being who followed them.

It may not be the whole meaning, of course, but what we think about now is a major explanation of what being created "in the image of God" signifies. I realize that this is repetition, but we must allow it to sink down into our spiritual ears and lodge in our hearts. Mankind is godlike in that he can truly design his own destiny. He does not have to love God or obey God or yield to God's will and plans. He can shut God out of his life and refuse Him access to his heart and love. He can break God's commandments and ignore His love and trash His grace and leave

His only Son hanging on a cross. He can ruin his body, twist his mind, surrender his freedom to cruel passions and addictions, and trample underfoot the precious blood of Jesus in the process. He can actually hold his never-dying soul in his singular control and consign it to a devil's Hell. That is how much of a free-moral agent God has allowed mankind to be.

The choice that each member of the human family makes about his life, his conduct and his ultimate destiny IS UNINFLUENCED BY GOD. He gives us that right -- to choose as we will. Note that I said "his choice is uninfluenced by God", and that is different from the information that is God-given. We need to see this and we need to see the difference. Both evil and good information comes to our minds. Both truth and error are presented to our minds. BUT NEITHER GOD OR SATAN INFLUENCES HUMAN CHOICE. THE CHOICE IS OURS!! Every human being who lives with the Lord throughout an endless eternity WILL DO SO BY A FREE AND OPEN CHOICE. Every lost soul who endlessly experiences the loneliness and separation of Hell with the devil and his angels WILL BE THERE BY HIS OWN DELIBERATE CHOICE. WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO BLAME ANY OTHER BEING FOR OUR ETERNAL DESTINIES. BLAME will be shockingly ABSENT in Hell!

I cannot emphasize this truth too much or too often. We are the kind of a person we want to be. We are living the kind of life, RIGHT NOW AND TODAY, we choose to live. There are not enough demons in Hell or in the bottomless pit combined who can keep a person from living for God and doing what is biblically right IF WE CHOOSE TO DO SO. God has committed all of His resources to that person and He will send angels by the droves to your car or pickup or office or room or wherever you are or whatever you are doing IF YOU CHOOSE HIS WILL AND WAYS. I may get into theological trouble on this one, but I believe it anyway. I even think that this works for unbelievers. I am convinced that God is on the side of those who choose for right and against wrong. God helps people -- children and young people and the young adults and the middle aged and the aging -- WHO SAY "NO" TO EVIL. I believe that!

I bear you record this day that people only get into trouble with temptation and sin WHEN THEY PARLEY AND PLAY WITH IT; when they keep considering it; when they do not just shut the door to it. I will stand by God's Word on this issue as long as I have breath, where it states in James 4:7 that,

"...if we resist the devil, he will flee from you."

When we truly shut the door on any entreaty to sin, and say "no!", and mean it, three worlds know it.

I would never want to leave the impression that sin is not desirable and interesting and appealing, and it does not matter whether we are male or female, saint or sinner, young or old or somewhere in between. There is no age or state of grace that renders us unsusceptible to sin and temptation, and we Christians must never allow Satan to confuse us here. If possible, he will try to get God's people to think that if you have a holy heart, you will not be tempted with evil thoughts and desires. When they do come, and they do and will, Satan will try to make you feel dirty and sinful just because of the presentation of temptation. However we may feel dirtied by temptation, even if it is strong and protracted and repeated, we need to remember that our Lord was tempted,

yet without sin, and Adam and Eve, who were created holy, were tempted. Holy people can be tempted, and will be tempted, so we had better expect it, and we had better expect it to occur when the flesh is weak and opportunities at the most conducive times and places. **THE FIRST ADAM YIELDED. BUT HE DID NOT HAVE TO.** Adam could have said "no". The second "Adam", Jesus, was also tempted, but He did not give in to the solicitation of sin, and in doing so, He proved to every follower of His that we do not have to yield either.

The point is, my brothers and sisters, **GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY GRANTED TO US HUMANS A GODLIKE AUTHORITY TO DIRECT OUR OWN DESTINIES. IT IS UNAFFECTED AND UNINFLUENCED BY HIM,** and He will not allow Satan to keep us from being saved if we want to. Contained here is great truth. God preveniently brings us, by awakening and conviction, to what I call "the intersection of truth." His Holy Spirit allows us to see the options, **CLEARLY,** and tells us the truth about sin and salvation, life and death, and heaven and Hell. God always tells us the truth about these eternal issues, while Satan, the arch deceiver of our souls, lies and deceives and covers-up and masquerades what the end of sin is and what it does and where it leads. I want to emphasize this. **GOD TELLS US THE TRUTH. HE NEVER LIES OR MISREPRESENTS THE TRUTH.** God always allows every seeker to know what is expected and required to be accepted of Him.

We stand at this intersection of truth and hold the power, or authority, to go either way. We make the choice, and any so-called "no-choice" **IS** a choice. We can go either way or listen to either God or Satan, but we cannot be neutral. We cannot make no choice at all. We can put God on hold, but even that is a courteous "no". We can say "later" to Him, but it is still a refusal.

I could wish that I did not have to say these things, but the truth demands that I do. There is nothing nice or pretty or decent or kind or pleasant about sin. Not in this church, but I get considerable criticism about my preaching against sin, and the reasons are always the same. "Pastor, you need to present the gospel in a positive way and not be so negative. My answer is the only one I know. Sin is sin, and is neither negative or positive. Where does this kind of criticism originate? Why has it become such an issue in the past generation? And I ask these questions about the church and preachers? My personal experience with the Lord has been just the opposite of these who constantly talk about being positive about sin. I know of nothing in my entire life or life's experience **THAT WAS MORE POSITIVE THAN WHEN GOD, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, FORGAVE ME AND DELIVERED ME FROM THE BONDAGE AND POWER OF SIN!** That was the best and greatest experience of my entire existence! I can assure you that I not only view my conversion as positive, but those conversions of every other truly saved persons whom I know view theirs the same! There is no way I know about to address the matter of salvation and not consider sin.

Let me repeat the text of the morning and then see how it treats the statements I have made above!

"In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

I realize that giving grammar lessons on Sunday morning is not too welcomed by most worshippers, but this one is so special and filled with meaning that I will do it anyway. Just look with me at the plethora of nouns in this one, brief, verse! There are six of them, and I want you to help me identify them. The first? "REDEMPTION". The second? "BLOOD". The third? "FORGIVENESS". The fourth? "SINS". The fifth? "RICHES". And the sixth and last? "GRACE".

If we include the four pronouns, which we all know takes the place of nouns, there are ten noun references in one, brief verse of nineteen words, and six of them are prepositions! Of the four pronouns, three of them refer to Jesus ("Whom", "His" and "His".) and one refers to us, the redeemed, "we". Now, I want you to look closely at this verse and see the single verb, and it is an auxiliary verb, "have". The Lord wants us to expand our minds quite a bit this morning and realize just how much, and how great, His salvation has afforded to us? The extent and meaning of the redemptive nouns in this brief verse boggles the human mind, if we will just take the time to think about it a bit. We are going to call these redemptive nouns "properties" from this point on for want of a better description of them. I want you to sort of line them up mentally with me in one single list, and then we are going to separate them. You follow along with me as I list them in the order they are given.

(1) OUR "REDEMPTION" (2) HIS "BLOOD" (3) OUR "FORGIVENESS" (4) OUR "SINS" (5) HIS "RICHES" (6) HIS "GRACE". Now, we want to realign them by ownership, calling them "HIS PROPERTIES" and "OUR PROPERTIES"

HIS PROPERTIES	OUR PROPERTIES
His Blood	Our Sins
His Riches	Our Forgiveness
His Grace	Our Redemption.

Now I want you to re-realign them in the order of their occurrence, and we might come up with some different answers here to start with, but I think we will all end with the same.

OUR PROPERTIES (in order of occurrence) HIS PROPERTIES

(1) Our Redemption	(1) His Grace
(2) Our Sins	(2) His Riches
(3) Our Forgiveness	(3) His Blood

What we are seeing here is that all of what has happened between God and mankind IS BECAUSE OF HIS GRACE. We have to recognize that humankind was neither an accident or a mistake. Everything about our creation was by perfect design, and it all started in His grace. God wanted to share Himself with another special being. I hope that the enormity of such truth does not escape us. God wanted to do something unique, unprecedented, different from anything else He had ever done before. He wanted a special creation -- someone so much like Himself that He would come to call them "sons", "daughters" and "brothers and sisters". SO, HE CREATED MANKIND, in the full knowledge, of course, of the cost to Him, and the ultimate outcome, which, I think is going to surprise us, and be grand, glorious, and fulfilling to view and contemplate eternally.

I urge us to recall a specific statement about man's creation in Genesis 1:31, and I quote:

"And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, IT WAS VERY GOOD." The Hebrew, (TOB MEOD), means "superlative; only good; as good as it could be." In other words, "perfect". In God's rich grace, He brought into being individuals who would be more like Him than any other creature before or since. Only human beings can ever "be in His image"!

We can only imagine what Adam and Eve were like before their fall into sin. We can only imagine what it will be like in the future to be in His image for eternity. What we do know is that it was above and beyond the character and morality and purity and Godlikeness that was possessed by any other creature brought into being by the mind and hands of God! We can only imagine what walking and talking with God in the cool of the day must have been like for Adam and Eve. We can only imagine what being in His presence and in His likeness for eternity will mean.

What we do know is that it was in the very Person of God to share Who He is with another being. Grace is sharing. God is a sharer. He is a giver, and when He forgives and cleanses our hearts of self-serving attitudes, we possess that same nature of wanting to share and to give just because it is in our hearts to do it, and not what the results or return might be. Such an attitude is impossible without a heart cleansing and a heart change. We are just not naturally like that, and we all know it.

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Chapter 5
LOVING IS GIVING
or
GOD DOESN'T STRUT

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only. . .Son."

Loving is accomplished in as many ways as the human mind can conceive, but the one element in it that is constant, paramount and invariable is GIVING. Giving is the expression of love. Unexpressed love is lost love. If it is unexpressed, it only serves the person feeling it, and is lost to the one for whom it is intended. That makes unexpressed love selfish. At the least it is no love at all if it only serves the one thinking that he loves.

All of my life I have heard from many persons the explanation that, "I love, but I just don't express it." I think that I know what such explanations mean, but it is poorly spoken. I think what such persons generally mean is that they don't express their love verbally, such as in saying, "I love you". Or some individuals, usually because of temperament, early family training, or both in some cases, find it hard to express their love in any physical way -- hugs, squeezes, embraces, etc, I think that this is what is generally meant by persons who say that they love, but just can't express it.

There are many ways of expressing love other than verbally or physically, but if it is really love, it WILL be expressed in some manner. I repeat that love unexpressed is lost, and I might add, useless. We are going through a journey through some of my favorite scriptures this morning, and

they start with John 3:16, and I paraphrase and edit it for emphasis. "God loved -- He gave." Loving is giving, and without giving, there is no loving.

I am impressed with the purity of God's love in sending His only Son to earth to die for our sins. What I mean by its purity is that it was totally selfless and totally of grace. God was totally cognizant of what was happening when He gave mankind the gift of His Son. He knew the cost, the price, the investment required, the result, the rejection and squanderings of His gift BEFORE He gave it. HE GAVE IT ANYWAY. That is love. That is grace.

Our love, at best, is flawed. It is uninformed. Oh, I don't want to leave you with the impression that human love cannot be full and total. It not only can, but that is the only love that God accepts from us. The point is that, even when we give 100% of our love, it is flawed, because we can only give up to our capacity of our understanding. Let me illustrate.

I gave my Deloris 100% of my young love as we stood before God's altar and God's man December 24th, 1953 in Fowler, Kansas, but the love that I have for her today forty-one years later, is like a big block of granite compared to a sugar cube. And if the good Lord allows us more years together, that love will become harder and firmer and deeper and broader and more definable. If the tears and sorrows and disappointments and personal cost of marriage and child rearing could have been viewed in advance, few, if any of us, would ever start that journey. That is why I say that God's love in sending Jesus was pure. He knew exactly and totally what His act of love would cost. He saw it clearly and completely and did it anyway.

Our family are great note writers, and the products are some of my personal and most valued treasures. I share some of them with you this morning only to illustrate an important point. Most of them are yellowed by age and exposure to light and moisture. There are five of them taped to the inside of my bathroom cabinet so that I can see them every day as I shave, comb and brush in preparation for a new day. One says, "Good morning, Papa. I love you . Miriam." Another says, "Papa. Please make sure that I'm up by seven. Thanks. I love you. Trella." A third one says, "Dad, have a good day. Love ya. Jack" But the whole reason that I share these very personal treasures with you is for the other one taped up in my shaving cabinet. It doesn't have a single word from the giver except the ones I wrote on it when I received it. All that it has on it are the lines of the little page filled with nine different shades of color crayons, Andrew, my oldest grandson, gave it to me one day after he saw his parents giving brief love notes to me and his grandma, and just as he had seen his parents leave them for each other.

Most grandparents have something similar in their homes, but I want you to know that the notes you have are just so much scratching and scrawling to me and every other grandparent, but I get all "mushed up" and emotional as I "read" Andy's love note to me. Listen to me now. He wrote that just for me! Especially for me! There is no sight in all of God's great earth to compare with the love expressed in a child's smile and the expectancy in his eyes as he expresses his love in a scribble or a wilted dandelion or a dirty pebble. I submit to you that the purity and selflessness and total love expressed in the gift of a child is equal to God's gift in His Son. No wonder that Jesus issued stern judgment upon those persons who disdained and offended a little child! "Hang a heavy rock around their necks and dump them in the Lake", Jesus said, And He meant it! No wonder that Jesus took them in His arms and stated that "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus Christ found

a kindred spirit in a child. He bonded with the innocence and selflessness and humility of a little child.

We have an awful lot to learn -- and unlearn -- when we come to Christ. Among them is that He is meek and lowly, and He intends for us to be like Him in that kind of spirit. Among them is that He is a giver and not a taker. Among them is that He is a servant and not a master. Among them is that He is not interested in possessing anything or anyone. Jesus didn't come to earth to get anything, for He had everything already. You see, real love doesn't have a profit motive. "Love seeks not its Own", God says. Jesus said, "get in My yoke and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly", This has to mean that we are to learn how to be meek and lowly.

The yoke of the follower of Jesus, or as we sometimes term it, the cross of Christ, is at the same time, heavy and light, It is a burden in the flesh, but it is freeing to the spirit. A carnal Christian will always be struggling with the cross, with the yoke, whereas the Christian who accepts the regimen of spiritual thinking and acting will experience a freedom.

The New Testament term "doulos", translated "servant" of Jesus Christ, has a far deeper meaning, and it explains what I have been discussing here. The literal meaning of "doulos" is not merely "servant", but "love slave", and derives from an Old Testament practice that is described in detail in Exodus 21:6. God told Moses that, every seventh year, indentured Hebrew servants were to be given their freedom, unless his servant loved his master so much that he wanted to serve him for the rest of his life, Upon his public declaration of such an intent, the master would take a sharp awl and bore through the lobe of his ear to the doorpost of his house, and this act would declare that he would be his love slave forever.

Every genuine Christian is a "doulos", a love slave of Jesus Christ. We are His eternally by a deliberate choice. We have surrendered our lives to Him and placed ourselves in His care and keeping eternally. We belong to Him. Satan and sin no longer has dominion over us. You may not be able to see it, but I allowed Jesus Christ to pierce my ear AND my heart when I knelt at His cross. He stamped me with the signet of heaven's God and my name is inscribed in His book of life. The name of the Lamb of God is written on my forehead and my name is written on His hands and there is a mansion in glory with my name on it and I have a reservation at the marriage supper of the Lamb! God's brand is already on me so there is no room for the mark of the beast. I'm a citizen of heaven and headed for the pearly-white city whose builder and maker is God. I am not my own anymore. I belong to Jesus and, therefore, have all of His power and authority committed to my redemptive success. Jesus Christ has eternally identified Himself with His servants, He said that where the Lord was, there would His servant be also. He said that where the body was, there the eagles would be. I tell you, my friends, that the servants of Jesus will win! His servants will reign! His servants will look on His face! We shall behold Him, face to face.

Loving is giving. Loving is serving. The greatest love is a giving one. Love is expressed in serving. The most powerful and weighty truth about living the Christian life is what we discuss now. The persons who walk the closest to God -- those who know Him most intimately -- are givers and servers. They are the least interested in their well-being and most interested in other's. They are preoccupied with the burdens and problems and troubles of others more than their own, They are more concerned about the pleasure and happiness of those around them than their own. I

said that the biblical truth of this is heavy, and we are going to heft a lot of it, but not all by far. I want the very preponderance, that is the multiplicity, of it to guide us into pleading with God to make us more like Him in this regard.

Perhaps the most impressive proof of servanthood comes from the teaching of our Lord during His passion. It ought to dominate our personal thinking and conduct because of its authority. Turn with me to Matthew 20:25-28. Obviously, I can only make passing comments about Jesus' teaching here, for many entire sermons come out of it.

"Jesus called His followers unto Him and said, You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great (bosses) exercise authority upon them.

"BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.

"Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The point is that Christians are to serve, not to be served. Let no one claim that Jesus, just because that He was God could be this humble, but no other person could be, for Jesus laid this down AS A REQUIREMENT for following Him in verse 26: "IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU." Nothing could be more simply or plainly stated than that. There is absolutely no room for misunderstanding on this. THERE IS NO PLACE AMONG GOD'S CHILDREN FOR SELF-IMPORTANCE, POSITIONING, STATUS SEEKING, OFFICIOUSNESS AND SELF-HONOR. I wish that we could see that God isn't even like that. Pride is peculiar to fallen humanity, It is totally absent out of the realm of this earth. GOD DOESN'T STRUT. Just arrogant people do. God isn't pompous, but people act that way, even in church circles.

Christians who spend time with God bear His unmistakable mark upon their spirits and in their attitudes and on their countenances. I wonder why we witness so little of this Godlikeness among us?

Turn with me to Romans 12, ten and sixteen, and I read:

Be kindly affectioned one to the other with brotherly love; in honor, preferring one another."

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own (estimation)."

Two amazing facts jump out at me every time I read over these verses. One is that it is so clear in meaning and the other is that it is almost totally absent among believers. You find about as much pride in any cross section of the church as you do away from them. But, thank the Lord, there are some wonderful examples! It is always refreshing to witness selflessness -- wherever you see

it. It is so uplifting to see any person surrender a right or yield to an opinion in favor of someone else. I know that I say this often, but truth needs repetition and continual exposure. **IF NO SIN IS INVOLVED, IF no biblical truth is ignored, if no moral principle is being surrendered, WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE WHO APPEARS TO BE RIGHT OR WHO GETS HIS WAY?**

I'm on rock solid ground as I make this bold assertion. 95% of all that Christians argue over and get upset about and separate over has nothing to do with sin or right and wrong. The trouble is the result of having our own way or not getting it or having our feelings hurt, and I'm aware that my percentage figures may be too low.

One of my life's biggest disappointments in my relationship with the body of Christ is at this very point. **WE ALLOW THE DEVIL TO UPSET US TOO MUCH.** We are way too short on forbearance and understanding. I've been deeply pained to watch Christians get upset over some little, tiny remark that, at other times, they merely laughed off or joked about. **THE REASON IS SELF. THE CULPRIT IS PRIDE.** Generally speaking, people who get peeved are peevable, and that may not be very theological, but we all understand it. We farmers call that "being on the peck", and if you don't understand what I mean by "an old biddie" attitude just try to get within arm's reach of a setting hen without getting glared at, snarled at and pecked. This is a hundred miles from suggesting that good Christians don't get their feelings hurt, The only saints who don't experience hurt feelings are those in glory, but when it happens, **YOU DON'T HOLD IT AGAINST THE PERPETRATOR, AND YOU DON'T STOP WORKING TOGETHER WITH THEM, AND YOU DON'T GET PEEVED, AND YOU DON'T START TALKING AGAINST THEM TO EVERYONE WHO WILL LISTEN, AND YOU DON'T LEAVE THE CHURCH, AND YOU DON'T BACKSLIDE AND BLAME EVERYONE FOR IT.**

This is an appropriate place to turn our minds to Paul's instructions given to the Corinthian believers, and while you are turning to First Corinthians the thirteenth chapter, I want to make some strong, positive, cogent statements about it. Number one, Paul possessed these Christlike characteristics that he sets down in this chapter or he wouldn't have been preaching it to others. Preachers who don't practice what they preach are liars, **L-I-A-R-S**, and that includes me, especially me. Number two, This is not conduct reserved for a future, glorified state as some carnal, contemporary professors of religion are teaching. Why, in the name of common sense and fair play, would the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to set down humanly impossible and unattainable standards of Christian behavior for living members of Christ's body that could only be realized in a heavenly setting? What on earth would be the point in telling us how we are going to be acting in the New Jerusalem? **WE WANT TO DISCOVER GRACE AND POWER FOR THE SOMETIMES SOUR NOW AND NOW INSTEAD OF PIOUS PLATITUDES FOR THE SWEET BYE AND BYE!**

Hear me now. I need some "turn-the-other-cheek" sweetness from the Savior **NOW** when the devil and those who are doing his dirty work are slapping me around. I need some "go-the-second-mile" grace **NOW** when carnal believers are taking advantage of me and getting their pound of flesh. I need some "love-my-enemies" grace now when my name is being nastied and my love for God criticized and my work for God made light of and my walk with God condemned as elitist and pietistic. **I NEED GOD'S GRACE WHEN THE FLESH IS WEAK AND THE RESOLVE IS LOW AND THE FAITH IS TESTED AND THE PRESSURE IS ON!**

Dear saints, First Corinthians thirteen is NOT for a future, glorified state, IT IS FOR THE DAILY GRIND, IT IS FOR THE STRESS AND STRAIN OF OUR DAILY NEEDS AND CHALLENGES. God's marvelous grace is specifically designed for our lowest point of resistance -- for when our determination is maxed out -- when our courage has vanished and our faith is bankrupt. When we write our last check on our strength and resources, GOD IS JUST KICKING IN HIS BLANKET COVERAGE. When our pantries are empty, God opens His up!!

Too long the church has wimpily excused lousy behavior and dirty, rotten attitudes as "just the way we are. We can't help it." I'm sorry, but I have knocked around the church just long enough to verify sweet spirits and loving responses and kind reactions, There are not an overabundance of examples to be sure, but they are there, and here, if we are looking for them. How many do we need? One was enough for me, and praise God, I saw First Corinthians thirteen in action when I was a teen in the church, and you have too. So, let's read from this wonderful scripture, verses four through seven, and I will be reading from the Living Bible, It is so beautiful AND powerful.

"(God's divine love in us) is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud;

"Never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.

It is never glad about injustice, but rejoice whenever truth wins out.

If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him."

From Paul's counsel to Corinthian Christians in the church there, we jump across the Aegean Sea east to Ephesus and the brothers and sisters in Christ there. He tells them nearly the same truth about their treatment of one another in the 4th chapter, verses one through three, and I read:

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

"With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

What an order! What a job description! There in verse one is our job description, Christians. "Live and act worthy of God's name and claim." So, there is our job, and then he proceeds to tell us how to accomplish it. (1) With lowliness and meekness. (2) With long-suffering. (3) Forbearing one another in love. (4) Constantly working at unity. . .

I want to ask a question that I consider one of the greatest in all of our lives: How important is unity? In a marriage? In a family? Between brothers and sisters? At the workplace? In

the church -- the body of Christ? I'm not suggesting that having unity is all-important, but it is awfully close. Fractures in relationships are epidemic today. Everywhere I turn and look there are destroyed trusts here and separations there and fractured commitments over here and broken promises across the way.

In every area of our lives there looms the grim threat of separation and suspicion, and the deception that underlies it all. Its dark shadows creep into the church and sows its seeds of distrust among God's people that results in distance. Have you ever seen such a time? I haven't. A time when distrust is so prevalent? Where distance is sought and maintained? I realize that for some of you younger Christians this is accepted because you have seldom or never known it to be otherwise. I tell us straight out that it is never intended to be like this, and God's great grace is maligned and we are all impoverished by the suspicion and distrust and wariness among God's people.

I pause to testify that there are those saints whom I know, and some of you are here, that I can count on, They can be counted on by others too. A solid, dependable trust exists between us that you know what to expect from them. Their support can be counted on in and out of their presence. These are people who will disagree with you as quickly as agree. In other words, they can be depended upon to speak the truth as they see it, even if it is unpopular with others or even if it brings them into a bad light. The Bible calls this "swearing to your own hurt", and means that the truth is what guides and motivates honest people even if it goes against them. Sometimes we have to say, "I dropped the ball. I fouled up. I judged too quickly. I spoke out of place. I didn't have all of the facts. I was mistaken. I'M WRONG & YOU'RE RIGHT." BE CAREFUL OF THOSE WHO CONSISTENTLY AGREE WITH YOU. BEWARE OF ANY PERSON WHO SAYS THAT YOU ARE GREAT BEFORE THEY GET TO KNOW YOU. I said to be careful of those who consistently agree with you. I said that improperly. Don't be careful of them -- be afraid of them! Nobody agrees all of the time. People who smile and nod at everything you say either aren't listening or are lying. I count on people who will be honest with me. But I have to admit that I am soon uncomfortable with rare persons who take exception to everything I say.

And then there is that group -- in and out of the church -- who are mean-spirited and callous with their frankness. We don't have to hurt people to be honest with them. Being "brutally frank" is seldom loving or kind, It is usually a selfish excuse of telling people off.

Having said all of that, I look in vain, most of the time, for what I term "graciousness" among God's people. It is that attitude of making others feel comfortable and valuable and SAFE whenever you are in their company. Around some Christians I don't ever feel safe, and I feel badly about that. They are consumed by their own agendas: their interests, their desires, their needs, their wants, their families and their feelings. What a treasure it is to know persons in whose presence you are safe! You know, it is really quite simple to know how to treat other persons -- just be to them what you want them to be for you. BE the kind of friend that you would want in a friend. That sounds so much like Jesus' golden rule.

Then let's get some more "attitude instruction" from Ephesians, chapter four, verses 31 and 32 and go right into the fifth chapter, verses 1 and 2.

"Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice:

AND BE YE KIND ONE TO ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, . .

Doesn't this bless you? It does me. Be ye kind one to the other. We need an epidemic of kindness! I can't think of a more needful ingredient in any relationship than this one! Kindness says, "It's OK. It's alright", while unkindness grumps and grimaces and glares.

I have the word "tenderhearted" underlined twice in this verse, That is how important I see it. It's nearly impossible to misinterpret tenderness. It's about as pure and unambiguous and honest an emotion that a human is capable of manifesting. I'm not talking about a "poor pussy", "turn-on-the-charm" kind of amorous show of affection that is merely seeking something in return. Genuine tenderness is a combination of selfless concern and humble graciousness. Few can adequately describe or define it, but everyone knows "when it is and when it ain't." As I said, tenderness is nearly impossible to misinterpret. It's hard to fake tenderness.

Tenderness is not weakness, nor is it a strictly feminine trait. There are some women who are very "untender." They are the kind who if you entered their lovely home with your head in your hands, they would direct you to not get blood on the carpet." That's not original with me, but not far off some times. Just in case someone might be disposed to relate wimpiness to tenderness, God ascribes this characteristic to Himself in Luke 1:78 and James 5:11. David and Solomon refer to God's tender mercies ten times in the Psalms and the Proverbs, and God turns back His prophesied judgments upon two kings because "their hearts were tender." I tell you that God is into tenderness, and He is against hardness,

I suppose that I pray more to our God for this very thing than any other. We need a breaking up of the fallow, crusty ground in people's hard hearts. TEARS NEED TO FLOW. SOFTNESS NEEDS TO RETURN TO RELATIONSHIPS. TENDERNESS needs to return to eyes, and touches, and tongues! I doubt that there is a living person on earth in any culture who does not know the difference between tenderness and hardness of spirit.

Verse 32 of chapter four) and one and two of chapter five outline how tenderness is worked out in a practical manner: FORGIVENESS AND LOVE AND GIVING. Forgiveness is the door to restoring strained and/or broken relationships, and we all know how to do that! Saying "I'm sorry may not always patch things up -- it depends how deep the hurt is and how credible the asker -- but if it is genuine, it will start the process. Sometimes people don't chose to forgive, and then we must let the matter be. What I am thankful for is that WE can be tender and receptive and sensitive and forgiving towards ALL persons to whom we relate, regardless of how or when they will receive it.

I said that the goal of this message was to let the multiplicity, or preponderance, of its truth to rest heavily upon us. In the second chapter, Paul repeats these same thoughts to the Christians at Philippi, verses 2-8. The central truth of this discussion is the first phrase of verse five, "let this mind be in you." How did Jesus think? What were the driving principles in His conduct? What formed the basis for His attitude towards behavior? Verse 2 emphasizes the unity matter again, when he says, "same love; one accord; one mind." Verse three says, "in lowliness of mind towards other Christians, judging them better than ourselves."

I wonder if there is anything that I can do or say to more deeply impress upon us what Paul is saying here? How can I help us see the depth and width of pinpointing the kind of conduct we are to expect and cultivate? Paul is stating that **THIS** is to be what orders our everyday choices and behavior. **"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU."** This should determine your behavior. **THE WAY JESUS DID IT.**

And how did He do it? How did He act? (1) He made Himself no reputation. How would we -- how do we -- act if we are not concerned about how we appear to others -- if all that we do is based upon His likeness and example? (2) He took on Himself the position of a servant. I tell you freely and fervently that it is a delight to be around Christians who have this servanthood spirit of Jesus. It's heavenly to relate to persons who have caught a vision of serving others like Jesus did. If you ever get two persons working together like this, you are tempted to want to rocket right out of this world and on to heaven -- it is so wonderful and blessed! This had to be why Paul said that he "had a desire to depart (to heaven) for it was better." Christians serving other Christians (and unbelievers too, for that matter) is a truly beautiful thing to witness. You see it often among new Christians, and it is always a great disappointment to see that initial humility fade and dissipate when maturity and experience in church work brings about officiousness and status-seeking and position desire.

What was Jesus thinking about conduct? (3) He humbled Himself. If a person sees himself as a servant, as Jesus did, pride is not only out of place, but is unnecessary. **PRIDE GETS IN THE WAY OF SERVICE. PRIDE GETS IN THE WAY OF GIVING.** The desire for recognition and reward and approval short circuits the flow of service.

One of the most incredible thoughts about Jesus becoming a man is the humility and servanthood temperament of the Son of God. This truth is as obvious as sunshine and air, but it is more often than not lost on the church. **HUMILITY AND SERVANTHOOD SHOULD BE A MAJOR GOAL OF A CHRISTIAN.** It is worthy of daily discipline and maximum effort. I ask anyone to isolate another single philosophy of life that identifies humility and service as a significant and worthy goal? As an ultimate prize to pursue? As an end result? As a fulfilling pursuit?

(4) Jesus became obedient. You see, our entire concept of humility is generally negative. We see it as debasing, embarrassing, demeaning, uncomfortable, and even painful, All of this comes of pride that is the direct result of sin in the human heart. Please pardon the repetition, but this world is the only residence and/or incidence of pride, **IT IS TOTALLY ABSENT IN HEAVEN. GOD ISN'T PROUD. JESUS WASN'T PROUD. ANGELS AREN'T PROUD.**

Another repetition. Serving isn't demeaning. It's fun. It's fulfilling. It's pleasurable. Bringing peace and joy and happiness and pleasure to other persons is enjoyable. Lightening up someone's load and smoothing the path for him is one of life's highest joys. Watching a load lift from someone's shoulders or countenances is a therapy that you can't get from a bottle or spending money that you don't have or going somewhere.

All that we have to do to prove this is think a little. What parent or spouse or grandparent doesn't get great pleasure out of doing for and buying for, and even suffering for, a loved one? We all do. We all understand and feel such pleasure even as I speak. Please underline the last two words I said in that phrase: "loved one". Ah, there's the key! It's easy to put ourselves out for those whom we love. It's easy and enjoyable to serve those whom we love. It's easy to sacrifice for those we love.

A light starts to come on here -- if we are thinking and if our hearts are right, If we our serving and sacrificing and giving and doing is limited mostly to family, **OUR LOVE IS STILL IN THE SANDBOX STAGE**. We're still in kindergarten. God's love is the kind that reaches out to **ALL**, not just to those or primarily to those, whom we naturally love.

The light of grace starts to come on when we desire to love unselectively and unrestrictively. When our entire motivation towards other persons is "What can I do for you?"

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Chapter 6 THE HEART OF JESUS

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28-30 -- "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART: and ye shall find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

I fully realize that I talk about the nature and character of God a lot, but the closer I get to Him and the more He allows me to inspect Who He is, the more I love Him and the more I want to talk about Him, All of us love to talk about the finer and nobler and most beautiful aspects of those persons we know. There is just something about the inner strengths and beauties and character qualities of other persons that claim the attention of those of us who look for genuine and lasting values.

The song writer said, "Jesus Will Outshine Them All", (all heavenly beings) and I believe that to be true, only I am discovering that He outshines each member of the human family, and for that matter, all of us put together. There is something super attractive about this heavenly and divine Person Who not only came to earth to live among us for a short time, but Who is willing to live within our hearts, and be the center of who we are if we will only allow Him to. It is a most

precious and powerful consciousness to have the God of the universe come into our innermost natures and walk and talk with us constantly. There is nothing I know about on this earth that can compare with this actuality, and it is something that we cannot explain to anyone else but another person who has come to experience the same reality. The knowledge that Jesus lives in me eclipses every other, and all other information stored in our consciousness, and I would suggest to us this morning that the rolling, passing, unfolding eons of eternity will never reveal any greater consciousness within who we are than this very knowledge. Heaven, and heaven's God, will never reveal to our minds and beings, any greater truth or fact than this, All that heaven has to offer any being, for time and eternity, is less than truly knowing Jesus Christ as the Savior of our souls. It is a miracle of Divine proportions that HE WOULD COME TO LIVE IN OUR HEARTS, and I just wish that we would get ahold of this marvelous actuality.

The fact is that we can know God right now! We do not need to "wait until we get to heaven" to experience God! We need to see this and claim this! We need to often be reminded THAT GETTING TO HEAVEN WILL ACTUALLY BE ANTICLIMACTIC in a very real sense. The greatest moment of our eternal existences will not be that fanciful "magical moment" when we step on heaven's glorious threshold. Way too much is made of the idea that, "if I can just get to heaven, I will have it made." I tell us without hesitation or fear of contradiction that the greatest consciousness of an human mind and being is when Jesus Christ comes to live within our hearts and beings!! That starts it all! Being born again is more real and more important than being born natively and physically.

I hope that you, at least a few of you, will remember the message the Lord had for us from this pulpit a few month's past when we talked about the Lord being the God of the living and not the dead. GOD IS INTO CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS. God is interested in working in and revealing Himself TO PEOPLE LIVING TODAY. God is actively and constantly looking for persons to whom He can reveal Himself. HE IS MORE WILLING TO SHARE WHO HE IS WITH YOU AND ME THAN WE ARE TO KNOW HIM!!! What is going on between you and me and God, this very day and moment, is the currency and wealth of heaven. THE MOST EXTRAVAGANTLY IMPORTANT RAPPORT AND EXCHANGE THAT IS OCCURRING MOMENTARILY IS BETWEEN HIM AND YOU AND ME!!!

In what, and of whom, does God place His greatest interest and value right now as I speak to you and as you listen? We cannot believe that God's mind is ever in neutral, GOD IS CREATING RIGHT THIS MOMENT AS CERTAINLY AS HE EVER DID IN THE PAST, only his creativity IS IN RELATIONSHIPS and not "things"! Oh, how He wants to help me to see this marvelous truth!! I have said before that His relationships with us IS MORE CREATIVE THAN HISTORICAL, and I mean by that Who He is to us, and what we are to Him IS CREATIVE in a sense more remarkable and outstanding than any creation that we can see with the naked eye. When we sit at His feet and learn of Him, something original and creative is occurring! When He talks to us and we listen to Him and talk with Him, ground is being plowed that is as creative as a new galaxy could ever be.

What Solomon said, "There is nothing new "under the sun" IS NOT TRUE! NEW DEVELOPMENTS ARE OCCURRING BETWEEN HIM AND ME REGULARLY! He fills my mind with new discoveries about Himself nearly every day!

We have to see this! There never has been, or will there ever be, any other being just like me -- or just like you. Each and every human being IS MORE INDIVIDUAL THAN ANY OTHER UNIVERSAL BEING EVERY CREATED BY THE MIND AND HAND OF GOD. 'You and I are unprecedented and unique beyond imagination or comprehension, and the devil will do his worst to keep this powerful information from us. He does not want us to realize the uniqueness of humanity. Satan desperately wants to keep from us that THE POTENTIAL OF HUMAN BEINGS IS SO VAST AND INFINITE THAT IT BEGGARS DESCRIPTION AND DEFIES COMPREHENSION. What God has prepared for us and what is ahead for us is so indescribable and so awesome that "eye has not seen or ear heard, or has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."

If we ever want to know how valuable we are to God and if we want to get a hint about our eternal potential with God through Christ, all we have to do is GAZE THOUGHTFULLY UPON THE INCARNATION AND THE CROSS. The incredible cost to God for humankind's eternal redemption in and through Christ ought to give us an accurate measurement of our value to God. We cannot look at what it cost God to redeem us and fail to see what we are worth -- however desperately and constantly Satan tries to make us believe that we are worthless and awful and no good. Do not miss this marvelous truth that GOD'S MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY IS RELATIONSHIPS. Please allow the Holy Spirit to sear this truth upon your minds. WHAT YOU ARE DOING FOR HIM AND HIS CHURCH IS FAR LESS IMPORTANT TO HIM THAN WHAT IS GOING ON BETWEEN YOU AND HIM. God is into relationships.

I keep hearing statements that sound grand and glorious from a great many preachers these days, and I certainly do not disagree with what they are saying, but I wonder if they REALIZE what is meant by their statements. I keep hearing that, "God is up to something", and I believe that passionately, perhaps as much or even more than they, and have been preaching the same truth and beating the same drum, But I wonder if "the something that God is up to" is correctly identified? WHAT GOD IS UP TO TODAY, IN 1999, IS WHAT HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN UP TO, and I forthrightly reject the idea that maybe God has been sort of coasting along for awhile here in the past few years or generations, and now at the end of the dispensation or close to the end of the church age, He is going to do something wonderful and marvelous in and through the church. MAY I REMIND US THAT HE IS THE GOD OF THE LIVING AND NOT THE DEAD. Those followers of His who have kept close to Him and listened carefully to His voice and kept their ears to His heart and mind, ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH AGE have discovered, and continue to discover today -- THIS VERY DAY AND HOUR -- Who He is and what He is about!!! In every generation and at every point in human history, GOD HAS SOUGHT OUT THOSE WHO WOULD STOP WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND SEEK AND SEARCH OUT WHAT GOD WAS DOING, AND WHAT HE WANTED TO DO. Do you know what they discovered -- whether it was Moses or David or Daniel or John or Peter or Paul or Luther or Wesley, whoever else paused to listen to what He had to say? They ALL discovered the same thing, and that was Who God was.

You see, when we relate to any other person than the Lord, IT IS MUTUAL DISCOVERY, for we need to find out who "you are" and you need to discover "who I am", but this is not necessary with the Lord. He already knows all about us, so our relationship grows and increases

AS WE DISCOVER HIM and this occurs as He reveals Himself to us. I do not need to tell you that this is eternal in dimension. Discovering the strength and beauty and various aspects of the nature and character of God will continue to develop eternally, I can only say that such a possibility is wonderful to contemplate, for the closer you look at Him, and the more you scrutinize Him, and the more you know about Him, **THE BETTER HE LOOKS AND BECOMES!**

There is no other way to discover God than **TO SPEND TIME IN HIS PRESENCE**. Observing nature **LEADS** us to Him, and praying **OPENS THE AVENUE** to Him, and reading about Him and hearing Him talked about (as we are engaged right now) stirs our minds and agitates our interest, **BUT THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO REALLY KNOW GOD** than to wait before Him and sit at His feet **AFTER** you get into His yoke. Somewhat like trying to get a formal education without knowing how to read. You have to be born again, and born from above, and born of the Holy Spirit -- you have to have a heart and nature change -- before you are even ready to discover Who God is. Once you are "born" a child of God, **THEN** you have the privilege of sitting at His feet and "learning of Jesus .

"Pastor Boone, What do you learn about God? and what do we discover about Who He is?" Learning to know Jesus is somewhat like (and I know this is a homely illustration, and those of you who are younger might not even be able to relate to it) unraveling something that is woven. (Maybe you knew that "unravel" is really a redundancy, for ravel and unravel is doubling the meaning of the word). But discovering the Lord is a lot like catching a thread or an end of yarn and pulling it apart, loop by loop, or stitch by stitch. Or, for some of us farmers of the past who used to get grain in burlap sacks, it is a bit like loosening the tie at the end of a stitched sack and then pulling the two strings from their loops one at a time. I do not know about you folks, but learning the Lord with me is a word at a time and a sentence at a time and a thought at a time, and then I just sit there and cover my face and cry and sob and wipe my eyes and allow Him to fill my heart with His Person. He is so good to share Himself with us, and He will just do that as long as we can stand it and for as much time we have to stay with it.

One of the greatest revelations about Who the Lord is comes from these statements of the Lord Jesus here in Matthew, It is nearly incredulous that the Lord God is an humble Being. Jesus said that He was "meek and lowly at heart", and if there is any one aspect of the nature of God that His followers need to explore and expand upon, it is this. God is humble at heart. The intrinsic nature of God is lowliness and humility, and any person who would give the time to think a little about this would agree. Remember! Jesus is meek and lowly at heart!!

We have to rearrange and upgrade our concepts of God and Who He really is. **WE MUST CHANGE OUR THINKING ABOUT GREATNESS AND AUTHORITY AND POWER** if we, number one, want to know Who God really is, and number two, want to be like Him. We have to nearly completely discard the concepts of greatness to which we have been exposed and which we have learned all of our lives **IF** we want to know God.

Even the terms "great" and "important" and their mental concepts as we know them are not a part of the Person and nature of God. Degrees of stature and levels of value have no relevance at all in God's mind, except that He is aware that us humans make comparisons.

These statements of mine are not new thoughts at all, for God impressed them upon Isaiah's mind, and he wrote of them, three millennia past. "To whom then will ye liken God", he said. "or what likeness will ye compare Him?" (SEE Isaiah 40:18. He continued in verse 25 of the same chapter as he asks, "To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? sayeth the Holy One?"

The best relationships I have on earth are with those FEW individuals who are more interested in me than themselves. On my part, I am the happiest when I can make THEM pleased and happy -- when I can lift their load a bit -- when I can do something nice for them -- when I can help them be better persons and Christians"

This leads me to identify the highest of all values, in time and in eternity as THE QUALITY of individual humankind's relationship with God. Please note that I did not say merely the relationship humans have with God, BUT ITS QUALITY! I repeat that the most important thing about humanity is relationships -- first with God, and then with other humans. The greatest FACT of humanity is potential, but the most important THING (that is, something we can affect) is relationships. Human potential is a Divinely bestowed GIFT from a gracious God, while we CHOOSE our relationships AND their quality and depth. Allow me to repeat that "the highest of all values, in time and eternity, (is) the quality of (an) individual's relationship with God."

GOD IS SADLY DISAPPOINTED IN US anytime we allow our minds to make comparisons among or between ourselves. We need to see how very displeased it makes the Lord when individuals establish and maintain standards of human abilities and levels of achievements and comparisons of accomplishment! THE "GRADING" GOD DOES ON YOU AND ME IS ALWAYS ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS, and the sooner we can get this fact firmly in place in our minds, the sooner we can get to "cracking" on developing the relationship God has eternally ordained for each of us. No person has the right to establish standards of relationship between God and any other human individual, FOR EACH OF THEM ARE DIFFERENT and unique and unprecedented and original!!! God's Word does leave the church with standards of CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOR as we relate to each other IN THIS WORLD AND THE BODY OF CHRIST. Any other way would present havoc and disorder if every man did what was right in his own eyes, so to speak. We have to draw a bold line between SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS and PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD. What we are talking about in this message is that rapport and communion and walk with God that is between an individual human soul and his God, THERE IS NO OTHER LIKE IT, and will never be another like it, through all eternity. I pray the blessed Holy Spirit will help us see what He is asking me to emphasize today.

It is prostitution of the highest sort to waste this most incredible value! God wants you to know Him in a more personal way than you know any other being here on earth. He wants you to develop and build a relationship with Him that only BEGINS HERE ON EARTH. This life is just getting our shoe laces tied up and settling down in the starting blocks. This physical life is just the brief waiting period before the crack of the gun. This life is just the awaiting of the lifting of the baton as the concert of the ages is about to begin. This life is merely the irresistible urge swelling in the rooster to crow the arising of the day's magnificence of the sun. This life is just the assembling of the members of the choir, and physical death is only the quieting of the choir as the key is set, and the eyes are unisoned to the Director, and the teeth separate, and the jaw drops, and

lips begin to part, and blended voices start the magnificent resonance of Edward Perronet's "All Hail The Power Of Jesus' Name"!

Knowing God and finding out about Him is just like discovering any other person. YOU HAVE TO BE MORE INTERESTED IN THE OTHER PERSON THAN YOURSELF. The more self-centered we are, the less God-centered we will be, and if any of us are expecting to be with the Lord and spend eternity with Him where He is, we had better get off from our obsessions with "our things", and start becoming interested in "His things". Hear me now. FROM AN INTEREST STANDPOINT -- FROM A LOVE STANDPOINT -- FROM THE STANDPOINT OF "WHERE OUR HEARTS ARE -- there is not going to be such a dramatic and drastic change in us at the point of leaving this world as we customarily think. Jesus left us with NO doubt about this statement I have just made, for He plainly said in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Regarding the QUALITY of our relationship with the Lord: WE set the pace of development. WE determine the acceptance (not the availability!) of information from His heart to ours. You see, God knows who we are, in loving and infinite detail, FOR HE DESIGNED US individually and specifically. He reaches out and down to us constantly and incessantly and repeatedly, SPECIFICALLY TO SHARE WHO HE IS WITH US. I suggest to our minds this morning that IN THIS ENDEAVOR ALONE DOES GOD CONTINUE TO CREATE. We have been told by earth's brightest minds throughout humankind's history, and it has only been accelerated in these days, that God never stops creating new and fascinating galactic systems -- and that the universe is constantly expanding. We believers have the right to question this, both practically and biblically. The universe is not expanding at all, It has been there all the time, just as it is, merely awaiting humankind's discovery by more powerful means to probe and reveal!!

The holy scriptures in Genesis 2:1-3, as well as the tense and meaning of the Hebrew word "create", leave us with the strong inference that our physical universe was a perfectly "done deal", in the idiom of the day, when God "finished it at the conclusion of "His work". Listen. I know you know it, and I know you have read it frequently, but I urge you to listen to the familiar verses about the creation of the physical universe with the idea in mind that it was perfect and complete in its original act by God.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made: and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He rested from all His work which God created and made."

Now, I ask you to draw in your minds to the main point in all of this discussion about "God's current creativity." Unquestionably, an almighty God continues to create, BUT THAT CREATIVITY IS NOT NEW UNIVERSES, BUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH BEINGS WHO WERE CREATED IN HIS IMAGE. God is far more concerned with what is going on between you

and Him and me and Him than any happening anywhere in this entire mind-boggling universe, I hope this will not escape us!!

We need to discover what is in the mind and heart of God towards us "by the back door", so to speak. We can always know Who and what He is towards us, and who and what He wants us to be like, by knowing Who He is NOT. God is not proud. God does not strut, or swagger. Why He wants me to do my best to impress this on our minds is because it presents such an understandable image in our minds, We all understand strutting and swaggering, **GOD IS NOT LIKE THAT AND HE ABHORS HUMANS WHEN THEY ARE LIKE THAT.** God is not overbearing or imperious. God NEVER attempts to impress anyone about Who He is. Anytime He refers to Himself in any way, **IT IS A STATEMENT OF FACT AND TRUTH,** and never any attempt to "prove" Himself or "authenticate" Himself. He is not great because He refers to Himself as great, **HE IS GREAT BECAUSE HE IS GREAT!!!** God does not have to promote Himself or advertise Himself. **HE REVEALS** Himself so that we can know Him and Who He really is, but He never tries to **IMPRESS** us. It is not in or of God to try to elevate or expand Himself. These are all human efforts and are not divinely engaged.

GOD ALWAYS THINKS AND ACTS ACCORDING TO FACT, and therefore His realm is never that of "degrees", or "levels". Anything, or in the case of His Being, anyone, perfect is just that -- perfect! Nothing about God varies (SEE James 1:17 -- in Him is no variableness or shadow of turning), and that is why He never changes. God never "gets better" or improves, and that is a totally foreign concept to us. Anytime God relates to us or deals with us, **IT IS FROM THE BASIS OF THE VERY BEST;** not the best of humanity, **BUT THE BEST OF DEITY!** I can give you my best and fall far short of meeting your need. You can do your very best to help me, and try your hardest with all your ability and perceptively and kindness and resources at your disposal to help and comfort me, and we can still leave each other needing and yearning and hurting. Those who love us so much that they would instantly place their lives in jeopardy for us, simply **CANNOT** touch us and reach us in most of our deepest human needs. We all know this! It is so frustrating to desperately **WANT** to alleviate emotional upheaval and mental strain from another's heavy life's burdens, and not be able to do it.

IT IS NOT LIKE THAT WITH THE LORD, and I would not even hint that we always get relief when we call upon God. Lots of times I get no recognizable results from my frantic, heartbroken cries for help to God, and would be a false prophet to leave that impression with anyone. I would be one of earth's last to try to explain the ways of God in His dealings with us. What I will faithfully assert is that, those times when He comes near with His strong arms and places them under us, **IT IS A FULLY ADEQUATE SUPPORT!!!** We do question where He is at times, and we do wonder if He hears our calls, and the knowledge of His love and care is most often "of faith and not by sight." **BUT WHEN WE ARE CONSCIOUS OF HIS INTERVENTION, IT IS POWERFULLY FULFILLING,** and there is no other experience on earth quite like it!! When we are aware that we are being supported, and elevated, and sheltered, and hidden, "in the everlasting arms", and "under His wings", **THE COMFORT IS COMPLETE AND FULL,** and nothing else is needed when the Lord lifts us up!!! Brother, when God stands you up and dusts you off, you know that you have been strengthened and energized! Sister, when Jesus puts His arms around you, you know that you have been embraced -- and held!!! There is no experience on earth that compares to the undergirding of the Lord.

God told David in 2 Samuel 7:6, when he wanted to build an expensive and ornate house in God's honor -- a house in which He could come down to earth and dwell and visit His people:

"I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the Children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day -- I ... HAVE WALKED IN A TENT...."

GOD DOES NOT DWELL IN EDIFICES. GOD DOES NOT TRAFFIC IN BUILDINGS. We build them, and we ornate them, and we elegant them, and we ostentate them, and we lavishly construct flamboyant edifices with awesome architecture and expensive designs, and in many ways, especially in the past, have impoverished worshippers and indentured the body of Christ **MUCH MORE TO IMPRESS ONLOOKERS THAN TO IMPRESS GOD!!!** I doubt that God's feelings and interests are ever considered as church leaders and congregations plan a place of worship. I fear that literally thousands of congregations, who name the name of Christ, worship their buildings more than God!

One of the saddest biblical portraits of Jesus Christ is revealed to the church in The Revelation 3:20 where He is seen **STANDING OUTSIDE THE CHURCH**, knocking at its door and seeking entrance. The constant danger of the Laodicean Church (the end-time church -- the 1990s church) is that in its wealth and prestige and grandeur and material acceptability, **JESUS IS OUTSIDE, AND HIS WEALTH AND HEALTH IS SACRIFICED!** My main task as a pastor in 1999, as we live on the threshold of the 21st century, is to help those who listen to me **TO KEEP JESUS AMONG US! I WANT GOD TO WALK IN MY TENT. I WANT HIM TO WALK IN OUR TENT!!**

The Bible is poignantly explicit in its proclamations that God does not dwell in anything of human manufacture. **I BEAR YOU RECORD THAT IF WE DO NOT BRING HIM WITH US TO THIS CHURCH, GOD IS NOT IN THIS CHURCH!** and the same can be said for any other edifice that calls itself a house of worship.

"Heaven is My home, and earth is My footstool"

God said to Isaiah in 66:1. And the last half of verse 2 could well be the all-time favorite statement of mine in all of the Old Testament, If it is not the most important concept to my mind, it ranks of one of them. God said there...

"...to this (person) will I look, even to him that is humble, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Jesus said of the promised Holy Spirit, Whom He called "the Comforter", in John 14:16,

"I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, **THAT HE MAY ABIDE (or live with) YOU FOREVER.**"

God prompted the Apostle Paul to address this same matter of where God dwells and the persons in whom He lives, when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:16,

".... ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I WILL DWELL IN THEM, AND WALK IN THEM, and I will be their God and they shall be My people."

Me! and you! A dwelling place for God! I wish there were some way I could help us see that God lives nowhere else but in the hearts of humankind. He actively seeks that close of a relationship with you and me.

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Chapter 7

IF

"And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for an house of sacrifice.

"IF I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among you,

"IF My people who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

"Now shall Mine eyes be open, and My ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place.

"For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever: and Mine eyes and My heart shall be there forever.

"And as for thee, IF THOU WILT WALK BEFORE ME as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe My statutes and My judgments;

"Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel.

"BUT IF YE TURN AWAY, and forsake My statutes and My commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them;

"Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of the land which I have given them: and this house, which I have sanctified for My name, will I cast out of My sight, and I will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations.

"And this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to everyone that passeth by it; so that he shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and unto this house?"

"And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them and served them: therefore hath He brought all of this evil upon them." 2 Chron 7:12-22

So, the title of this morning's message is this tiny word "IF", and it rose to the surface four different times during the reading of the scripture.

Those of you who are grammarians know that this word IF is a conjunction. A conjunction is a connecting word. The word joins other conjunctive ones such as "and, but, for, so and because." Conjunctives, or connecting words, have immense importance, and even if you have no interest in grammar as a study, you use them and rely on them constantly. Listen to some sober thoughts that I have put together for emphasis. "You can decrease your chances of serious injury or death 65% in a vehicle crash IF you buckle your seat belt." And another, "You can avoid a heart attack or crippling stroke IF you eat and exercise properly." And then there are some very pleasant thoughts that illustrate the importance of the little word "if". "IF you can come to our house at 5:30 Friday evening, we'll have dinner together." Or this letter might come from an attorney's office: "You have been named as the sole beneficiary of your Aunt Bloatey's estate, IF you will come to my office at 10:30 Monday morning, you can pick up the check."

"Ifs" are not only very important, but we use them every day. If means on condition that". Its dictionary definition asserts a conditional meaning. Anytime that the word is used, a condition is established. You never use the term if it is not conditional. If a statement is declared; if there is no condition involved in a matter, the word if is not used. So much for the definition of, and grammatical usage of, the word "if".

Its usage and significance has no greater meaning than when it involves God's dealings with mankind. We need to realize how frequently "ifs" are inserted throughout God's commandments and promises to mankind. You can hardly read a page of the Bible but what you encounter conditions that God has set forth for our relationship with Him.

We are told that God is a sovereign and arbitrary Being and that, accordingly, He exercises total control over His creatures, including humans. If that is so, WHY ARE THERE SO MANY CONDITIONS; why do we encounter so many "ifs" and "buts" and "fors"? Please note with me in Genesis 2:16 and 27 that God's very first conversation with man included two conditions -- two possibilities of choice. God's very first commandment, very first requirement, to man came with conditions, that is, with the possibility of choice. Follow me as I read about it.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, BUT (there's the first condition)

"Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: FOR (there's the second condition) in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."

God's very first commandment to mankind established man's free-moral agency. The fact that Adam could, that it was an option, that he had a choice, to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree is proof that God had given him that right, That he could choose to eat and that such a choice would

result in a death establishes a conditional, volitional ability passed from the Creator to His creation.

We need to see what a precious treasure God has imparted to the human family here. He gave to them a heretofore very unique aspect of His Godness. He shared with man a part of Himself that made Him God. I hope that this is not lost to us. He imparted some of His sovereignty to some of His creatures. He didn't have to do this for any reason. God wasn't responding to some universal or moral law outside of Himself that required Him to do this. He wasn't even reacting to attributes within Himself that demanded His placement of the power of choice within man.

Here we witness the grace of God. God is a gracious Person. God is a giver. He shared something very precious, very valuable, very Divine, with mankind, **SIMPLY BECAUSE HE IS A GIVER BY NATURE**. There was no compulsion, no demand, no requirement, no insistence that drew upon Him to do this. He did it just because He is gracious.

That He did this, that is, freely gave us the authority to choose what we will do and whom we will serve and listen to and obey, is enough of a consciousness in itself. That God would freely give us this portion of His total control over His created beings and place it into our hands, so to speak, is a gift of itself of incredible proportions. But there is a greater realization in the act of the gracious impartation to us. The greater realization is that, when He gave mankind this precious gift, in His perfection of understanding, He knew beforehand that we would misuse, abuse, violate, prostitute and trash this trusted treasure from His beneficent heart. Who would do such a thing? Who would give His gifts to others persons with the foreknowledge that they would recklessly reject it and carelessly trash it? Who would make loving investments of devotion and trust in another person with the perfect foreknowledge that it would be returned by selfish indulgences and scornful willfulness? **GOD DID. GOD DOES.**

Two powerful realizations emerge from such thinking: (1) God is much more of a gracious, giving Person than He is credited with, and (2) the awesome gift of human choice is woefully underestimated and horribly abused by all of us, including myself. Every waking minute of our days we are choosing, choosing, choosing. We use this precious gift from God dozens, scores, perhaps hundreds of times each day and hardly ever think about its value, its tremendous power, and certainly not its accountability.

This gives rise to perhaps the primary reason why we should quickly surrender our wills to Him and place right back under His control the motivations and outflow of our lives, This is the smartest move any person can ever make -- that of yielding control and authority back to Him Who trustingly gifted it to us.

Most of us have lamented the foolishness of children in their thinking that "they had to find out for themselves", There is not a loving adult who has not sadly watched the young and the foolish experience the pain and sorrow that could have been avoided if they would only have listened to "mom and dad". All of us have thought, "Why don't they listen and save themselves a lifetime of painful memories of mental suffering and scars? Why don't they take my word for it and yield to my knowledge and warnings?"

My dear Christian friends, we are most often with God just like those so-called "foolish, unheeding youth" when we insist on holding tightly onto the reins of our lives, We are just like them when we can't really trust God for what is best for us and lovingly yield to His will in everything. **THE WISEST ACT OF ANY PERSON IS TO SURRENDER TO HIS WILL** -- to place back into His gracious hands the control of our lives. The choice is ours, of course, to move in whatever direction we will. The choice is ours to make our daily moves without seeking His direction and wisdom and blessing. I wonder how few of us even think of the great privilege we have in our control to say "yes" or 'no"?

This God-given right of humanity to control the direction of our lives finds no greater emphasis than in the classic circumstances that surrounded the dedication of the first temple in Jerusalem by Solomon. Nearly the entire sixth chapter of Second Chronicles is dominated by King Solomon's prayer of dedication. Edifices built for and dedicated to the worship of almighty God from that memorable occasion until present times have used some of Solomon's impassioned thoughts and expressions in the course of their dedication ceremonies. It is doubtful that any of them contained such a confession of need; such an expression of reliance; such an imploring of God's favor; such prophetic implications, and, above all, such a recognition of Divine involvement of the national life of its people. One cannot help but wonder how readily God would pour out His Spirit on any nation whose leader would publicly and humbly and sincerely implore Him as Solomon did on this occasion? The reason why we know that this was not just for show -- that Solomon was sincere -- is that when he finished his prayer, the fire from heaven fell. God never approbates, approves, insincerity.

But it is not Solomon's prayer in chapter six to which I direct our attention this morning, It is God's **RESPONSE** to his prayer that captivates my mind. Please carefully observe, We can pledge and promise and plan and intend all that we want to. We can offer great, high-sounding, full-flowing, and sincere prayers. It is good to get all fired up with high ideals and great causes and noble intentions. It's always exhilarating to hear the bands play and listen to the idealistic rhetoric and be caught up in the emotion of the moment. **BUT WHAT WE DO WHEN ALL OF THAT IS BUT A DIM MEMORY IS WHAT GOD PAYS ATTENTION TO.** Ticker tape and tinsel inevitably surrender to the sweaty routine of living out our intentions when no one else sees and few care.

God knows that and addresses Himself to the harsh realities of life where choices are made in the furnace and not the fanfare; when we decide Whom we will serve and how we're going to conduct our lives when we are pressured rather than pretty and perfumed. The true test of character is when it is time to pay on our promises, especially when no other human eye can tell what our choices are.

Look with me at the seventh chapter of Second Chronicles, verse twelve, where it states that "the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him..." Then follows ten verses of God's revealed proposals to Solomon personally, but also to a group called "His people". It is His message to whom He terms "my people" that brings about the emergence of the church and, accordingly, each of us, into the picture.

The term "my people" arises as a broad one and has evolved into the larger body of believers in God as their Father, Savior and Lord. The question could be asked, and answered, "Who are God's people?" from this important exchange between God and Solomon.

The identity of "my people" must first be discovered in God's initial reply to Solomon. "I have heard thy prayer." God's people are praying people. God's people pray to Him. We talk to Him if we belong to Him. People who don't pray either never knew Him at all or they have left Him. God's people are not that because they are Jewish or Catholic or Wesleyan or merely because they have come to be known as such. LABELS AND TAGS ARE MEANINGLESS TO GOD. What counts with Him is heart conditions. Please recall with me one of my favorite scriptures found in 2 Chronicles 16:9 which states that "the eyes of the Lord go to and fro through all of the earth to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards Him." Heart attitudes are what impress God. Hearts that seek Him out. Hearts that quest for God. Hearts that place an importance on prayer. Hearts that engage in conversation with Him.

I am deeply touched by Paul's responses and actions immediately upon his conversion. Recall with me how God instructed Ananias to go to Paul at Judas's house on Straight Street in Damascus and pray for him. Other than telling Ananias where to go to find Paul, the Lord only says one thing about this new disciple. Do you remember what the Lord tells Ananias that Paul was doing? Here it is in Acts 19:11. Just three words. "Behold, he prayeth", Or in other words, "Look, the man is praying." Persons who pray are noteworthy to God.

Praying and who prays and how much we pray has a certain, unchangeable measuring property. YOU TALK WITH WHOM YOU LOVE. If you love someone, you communicate with them. You spend time with whom you love. I know that what I am going to say now will serve as a embarrassing wake-up call for most Christians, but few of us will disagree with its accuracy or the need of its being said and emphasized. WE CAN CORRECTLY MEASURE OUR LOVE FOR GOD BY THE TIME AND ATTENTION THAT WE GIVE TO HIM.

I have this strongest persuasion that most Christians of the 1990s can recall a time with their walk with God when they spent more time with the Lord. Especially during the "honeymoon" of our relationship with Him. I will plow deeper into this subject and will get very little, if any, objections to my strong assertions here. A growing love for God will work out into a growing, stronger relationship with loved ones and close associates. IT CANNOT BE ANY OTHER WAY. YOU CANNOT BE LEARNING MORE AND MORE ABOUT GOD AND NOT BECOME A MORE LOVING, CARING, SENSITIVE, SELFLESS PERSON IN THE PROCESS.

Individuals who are having trouble in their relationships with other persons -- spouses, co-workers, neighbors, school chums, and especially others in the church -- are generally always FIRST in trouble with their walking and talking with God. I have yet to see persons who are in a fractious situation in the church -- those who are fussing, scraping and causing strife -- who are maintaining a warm, real, close walk with God, There are exceptions, of course, but 99% of the time, godly persons who habitually bathe their daily lives with God's gracious, loving presence have a spirit of graciousness and selflessness and kindness about them that promotes mutuality and cooperation.

I am reminded of one of my favorite scriptures at this point, and I quote it from James 3:16-18:

"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

BUT THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE IS FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE, GENTLE, AND EASY TO BE ENTREATED, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

I like the way the NIV puts that last verse: "Peacemakers who sow in peace, raise a harvest of righteousness."

I do not wish to be misunderstood or misquoted about this matter of Christian conflict. Nothing that I have said above has anything at all to do with standing up for the right and against the wrong. I don't suppose that any of us who follow Christ will ever experience as much conflict as Jesus did, but it will come. The more like Jesus we become, my guess is that we will experience increased opposition. I am not ignorant of this. The conflict that I have been decrying is that arises between brothers and sisters in Christ BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES IN PERSONAL OPINIONS.

Long ago God strongly dealt with me about contending with other Christians. WAS MY CONTENTION FOR WHAT WAS RIGHT, OR WAS IT FOR MY WAY? I can promise you, that in my case at least, the more honestly I applied this question to the contentions and differences that arose between other Christians and me, the more the conflicts abated. MOST OF THE TIME IT WAS "MY WAY" AND "MY OPINION" that was at issue, and not a matter of what was sin or what was wrong at all. And, as a pastor who has watched scores of scraps and misunderstandings and hurt feelings and separations of fellowship over a span of forty years of ministry, the 99% figure mentioned earlier is not exaggerated at all. Most church and family and spousal fusses spring from contentions over "my way" versus "your way" .

I know that down in my heart, after having personally analyzed this time after time, that spending time alone with Jesus SOFTENS THE SPIRIT AND CLEARS THE ATMOSPHERE and helps us to see people and situations as Jesus does. Even when there is a legitimate place to contend for the right, touching the heart of God about it enables us to do it in a spirit of selfless and courteous fervency. In fact, my experience in this has proven to me that we are not even spiritually confident and courageous to face legitimate conflict until the element of self-interest has been eliminated. Far too often the real cause in conflict is self and not what is right.

So, God is constantly looking for those who pray. Does it bother you a bit that Solomon prayed this prayer in a rather elevated manner? It could bother me, as stated earlier, if it were not for the Divine approbation at its conclusion. God didn't discredit the "podium prayer", so why should we? Two things of a positive note impress me. Solomon knelt before God and all of his subjects, and as such, he was certainly providing an important example for the people. What a picture! Here was a wealthy, mighty, world-recognized king on his knees publicly!

What is much more impressive about this scene than King Solomon's prayer is God's response to it. Often we are perplexed about what God thinks. We properly wonder about His attitudes and what His responses are to our thoughts, decisions and actions. He is the One with Whom we have to do. He is the Judge of all the earth and each of us will answer to Him and no other Being about our choices and conduct. SO, WHAT DOES HE THINK?

Look at this situation closely, There are a hundred issues of life and conduct that confront us humans -- lifestyle issues, the way we act, the things we do, how we talk, the places we go, what we spend strength, time and money on, and how we treat other persons. But please note the single issue that God discussed with Solomon. When heaven's God spoke to a man about His requirements for him, He said nothing about money or possessions or travel or politics or commerce or even about our relationships with other persons. Think of it!!! GOD ADDRESSED ONE, SINGLE, BURNING ISSUE! And my humble judgment is that this is going to be the same burning issue that we each face as we stand before Him on that fateful day of the Lord. It is the one issue that orders our everyday lives. It's the single issue that overshadows all that we do or think or say. It is truly the only issue upon which all of our lives turn. The reason that God went for THAT ONE, SINGLE, PRESSING ISSUE is because all that we are and all that we do and all that we think and all that we decide derives from it. It is the issue that God has addressed to each individual of humankind throughout His entire relationship with us. It is the first commandment. It is the second commandment. It is what we see -- it is what we hear every time that we get quiet enough and get close enough to God to hear His heartbeat. It is what Moses heard on Mt. Sinai, It is what David heard as he walked with God in the quiet sheep pastures. It is what the prophets heard EVERY TIME that they received a message from God. It is what Peter heard when Jesus was ready to leave the disciples and go back to heaven, It is what Paul heard when he listened to the beating heart of Jesus Christ and wrote the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians. It is what John heard from Jesus on Patmos when He told him about the deep, problem of the Ephesian Church.

A LACK OF LOVE IS AT THE HEART OF EVERY EARTHLY PROBLEM. SIN IS A LOVE PROBLEM. EVERY WRONG COMMITTED AGAINST GOD AND MAN IS A LOVE PROBLEM. Every sinner and backslider in Coeur d'Alene today remains that way because he loves himself and his wishes and pleasures more than he loves God and His church and His ways. Every church problem is a love problem. Every broken marriage and broken home is the result of one person loving himself more than he or she loves his spouse and children. Every fractured friendship is because of selfishness. RELATIONAL PROBLEMS ON EVERY AND ANY LEVEL IS BECAUSE OF A LACK OF LOVE.

Fifteen year's ago I wrote these words in the preface of a small book entitled, " Good Enough For The Preacher." I saw it --I knew it -- long before that.

"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."

It is no different, just worse, much worse, in the church today. Hear me, dear, precious hearts, WE WILL ANSWER BEFORE GOD AT OUR PERSONAL JUDGMENTS, FOR EVERY TIME THAT WE HAVE PURSUED OUR SELFISH, GRATIFYING WAYS TO THE HARM AND DISCOURAGEMENT OF OTHERS. I've watched it happen with such frequency and regularity that it is a surprise anymore when it doesn't. Few people in and out of the church, make personal decisions based on how it will affect others. IT IS NEARLY ALWAYS PREDICATED UPON WHAT I WANT TO DO. It makes me so sad. I weep and cry over and over it.

I open my heart and share with you some of those heart-cries that surface regularly in my personal intercessions for the unsaved. My constant, daily prayer as I weep over all of those who are not following the Lord is: "Please, Jesus. Help them to love You!" I have prayed that prayer a thousand times and will continue to until I can pray no more.

I KNOW THAT IF A PERSON REALLY FALLS IN LOVE WITH JESUS CHRIST, the result will be a selfless person who puts God, his spouse, his friends and his church above his own desires and wants. Don't tell me that it doesn't work and that such a thing is merely idealistic, for I know better. I've witnessed this grace work selflessly in too many people. The reason that we think that it doesn't work is because we see so little of it.

There are many who would label such statements as I am making an over-simplification and that I am suggesting that salvation is a cure-all, so to speak. I need to say that there are wide variations of so-called Christian experiences of salvation, or conversions, I would not waste my time in the futile effort trying to explain the wide differences in persons who profess to be a Christian. Having said that, I do not hesitate to restate what I have already said. Those persons who truly and wholly love Jesus Christ become selfless people who place the Lord, His church, other people's desires and needs, and the unsaved of the earth BEFORE THEIR OWN.

What touches my mind deeply today is how different we can be in our love and service to God by a single act of our will. All that we are in time and eternity and all that we do throughout our lives turns on our constant response to this tiny word "if". WE INEXORABLY MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF OUR HEART CHOICES.

God cautioned Solomon about this solemn fact of the precedence of the human will. I know that I can't possibly get this to sound as integral as I feel it and see it. Here we see that almighty God, the Creator of all things and all beings, talking with a man, one of His creatures. He is basically saying the same thing to Solomon that He said to Adam so long ago. "IF you want to love Me and obey Me and keep My commandments, YOU CAN. IF you choose not to, you can do that as well. BUT IF YOU DO, I will withdraw My presence from you."

There is deeper, more probing truth in this message from God to Solomon, and each of us. There are varying levels of human commitment to God's laws and ways. And, my friends, THIS is what makes the difference between the obviously deeply Godly Christians and all of the rest. You'll discover that in verse seventeen, and some of you already know what that difference is, It is another tiny, little word -- this one three letters, "ALL". I want to lay down some unimpeachable laws about loving God with ALL contrasted to some. (1) We can love Him 100% (2) Regardless

of the veritable masses of professed Christians who say that they love God and His commandments, but have obviously withheld a part of their love, **GOD WILL ACCEPT NO LESS THAN OUR ALL**. We're just kidding ourselves if we think that He'll buy a fractured, half-way, part-time love. (3) Anything less than a total love -- a total commitment of our all -- a total obedience to all of His laws and commandments, **WILL RESULT IN A PIECE-MEAL WITHDRAWAL**, even if an outer form of religion continues. That's backsliding.

Most backsliding occurs because of this. I think that most, if not all, believers come to the point of total surrender very soon after their conversion. It won't be long until the Lord brings us to the point of a surrender of the "apple of our eye", so to speak -- that one largest love of our hearts. There is no sense in my trying to identify it for us, for it is as varied as our interests and temperaments, but we all know it when God brings us up against it. It is at that point that we will either say "yes" and yield to His wisdom, or we fail to yield and start backing up. I've watched it happen over and over, This nearly always happens in our quiet and lonely times where no other person witnesses, **BUT WE KNOW AND GOD KNOWS**.

Our wonderful God is charged with making cruel demands and heartless requirements, when in truth **HIS GOAL IS TO PROTECT FROM OURSELVES**. Just as a loving Father, He sees down the road what would cripple and hurt us and puts His finger on what would destroy us. It's really not a person or a thing at all. **IT IS DISOBEDIENCE. IT IS REBELLION**. He wants us to softly and tenderly yield to His goodness, wisdom and eternal love.

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Chapter 8 INTRODUCTION to BIBLICAL GREATNESS

Philippians 2:3-11

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind **LET EACH ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN THEMSELVES**.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

"**LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU**, which was also in Christ Jesus.

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

"But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

"And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name:

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

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

The first thing I want us to do is focus our minds on one word in verse 6, the word "form" -- a much discussed and misunderstood word, and its meaning.

What the word MORPHE means is, "the special or characteristic feature of any person or thing."

WHATEVER ELSE we may glean from verse 6, that states,

"(Jesus), being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

It has to say that THERE IS A SAMENESS OF NATURE WITH GOD AND JESUS. We may go, theologically, dozens of ways about what that "sameness" means, but the Bible's position is that THERE IS TOTAL AND PERFECT EQUALITY WITH THE PERSONS OF GOD, THE FATHER, AND GOD, THE SON.

I will give you my own conclusions on this, and then get quickly to the issue I consider Paul was emphasizing here about Jesus' coming to earth, and particularly, THE MANNER IN WHICH HE DID IT!!

My understanding of God and Jesus is that Jesus is very God in every way except in OFFICE AND FUNCTION. Jesus is not a part of God, or possess part of God. He has all of the attributes and characteristics and nature of God in full measure. There is nothing of Who God is that Jesus is not. ONLY THEIR OFFICES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND FUNCTIONS DIFFER, and that is by mutual planning and agreement .

When God came into a human body, it was as a baby -- not a grown man, and not a man of station and means. Jesus "made of Himself no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant", Think of this! Jesus could have been reputable He could have established Himself as respected and honored and praiseworthy, BUT HE TOOK ON HIM THE NATURE OF A SERVANT.

The point is that Jesus Christ controlled His reputation as much as any of us, and He deliberately positioned Himself as a servant, AND INSTRUCTED HIS FOLLOWERS TO ADOPT THE SAME ATTITUDE. (See Matthew 20:25-28).

No individual can seriously study God's coming to earth AS A BABY and not see that GOD HAS A NATURE DIFFERENT FROM OURS . . and He gives to His followers that same desire and purpose TO BE HUMBLE AND TO SERVE. It all revolves around what we think is great and important, and what God clearly says about them.

BIBLICAL GREATNESS

My poor mind has been intensely challenged for most of my walk with God about certain statements Jesus made concerning lowliness of mind and heart. Lowliness of mind and heart is a certain indicator of character meekness, or better known as humility. Every time I read over or ponder the teachings of Jesus about the identity of true greatness among humankind, it invariably revolves around this trait of lowliness of heart and mind. Also invariably, I am left mentally agape, in a kind of awesome wonder.

One thing is obvious about true greatness as Jesus describes it. **IT IS SO VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM THE CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES OF EARTH'S IDEA OF GREATNESS THAT WE MOST OFTEN DISMISS AND REJECT IT.** These dismissals and rejections are generally accompanied by the attitude that biblical greatness is too high of a standard and that nobody can really live like that. The adoption of such attitudes reject the clear teachings of Jesus about it, and no serious Christian wants to be guilty of that. The truth is that real greatness, as taught by Jesus and faithfully witnessed to by God's Word, is so uncharacteristic that we generally overlook it. It is so heavenly in nature that most of us miss it. It is so "unmarketable" that most of us do not pursue it. It is so uncommon in principle and practice among humankind -- in and out of the church -- that its value among us is nearly nothing.

There is little known about God's portrayal of true greatness. It simply does not hold much interest to us. Consider this: a college level course entitled "Meeknessiol", or "Humilityiol", or "Lowlinessiol", or "How To Be A Servant." Institutions of higher learning, even religion-oriented ones, do not offer such courses because there is little or no interest among educators or students. Other than the few who pursue Christlikeness or are in diligent search for the nature of God, the interest among humankind is just not there.

The question could be asked then, "Why are your listeners and readers being exposed to such a consideration? Why talk about it? Why write about it?" The answer is really obvious in my mind at least, and it is discovered in the adjective "true" as it modifies the thought of true greatness. **TRUE** greatness as contrasted with the generally-held concept of greatness among us. The importance is discovered then in what is true? What is genuine? What is real? Any person who is interested in **THE FACTS** about anything should want to know what is true and what is false, -- what is real and what is fake -- what is genuine and what is only a facade -- what is actual and what is only imaginary.

Jesus made a powerful statement when He stood before Pilate, the Roman governor, at the time of His arraignment to be crucified (See John 18:36,37) that has been excavating my mind for weeks. Let me read it to you.

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence.

"Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. TO THIS END WAS I BORN, AND FOR THIS CAUSE CAME I INTO THE WORLD, THAT I SHOULD BEAR WITNESS UNTO THE TRUTH. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice."

Jesus made two unmistakable declarations about truth, The first was that His purpose in coming to earth WAS TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH, and the second was that serious searchers after the truth WOULD ACCEPT WHAT HE SAID AS TRUTH.

Out of all the various differentiations made between good and evil, this is not among them, and it should top the list, for what mankind believes about Jesus Christ being THE TRUTH determines their eternal destinies. A "bottom-of-the-soul" subscription to Jesus being THE TRUTH -- in everything He said -- is the one and only guarantee of an acceptance before God. Jesus did not make any slip-ups. He never "misspoke". He never once had to reverse or alter or adjust His statements. He never miscalculated or underestimated or over-emphasized His declarations or claims. (We are all different from Him in that regard). The reason Jesus did not have to qualify or adjust or rearrange His statements WAS BECAUSE HE WAS (and IS) THE TRUTH!

I am eagerly impressed with such a thought! Never once did Jesus have to return to a statement, or statements, He made and then later amend or correct it. There is no other individual in mankind's history about whom this can be said, however committed to the truth he or she may have been (or is). We can be honest and truthful IN OUR HEARTS and by the time heart thoughts pass through our heads and exit by our mouths, they often are horribly mangled! This fact of life saddens and embarrasses truly honest persons, and is most often unexplainable, even to ourselves sometimes.

But when we do these things WE MAKE RIGHT SUCH SLIPS OF THE MIND AND TONGUE! We apologize, or try to. If we are following Christ, WE WILL CORRECT our offenses, and the saints who refuse to or become weary of making corrections to failures and blunders, not only backslide and shut off the favor of God, but they erect barriers between themselves and those whom they have offended, This is a pattern of maintaining good relationships with God and man, but Jesus did not have to edit His words because He was THE TRUTH.

An extension of this thinking is that anything He said EQUATED VALIDITY. No person has the right to say that Jesus "did not mean what He said" or that what "He said was unimportant." I fear for theologians who take positions of "editors of Jesus Christ", so to speak. We can only come to a single conclusion about those who do. THEY HAVE REJECTED JESUS CHRIST AS THE TRUTH. They have decided that what He said could have been flawed, or that the recording of it could have been flawed. I judge that such scholars court blasphemy! That is how strongly I feel about such persons and their choices.

It is always mentally stimulating to read Mark 1:22, and I quote:

"And they were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one Who had authority, and not as the scribes."

How did these listeners determine what was authoritative and what was not? How did common, uneducated, undegreed individuals know that what Jesus said carried an authority that their academically degreed professors did not have? We have to be impressed with this! **THE PEOPLE KNEW! THEY COULD TELL!** They sensed in their innermost beings what was the truth and what was not. This almost validates the residence in each person's consciousness a "truth indicator", an "authority monitor", a "reality gauge", that is a safe guide to what is true and genuine **IF WE WILL LISTEN AND OBEY**. If this is so, and I believe that it is, then those millions who do not accept the authority of Jesus as **THE TRUTH** in all He said and claimed **HAVE REJECTED HIM!** It has to be!

Now, having drawn such conclusions from Jesus' declarations, let us narrow our thinking to the identity of true greatness. Whatever our experiences have been until now -- however it may not line up with our teaching, our training, and certainly the thinking and practices of our society today, **WHAT DID JESUS SAY** about greatness and what it really is? First, let us look into the heart of Jesus Christ as He addresses this very query by His disciples in Matthew 18:1-4, and this has become such an integral part of my personal life and thinking that it has adorned my study walls for a good many years. Let us read:

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

"And Jesus called a little child unto Him. . .

WAIT: WAIT! STOP! That is far enough! **JESUS CALLED A LITTLE CHILD!** Oh, how I pray we will allow this to grip us! This clause needs to enclose us and encircle us and suspend us and elevate us and isolate us and captivate us. This thought must hold us until it flows through our beings with a heavenly purification action. It needs to penetrate our souls and infiltrate our entire beings until there are no areas untouched or unaffected by its natural intensity!

"Who is the greatest in God's kingdom?" **"AND JESUS CALLED A LITTLE CHILD!"** If there is a gong or a clarion or a klaxon or a fanfare in heaven, you can hear it now! If there is a **"NOW HEAR THIS"** in heaven, it occurs now! If you want to know who and what God highly values, open wide your ears and eyes now! Jesus called a little child! His answer to the question of what true greatness consists is to be discovered in His act of calling for a small child. How small -- what size -- what was the age of this "little child"? The child had to be a very young one as Mark says of him that Jesus "took him in His arms." (SEE Mark 9:36). The Nestles Greek New Testament is my favorite in its rendering of this clause: and Jesus folding him in His arms, said...."

This child was small enough that the appropriate treatment would be to actually "hold him in His arms", It was customary to hold or carry a child this small. Most of us would judge him to be at least three or under, and my personal guess is much younger, more than likely a baby boy in arms not walking yet or barely so.

There are other than biblical reasons for such a conclusion, My experience with small children, our own as well as those of other parents, is that they began to show signs of selfishness and bratiness and pride quite early. There is very good reason for the contemporary assignation of the "terrible twos". Most parents, especially new ones, anguish over how quickly their sweet, innocent, precious, adorable, little baby becomes possessive and arrogant and deceitful and punitive and disobedient and destructive. The child who does not and is not is the exception and not the rule. If you had a child who was sweet, obedient and caring into his twos and three and fours, thank God for one thing, and please do not judge other's children by that one exception for another.

This small child Jesus held in His arms, who He was about to use as an example of "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven", had the characteristics mentioned in verse four, and let us finish the reading of Matthew 18:1-4.

"And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them,

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

What an object lesson Jesus was giving here! All of those around Jesus who were close enough to see and hear looked upon who Jesus used to explain true greatness. The innocence. The simplicity. The softness. The tenderness. The dependency. The peace. The trust. The contentment. The humility. The absence of station or rank. The absence of competitiveness.

For many years my consciousness has been stricken with the reason why Jesus was so comfortable with this little child in His arms, It is true that He used him as an object lesson to try to impress the truth of true greatness on His listeners, but that is not the main reason. My educated guess is that every time Jesus looked on a small child (the point being that this was not a random act) -- every time Jesus looked on a small child such as this one, something stirred in His spirit and tears embellished His loving gaze. My guess is that Jesus often sat, just like this, and held them in His arms **JUST LIKE HE DID THIS DAY**. I am strongly suggesting that this was characteristic of Jesus to hold little children in His arms and that He did it often. The reason why this was His custom of holding little children in His embrace and feeling its small, rapid heartbeat close to His own loving heart **IS THAT HE WAS JOINED TO A COMPATIBLE SPIRIT**. Jesus Christ was in sync, attuned, compatible with the nature of a little child. Jesus felt more "at home" and more of a kindred spirit with small children than most adults. Consider, ponder and weep!

Do you want to think like God thinks? Do you want to know what He highly values? Do you want to know what pleases Him? Do you want to know what He is like and what He considers important? If you truly want to know what God calls greatness, it is discovered in this illustration, and we are going to have to come to the realization **THAT GREATNESS WITH GOD IS NOT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF IT AT ALL**. We will not only have to change our definition of

greatness, BUT ACTUALLY DEVELOP AN ENTIRE NEW SET OF MEASUREMENTS. This is a powerful concept! The measurements of grace are as unique as they are wonderful!

The greatness of humankind is in conflict with God's greatness. Take the reference of Jesus about humility for an example. We are raised from childhood with the teaching that meekness is weakness and humility is wimpishness.

Listed here are some startling realizations, God is intrinsically an humble Being. The universe is literally filled from end to end with humble beings. Arrogance and pride are peculiar to the earth and its inhabitants. Sin is the result of pride (See Ezekiel 28:17). Pride is the first sin (See Ezekiel 28:15) and it occurred (it did not originate with God) because God granted AN UNINFLUENCED CHOICE to some of His created beings.

Heaven and all of God's vast universe is characterized by a total absence of pride even as heaven's God is intrinsically humble. You see, the reason why we initially reject the concept of God's humility is that we equate true humility with earth's (thus society's) concept of it, which is non-aggressive, non-confrontational, fearful, flaccid, weak, docile, and wimpy. NOTHING COULD BE MORE ERRONEOUS, and Jesus was directly trying to correct such an error.

I urge us to take a long look at our Savior when we are inclined to equate true humility with fearfulness or weakness or non-confrontation. Jesus seemed to be always "in the faces" of the hypocrites and religious liars. Jesus stood "toe to toe" with them and named their infamous pedigrees without a hint of fearfulness. His stinging, inflammatory judgments of their veiled, empty hypocrisies were anything but weak and wimpy! I have emotionally preached for a lifetime that Jesus Christ was a man among men and have vigorously rejected an effeminate, sallow, acquiescent, stoop-shouldered, "tiptoe-through-the-tulips" wimpy kind of a Lord and Savior! Jesus always stood up for what was right and good and holy and proper and virtuous AND NO MAN OR WOMAN CAN DO THAT IN WEAKNESS AND FEAR AND TREPIDATION!!

Our Lord's self-description ought to quell any contrary voice relating to His intrinsic humility, is established in His statement in Matthew 11:29:

I am meek and lowly in heart...."

Nothing else, or further proof, is needed. This says it all. Jesus IS meek and lowly in heart, God is meek and lowly in heart, and we will be surprised when we see Him!

We have to stop, equating greatness with pompousness; with grandness; with arrogance; with loftiness; with aloofness; with distance and unapproachability. The reason we do is because, without the grace of God, THAT IS THE WAY WE HUMANS ARE: But God is not like any or all of that. All of that was introduced as pride into the natures of humankind at the fall in the Garden of Eden.

There is no conflict with humility and all other good in God or redeemed mankind. True humility is compatible with all other good. The intrinsic meekness of Jesus did not suffer at all as He excoriated the duplicity of the Pharisees. The lowliness of Jesus did not depreciate at all as He

hammered the unbelievers of Capernaum. The humility of Jesus was not abandoned as He drove out the crooks from the temple. WE HAVE TO CHANGE OUR MINDS ABOUT MEEKNESS BEING WEAKNESS AND LOWLINESS BEING NON-ASSERTIVE AND HUMILITY BEING NON-CONFRONTATIONAL.

Greatness with God is not merely the opposite from our ideas about it -- it is different. Our concept of greatness arises from recognition and status rank and position and experience, God's has to do with being and with nature and with character. All of the above -- recognition, status, rank, position, experience -- may or may not have validity in fact. There is the greater probability that what others think about any other individual is incorrect.

That is a major reason for a Great White Throne judgment before God. (See The Revelation 20:11). God will call every human being into one, vast judgment arena TO MAKE RIGHT ALL WRONGS. God's judgment throne is not primarily "to give those beggars what is coming to them", or is it a Divine, gleeful pronouncement of damnation to the disbelieving and disobedient. IT IS PRIMARILY THE MAINTENANCE OF THE RIGHT. Everything within and about the character of God is right and true and genuine. I know that it is nearly impossible for us to consider an environment of total truth and complete integrity and perfect genuineness, but that is God's realm.

Any person comes near to God when he is completely open and honest about himself before God and other persons. We are one with God when we are like that. Unmixed integrity bonds any person with God. Genuineness of character does not redeem any person, but God peers into such a one's heart for He finds a oneness there. That person who will not tolerate deception in himself, before God and with others, is in the very best position to know God and understand God, and I personally believe that God's Holy Spirit will lead such a person to Himself Through Christ.

And so truthfulness and honesty becomes greatness in the mind of God. Reality and genuineness -- the way things REALLY ARE -- becomes greatness. Recognition has value only if it is genuine, That is why God is great -- not because He is called great or is acclaimed great or recognized as great, BUT BECAUSE HE IS GREAT! He is great whether He is accorded greatness or not. All that is spoken and recognized about God has validity because of its reality and not because of the acclaim of beings heavenly or earthly. God's holiness is because of the fact and not because of its proclamation. It's proclamation is because of its reality, The same can be stated of all God's attributes.

We have to see that everything about Who and what God is IS A FACT, and the recognition of it does not validate it. It only proclaims it. Who He is is intact whether we choose to believe it or not. The point of all this rationale is that greatness with God and before God DOES NOT PRIMARILY INVOLVE POSITION AND ACCLAIM FOR HIMSELF OR ANY OTHER BEING. That God, or any other being He has created, is acclaimed or honored to any degree HAS TO DO WITH THE ACTUAL CHARACTER AND NATURE OF BEING, or beings.

In heaven there will be nothing hidden or unknown. Heaven is a transparency. Did you catch that truth in The Revelation 21:27? that (in heaven) "...there shall in no wise enter into it anything that . . maketh a lie. . ."? There will be no deceit, no ambiguity, no ulteriority, no

innuendo, no subterfuge, no hidden meanings, NOTHING FAKE OR SHAM OR UNREAL! Such truth should make any thinking person homesick for heaven, when every inhabitant will be exactly who and what they really are and not what is thought or supposed to be. Praise the Lord!

Greatness in earth's context is not even nothing in God's viewpoint, It is less than nothing. It is a negative, and the reason should be obvious, IT IS MOST OFTEN INCORRECT. At this point a cogent thought emerges. Remember the times within the body of Christ, when God's Holy Spirit draws near and all of us are touched and moved in love and unity? Prominent at these times IS A KIND OF LEVELING EFFECT. Heavenly atmospheres are invariably leveling and unifying and commonizing. We all sense a community, a co-mingling, an amalgamating of hearts and minds and spirits. There is nothing on earth quite like it! Any elevating IS CORPORATE and rarely individual. The attendance of the Holy Spirit among true believers is always unifying.

THAT IS HOW AND WHAT HEAVEN IS! How intensely God wants us to see this! Turn with me to a "greatness reference" in Luke 7:28, and as you turn to the scripture, please remember that the Bible does not contradict itself, however it may appear to at times. Let us read:

"For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: BUT HE THAT IS LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS GREATER THAN HE."

How can this be? If John is "the greatest", number one, How can he be greater than Jesus, and number two, how can a person who is "least in the kingdom of God,, be greater than John? IT IS BECAUSE "GREATNESS" IN EARTH'S CONTEXT IS NON-EXISTENT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. It is not merely that "greatest" and "least" are reversed in heaven, it is that greatness as humankind assesses it does not exist in heaven. I stated earlier in the message that we have to arrive at completely different means of measurements to understand true greatness.

The door to understanding "greatness" as it exists in heaven and as God knows it to be, is discovered in Jesus' oft-stated ideas about it, but is best seen, in Matthew 23:11, and I quote:

"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."

Note that I said this concept about greatness and servanthood "is the door to understanding Biblical greatness." It is only the door, the opening, the access. The understanding is much deeper and far broader.

The idea that servitude equates true greatness as God sees it is repeatedly taught by our Lord, It is the "as a little child" attitude again, and makes a lot of sense once "we get inside" of the concept. Once a Christian sees that serving is not demeaning or inferior, BUT IS IN FACT GODLIKE AND GRACIOUS IN NATURE, he becomes freed from rigor and demand. Once position and ranking has been laid aside from motives in our relationships, the entire scene of service assumes pleasure and discovers unlimited latitude.

If serving is the door to God's kind of "greatness", GRACIOUSNESS IS THE BROADENING OF IT. Graciousness of character literally obviates the barriers of deserts. What I

mean by deserts is what we "owe" one another -- what I "owe" you and what you "owe" me. Graciousness of heart largely frees from expectations and anticipations. If you think and act graciously, you are not anticipating a response or expecting a return. Remember that graciousness is finding fulfillment in someone else's happiness, pleasure or well-being. When we have the light of graciousness shining fully in our hearts, we start to understand why "greatness" may not even be a consideration, or an experience, in heaven! My guess is that the only reason Jesus referred to it at all was because He was asked about it, and also the reason why His answer was seemingly contradictory. Paul certainly had this concept nailed down when he said to the Roman Christians that they were to "Owe no man anything, BUT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. . . ." (See Romans 13:8).

Grace begets graciousness. The grace of God in our hearts immediately begins to pump its graciousness (or selflessness is another face of graciousness) into OUR HEADS. The work of God's grace is perfect and instantaneous, but the action OCCURS IN OUR HEARTS and it has to be transferred TO OUR HEADS. HOW QUICKLY AND HOW PRACTICALLY THAT HAPPENS DEPENDS ON MANY PERSONAL DIFFERENCES -- temperament, experience, training, discipline, gender, age, ability to comprehend, ability to love, ability to trust, ethnicity, and social customs to name a few. BUT ALL OF THOSE ARE ABRIDGED AND NULLIFIED BY ONE -- perhaps the most affective one -- OBEDIENCE!!!

Some Christians seem to accelerate. Some Christians seem "to have a nose" for Christlikeness, It is characteristic for them to hunger and thirst after the things of God. These individuals are invariably SENSITIVE TO OTHERS -- GRACIOUS, GIVING, SHARING, SERVING, AND SELFLESS. In these persons, you can just about guarantee A SPIRIT OF SETTLED OBEDIENCE to the will of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit. Those who "knock at His door" and sit at His feet and "wait" for Him invariably become like Him, and since GOD IS GRACIOUS IN NATURE (See Exodus 34:6), those who intimately know Him become "graciously and graciously"!

Since there are no limits to God's grace, those who seek Him and wait for Him get fresh installments of it -- wonderfully! AS OFTEN AS REQUESTED!! What a thought for contemplation! GRACE ON DEMAND! GRACE AS NEEDED! God gave John the Baptist a clear view OF FRESH AND ADEQUATE GRACE FOR US in John 1:16 when he wrote:

"And of His fullness have we all received, AND GRACE TAKING THE PLACE OF GRACE."

It is the promise of constant, always available, limitless, applicable grace. Whatever the need, whoever the person, wherever the place, whenever the call, THERE IS ADEQUATE AND AVAILABLE GRACE!

It is surprising, and sometimes downright amazing, to ourselves more than to others around us, how gracious we are becoming when we "hang around the Lord", and I mean no disrespect to Him by the colloquial term. I just want the thought to grab us, I have been "hanging out with Jesus" since my late teen years, AND I AM NOT THE SAME MAN AT ALL! R.H. McDaniel wrote it:

"What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought,
Since Jesus came into my heart..."

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Chapter 9

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMBLE

I know before I start this message that most people would not even be interested enough in the subject matter to want to learn about it. All I can say is that it is the stuff that heaven is made of. The only persons who will inhabit God's holy heaven are those who are humble, and there will not be one proud individual there. THAT is how important the subject matter of this message is.

I have made some strong, assertive statements above, and I will support them biblically. The church of Jesus Christ needs to lift up her voice in these days about who is going to heaven and who is not. Everybody is not going to heaven when they die, as is generally thought. We preachers need to lift up our voices like a trumpet and insist that there is a cost to the discovery and capturing of eternal life. It cost God His Son and it will cost any person who desires to go to heaven his all. There is nothing more biblically clear than what I have just said.

For this message, however, we are going to concern ourselves with the idea that the humble are going to heaven and the proud are not. Follow along as I open God's Book and read. Turn with me first to

Mark 10:15 "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."

Luke 18:14, 16 & 17 ". . . for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

". . . suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

James 4:6 "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

I Peter 5:5 ". . . all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

Even in the Old Testament God made it clear that those persons whom He would accept were the humble in mind and spirit. Listen!

Isaiah 66:1 & 2. "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?"

For all of those things hath My hand made, and all of those things have been, saith the Lord: BUT TO THIS MAN WILL I LOOK, EVEN TO HIM THAT IS POOR AND OF A CONTRITE SPIRIT, and trembleth at My word."

Isaiah 57:15 "For thus saith the High and Lofty One That inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, WITH HIM ALSO THAT IS OF A CONTRITE AND HUMBLE SPIRIT, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Perhaps the most compelling reason for any Christian to see the value of true humility in his life, and to make that a lifelong goal and pursuit, is that such a spirit of lowliness was characterized (note that I did not use the term "exemplified" your Lord Jesus. Jesus didn't merely "model" or "exemplify" humility it was characteristic of Him. Jesus didn't "act" in a servile and humble manner so that His followers would "pattern" themselves after that. That is the way He was, and is, I fear that this innate characteristic of Jesus, that He self-portrayed in one of His best-known statements of all of His public teachings, is lost to most of us, and I remind us of it as set forth in Matthew 11:28-30:

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

I have been faithfully preaching for a number of years now that God is essentially humble, just as He is essentially holy. If you have wondered about the accuracy of this, dwell mentally for some time on the scripture that I have just read. Jesus said of Himself that He was "meek and lowly in heart." I need to tell you now that I am going to be relying heavily on this fact about Jesus' essential humility and lowliness as I try to explain what it means for us to be humble.

Paul gives us an insightful look into the kind of Person Who Jesus was in Philippians 2:5-8, and I quote,

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The Bible clearly identifies pride as sin. In fact, it identifies it as the first sin in Isaiah 14:12 through 15 and Ezekiel 28:17. The same two passages of scripture identify pride as the reason why there is a Satan; a devil. It is surprising that Christians generally, even in the holiness movement, view pride as something bad, but not necessarily wicked. It is viewed as a necessary evil, sort of like bad breath and sweat and snoring and sour stomachs. I'm not kidding! Pride gets a bland review by the church. **I AM DEEPLY IMPRESSED WITH HOW DIFFERENTLY GOD SEES PRIDE FROM THE WAY IT IS GENERALLY VIEWED BY US.** I make no apologies in stating that I have spent my life trying as best as I can to see things from God's perspective. I intend to keep right on doing that.

I have already read to us that Jesus made humility a condition for going to heaven, He made it crystal-clear that only those persons who had a disposition "as a little child" could inherit the kingdom of heaven, We can come up with all sorts of meanings about what Jesus meant by "as a little child", but every explanation will HAVE to include humility. My guess, judging by all of the sermons and teaching on this scripture, is that humility would be the first thought that comes to our minds. Innocence would have to be out, for there is no way that any of us could recapture that sweet trait of children. Lack of knowledge and inexperience would have to be out. You can't "unknow" something.

Standing or position, or we might term it our reputation (which children don't have), would have to be omitted, because just being adult and a member of society affords all of us that. When we start to honestly consider just what Jesus meant when He stated that a person had to "be as this little child" to enter the kingdom of heaven, **IT BASICALLY BOILS DOWN TO HUMILITY. IT POINTS DIRECTLY TO THE ABSENCE OF PRIDE.** If the carnal trait of pride is removed from any person's heart, you come up with a beautiful disposition. You get rid of the ouchiness, selfishness, offensiveness, quarrelsomeness, possessiveness, stubbornness and anger and get instead congeniality, cooperation, friendliness, peacefulness, courtesy and kindness. **JESUS, OUR LORD, WHO INSTANTLY KNEW THE HEARTS OF MEN, POINTEDLY IDENTIFIED WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE OUT OF HIS KINGDOM, AND WHAT WAS A NECESSITY TO GO THERE AND LIVE THERE.**

Here is the way it is. If anyone could get to heaven with sin in his heart, he would be out of place in a holy heaven. If anyone could enter heaven with selfish pride, he would be eternally unhappy in an atmosphere of lowliness and humility. If anyone could. get into heaven with a carnal nature, there would not be one little corner anywhere for him to be comfortable or enjoy anyone else's company. Dear brothers and sisters, heaven would be a Hell for selfish and proud and carnal people because of its holiness and selflessness and humility -- **FROM THE THRONE OF GOD THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE REALM.** Think with me briefly, When the young prophet, Isaiah, "saw the Lord high and lifted up -- when His train filled the temple", what was his immediate response? When Isaiah saw the seraphim and heard them wondrously proclaim "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" -- what was his response? When the "posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke", what was the young prophet's response?

He said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." That is

exactly how any other person would react if he could be in the presence of a holy God with defilement or uncleanness. Why would anyone think that he would even want to be in a place where all who were there were pure and lowly and humble and holy? Heaven would be pure and constant misery for a proud, selfish and arrogant person.

With these thoughts fresh in our minds, let's examine the first beatitude in the so-called Sermon on the Mount in Matthew five. Any person who has ever read the Beatitudes has been impressed with this question: "Why did Jesus start them with pronouncing a special Divine blessing on the persons who were humble in spirit? Our answers to that question would vary, I know, but it is enough to say that we have to recognize the immense importance of Humility and lowliness of spirit for Jesus to head His list of "blesseds" with it.

My guess is that Jesus started with humility **BECAUSE IT IS BASIC**. If it isn't in place as the foundation of Christian thought and philosophy, what follows will be meaningless. If a Christian "building" is to be constructed, the foundation of humility must be first laid. It is really that simple. Nothing is more basic or simple than this: if we are going to live a Christian life, human pride has to go. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", **THAT IS HOW IMPORTANT HUMILITY IS. WE WILL GAIN OR LOOSE HEAVEN BECAUSE WE GAIN OR LACK IT**. It is easy to see why serious Christians want to know what it is. What does it mean to be humble?

There are a veritable plethora of introductory thoughts that must be considered before getting into the biblical meaning of humility. First, it is rarely innate, that is, a natural inclination, I have known few individuals in my lifetime who I would classify as innately humble. The human family is generally proud, not humble. Second, we have to define what it means to be a Christian, or else anything that Jesus, or the Bible, has to say about humility will be unauthoritative and meaningless. Defining "Christian" should be obvious. It means to be like Christ. It means to follow His teaching, and especially, His conduct.

Third, we must be prepared to evaluate differently from just about everything we have thought or done throughout our lives. Six words that Jesus repeatedly emphasized in His teachings epitomize this fact about being a Christian and following His teachings. Over and over Jesus said, "Ye have heard. . .but I say." The world has never known a more outstanding format for change. To truly be a Christian means **MAKING MAJOR CHANGES IN OUR THINKING AND IN OUR LIFESTYLES**, sometimes completely opposite of our training, and, certainly, our natural inclinations. Nobody can understand or practice what humility means until he is ready to make major changes in his thinking about it.

One of the most important thoughts to get us started is that we must not stereotype the trait of humility, or humble persons. The broad meaning of "stereotype" is to make the same. It means to standardize everything. Here are some examples of stereotypes. "All women are crybabies." "All men are stubborn." "You can't trust salesmen, Gypsies or politicians" . "All Italians like pizza." "All Mexicans are lazy." "All Dutchmen are bullheaded." That is enough. Those are examples of stereotypes. We must not do that in our quest of finding meaning to humility.

Let's look at some "humility stereotypes" that we must avoid if we are to discover true meaning. "Humble persons are quiet and don't talk much." "Humble people are unaggressive and acquiescent. They always give in." "Humble people are introverts." "Humble people are patient." "Humble people can't be good leaders." "Humble people are scardy-cats -- they won't fight." "Humble people are indecisive and non-committive." All of these are generally held stereotypes relating to humble persons.

Here is the major problem with such spiritual stereotyping. **IT MAKES GOD A RESPECTER OF PERSONS**, which is not only unbiblical, but is uncharacteristic of Him. If quiet, unaggressive, introverted people were just naturally humble, and if vocal, aggressive extroverts were despositionally proud, **THEN WE WOULD HAVE TO CONCLUDE THAT GOD SHAFTEO SOME OF US AND FAVORED OTHERS**. That just isn't so, and thinking persons know it. We're going to have to get the idea out of our heads that a smiling, quiet, little "Miss Muffet" sitting daintily on a tuffet, isn't necessarily humble. A person can hide himself in the rear eschelons of humanity where he will be completely unnoticed and out of the limelight and be proud as a peacock while thinking, "Just look at all of those movers and shakers' making fools out of themselves!" **THE TRUTH IS THAT, IN THE NATURAL MAN, WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH OUR TEMPERAMENTS AND THE PLAGUE OF PRIDE**. The good news is that Jesus can effectively deal with pride and stamp His image of lowliness and servitude on our hearts **WHATEVER OUR TEMPERAMENTS MAY BE!**

With this in mind, we are going to make a list of what humility isn't -- what we don't mean by the term -- and I believe that it will help us on the way to understanding what it is. I list six things that humility isn't, and will refrain from discussion in detail until later in the message.

1. Humility isn't temperamental, that is, it isn't merely an "easygoing disposition." (Now, as I click these off one by one, I want us to make mental comparisons to Jesus' life and conduct).

2. Humility isn't timidity, that is, it isn't merely an unassertive disposition.

3. Humility isn't quietness, that is, it isn't just not talking too much.

4. Humility isn't weakness. It isn't being soft-spoken or having an acquiescent disposition.

5. Humility isn't unaggressiveness. It isn't a noncompetitive or a non-combative disposition.

6. Humility isn't dishonest. It isn't "falsely humble" or "dishonestly humble." We want to talk quite a bit about this.

One fact is certain: God looks on the heart. He sees and He knows what is really going on inside of us, so the last thing that any serious Christian wants to do is to kid ourselves about our inner condition. Honest people will avoid perceptions about themselves that are untrue. We are going to see that this works **TWO WAYS**, and not just one.

Humility isn't dishonest, so it won't tolerate a person making statements such as these: "Oh, I'm not good enough to do that", or "you had better get somebody else who can do it well", or "I'm not good at anything." That is NOT humility. Now, some persons might truly feel that way about themselves, and it is nearly always the result of training, not temperament. Generally, normal persons who view themselves as incapable or incompetent were not affirmed, that is, encouraged or applauded, about their abilities as a child. Poor self images are not personal, but parental failures, as a rule.

My experience, and therefore judgment, is that most people who say that they are incapable or inept, **WOULD BE HIGHLY OFFENDED IF YOU SAID THE SAME THING ABOUT THEM.** That proves to me, down deep in their hearts, that they really don't feel that way about themselves, whatever they may say outwardly. True humility is not dishonest. If any person's disinclination to perform any task is truly from humility, it will cause the person who possess it to make honest responses to any refusal, rather than blame it on inability. If we just don't want to do something or are uncomfortable in doing a thing, for any reason, then we should just say so, and not blame it on inability. Here is a good rule to keep God's people honest: **DON'T MAKE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS ABOUT YOURSELF OR YOUR ABILITIES,** or supposed absence of them, **THAT YOU WOULDN'T WANT OTHERS TO MAKE ABOUT YOU.**

I told you that there were two sides to this development. True humility is as honest about one's abilities as he is about his perceived inabilities. Statements about inabilities when the opposite is true is flat out dishonest. I mentioned earlier that this study would necessitate casting aside some lifelong thinking and habits. **DENIAL OF GIFTS AND ABILITIES IS DISHONESTY.** Christians are historically so opposed to pride and bragging that the devil has made a bunch of unwitting religious liars out of many of us. Real humility isn't dishonest. Many of us have seen the truth in what I am preaching about here, but have refrained from being totally honest about our gifts because of how it would be perceived by our listeners. We aren't honest, even when asked many times, about our abilities because listeners would think that we are parading them.

"Pastor, doesn't the Bible say "Let another man praise thee and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips?" (Proverbs 27:2) Of course, and I think of the verse often, **BUT THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-PRAISE AND BEING COMPLETELY HONEST ABOUT GOD-GIVEN ABILITIES.** Sometimes I wonder how freeing it would be for God's people to be able to forget about what others thought about us and just go all out for the Lord with all that there is of us? I wonder how much more kingdom work we could get done? Maybe in heaven we will know. I doubt that my bringing this to our attention will bring about more candidness among the saints, but I know that the body of Christ is always strengthened and benefited when we can maintain honesty and sincerity as a basic Christian lifestyle.

Before digging into what it actually means in identifying various traits of humility, it would be folly to discuss the way it should be represented in us without a down-to-earth analysis of the kind of Person Jesus was. I am impressed, and encouraged, I might add, that the Bible says very little about Jesus' temperament. We don't have a clue about His psychological and temperamental makeup. All that we have is inferential from how He acted, and I think that we will discover that that is enough.

Isaiah prophetically described Him as a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief", and that when He was afflicted "He opened not His mouth." NEITHER STATEMENT PROVES ANYTHING ABOUT HIS TEMPERAMENTAL DISPOSITION. As mentioned earlier, His self-description was that He was, "meek and lowly in heart", As we shall see, His meekness certainly didn't make a cowering, soft-spoken wimp out of Him. His self-portrait doesn't prove anything about His temperament.

I am guessing that the Bible doesn't SPECIFY JESUS' TEMPERAMENT BECAUSE IT IS UNIMPORTANT. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT TEMPERAMENT HAS NOTHING AT ALL TO DO WITH HUMILITY. The truth is that God designed into people varying temperaments, and the human family needs the quiet AND the vocal kinds of us every bit as much as we appreciate the varieties of colors -- the brights and the subdued ones. We need the easy-going AND the high-g geared among us certainly as we need soft things and hard things, and hot and cold things, and sharp and dull things, and sweet and sour things.

The church errs grievously when we equate (automatically) quietness and acquiescence with humility, and loquacity, (that is being loud and vocal),and aggressiveness with self-importance. It just isn't so. I want you to recall with me Jesus' faithful preaching to the hypocritical religious teachers of His day as recorded in Matthew 23. There is no way that honest people could read this chapter and cast Jesus in the quiet, bland type of personality. and I read just a little of this chapter. Listen.

Verses 13-17: But woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widow's houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of Hell than yourselves.

"Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is debtor.

"Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?"

Verse 19: "Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?"

Verses 23-29: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

"Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

"Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous.

Verse 33: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell?"

In chapter three, one through six, Mark portrays our Savior as a very passionate man Who felt His anger burn against the hypocritical display of unconcern and callousness of the day's religionists in the face of human misery, and I read.

"And He entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which has a withered hand.

"And they watched Him, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse Him.

"And He said unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

"And He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

"And when He had looked round about upon them WITH ANGER, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other."

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Chapter 10 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMBLE -- part 2

The point is that it can't be even remotely proven that Jesus was temperamentally quiet, soft-spoken, introverted and retiring, He may have been, or He may have been exactly the

opposite, or He may have been somewhere in between, IT IS NOT IMPORTANT. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS FOR US TO SEE THAT TRUE HUMILITY IS A BEAUTIFUL AND HEAVENLY SPIRIT THAT FUNCTIONS WITHIN ANY TEMPERAMENTAL VARIATION.

I ask each of us the obvious question in connection with Jesus and His temperament. Was He "meek and lowly" as He excoriated the honor-seeking Pharisees, and castigated the hypocritical scribes, and passionately "read the pedigree" of the chief priests? Certainly! Was He less humble when He was responding in the emotional heat of righteous anger? Certainly not.

While we are at this juncture, something sensible needs to be said about voice raising. I have a perfectly reasonable question to raise (pun intended), If God never intended for us to raise our voices, why are we able to do so? Will there be somebody arise to tell us that our ability to yell or shout or holler is the result of the fall, and that we were originally created to speak in a monotone? Is the only propriety in voice raising for playing children and hog calling? If so, 95% of Italians would die of suffocation.

Listen to what God told His prophet, Isaiah, in 58:1:

"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

When John, the Baptist, was revealed to Israel six months before Jesus started His ministry, his message of repentance was as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, . . .

Our Lord was moved to raise His voice more than once when the occasion demanded it, as we can observe in John 7:37.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and CRIED, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."

The Amplified says, "Jesus stood forth and He cried in a loud voice..."

The NIV says, "Jesus stood and said in a loud voice..."

The LB says that, "Jesus shouted to the crowds..."

The Greek word here actually has the prefix "EK" with it, meaning "out", and should be translated "cried out" to be accurate, The same word is used two other times in reference to Jesus' proclamations. Verse 28 of this same chapter states that:

Jesus cried out in the temple as He taught, saying, Ye both know Me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true, Whom ye know not.

"But I know Him: for I am come from Him, and He hath sent Me."

The same word and expression is used about Jesus' passionate statements in John 12:44, and says,

"Jesus cried out and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him That sent Me.

"And he that seeth Me, seeth Him that sent Me."

It is both biblically inaccurate and unfair to think, believe and I teach that if a person is humble and Christlike he will never raise his voice or become emotional in how he expresses himself. **THERE IS NOTHING IN THE BIBLE THAT TEACHES A STATE OF GRACE THAT OBVIATES A CHRISTIAN'S FEELINGS OR EMOTIONS.**

Two of the godliest and wisest men I have ever known, Reverends Robert H. Heckart and Thomas Lee, were both outspoken, extremely frank and strongly opinionated temperamentally. Both men were greatly misunderstood because of the frank way they would "call the shots as they saw them", so to speak. Both men could "snap off" quick and fearless judgments when they saw what they understood to be improper behavior or unfounded and unwise choices in the work of the church. What impressed me at the time, and now in review, is that they were usually correct in their judgments.

I was privileged to work closely with both men over long periods of time and in varied circumstances, and never once observed either carnal pride or carnal anger in either of them. Both of them had pure motives and didn't profit from lifetimes of faithful service to God and the church. I think that most people in the church who opposed and criticized them were simply unaccustomed to the stern commitment to honesty they subscribed to and lived by. You could trust them to be the same anywhere and everywhere. Here is a good way to measure any person, and I relate this remembering my two good friends. **DO YOU TRUST THEIR OPINION AND CONVERSATION ABOUT YOU OUT OF THEIR PRESENCE**, as well as when you are together? You see, honest people don't change with their environment or the persons around them.

We have been privileged to have Brother Lee in our home often, and he was always courteous, gracious and gentlemanly. I would guess that most people who knew him would not think of him as an humble man, but I do. and this is why I use him for an example of humility. This is one of the main purposes of this message -- to define and teach what true humility is. **IT IS NOT NECESSARILY QUIETNESS, BUT IT IS A SOFTNESS OF SPIRIT.** It is not necessarily acquiescence, **BUT IT IS SELFLESSNESS THAT PLACES THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS OVER ITS OWN.**

Having said that, I can think of a good number of life situations that need firmness and sternness and bold confrontation and stout refusal -- in and out of the church. Jesus seemed to be nearly always in a confrontation of some sort. We need to think about that quite a bit. The uncovering of deceit and hypocrisy is not a job to be accomplished by timid souls with kid gloves and smiles, Think with me a bit. The usual response to the confrontations of Jesus from His listeners was anger. I don't mean displeasure or upsets or grumblings or mere hurt feelings. They wanted to kill Him!! I need to ask us. Was Jesus "meek and lowly" as He forthrightly confronted

and condemned the dishonesty and hypocrisy of the religionists? Of course. Not only was He still meek and lowly and humble at heart, **BUT THAT VERY NATURE OF HUMILITY MADE DEMANDS OF HIS SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG.** Whatever it was in Him that He identified as "meek and lowly in heart" rose up against all that was evil and unholy. **THERE IS NO CONTRADICTION BETWEEN RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION AGAINST WRONGDOING AND HUMILITY.** We must recognize this and believe it and practice it. Humility doesn't make weak-kneed wimps out of the saints, There are times that humility insists that we stand up and be counted without the slightest suggestion of the surrender of its nature and virtue.

Let's jump into what Christian humility is, and I have eight different identifying marks, and list them together now, but we will discuss them one by one:

1. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SORROW.**
2. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SIMILARITY.**
3. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SACRIFICE**
4. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **BEING A STUDENT.**
5. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SENSITIVITY.**
6. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SUBMISSION.**
7. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SERVICE.**
8. It is a spirit, or attitude, of **SOFTNESS.**

Humility is first of all a spirit or attitude of sorrow. Perhaps the foremost property of humility is the act of bowing before one's Maker in contrition, repentance and remorse. Bowing is an humbling act, and is universally understood as the most appropriate form of appearing before God. This is especially true when a person recognizes his sinful condition as God draws near to him and shows him his sin.

But even after one's initial meeting with his Maker, and he humbly and sorrowfully repents of his sinful acts, there remains a lifetime of errors and failures and blunders and human faults that are met in two basic ways. We either humbly and sorrowfully admit them and ask forgiveness of God and man, or we will be too proud to make such admissions and go about to justify and make excuses for them. There is not a person on earth, however pure and virtuous and godly, who doesn't make grievous errors at times, that hurt others with whom they have to do. Then we need to humbly and sorrowfully acknowledge our errors and mistakes. Nobody is so good that these times are not necessary. **TO ERR IS HUMAN, AND TO FORGIVE IS LIKE GOD.** Let's not ever forget that. I fear for Christians who evidently think that they have progressed spiritually to a point where they are beyond the need of humbling themselves and asking forgiveness.

I have already quoted a number of scriptures that tell us to humble ourselves before God, and to act submissively and humbly before our brothers and sisters in Jesus. I have been impressed from my earliest connection with a particular segment of the pledge that every member of the Wesleyan Church agrees to make a part of his life when he joins the church, and I quote from the Wesleyan Discipline, page 32, parenthetical (12):

"(I commit myself) to strive together for the advancement of God's kingdom and for the mutual edification (building up) of fellow believers, in holiness, knowledge, and love; to walk together in Christian fellowship, **IN CAREFULNESS, GIVING AND RECEIVING ADMONITION WITH MEEKNESS AND AFFECTION**; to pray one for the other; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy, and to demonstrate purity, charity and courtesy in all manner of life." (Caps mine),

Humility is recognizing our humanity and being broken and contrite over it. Some saints act as though they already live in glorified bodies! We don't! We err, and we make hurtful mistakes, and we talk out of turn, and we don't always make the wisest decisions. Our minds let us down at times, and it breaks our hearts, as it should. There is ample reason for all of us to humble ourselves before God, and before spouses and family members, and before other Christians and before co-workers.

The second meaning of humility is what I call the spirit of **SIMILARITY**. I repeat often that there are only marginal differences in any of us. Normal people are nearly identical in life skills. We walk and talk and function physically and mentally like any other human being. Normality is a gigantic blessing that most of us abuse and denigrate. Being able to think normally and communicate normally and function normally is a precious gift from God, and Christians especially should view it as such.

True humility thinks of oneself as no better than any other person. True humility sees value in every person. I want us to soberly face two facts about personhood. One is that each person is a soul. Regardless of one's abilities or lack of them -- whether an individual is cultured, highly intellectual and educated, or on the other hand, if he is considered substandard mentally, culturally and socially) **ALL OF US ONLY HAVE ONE SOUL**, and we can only be saved and lost eternally once. Each soul is as precious to God as any other. The soul of the heathen, and the vile, and the criminal, and the so-called "low class", and the mentally impaired, and the social rejects, and the babies and small children, and the infirm, elderly and senile (we'll call them social dependents), **ARE JUST AS PRECIOUS TO GOD** as those of us who consider ourselves normal, law-abiding, tax-paying, responsible, moral citizens. Let's call that group responsible functionaries. From one end of the spectrum of humanity and everywhere in between, each of us has just one soul, and each is similarly precious to God.

The second fact about personhood is that each of us is responsible for what **WE** know, No other person is responsible for what I know, and I am not responsible for what any other person knows, or what all other persons know. You can see how futile and needless it is for any other person to look down on any other one, or what their attitudes are towards them, and what their expectations may be of them. **NONE OF IT COUNTS FOR ANYTHING**. A person can be viewed as a reject, a nerd, a waste and a human cast-off, but how anyone feels about anyone else **MEANS**

NOTHING. ZIP. ZILCH. Their soul is precious if no body cares about them. Their soul has the same worth as any other person. I ask each of us. Is the soul of a dirty, uneducated, poverty-ridden, half-dressed African one whit less valuable to God than a perfumed, college-educated, affluent American? **NOT A MILLIGRAM LESS VALUABLES HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HE KNOWS, AND YOU AND I ARE TOO!** But what a difference in how much we know!! Humility is an attitude of similarity, that is, an attitude of viewing ourselves as superior **TO NO OTHER PERSON**. That leads us into a natural declension of the third identity of humility.

It is an attitude, or spirit, of **SACRIFICE**. This is best understood by recognizing our indebtedness to being. **WE OWE SO MUCH TO SO MANY!** Especially to God! In Psalms 68:19, David said it best and conclusively: "Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loadeth us with benefits."

Having being necessitates a recognition of the same. A monkey or a gorilla can perform physically in much the same ways as a human, but neither has being. They are beasts with life, but have no reason. Many anthropologists (people who study people) have tried stubbornly to link animals to humans, but are further from any success today than in Darwin's day. To have being, there must be recognition; understanding.

The next step is obvious. To know is to be responsible. I say often that the greatest fact of humanity is potential, and **THAT** is what places us hopelessly in debt. I suggest to us that such knowledge can be so overwhelming that we can react negatively to it, and actually find ourselves doing nothing about developing our potential because of its sheer magnitude. The Lord doesn't want that from us. It is negative and counterproductive. What the Lord does want is an overriding attitude of humility in our everyday lives that tackles our mountains of potential **A TASK AT A TIME. ADDING A TRUTH HERE AND A NEW SKILL THERE AND PUTTING THEM INTO USE TO BLESS GOD AND OTHERS, IS THE IDEA.**

A Sunday or so ago we talked about how Jesus "increased" in favor with God and man during those eighteen years of so-called "obscurity" between the ages of twelve and thirty. That knowledge can't help but be impressive to us. Though biblical historians leave us little or nothing about those unheralded years, the Bible says He "increased". He learned. He developed skills. He improved. He added to. And all of the accumulated knowledge and skill was used to bless those around Him.

It never fails. The more advanced and accomplished an honest person becomes in life knowledge and skills, the more indebted he becomes -- even if he is not a Christian. The more a person knows, the more he sees that he doesn't know. That is an unfailing fact of life, and we become indebted to such knowledge and experience.

This leads to the fourth identifying mark of true humility, and that is that it is an attitude of being a **STUDENT** -- teachability. I like to think of this attitude as **THE WONDER OF DISCOVERY**. The opposite attitude is smugness. Self-satisfaction comes in many sizes and colors, It can range from arrogance to just plain laziness, All of us have to guard against smugness. Knowledge and expertise in anything tends to it, and the only cure that I know of for it is humility.

Here is a huge plus for humility, It is the most "aware" activity of the human mind. Humility isn't mindless abandonment to benign timidity or a sort of surrender to naive innocence. HUMILITY DOESN'T "NOT KNOW". There is a mind expander for you. Humility doesn't capitulate to irrational mental neutrality. You don't take your brain out of gear to embrace humility. DO YOU THINK THAT JESUS DID? Did the "meek and lowly" in Jesus make Him less thoughtful, inductive and intelligent? Absolutely not! I repeat that humility is the most "aware" activity of the human brain. You see, we have stereotyped humility into mental passiveness, when the opposite is true.

SMUGNESS IS THE REAL PASSIVITY. Smugness folds its arms and dares you to teach it anything, while true humility is prepared to move ever deeper into new understanding of truth. Smugness won't advance, while the very nature of humility is a yearning for discovery. Humility is discovery's pauper. Humility is hunger. Humility is God's beggar, knocking at His door -- sitting in His classroom -- waiting at His feet -- Hanging on His words -- listening for His voice. One of the highest aspects of human intelligence is its poverty -- its hunger -- its capacity -- its spaciousness -- its potential -- and all of it fits like a glove on humility. Humility is the garment of the wise and the cloak of the discerning, It is ALWAYS in style and is ALWAYS appropriate, whether in a palace or a hut. Humility wears well in a robe or in work clothes.

The fifth identifying mark of humility is its SENSITIVITY. This is especially noteworthy as it relates to recognizing the needs of other persons and taking steps to meet those needs. The sky is the limit to how much good can come from an attitude of sensitivity to the needs of others.

There has to be a basis to this -- that is obvious. Why are some persons whom we know such caring individuals? Why do they seem always to be reaching out to hurting people? Why is it that such people can be counted on to be in the middle of the pain and heartache of other people's lives? The answer to every question is easy, and just the same. THEY ARE SELFLESS INDIVIDUALS. That is the basis for their sensitivity to the needs and concerns of others.

"May I help you", is a question that we hear often. Nearly always it will be asked by a salesperson or an employee of some retail store or service agency. I have thought a good bit about this question, and some thoughts have polarized about it that we will talk about for awhile.

Why do these people ask this question? Do they ask if they can be of assistance because they are just naturally helpful people, or is it just because it is their job? The answer to that is quite obvious, for the chances of their asking you if they could help you if they were out of that setting -- for instance, if both of you were walking casually down the street, or in a milling group or crowd somewhere -- would be nothing, none. We just don't ask complete strangers whom we don't know and in a homogenous crowd of milling shoppers if "we can help them?." They would look at you as if you were a nut or maybe yell for a policeman, or slug you, or flatten you with a fifteen pound purse. (Women's purses are lethal weapons these days, you know.)

My mind goes into zones of marvelous quality as I muse about how pleasant a general "can I help you" atmosphere would be. What would our home environment or work place or school experiences or church life be like if there were a general, prevailing "can I help you?" attitude in

them? "Wonderful" and "heavenly" are two adverbs that pop right up, aren't they? Sensitivity to the needs of others is one of humility's faces.

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Chapter 11

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMBLE -- Part 3

The sixth identifying mark of humility is SUBMISSION, and this is sometimes hard to discuss, especially in a country like America, where we enjoy such a wide latitude of personal freedoms. But humility isn't a racial or national or cultural or social characteristic, It, and its opposite, pride, recognizes no boundaries or cultures or classes. It is a God-given spiritual quality of virtue and grace that can possess any person whatever his language or age or station or social standing.

Submission need not indicate weakness at all. One fact about humility that keeps arising IS THAT IT IS A STRONG VIRTUE and not a weak one. Submitting, if it is properly done for the right reasons, is a powerful act and has everything to do with the authority to whom the submission is made. TO WHOM ONE SUBMITS IS ALL IMPORTANT. To whom one submits identifies his master. To whom one submits marks his love. I repeat that submission is a powerful act and not a weak one.

There is a wide difference between submission and "giving in". The actual result, and the way it works out in a practical manners may appear to be the same, but whether it is one or the other, that is, submission or "giving in" is discovered in the reason, the intent. Whether one "chooses" to submit, or on the other hand, is caused to "give in" makes all of the difference in the world.

It is a bit like choosing one's battles and one's battlefields. Often youth and inexperience sees every difference of opinion as a challenge that needs to be confronted and subdued. Maturity and wisdom seeks ethical compromises and ways to cooperate without forfeiting principles, and avoids needless and costly battles. THAT IS A WISE SUBMISSION. The older and wiser we become, the fewer "lines in the sand" are drawn. Some people are in constant skirmishing, sort of "tilting at every windmill", and fail to see the big battle where they should be fighting. My fellow Christians, I expose a fatal flaw in our fighting here. The arena is huge and there are a thousand issues that contend for our attention every day. There are good causes in which to engage ourselves and our time and resources literally everywhere, We have to prayerfully consider where we will put our energies, planning and opposing. We have to decide where we will fight and where we will wisely submit. Christians are the last people in the world who are known for "carrying chips on their shoulders" and spoiling for a fight. Submission is not the same as "caving in", so to speak. It is, under God and led by God, choosing our battles.

I'm not done on this yet, for there is a world of difference in cowardice and selecting our battlefields. The older one becomes, the more he senses his mortality, and he wisely considers his shrinking days and years. We also sense our stewardship, that is, a sober consideration of what we are trading those shrinking span of time segments for? We think about what we are going to do with

the time left to us on earth? We think about what we are going to say to our Maker when we face Him? What have we bought with our strength and time? How many needless "OK Corral battles" have been fought? How many unnecessary "lines were drawn in the sand"? How many hot, angry words were exchanged that accomplished only hurt feelings and injured relationships?

Don't misunderstand either me or God's Word or the example of our Lord. There is a place to stand up and be counted and fight, but there are many more places to submit, as Jesus did often, and keep our eyes on the bigger battle to be fought. Jesus had the task of mankind's redemption to accomplish, so everything that He did on a practical, daily basis surrendered to that major, overriding goal. My sincere judgment is that the church as a whole, not as we individual Christians, must be lining up more or less with that same goal. **THE CHURCH'S SPECIFIC PURPOSE IS REDEMPTIVE.** We are here to save souls. I will maintain this as long as I have breath. I believe that this is God's call and claim on my life and ministry, though I would be the first to admit that I have been woefully unsuccessful from a statistical standpoint. **THE CHURCH IS HERE TO TELL PEOPLE HOW TO GET SAVED, AND STAY SAVED, AND HOW TO GET TO HEAVEN,** We are not called to meet every other social and economic need of our generation.

I know that I can be in error on this point, but I have to be true to my convictions as every other preacher. What I have to say will be construed by many as unduly critical, and I am willing to take the heat for it. My conclusions are the sad result of the product coming from today's church. **PASTORS AND CHURCH LEADERS WANT THE PRODUCT OF DEPTH OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER AND PURITY OF BEHAVIOR AND COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH AND A PASSION FOR THE LOST OF EARTH, BUT ARE AFRAID OF THE COST.**

I ask an obvious question: Would Jesus' ministry and teaching be any more accepted by the world OR the church today than it was when He was here in person? What reaction would His teachings find in today's church on the cost of true discipleship, and strict honesty in relationships, and purity of behavior, and living a separated life of prayer, fasting and humility? How far would Paul get in most of our 1995 pulpits as he came down on carnality, pride, divisions and contentions, and immorality? Do you think that John would be welcomed, or rebanned to Patmos, as he would fearlessly point his finger at professed Christians loving the world more than God? Would we tolerate Jesus upbraiding a cold, lifeless, hypocritical church because we were neither cold or hot -- merely lukewarm? I think that we all know the answers. If Jesus or Peter or Paul or John were speaking to today's church, they would be treated about the same as they were in their day.

This is hardly a new plea from my heart or an awakened conscience of mine I have been beating this drum all of my ministry. Fifteen years ago I wrote these passionate lines:

"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.

"And, it is empty euphoria, and amazing anesthesia, and a damning dream!"

I'm saying these things to support my contention that there are many battles that we should stay out of so that we can be in THE ONE BIG FIGHT for lost souls. We can't engage every enemy of God and good, and we don't have enough time or strength to be involved with everything that is wrong.

The fight for the salvation of the lost around us, which is largely fought on our knees in the place of intercession, is unheralded, unpromoted, misunderstood, unrewarded, hard and frustrating, BUT THAT IS THE BIG BATTLE! Satan, through the flesh, will do all that is in his power to minimize it and depreciate it and discourage it and sidetrack it and masquerade it with something less or other.

I beg of any of you who understand what I am taking about to make intercession THE driving force of your lives. I know how disappointing and discouraging it can be, but as I have said often before, what keeps me at it personally, and why I constantly try to encourage God's people to stay at it, is that WE ALWAYS GET THE "GREEN LIGHT" -- WE ALWAYS GET HEAVEN'S APPROVAL WHEN WE PLEAD AND WEEP AND INTERCEDE FOR SOULS. I have never known it to fail. God encourages intercession for the lost -- always. Let's move on.

Perhaps the most outstanding attribute of true Christian humility is the seventh we will discuss, It is a spirit or attitude of SERVICE, or servitude. Nothing is more clearly established and taught in the Bible than this. Jesus and every gospel writer emphasizes the servant aspect of Christianity, It is neither an obscure or insignificant virtue in the lineup attitudes of Christians. IT IS AT THE VERY HEART OF IT! It's presence or absence is obvious. It sticks out like a sore thumb either way. There is no way to show its presence or hide its absence.

I want to point us to a biblical example of what I mean that has humbled and thrilled me every time that I read about it. It moves me to tears without fail, and it is not even in the New Testament where we would most likely expect it to emerge as a successive act of Jesus' teaching and shining example. We see an humble spirit of service in Abraham long before the Law and long before written scriptures and long before the prophets. Abraham was barely out of heathenism as we get a ringside seat into the arena of humble servitude.

Read with me, and weep, in the very front of your bibles, Genesis 18. Before we read, and while you are turning, remember that we know these three men to be the Lord in human form, but Abraham didn't. We need to realize that this good man treated all strangers this way. IT WAS HIS CUSTOM. IT REVEALS THE KIND OF PERSON ABRAHAM WAS. Abraham was prosperous and independent and highly regarded in the entire countryside. He was what we would call "a big man" throughout this region of earth. Chapter 14 tells us that he was big enough to immediately

organize 318 fully armed and mounted men of his own household to go into battle. This was the equivalent of nearly three companies in today's armed forces. Abraham was a rich and powerful man. Now, follow in the scripture with me, starting with verse one of chapter eighteen.

"And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mam're: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;

"And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

"And said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

"Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.

And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that, ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant, And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

"And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it and make cakes upon the hearth.

"And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.

And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them, and they did eat.

There are a good number of Abraham's actions that impress me as I read about this part of his life, and all of them are outstanding. I am impressed with his age, for he was 100 year's old! Most persons who attain such lofty, lengthy ages are viewed by society at large in one of two ways: senile and tolerated, or respected and coddled. They often view themselves as worthy of special honor, attention and considerations, and, generally speaking, this is not too far out of line by either society or seniors. That is one thing that makes Abraham so special. That is what brings tears to our minds and eyes as we take this page out of his life. Most persons at this stage of life are being served, and are willing to be served by children and grandchildren. They are being watched over, cautioned, attended to and being cared for. But look at this centenarian; this Abraham man; this one hundred-year-old gentleman, if you please! He is jumping up at the approach of three strangers! He is running around like a twenty-year-old! He is waiting on them and personally attending to every need! He had servants running out his ears, so to speak, but he makes sure that they are refreshed and comfortable and their needs met!

You have to be impressed with Abraham's hospitable attitude. The Bible highlights it. The Bible emphasizes it. God wanted every follower of His to see how we should think and act in the presence of visitors and strangers and guests. You don't think so? You think that maybe pastor Boone is making too much of this? I ask the question: Why do you suppose that God impressed

Moses to record all of these details? Moses, the author, only knew about them because God showed them to him.

Here is our biblical history lesson for today, and it is not only interesting, but necessary to a correct interpretation of this passage. None of the entire Book of Genesis and the first part of Exodus, chapter one, was personally witnessed by the author, Moses. All of that was directly given to him by God. Now, look again at this incident that we are now discussing. Abraham was born in 2161 BC, lived for 175 years and, therefore, died in 1986 BC. Moses was not even born until 1520 BC, or 466 years after Abraham's death. God revealed all of this to Moses. God wanted His followers to see and remember the courtesy and friendliness and graciousness and servitude disposition of Abraham.

I want the weight of this good man's hospitable nature to rest upon us. When he saw them, he RAN to meet them, and BOWED himself towards the ground. Now, I am paraphrasing this next, He said, "If I have found favor in your sight, my Lord, let me refresh you with food and drink and a place to clean up. Stay with us and rest a bit before you continue your journey." And Abraham HASTENED (v.6) to Sarah and had her make some bread. And Abraham RAN (v.7) and caught a calf and had a servant butcher it." And in verse 8 we see him "standing by them, waiting on their every need and comfort."

I don't have the slightest hesitation in making the statement that God wants His followers to possess a servant mentality. Jesus not only possessed it, but taught that His disciples should be the same way -- not only in their service to God, but serving and submitting to one another as Christians, as well as serving our lost generation. You have seen or heard of the modern axiom, "SMILE -- people will wonder what you've been up to." Here is its parallel: SERVE -- people will want to know what happened to you!" One fact is as certain to me as life. **THE BETTER THAT WE KNOW GOD, THE MORE LIKE HIM WE BECOME; THE MORE GIVING WE WILL BE; THE MORE OF A SERVANT WE WILL BE.**

It will not work as a belief or a discipline. It has to come from the heart, and not just the head. It is impossible to serve others if we do not see ourselves as a servant, If it isn't in our hearts, it is demeaning and galling. It smarts and burns if it isn't a mentality -- a characteristic. On the other hand, it is heavenly and truly fulfilling -- in and out of the church -- if we see ourselves as IN DEBT to all persons around us -- like Jesus and Paul felt towards their generation. May I say again? **WE ARE A PEOPLE HOPELESSLY IN DEBT**, only most of us don't see it. Self gets in the way of service, and blocks our vision, and throws us out of focus.

We can manage to be hospitable and gracious as long as it is to that kind of person or people, **BUT WHEN FOLKS START TO USE US, OR ABUSE US AND MISTREAT US, THEN DO WE CONTINUE TO SERVE THEM?** That is when we discover if it is in our hearts or if it is only a nice concept. That is when we know if it has got into our natures or if it is only in our heads.

Folks, it is GRACE that we have to have to be in God's image! God must do something in our hearts and to our selfish, carnal natures if we will be like Him in this service virtue! **WE MUST NOT ALLOW OUR MINDS TO ASSUME** that such an humble, service attitude is impossible, for Jesus not only lived it, but told us to live like that. I read it again, though I realize

that you hear it from me a lot. Jesus said to His followers in Matthew 20:26, "IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU." What shall not be so among Christians? Positioning? Pecking orders? Bowing and scraping? Bossing? Maybe, but all of that is just superficial. All of that is just what is obvious. What Jesus was aiming at directly was THE DESIRE FOR PROMINENCE -- THE DESIRE FOR RECOGNITION. Why would we -- why do we -- WANT THAT? Enough already, as the Dutch would say.

The eighth and final thought that we will discuss is that true humility is an attitude of SOFTNESS. We have made it very clear that there is compatibility between humility and frankness, or truthfulness; between humility and confrontation; between humility and aggressiveness; between humility and boldness; between humility and speaking up and speaking out; between humility and forcefulness. So, how can softness co-exist with all of the above? It can the same way that softness can be compatible with manliness and courage and justice and correction and punishment.

Here is another place where we fall prey to stereotypes. It is hard for us to see softness as being compatible with forcefulness and sternness and boldness and justice. I remind us once again of our Example, the Lord Jesus. Was Jesus humble and lowly and loving as He drove the money changers with cords from the temple? Why not? Was He meek and lowly in heart when He faced down the hypocritical Pharisees and called them liars to their faces? Certainly. Humility is an attitude, a nature, a characteristic, and it is not controlled or comes and goes with emotions. Is God merciful and loving and gracious in judgment? He is the same God Who is not a schizophrenic. God does not have multiple personalities.

I tell us a true story that I observed personally in conclusion. Some year's ago I was in a Judge Sarah "Somebody's" courtroom in Spokane, Washington for a minor traffic violation, I had bought plate tags long before they were needed, but had failed to stick them on by the expiration date. I was so impressed by her outstanding fairness that I told Mrs. Boone that it was truly a privilege to pay my small fine just to sit in her courtroom and watch her in action. (Yes, I wrote her a complimentary letter afterward. I try hard to practice what I preach.)

There must have been one hundred to one hundred twenty-five persons in her traffic court that day, and she went to work on her very busy docket like we would cut stove wood. I wanted to stand and applaud her as her moods changed with the nature of the traffic offenses and the attitudes of the offenders. In the interest of time, I refer to just two persons, and neither of them was me. She put my case away in about two minutes flat, and it cost me \$12.00 as I recall.

One man was elderly and obviously confused about both the law and the nature of his offense. He wondered why he were even in court. He just didn't see the problem with his infraction, and everyone else in court could see that he was sincere in his misunderstanding of the issue. So did the Judge. She patiently and gently, and without blame or intimidation, explained to the fatherly man what he had done wrong and how it was against the law. He still didn't quite see what he did wrong, but accepted her explanations and was willing to pay the fine that she imposed. All through this, no one could have been kinder or more courteous or skillful in handling this elderly gentleman. She never raised her voice or became exasperated or made him feel put down. In fact, she went out of her way to make him feel that he was not a criminal.

The other man was a 35 year-old brat! By his own admission he had dozens of parking tickets from violations over a span of months. He was only in court that day for the purpose of trying to prove that the tickets issued to him were illegal because he didn't think that the city had a right to designate "No Parking" zones. He was trying to embarrass and intimidate the Judge with his professional status, his wealth, his rhetoric and his exalted opinion of himself. He blathered on and on about "the city's arrogance" and the "intimidation by the police" in ticketing him, and about him being "a poor, abused, mistreated, upstanding citizen" .

That lady judge took all of that she could, and when he paused to take a breath, asked him if he was through? in the middle of his tirade. I'll never forget how she put him in his place and what she said. Of course, I can't remember the exact words, but they were something along this line.

Mr. So and So, you are the offender, and not the law or the city or the police. You have blatantly and flagrantly offended the law while everybody else has obeyed the "No Parking" zones in question. Why do you think that you can do this? Do you think that you are any better or more privileged than any of the rest of us? No, Mr. So and So, you are the one who is wrong! And I am going to tell you something else, even though I don't think that you want to hear it. You don't come into this court and tell it what is right and what is wrong. This court doesn't determine that and neither do you. That is what laws are for, and we don't go around disobeying the ones that we don't like and that we don't agree with.

"I'll tell you what you should have done with those tickets, and I'll tell you what you should do hereafter. When you get a parking ticket from now on, you just put it in your hot little fist, and you march right down to City Hall, and you pay your fine just like the rest of us do, and you will not be here wasting the taxpayer's money and my time." And she banged down that gavel with vigor and force and gave him a hefty fine that snapped back his head, and he left without saying another word. That is where I wanted to stand and applaud, but thought that she might just be in the mood to fine me for contempt of court.

What a picture, and I carry it in my mind to this day! It was the same person -- soft, and kind and understanding one minute, but issuing stern, passionate justice the next.

* * * * *

Chapter 12

THIS GRACE Romans 5:1-2

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by Whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

We live in a world that, for the most part, doesn't understand grace.

Our culture is one of checks and balances, cause and effect, stimulus and response, reward and punishment. It is of wages and salaries for labor expended and of payment for services

rendered. We grow up with the attitude that if we do such and such, we get something, and if we fail to do certain things, something is lost or taken away.

A return is the common motivation in all that we do. Accumulation and acquisition is the center and circumference of society worldwide. The unspoken, but consistent, question arising from any choice confronting us is "What's in it for me or mine?"

Jesus capsulated the value system of this world's peoples, and contrasted it to His own, by stating in Luke 6: 32-36:

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

"And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to other sinners expecting to be repaid in full.

"But love your enemies. Do good to them and lend to them not expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, BECAUSE HE IS KIND TO THE UNGRATEFUL AND WICKED. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful"

Jesus further expressed this same gracious, giving attitude in Luke 14: 12-14.

"Jesus said, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.

"But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

"and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The understanding of grace begins to shine in our minds as these ideas from Jesus touches us: give, not expecting a return. Share what you have without the thought someplace in the back of your mind that there might be a reciprocation.

This attitude opens the door to understanding the riches of God's grace. When we can start thinking along these lines of giving to and doing for others without expecting something in return, we peel off the first layer of God's grace towards us -- we open the door -- we read the introduction -- we access the computer.

In the Old Testament the grace of God emerged only briefly and spasmodically in the lives of a few, namely Noah, Moses and David. The relationship between God and man in the age, or dispensation, of the law was direct and inflexible. The way God dealt with mankind and the way

He commanded mankind to relate to each other was, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."
This was a system of strict rewards and punishments.

In amazing contrast is that of grace. References to "grace" abound in the pages of the New Testament. It's like a vast landscape of millions of flowers blooming in resplendent profusion compared to a barren, harsh desert with a flower here and there.

Grace is the order of the church age; the atmosphere of the dispensation; the environment of the new birth relationship. Grace is the word to be spoken, the truth to be written, the song to be sung, the music to be played, the concept to be meditated upon, the life to be experienced and the testimony to be proclaimed.

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound!
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found.
Was blind, but now I see.

"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

-- John Newton --

There are three primary reasons why God's grace is so amazing. The first is because of its nature. The second is because He would share it and the third is that He plans and expects US to exemplify it.

It is first of all amazing grace because of its nature. There is something big and huge and gigantic, even astronomical about it.

It's so big that it's hard to define. Just when you think that your mind has a handle on it, you're left with a groping, strange, illusive fascination that it is something imponderably immense. Like the ocean or the sky. Trying to comprehend it is like an ant trying to move a beach.

I know holy, capable men who have preached a quarter of a century before tackling a full-length message on God's grace. Who writes a book about it?

Ephesians, chapter one, is the most underlined, most uncomprehended chapter in my Bible. The base cause of ALL that God has done, is doing and will do for mankind redemptively is contained in one superlative phrase, "the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7)

There's something pervasive and protrusive about this grace. Like the dawn, it opens the treasures of sight, expanding ones view from horizon to horizon while limiting definitive scrutiny to a solitary item in hand. We can view it all instantly, but only comprehend it "a leaf and a pebble" at a time.

There's something warm and personal about this grace. By design, it is to attach to us, to become a part of our being. God's grace is vital. It is a living consciousness. It's organic, more like a Divine character transfusion, than a mere transfer of emotion or philosophy. Grace does more than train and impact the mind. It transforms the nature and transfuses the soul.

There's something full and satisfying about this grace. It fills to overflowing. It cleanses through and through. It's like a river flowing out of a person's innermost being. Just as a drink won't drain a river. Just as a deep breath won't implode the atmosphere. Just as a look won't shade the sun. Just as a listen won't deafen the airwaves. Just as a touch won't dissipate feeling. Just as a smile won't bankrupt happiness. Sitting at grace's table will never diminish its supply. There's more. There's more.

There's something insistent and persistent about this grace. It invites ceaselessly. It intreats endlessly. It reaches out repeatedly. It undergirds and supports faithfully. It avails itself constantly. It endures predictably. It advocates permanently.

Then there's something expensive about this grace. Its riches are discovered in God's tears. It brought Him to his first and only point of risk. It moved Him to invite pain. God certainly understands a broken heart. His grace, as portrayed in His sinless Son Jesus, moved Him to tear out a part of His heart and put it in mine.

No wonder that there's something big about His grace. You could throw three encyclopedias, ten dictionaries and a dozen Thesauruses at any definition of God's grace and still remain breathless at such futile effort to describe it.

SO GOD WRAPPED IT UP IN SWADDLING CLOTHES AND LAID IN A MANGER IN BETHLEHEM. He put it in a body with a baby's cry, a smile. He gave that body tears and sweat and pimples and greasy hair and broken fingernails and dirty feet and sore muscles and sleepy eyes and a beating heart.

Why did God allow His Son to become a man? He certainly knew the risk, the pain, the cost. Why did He create a human race who would break His laws and His heart and necessitate the atoning sacrifice of His Son? He certainly knew the risk, the pain, the cost. Why? Why?

The only answer is because of His grace.

God is a giver by nature. Every view of God that would present Him as a harsh, exacting, demanding, judgmental tyrant is a deceptive distortion of the highest sort.

To see how wrong that distorted view is and to see how much of a giver God is, we must first understand His holiness, This may seem a bit disconnected at first thought, but will quickly make sense as we mentally develop it.

Since God is perfectly and completely holy, He cannot be or think or act any other way. All that He does moves in union with pure holiness. God can think no wrong or do anything evil, God is the complete opposite of evil, so He is perfectly good and pure and holy.

How is this kind of a Person going to relate to a sinful being? How is it possible for Him to enter into a personal, acceptable relationship with any sinful creature?

Can He somehow ignore the truth of their sin? Can He whitewash the facts? Can He pretend that the evil of their natures doesn't exist or never existed?

This is how we humans most often deal with sin. We hide it. We cover it. We lock it up in the vault of the soul and lock the door. Does that take care of it? Is it gone just because no other person knows? This is the fact of personal sin and the need of personal salvation. WE KNOW THE TRUTH! know what is in our soul vault. God also knows. No other person dead or alive may know, but WE and GOD knows.

So this sobering fact emerges, and something bigger than life or reason confirms it: we and God, two beings, has an accurate, detailed inventory of what is locked up in the impregnable vault of our souls.

But a greater reality than this arises: Only one of us has the combination, and it isn't God. In His grace, He gave it to humankind, He took that part of His sovereignty, that is, total control, and He gave that control of each individual's moral nature back to him, and WE ALONE have the combination. How can any thinking person blame God for whatever might occur from that point? He gave us something more infinitely precious than ever was given to any creature before -- the authority to choose what we will do with our own eternal destiny. An authority so complete, a control so personal, that even He, the almighty God, will honor it.

So, we can choose to keep the vault locked, unseen and unknown to mortals, but especially witnessed by a holy God.

This God cannot overlook sin or ignore evil, That would destroy His Godness and He would become no better than the hypocritical sinners to whom He would relate. Abraham queried, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25) Abraham in his day, so far removed from our generation, understood that, to truly be God, He had to do what was right.

We need to see how important in the scheme of eternity it is to be right.

Many people think that God is so arbitrary and sovereign that He can do anything that He chooses to do. Since He is almighty; since He is generative; since He is creative, that is, since He is a Being that can make something out nothing, He must be able to do anything He chooses with what He makes.

We must see that this is not always so. God is bound by His own nature and everything He does perfectly agrees with that nature. For instance, he cannot lie, for His nature is truth. He cannot

do evil, for His nature is good. And in this case, here where He is faced with human sin, He cannot do anything to correct it that is not right.

God will always do what is right and He will never set aside that rightness in His nature to exercise His sovereignty here and there to fit a moral emergency. The rightness of His nature wouldn't allow Him to say to human sin, "Well, I see that experiment didn't work. I'll just get My big broom and sweep mankind's moral mess into a black hole somewhere on the backside of the universe." That would place Him on the same level as us human sin hidiers

God's rightness requires an open, head on, up front confrontation with the sin of man's soul.

THIS is what Jesus anguished over in the Garden of Gethsemane. God COULD not deal with universal sin by any arbitrary intervention. By man's choice sin had entered the universe, and by man's choice it must be removed. It had to be done through man's personal choice, NOT through God's. Jesus Christ faced this choice as a man. He made that choice to offer Himself as a pure, spotless sacrifice AS A MAN. He chose with the same intellectual and rational capabilities that we posses. Let no person ever say that he just does not have what it takes to chose to be saved; to choose to walk with God; to choose to live a holy life. Jesus Christ proved AS A MAN that we can. Jesus did not have an "edge" on the rest of us as He struggled with life and death and sin and temptation. He did not exercise His divine power, EVER, to place special abilities into the arena of spiritual conflict that the rest of us do not have. He made His choice to be the world's redeemer in an atmosphere of sweat, blood and tears. When all of earth's billions of peoples are assembled at the final judgment, it will be clearly seen that Jesus Christ exercised the same human choice with the same human knowledge and ability that we all have -- no more and no less.

And so, in the mind of Almighty God, there was only one right way for evil to be dealt with. It could only be accomplished THIS way.

This leads us to think about the second reason why God's grace is so amazing. It is amazing because He chose to share it. We must see that the ONLY way that God could share Himself with us is by and through His grace.

Sin demanded a penalty, not because God said so, but because that's the only way it would be right. It could not be a cover-up; not a panacea, not just a cosmetic facade; not a temporary quick fix.

Neither could mankind deal with sin itself. The enormity of it all baffled the world's historians, confounded her philosophers, prostrated her religions, and bound every mortal with the impossible burden of personal sins.

The sin of the human soul is a moral malignancy that writes death over all the pages of our lives. Every day, sin faithfully asserts its presence and authority. Every breathing soul struggles with its prevailing power and recognizes its insistent claim of supremacy. Each individual of every preceding generation has extinguished his flickering flame of mortality in the fearful chasm of an open grave while sighing and hoping for a redeemer.

UNTIL JESUS CHRIST, GOD'S SON, CAME TO EARTH. In a warm, human body just like yours and mine.

THIS is the ONLY way God could eliminate evil. He COULD provide a genuine remedy for humankind's sin by the awesome, unthinkable sacrifice of a pure, holy and perfect Entity. It could not be a mere covering, like putting a blanket over an object. It could not be some sort of hiding, like in the bottom of an ocean or in a deep frozen crevasse. It could not be an arbitrary canceling like the waving of a wand or a closing of the eyes. In all of these instances the truth would be that somewhere SIN WOULD STILL EXIST.

A genuine remedy HAD to be one of equal or superior quality, It had to be accomplished by a person who was so worthy that a holy, truthful, righteous God and a witnessing universe could eternally accept.

John, the one human being who knew Jesus Christ better than any other, felt and understood this dilemma. The man who leaned on His breast and listened to His heart was stirred to write in the Revelation 5:

And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof'? AND NO MAN IN HEAVEN, NOR IN THE EARTH, NEITHER UNDER THE EARTH, was able to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof.

"And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and read the book, neither to look thereon.

"And one of the elders said unto me, 'Weep not; behold the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, had prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

"And I beheld, and lo in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, STOOD A LAMB AS IT HAD BEEN SLAIN.

"And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.

"And (all creatures of all time) sang a new song which said, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and has redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation.

"And has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

The testimony of another John, John the Baptist, who in Jesus' own words was the greatest man ever born among women, comes as a startling statement to a world waiting for a Redeemer:

"And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?

"He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make a clear path for the Messiah to come.

"John answered them saying, 'I baptize you with water, but One stands among you whom you have not accepted yet.

"Even though He was born after me, He is preferred before me. I am not even worthy to untie His shoelaces.

"The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world'.

"This is He Whom I spoke about.

"Then John told about seeing the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descending from heaven and resting upon Jesus.

I didn't know He was the one, John said again, "but at the time God sent me to baptize He told me, 'When you see the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon someone -- HE IS THE ONE YOU ARE LOOKING FOR.

"I saw it happen to this Man and I therefore testify that He is the Son of God.

Just think of what this all means to mankind! What Jesus did for us means that we can face death with hope. It means that we can live again and anew when this life is past. It means that there is an after life that is free from worry and sorrow and weeping and pain, AND THAT IT ALL IS FOREVER. It sounds like a fairy tale, a utopian novel, a fascinating, but illusive dream, But that is exactly what God wants to share with us- in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

That is the grace part. He has already come to earth. God has already given Him to earth's peoples. He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Through His death on Calvary's cross and triumphing over death on the first Easter by rising from the grave, Jesus Christ is offered to each and every individual as the only remedy for personal sins, All of this comes to us as a free gift of God's grace.

God's grace is all around us and we fail to see it. All nature testifies of this grace. Things freely given, but undeserved.

Did it take a thousand nuclear reactors to lift the sun this morning? Why does this minuscule globe called earth support the only environment with the proper amount of oxygen to fill our lungs? I ask anyone, everyone who will listen, Why is there JUST the appropriate amounts so that we can breathe? Is it simply a coincidence that the carbon dioxide that every living creature

expels into the air is absorbed by leaves and grass? Can any honest person truly think that what breathing creatures MUST expel and plants MUST receive is an accident?

Did Aristotle discover reason? Did Rembrandt mix up all of the blues and greens and browns and yellows and reds? Did Brahms teach lullabies to each mother who rocks her baby to sleep? Did Stradivarius place the sweet saraphimic notes in the violin? Did Beethoven teach the canaries to sing?

Did Galileo make gravity or did Columbus create buoyancy or did the Wright Brothers originate lift?

Do we learn balance and sight and sound and touch? Who taught us to grip? A spoon; a pencil; a toy; a tool; a utensil; a rope; a book; the tiny hand of a child; the precious hand of a spouse?

We are helplessly and hopelessly in debt to a God Who shares. A God Who gives and gives and gives and then gives some more.

In Annie Johnson Flint's immortal words,

"When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
"When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
"When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
"Our Father's full giving has only begun.

"His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
"His power has no boundary known unto men;
"For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
"He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."

Jeremiah bowed in wonderment as he said,

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.
"They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."

John nearly shouts from the highest mountain these words,

"And of His fullness we have all received, grace taking the place of grace." Fresh grace, new grace, succeeding grace, unending grace.

God gives and shares even when men ignore Him and forget Him. He bestows even when no appreciation is coming. He lavishes His favor even when it is discounted and depreciated. Who but a God of grace would daily give gifts to those who curse His name and trash His benevolences and reject His love?

We may stop singing, but music will still be there. We may stop smiling, but happiness will still be there. We may stop appreciating, but beauty will still be there. We may stop trying, but achievement will still be there. We may stop loving, but love will still be there. We may stop giving, but generosity will still be there. We may stop expecting, but hope will still be there. We may stop forgiving, but peace will still be there. We may stop repenting, but forgiveness will still be there. We may stop believing, but faith will still be there. We may stop praying, but God will still be there.

In the elevating words of one contemporary songwriter,

"It's like a river, cool and clean and clear.
"It sometimes flows its banks, but it never disappears.
"It's like a river flowing to the sea,
"And its steadily growing stronger as it nears its destiny.

"It's like the sunshine falling through the trees,
"Providing the warmth to live, giving off the light to see.
"It's like an ocean ending in the sky,
"Reminding us of His promise, that His peace will never die.

"The puzzle of life has some odd-shaped parts,
"That just don't want to fit.
"And hard times make our broken hearts
"Seem like they're going to quit -
"But we go through those times, we're not changing our minds,
"We're cast down, but we're not destroyed.
"FOR UNDERNEATH IT ALL, THERE REMAINS OUR FATHER'S PEACE.

God loved so much that He gave. He gave a part of Himself. He shared His image, His nature, His fellowship and His eternity with us. When we used His gift of choice to sin, He gave His only Son as an offering for sin to restore and redeem that lost image.

The only imaginable reason why God would give so much that cost Him so much is because of His grace. (He is a Person Who WANTS to give something) (valuable and precious and wonderful to another person.) All we have to do is think of the person we love the most and how much we nearly burst with desire to give them gifts and do things for them. We can't even put into words the deep, moving feelings of desire and love and devotion we have for them.

You see, grace doesn't measure or weigh in cost. Results don't figure into the nature of grace. Grace has no motive. God didn't calculate the cost of mankind. He simply WANTED to share Himself.

The final reason why God's grace is so amazing is that He intends for us to manifest it in our lives and by our conduct. The plan is for us to be small replicas of His grace. He wants to change our naturally selfish attitudes and absorb our thinking and saturate our purposes so consistently that we will find ourselves functioning in gracious ways towards others.

God does not intend or want to control us. That would change nothing. He doesn't want to harness and bridle us like a horse, ox or a mule. HE WANTS TO GIVE US A HEART LIKE HIS OWN. He wants to impart His thinking, His ways and His attitudes into the disposition of our beings. He wants to make us beautiful on the inside. He wants to rearrange the patterns of pride into selfless habits of service.

A person can be good, but fail to be gracious. One can be loyal and genuine, but not gracious. We may live a lifetime of integrity and lack this grace. Some people can be consistently proper and socially accurate and miss entirely the beauty of graciousness.

Graciousness is an attitude and an atmosphere before it is an act. It is warmth. It is courtesy. It is anticipation. That is, it anticipates the well-being of others. It feeds on the needs of others. GRACIOUSNESS IS FINDING ENJOYMENT IN SOMEONE ELSE'S PLEASURE. It is being fulfilled in serving. It finds its own happiness in making others happy.

Graciousness exceeds giving and going and doing in that it seeks not its own. It finds true enjoyment in the process, whatever the outcome or result of the act. It is pre-emptory, It is a prevenient act and most often is unmotivational. It comes right out from the wellspring of grace. It is an intuitive outflow of love and desire and caring.

Is it possible to give and give and give as God does? Can we actually live in an atmosphere of caring and doing for others? Isn't that too high of a standard? Doesn't that ask too much? Isn't that unrealistic? Not at all if we are OF and IN His grace. The surprise would be if it did not work that way. The fact is that it is impossible to be OF Him and NOT be like Him.

We become like what or whom we hang around. How quickly we acquire the idioms and voice inflections and gesticulations of those we admire and spend large amounts of time with. Chips off of the old block, so to speak. We pattern our heroes and we imitate their ways. We acclimate to our environment.

Even so, any person who hangs around God's wonderful grace takes on the same.

God is one person Who will never embarrass you or let you down. It will never be discovered one day that He turns out to be less than the HUMBLE, SELFLESS AND GRACIOUS Person He is known to be. Hundreds of generations and millions of individuals have time-tested the grace of our God.

His own description of Himself in Exodus 34:6 is as breathtaking as it heartwarming, "The Lord is gracious. .

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Chapter 13

....IN WHICH WE STAND

Part 2 of This Grace ... In Which We Stand

Romans 5:1-2

This verse in Romans, chapter five, verse two, sits like a giant diamond in the midst of a veritable landscape of rare jewels. Listen to it again. I want to cut it up in bite sizes so that its power can get ahold of our minds **THROUGH JESUS WE ALSO HAVE ACCESS BY FAITH INTO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE STAND."**

All that is redemptively afforded to mankind is because of Jesus. It is as though Jesus became the road or the avenue or the pathway to accessing the grace of God. All that God's grace bestows upon us has been accessed by Jesus.

Look at all of the redemptive riches that are enumerated in verses one and two because of Jesus! Justification! Peace! Access! Grace! Standing! And we receive it all simply by trusting in Jesus' sacrifice!

The first of the riches is JUSTIFICATION. Justification occurs in heaven and not in us. It is more FOR us than IN us. Anytime a person repents of his sins, rejects them and trusts in Christ's atonement for those sins, a legal act occurs in heaven prior to the regenerative action that happens in his soul. From a practical standpoint, it is simultaneous, but in actuality justification immediately precedes regeneration.

The heavenly scene is not too unlike that of a courtroom in which each sinner is arraigned before heaven's court and charged with all of his sins. The list is there in its entirety with each sin committed against God known and open before Him.

As a convicted sinner repents, God hears and notes it all. The Holy Spirit acts as the Agent to convict, or convince of his sins. He faithfully identifies and presents every transgression. This is why many of us could truly remember each and all of a lifetime of sinning. The Holy Spirit is in this world to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. No person could possibly dredge up each act of sin. We would most certainly forget this one or that one that had slipped our minds. But the Holy Spirit can, for He has the list in His mind just as it is recorded in heaven and He faithfully convicts us of them all.

When the sinner has owned up to everything, and that is the very best description of repenting, that is, agreeing to everything that God brings up, when he has owned up to everything that the Holy Spirit has listed on his personal sin account, Jesus steps forward and states that He has shed His blood on Calvary to atone for this soul's sins. He states that His blood means that He has taken the place of this condemned sinner and actually became sin for this soul.

On that basis, God the Father states that everything held against this condemned person is obviated, expunged, erased, blotted out, nullified, eradicated forever, and that the record is clear. That's justification! It means that such a person is righteous and uncondemned and fully accepted in oneness with God. It means that his record before God and all heaven is so clear and clean that it is as though he had never sinned at all.

The second consciousness of heavenly riches because of what Jesus has done for us is PEACE. Like justification, peace is a dual-action. Before we experience peace within us, before we are conscious of it, before we feel it, it has already occurred in heaven in the mind and nature of God.

We must never forget that sin, and therefore the person who allows it in his life, is in rebellion against heaven's holy God. God declared war on sin at its birth in the mind and nature of Lucifer, and He will destroy its last vestige from the universe one way or the other. It will either be destroyed by each person's confession and rejection of it as he trusts in Christ's sacrifice for it, or God will ultimately destroy it and everything and everyone connected with it.

When we are spiritually regenerated and forgiven through Jesus' shed blood, the center "wall of partition" that Paul referred to in Ephesians 2:14 is broken down between man and God. I want to read this entire passage and let its power rest upon our minds.

Unsaved man "is without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, that dividing wall of hostility.

"He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

"For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." Ephesians 2:12-14, 17,18.

So a born again person has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't think about this peace too much, for it is understandably overshadowed by the peace we experience OF God. In fact, the peace OF God manifests itself because of the peace WITH God.. The peace we feel would be impossible if first of all a peace with God had not taken place.

Sin keeps men at odds with God. Nothing is more definite than this, and we all know it. Sin separates us from His approval and from His acceptance. Sin always puts that barrier that Paul was discussing between a person and God. The idea that a person can sin and still have peace with God may be a strongly taught theology, but it is horribly erroneous in human experience. People can claim that they are still right with God when they deliberately commit sin, but in their hearts they know better.

Peace and forgiveness is always God's witness, His seal of approval, His spiritual rainbow. When we have the peace OF God, we know that we have peace WITH God. What a wonderful knowledge! And it is because Jesus became our Substitute -- our Mediator -- our Go-between.

The third realization that comes to a regenerated person when he is forgiven is that of ACCESS. The word is used three times in the New Testament, and in every case it occurs because of what Jesus did for us.

The word in the original language means a freedom to enter into another person's presence by the favor of a third person, a benefactor. Some Greek scholars prefer the usage of the idea of a personal introduction or a personal recommendation. Anyway we want to view the idea of what this access may mean, the outstanding feature of the act is that Jesus is the only way to God.

The fact of Jesus accessing us to God is overwhelming and breathtaking in contemplation. What is completely baffling to me is, "Why would He want to?" And equally astounding is, "Why would God allow Him to?" The cost of our redemption to God the Father and God the Son is so immense that our minds can't bear it. We just can't take it in!

I say this as reverently as humanly possible, but the picture in my mind is that of the prostrate body of Jesus Christ stretched from Calvary to heaven's door, and mankind treads upon Him to come to the Father's forgiveness. He said, "My body is broken for you." He said that, "Whosoever eats His body and drinks His blood has eternal life." The saints can see this no other way. We are borne to God and heaven and eternal life on the body of the Lord Jesus.

The saints of God who understand this truth hold it so dearly that they, like Paul, refuse willful sinning in their walk with God. For he states in Hebrews 10:26-29 that willful sinning is, "treading under foot the Son of God and counting His blood and unholy thing." He goes on to lament in Hebrews 6:4-6 that "falling away (backsliding) is crucifying the Son of God afresh, and puts Him to an open shame."

Those who truly know God have much deeper reasons for refraining from willful sinning than being lost or missing heaven. We reject sin because of the effect it has on Jesus. Committing willful sin counts the blood of Jesus an unholy thing. It walks upon it, like it is rejected and lightly esteemed and has such little value that it is cast down and used as a floor mat. William Barclay says that willful sinning "is not mere rebelliousness against the law; it is the wounding of love."

Sinning is spurning. Sinning is a sacrilege. In the Old Testament, sacrilege, that is, the abusing of sacred things, was punishable by immediate stoning. The Bible calls deliberate sinning by Christians sacrilege of the highest sort, and Paul states that we don't do that. Why?

Because we count the sacrifice of Jesus a holy one. We revere and worship Him as God. We recognize His atoning blood as the one and only access to God and forgiveness. We see Jesus as the only way to acceptance with God.

So if Calvary is anything at all, it is ACCESS. Jesus Christ may have appeared to be a helpless, penniless, forsaken, idealistic visionary to the Jerusalem masses and Judaistic officialdom on that historic day when He suffered and died on the cross, 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 Hell-bound humans, and an 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. When we really know Jesus, we share this view of the Father with Him. We walk softly and reverently in His way, for the price exceeds gold that perishes. Every step towards heaven and eternal safety has been afforded and guaranteed by a payment so costly that understanding people weep as they walk.

The fourth and fifth consciousness saved persons experience are named as GRACE and STANDING, and I want us to think about them together.

Standing in grace! What a concept to challenge the mind of the most mature saint! We can see immediately that the word picture the Apostle Paul uses here is significant. The position of the persons referred to here is not lying or sitting, but fully upright.

In fact, in the presence of God's grace through Jesus Christ, any other position would be out of place, for the entire idea from the Greek language here presents an atmosphere of royalty.

It is the setting of a degenerated, lowly outcast who has had no rank or position or level of royal relationship approaching a palace door. This person has been an antagonist, a rebel, an opposer. He has spent his entire life until this time in opposition to this great king before whose castle gate he now stands. But he is vanquished, subjugated and subdued as he answers the strange summons to be presented to this king. The door now is opened, and this lowly peasant, who would customarily bow on his face to the ground before royalty, is ushered in to the palace of a great king and stands in his presence.

He doesn't really know why he remains upright. He can't seem to prostrate himself even though he wants to with all his might, and earnestly wills his body to bend. It seems that he should. By all common logic he ought to fall flat to the cold marble and await a judgment of death and doom.

But still he stands there is not another person around him to refrain or compel him. He doesn't see that he stands alone, for to turn his gaze from this awesome majesty would be a sacrilege. He senses it. There is no other being with him as he stands before the king. It is just the two of them and not a word is spoken.

But why is he standing? Like a statue carved in stone. Like a child lost in wonderment. Like the silent spectacle of a glorious dawn. Like two loved ones holding hands. Like the strong handclasp of two old friends.

IT'S THE ATMOSPHERE! That's what it is! The atmosphere is like, "All is well." That's exactly what it is! ALL IS WELL. No words are spoken or necessary. All IS well.

This former outcast is received by this great king as a friend, as a guest, as an honored, respected, accepted person. How can this be? And why is he all alone? Why does the atmosphere fairly vibrate with happy acceptance? He wonders, "How can I feel so encompassed and enfolded? How can I sense this environment of being received as someone valued and wanted?"

That's the word! That's the feeling! That's the idea that is gently pressing against me! Wanted! He wants me!!'

Still He does not speak. Indeed words would be strangely out of place in this atmosphere of transcendent understanding. Yes, He does too speak, but not with His mouth. The messages and meanings are borne by an unearthly transport. It's an awareness like light and warmth. It's a flooding of the consciousness.

The personal aspect of this standing position before God is most impressive. How God relates to us on such an individual basis is humanly mysterious. Much should be made at this point about Adam's singular creation. It was by Divine plan and choice to create A MAN, rather than mankind. The fact of human individuality is one of the explanations of Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Regardless of how similar we humans are to one another, say, comparing our species to birds or fish, we differ as individuals exceedingly. We joke about some of our acquaintances being so unique that "they threw the mold away." The fact is that the molds are discarded for each of us. No two of us are cut out of the same cloth.

We may be lost in the crowd at work or school or even at family gatherings. We may be largely unrecognized in our peer group and unknown in our communities. We may only be a number in a vast multitude, and nobody may care who we are or where we live. There may be few persons or none at all who know our names or would miss us if we suddenly dropped off from the face of the earth. But....

Individuals are important to God. St. Augustine noted that, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us to love." The weight of this truth needs to press in upon us. We are not nobodys going no where. We are not somebody reincarnated from a higher or lower lifeform from some dim, former existence. We are a somebody occupying a unique and everlasting identity in this universe as the individual person we are. No other being ever was like us and no other being will ever be like us. This thinking should shake some sobriety into us.

This is why God has invested so much of His grace in individual humans. Though man will never eventually be merged into God, we are godlike in that we are eternally individualistic.

When the Spirit of God convicts us -- when He gets our attention when He arrests our downward plunge towards Hell and destruction by convicting us of our personal sinning -- and when we come through that door and stand in His presence, we discover that we are surrounded by His grace. This awakened person stands in a veritable sea of grace. His feet are firmly planted on grace. His landscape is grace. His air is grace. His sky is grace. His sunshine is grace. He sees grace. He hears grace. He feels grace. Grace is the atmosphere. Grace is the language. Grace is the communication. Grace is the music, the relationship.

All of this consciousness of being pursued and invited to the over-whelming grace of salvation is individually imparted. It is a private audience with the God of the universe. The awesome specialty of this is unquestionably lost on us. A private audience with God!

You may be hurting until you can't sleep, but you get in line and wait your turn to see a doctor. You can wait for appointments with the lawyer, preacher, mechanic, plumber, electrician, carpenter, repairman, and even the poodle parlor, but heaven's door is always available.

You can't even GET an appointment with the Queen or the President or the rich and the famous on earth, but you can come unannounced and without prior arrangements into God's immediate presence. The appointment has already been made for us at Calvary's cross.

No offer is more generous, no gift is more gracious, no opportunity is more available than this. Anyone can come into God's presence and be instantly aware that he is being received privately. No possibility on earth known to man is so valuable and rare. We may stand before God! It is not a dessert or a reward. It is because of His grace.

The significance of standing before God must not escape us. The more we consider the incongruity of this act, the more amazing it becomes. Angels bow before Him. Seraphim cover their faces and feet when in His presence. Cherubim will not look upon Him as they attend His glory. Living creatures ceaselessly, day and night, describe His supremacy, His glory and His ascendancy. Demons and all the minions of Hell cringe before Him, and Satan constantly submits to His sovereignty and authority. The universe and all creatures who fill it bow in humble abeyance before its Creator and Sustainer.

But when man steps into redemption's room of saving grace, he stands **GOD'S GRACE STANDS MEN UP!** It makes winners out of history's sorriest losers. It makes saints out of Hell-bound sinners. It lifts a sin-scourged soul from the pits of hopelessness and elevates him to highest heights of honor. **GOD'S GRACE STANDS MEN UP!**

This proclaims the supporting buoyancy of God's awesome grace. It emanates from His gracious nature. It's an effusion of the kind of person He is, and it is as big and generous as He is. It flows unendingly into our emptiness. It catches up the benighted lostness of our souls and suspends it in an ocean of care and love. The grace of God is so comprehensive that it fills the highest heaven and reaches to the lowest hell.

We need to ponder this. This statement that it flows unendingly into our emptiness. The nature of the human soul is cavernous. We are by nature in constant need of filling. Without God we exist in a vacuum. Our emptiness is spacious and exists without limit. The human soul was created in hunger. Its appetite is a vast, astronomical openness by design.

We are receivers, beneficiaries, takers -- made to be filled. "We have all received His fullness," John said, "and grace taking the place of grace." The only way men can receive God's fullness is by being an adequate receptacle, and so we have within us this gargantuan emptiness that requires fresh, new infusions of God's grace. And so we are filled and refilled; we are infused and re-infused. We are blessed and encouraged and strengthened and uplifted and elevated over and over by the Spirit of God.

When we are so very dry and bring our pitiful, little measuring cups to Him, He just lets His grace flow and our cups run over. That's the kind of Person He is, a "running over" God with oceans of grace and pity and mercy. Every correct view of Him is one portraying a God of abundance. All of heaven is programmed for giving. By design and nature the action of grace is benevolent. It flows into every crack and corner of our emptiness with fullness. What a contrast for contemplation! Our emptiness, His fullness!

Because of the grace of God revealed through the life and death of Jesus, persons STAND in the presence of heaven's God. This act is without precedent in the order of God's relationships with other beings. No mind will ever understand this provision from the heart of God without deep and reverent contemplation of His grace.

God WANTED to give something special to mankind. He WANTED to share some of the greatness and love and depth of His being with other persons. He reached out to us in the Person of His Son.

No greater gift has ever been offered than the gift of salvation, for it not only saves us FROM sin and death and Hell, but it saves us TO a personal relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

If we know Jesus in full and free pardon of our sins through faith in His shed blood, WE HAVE EVERYTHING! If we refuse that unique, redemptive offer, WE HAVE NOTHING, in this life or in that to come.

In conclusion, I want to read those beautiful lines from Romans 5: 1 and 2 one more time. I have written and spoken many words of thought and description about these two verses this morning, and maybe some of them will help us carry new and different understandings of just what the Spirit of God was trying to say to us through His servant Paul. Listen carefully as I read these two verses once again.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

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Chapter 14
GREAT GRACE WAS UPON THEM ALL! -- Part 1

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:31-33

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all FILLED with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus!
AND GREAT GRACE WAS UPON THEM ALL."

GOD'S GRACE CAUSES PEOPLE TO THINK AND ACT DIFFERENTLY FROM USUAL. We know how we act generally. We become accustomed to the way those around us act and react. We come to expect certain kinds of behavior from those persons with whom we relate on a daily basis. A FEW of those whom we know act out of interest in others around them. A FEW act selflessly and seem always to be thinking of the needs and wants of others. A FEW seem to be looking for ways to make other people happy and fulfilled and better. BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT MOST OF US HAVE COME TO EXPECT OF OTHER PEOPLE. Generally, and with the exception of those FEW characterized above, we just become accustomed to those persons we know and with whom we relate, to be more interested in their personal concerns and benefits, and to make decisions and choices predicated upon that self interest. IT IS A RARE AND ALMOST SHOCKING THING and I might add, suspiciously unbelievable?, whenever we encounter persons who seem always to be concerned with the needs of others. But I repeat as at the beginning of this message about God's grace, that, "GOD'S GRACE CAUSES PEOPLE TO THINK AND ACT DIFFERENTLY FROM USUAL!"

I am going to be talking to us this morning, and undoubtedly for the following message or two, about HOW INDIVIDUALS ACT AND REACT WHEN GOD'S GREAT GRACE IS UPON THEM, and I promise you that my preaching will be unbelievable to many, in and out of the church, and maybe even some of you who listen to me preach on a regular basis. I hope not! I would never deliberately preach a standard of Christian experience that I understood to be (1) unbiblical, (2) unattainable, (3) only for a select few Christians, (4) impractical and unworkable, and (5) grace from the mind and heart of God that I had not experienced in my own life and watched and saw evidenced in the lives of other Christians.

So, I repeat for the third time, "GOD'S GREAT GRACE CAUSES PEOPLE TO THINK AND ACT DIFFERENTLY FROM USUAL. God's grace causes people to think and act like He does. God's grace causes people to be selfless and gracious and thoughtful of others. God's grace creates an atmosphere of other-worldliness and heavenly-mindedness in those Christians who are enjoying it.

In this scripture we get an insight to God's grace and how it affects humans upon whom it comes and within whom it dwells. We get an idea of how God planned for humans to think and act when the Holy Spirit cleanses them and possesses them within their inner natures when He fills their hearts and minds with His love. What God's grace accomplishes in a human soul IS unusual for the witnessing world AND MOST OFTEN THE CHURCH, but it is common activity in heaven, AND among the Spirit-filled in the church. The Divine discharge, and the human reception, of God's grace is a little bit of heaven in which to go to heaven.

We must never stop preaching this! We must lift high the benefits and privileges and provisions and results of God's grace! We must not allow a sinful world to stop this message. We

must not allow the lack of real Spirit-dominated Christians within the church refrain it! We must not allow the rising tide of luke-warmness and apostasy within the church put out the flame! We must not allow the misunderstanding of the message stop it. We must not allow poor examples of it embarrass and intimidate it. The message and the truth of sanctifying grace is valid and unchanging even if little of it is being lived and witnessed to these days! **WE MUST NOT SURRENDER THE HIGH GROUND OF HOLY LIVING TO ANY EFFORT**, by the world or the church to silence this message of God's great grace! Doing so would necessarily reflect upon His grace's ability to do the same in the last days of the church on earth as before! **HE DOES NOT CHANGE, AND HIS GRACE DOES NOT!**

God's grace is so vast, and so broad, and so encompassing, and so versatile, and so applicable, and so multi-faceted, that there is nothing it misses! There is no circumstance in which it will not work! There is no human experience to which it does not apply. There are no questions it does not answer. There is no heartache or disappointment that is hopeless to God's grace. There is no nuance or peculiarity or complexity of human nature that it does not address. There are no temperaments or dispositions that it cannot soften, realign and transform. There is no nature that it cannot refine. **THERE IS NO DEPRAVITY OR MORAL DEFORMITY THAT IT CANNOT CLEANSE AND PURIFY.**

God's great grace is bigger than any and all theology. It transcends human reason and stupefies ALL human philosophy. God's grace mystifies and amazes our minds while eternally impacting our souls. God's grace outdistances theology and overwhelms philosophy and confounds logic **AND ELEVATES THEM ALL IN THE PROCESS!!** God's grace stupefies the most refined mind, and excels the highest intellect, accelerates the hungriest soul after God, and encourages the most devout and obedient saint **ON TO HIGHER GROUND! THERE IS ALWAYS ANOTHER LEVEL, ANOTHER ORBIT, ANOTHER DIMENSION TO GOD'S WONDERFUL GRACE!!!**

God's great grace is like the ocean, or the sky, or the sun. It is pervasive and encompassing and thermal and invigorating and cheering and dependable and never-ending and spandless and exhaustless! When God shares His grace with us, we neither feel elevated or humbled -- **WE FEEL EMBRACED AND INCLUDED!** That is the nature of God's grace! It enfolds and surrounds and heartens and embraces! Its very nature is munificent and beneficial and gratuitous. It is bestowed unendingly and copiously and abundantly! **HE GIVETH MORE GRACE!!**

God's grace is intuitive, for **"THE LORD IS GRACIOUS"**, with the emphasis on **"IS"**. Grace is His nature. It comes naturally for the Lord to be gracious. It happens naturally and not purposely. The Bible describes God in a single word: **"The Lord IS GRACIOUS."** (See Exodus 33:6). If you want to know Who God is, He identifies Himself as "gracious". It **IS** Who He is. Graciousness is His intrinsic nature. God does not try to be gracious -- **HE IS GRACIOUS.** God does not decide to be gracious -- **HE IS GRACIOUS.**

God's great grace is an outflow; an effusion; a natural, continual, unstoppable, inexorable extrusion of His benevolence. It is neither programmed or provoked, for grace in its purest form has no motive. Grace precedes motivation, for it is a natural characteristic. God does not **PLAN** to be gracious. He just is! God can reason and decide, of course, but His grace does not originate

from His mind. HIS GRACE COMES FROM HIS NATURE. It is Who He is without thought or design or intent or choice, and we need to see this.

I have explained to us on other occasions that it is very difficult for us to understand grace because most of our life's experiences are opposed to grace. Most of our thoughts and choices and actions are predicated on cause and effect. We think and decide and act to produce something, or because something has been presented to our minds. This is a wonderful and powerful ability that God has given to us, BUT IT MISSES GRACE BY LIGHT YEARS! About 100% of our decisions and actions are to produce effect. GRACE FUNCTIONS WITHOUT MOTIVATION OR EXPECTATION!! We need to deeply ponder these thoughts and we need to pin down the inescapable truth held in them. The more we discover about God, the more like Him we become, and that result is, THE MORE GRACIOUS WE WILL BE.

Both God's grace, OR His grace operating and resident within His children, thinks and acts WITHOUT ANTICIPATING A RETURN, and I urge us to not get uncomfortable here, for we are just getting our feet wet, so to speak. We are not even in deep water yet with God's grace. Grace frees us to think and act without the encumbrances of reciprocation.

What I mean by this "freeing" concept is that we are moved beyond motive and intent and into an area of thought and attitude that exceeds motive and intent. IT IS A NATURAL ARENA OF ACTIVITY. It moves into the area of virtues and characteristics, and more than anything else in my walk with God to this point anyway, what we discuss now has meant the most to me.

God has to "free" us from what I term "the encumbrances of reciprocation" or "the necessity of gratitude." God captures our minds when He can imbue them with His grace. I am guessing that before we can ever experience this "freeing" action of becoming gracious souls, we must first start to understand HIS GRACIOUSNESS. God has to help us understand what grace is before it can impact us in any practical way. His grace has to leap from our hearts and get into our heads.

I do not think this can happen until we are "crucified with Christ." I could be mistaken on this point, but at least for me in my walk with God, until I experienced a "self-crucifixion" like Paul did, and described in Galatians 2:20, I do not think that I was spiritually ready for the introduction of "selfless thinking" into my life. It looks to me like no Christian is ready to think and act selflessly until he has had a personal crucifixion, just like Paul did. What thrills me beyond capacity to explain, is that when any of us travels that difficult road to our PERSONAL CROSS OF CRUCIFIXION, there is opened into each of us a broad plain of fellowship and service to the Lord Jesus that is as unlimited as it is unexplainable to those who have not died.

Now, I do not want one, single listener or reader to stop his ears and mind to what I am saying because, "Pastor Boone is preaching his church doctrines now." My references for validity or support has not mentioned either Wesleyanism or Armenianism -- only what the apostle Paul stated about his walk with God. Paul talked about "a personal cross, a personal crucifixion of self, a personal death to self." Before he preached this message to the Galatian church, our dear, faithful Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples in Matthew 16:24 and 25 of the following requirements IF THEY INTENDED TO FOLLOW HIM AND GET TO HEAVEN. There can be no mistake about

what Jesus meant by His reference to "his cross", that is, my cross and your cross the Christian's cross. If Christians are of a mind to, they can "smooth out" and alter and adjust what this means until they can live about any way they want to and still call themselves a Christian. But if we want to take what the Bible says in the way Jesus gave it, and meant it, then being a follower of Jesus INVOLVES A DEATH TO OURSELVES. No honest person can fail to see this!

The Bible being its own best commentary, what Jesus meant by the Christian's cross is its most basic and simple meaning: A DEATH! A fifth grader could figure this out and have lots of comprehensive skills left over! In verse 24, Jesus said that if we would go with Him, such person must, "DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS." Nothing could be clear than this. Walking with Jesus is a denial of self. In verse 25 Jesus explains this so that no one who wants to follow Him could possibly misunderstand what He meant by "denying self", and a "personal cross". Jesus said the only way to save our lives is to lose them "for His sake".

I wonder why the church knows so little about this requirement and why we hear so little about it? Is it because it is SO FINAL; SO COMPLETE; SO TOTAL? Is this a real death to something about us or within us, or is it a mere metaphor? EVEN IF THE CHURCH CHOOSES TO IDENTIFY IT AS SUCH, SHOULD IT NOT HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON CHRISTIANS??? If what Jesus said about His followers "surrendering their lives to their personal crosses" is only a metaphor (which I do not believe) WHAT DOES THE METAPHOR MEAN? If what Paul described as being "crucified with Christ" is only a figure of speech, WHAT DOES IT MEAN??? Honest, serious Christians are going to conclude that the meaning is the same, either way.

In both instances, SOMETHING ABOUT OUR HUMANITY AND SOMETHING WITHIN OUR MORAL NATURES has to die so something else can live. In John 12:24 Jesus compared just what we are discussing here to a kernel of corn or wheat that could either be kept or planted in the ground. If it were kept, it would always be a lone kernel and would eventually die alone. If it were placed in the ground, it would die, but in its death, it would magnificently reproduce! Then He repeated the claim in verse 25 to His followers that,

"He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

The Greek word for "hate" here means, "to surrender the claim of."

All of this relates to the earlier comment that the great grace of God "FREES" a Christian from the bondage of reciprocation and/or gratitude. When we can act from grace, we are free from expectation. What a powerful concept! and what a delightful realization as we watch it work! If you are not expecting a response of any kind or to any degree, you can invest and give and contribute to your heart's content! Anyone can see how confining it is when our minds are always wondering about "how" what we give and do will be perceived or received? That is a "bondage" from which God's grace wants to deliver us!! We can see how "freeing" it can be when we invest our time and talents and love and interest in and on others AND NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT ITS APPRECIATION OR EFFECT.

If we do not get free from this awful restraint, then we are usually acting from the consideration of "how will this affect me and my family or my loved ones"? If we cannot discover a "death" to this, we will make our decisions based on "How will this make me look"? If this part of us is not crucified on His cross, our thinking is most often, "What will this cost me"? Think of how many good Christians are stopped from blessing and helping and encouraging others in their work for God because it might "elevate them and make them look better than me, or someone near and close to me"? I know we do not like to talk about such things, BUT WE NEED TO, and the sooner, the better. Any person who dies to all of this IS FREE TO GIVE AND INVEST LIBERALLY AND RANDOMLY AND INDISCRIMINATELY, AND EVEN EXTRAVAGANTLY!!! Praise God Glory be to Jesus! You see, Jesus taught us that we needed to die so that we could really live! God wants to free us from the corpse of carnality so that He can really turn us loose in a copious campaign of gracious and courteous service to the body of Christ and to a sinful world.

I almost hate to say this, but it is true. Some unsaved women, and a few unsaved men, seem to have this spirit of gracious and random investment into other people's lives, while millions of the church are still bound by the constraints of the old nature. GOD'S GRACE INTENDS TO FREE THE CHURCH FROM THE SHACKLES OF SELF! I do not know how to preach it any more clearly. My deepest hope and goal as a heart holiness preacher is to present this blessed truth in such a manner that God's people would HUNGER AND THIRST FOR IT. I never enjoyed the presentation of heart purity from the standpoint of "holiness or Hell", though I do not criticize those men of God who are led to do so.

God's children ought to WANT His best for them. The deepest desire of our hearts should be to long for and yearn for ALL His provisions through His precious blood. We ought to earnestly desire the will of God for the living of our lives before Him as well as being prepared to serve Him in His church. My understanding, and my experience is that, we cannot be our best in God's service as long as self-interest is in conflict with the Holy Spirit's. We need to be "free from the law of sin and death." I repeat the earlier statement that, "God's grace frees us to think and act without the encumbrances of reciprocation."

If a choice or an act is in anticipation of a return, it is not of grace. Jesus said in Matthew 5:48 that His followers were to be "perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect", and this CANNOT mean what we are told by liberal theologians that it means, because in both instances the Greek word is the same! (teleios). Jesus said that His followers were to be "teleios" just like God, the Father is "teleios", and whatever our theological persuasions may be, no one can make these two words different without twisting their meanings. Whatever this means, IT IS THE SAME KIND OF PERFECTION IN GOD AS IT IS IN HIS FOLLOWERS. You cannot be honest to biblical interpretation and say that the meaning is one way for the Father and another way for His followers.

Now, as long as we are here, let us stay here long enough to present this to our minds fairly. Liberal theologians (primarily Calvinistic ones) tell us that for the followers of God, this means "mature; of full stature." Does the Father need to mature? Is He in any kind of a "developing" stage at all? All of us would deny this, of course, for He is the only perfect Being existent in that there is nothing He does not know or nothing He needs. Are we followers of His

like that? Of course not, AND THE HOLINESS DOCTRINE DOES NOT TEACH AN ABSOLUTE PERFECTION FOR ANY BEING OTHER THAN GOD. It is unfair for other Christians of other doctrinal persuasions to state that holy people are "absolutely" perfect, for we do not believe or teach that. Christian perfection is not angelic perfection, or Adamic perfection, or resurrection perfection, or mental perfection, or emotional perfection, or physical perfection, or temperamental perfection, or verbal perfection, or functional perfection, OR EVEN SPIRITUAL PERFECTION, and I mean by that -- that Christians stop growing and maturing and developing. The term which most holiness people shy away from these days, "Christian perfection", IS AN OPERATION OF GOD WITHIN THE HEARTS OF FULLY-COMMITTED AND OBEDIENT CHRISTIANS APPROPRIATED BY FAITH AND FAITH ALONE! WHEREBY EVIL MOTIVES AND CARNAL ATTITUDES ARE CLEANSED AND PURIFIED BY THE FIERY BAPTISM OF JESUS, through the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit, and the heart of such a Christian is FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE. It is in this sense -- that the heart is perfected in love and grace, until there are NO evil intentions or vile motives or inclinations to anything unlike God -- that WE ARE PERFECT LIKE GOD, THE FATHER IS. This work of grace is accomplished IN THE HEART, and that is the reason I prefer the term, "heart holiness" to "Christian perfection", largely because the term is so misunderstood and misused by holiness detractors.

I want to quickly tell us that we need no commentary or theology book, or a course in original languages the unravel the meaning of the word "perfect" here. Bible believing Christians MUST NOT BE AFRAID of Jesus' teaching here, or shrink from it in the least. Remember what I say to us often about biblical interpretation: "The Bible is its own best commentary", and I am convinced of this the more I read and study it.

Just look at the context for the interpretation of Jesus' meaning of the term "perfect" relating to God and to His followers. We have to start with verse 43 and read the entire, surrounding scriptures to know what is meant by verse 48.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.

"That ye may be the children of your Father Who is in heaven: FOR HE MAKETH THE SUN TO RISE ON THE EVIL AND THE GOOD, AND SENDETH RAIN ON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.

"For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? do not even (sinners) the same?

"And if you salute your brothers only, what do you more than others? Do not even the sinners (like that)?

"Therefore, be ye perfect, EVEN as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Folks, as much as almost the entire body of Christ wants to change the meaning here in this verse, the single word, "EVEN", is there, and Jesus said it, and He had to mean it. Jesus knew what He was saying, even if the majority of Christians want to deny and reject it. The word "even" means "just like", or "the same as", and that is why honest interpreters of the Bible insist that **WHAT IS MEANT BY PERFECTION RELATING TO THE FATHER IS THE SAME AS IT RELATES TO HIS FOLLOWERS**. Since we know that it is not a perfection of the head, it **HAS** to be a perfection of the heart. Can we have a heart like God's? I believe it because Jesus taught it, and in fact, **REQUIRED IT**. In the Old Testament God required of the Children of Israel that "they be holy" and Peter repeated that requirement. Here is Jesus requiring that God's followers are to "be ye perfect". Would Jesus set down unattainable requirements for His children? Of course not! Would Jesus require unreachable standards for His followers? Certainly not! Millions of preachers and teachers claim that Christians just cannot live like this. They go into great detail and say that "Oh, that is not what Jesus meant." For all of those millions who say such things about Jesus' requirements here, **THERE ARE SOME CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE JUST BELIEVED THE PLAIN, UP-FRONT, STATEMENTS OF JESUS HERE AS FACT AND TRUTH, AND HAVE BELIEVED GOD AND TAPPED INTO THIS GRACE OF HIS!!!**

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Chapter 15 GREAT GRACE -- Part 2

God **IS** gracious. He makes the sun to shine on everyone. He sends the rain to everyone. His grace is unselective and free. He loves His enemies and blesses those who curse Him, and does good to them that hate Him. His grace is unprejudicial and random and universal. **HE EXPECTS US TO EXHIBIT THE SAME QUALITIES OF GRACE**, because He makes that grace **AVAILABLE** to us now! -- in this life today!! Jesus would be cruel and vicious and sadistic to make requirements of us without the provisions to accomplish them! He is obviously none of that cruel and vicious and sadistic -- so that "begs the question" and is "an un-moot point", logically speaking. If we are the children of our Father in heaven, God design is for us to manifest the same gracious characteristics as He does.

IT IS NOT TOO MUCH TO EXPECT GOD TO GIVE US GRACIOUS HEARTS. This is not too high of a standard. This is not too much to expect of God, **FOR JESUS RAISED THIS STANDARD, AND INVITED THIS EXPECTATION**, and not the holiness crowd. If what I am preaching today is branded by the church as "holiness", then Jesus was a holiness preacher!!! and we are in good company! I determined when I began following Jesus Christ that I would follow **HIM ALL THE WAY AND IN ANYTHING AND ABOUT EVERYTHING**, and just by following Him, I stepped into "the heavenly shower of God's sanctifying grace", and it cleaned me up in my heart, **AND GAVE ME A HEART LIKE HIS OWN!!** I wish that Christians could just rise above the lies of the devil, and shut our ears to the church's "nay-sayers", **AND LISTEN TO OUR HEARTS!** I wish the church would be brave enough to set aside their commentaries and theologies and **JUST TAKE GOD'S WORD AT FACE VALUE**. I wish that we would have the courage to take an honest look at the ugliness of our hearts and then compare them to the more than adequate merits of Jesus shed blood, **AND HUMBLY COME TO HIM FOR THE CURE**. I discovered, as

millions of other committed followers of the Lamb have, that God can, and will, give us selfless hearts like His own if we will just ask and believe Him.

So-called "suppression" is a human method of dealing with the old, selfish, sin nature, whereby trusting Christ to cleanse and sanctify it IS A DIVINE ACT OF GRACE. If "suppression" is not a definite aspect of "salvation by works" I do not know what it is. The "saved by grace alone" crowd are those who teach "suppression". Simply stated, "suppression" is something we do to try to corral and control the old nature of sin that remains in the regenerated Christian and "wars against" the new nature. Why not come to Christ and His cross and the merits of His shed blood for the defilement of our souls, and not some human method? Why not appropriate, by faith, the purifying and cleansing victory Jesus PAID FOR WITH HIS OWN BLOOD?

That shed blood WAS A PERFECT SACRIFICE, meaning that there is power in it FOR ALL SIN. Jesus did not die to PARTIALLY deal with the defilement and pollution of sin. In fact, Christians do not get to the heart of the sin problem until they address THE INNER, OLD-NATURE problem. THAT CAUSED THE SIN. God saves us from our committed acts of sin so that He can deal with man's BASIC problem. We needed to be saved from SIN before we ever started committing ACTS of sin. There is not a church or theology or religious set of beliefs that fails to recognize and teach this.

We humans are born with a sinful nature, and it begins to manifest itself and assert itself long before the age of accountability that age at which we recognize that we are sinners. All Christian religions believe that we cannot get to heaven with that old sin nature, and all believe that it remains in our inner natures after we are born-again. The question each of us must ask ourselves, whatever our doctrinal teachings and viewpoints: Does the atonement of Jesus make provision for all sin? Can God, through Christ, meet that need? Is God big enough to deal with the old nature, or did He leave this out of the atonement for us to fight and struggle with in our own resolve, willpower and strength? and ultimately be destroyed by Death?

Listen carefully now. If it is that way, THEN GOD PLANNED AND DESIGNED IT THAT WAY, and if this is true (and I say this as reverently as I know how), then both Jesus and the Holy Spirit of God are parties (that is, "allowing" participants) in the toleration and co-habitation of the carnal nature within the hearts of believers. I will explain what is meant by this statement, but first I want to emphatically state that I do not believe that, and also that this is the reason why I do not believe in the doctrine of "suppressionism".

Suppressionists believe that after we are saved and continue to experience the defilement of the sin nature, we have to do battle with the carnal nature all the rest of our Christian lives. They say the reason we are accepted with the Father, is that Christ, with His blood's atoning merit, stands between us and the Father, and as God looks towards us saved, but hopelessly carnal Christians, He cannot see either our carnal, polluted sin natures, OR our committed sin lapses, which they tell us we all continue to commit, and in fact, cannot stop from committing. They tell us that the reason God, the Father, cannot see all of that "entire sin business" IS BECAUSE JESUS AND HIS SACRIFICE FOR ALL SIN STANDS BETWEEN US AND GOD. Theologically, that is termed "imputed righteousness". The idea is that CHRISTIANS ARE STILL SINNERS and will remain so until we die, (making death more of a savior and sanctifier than Jesus!). They tell us that

death will finally deliver us from carnal sin, but until then, we are deemed righteous by Jesus being a "shield" or "buffer" for our sinful natures AND our acts of committed sins that will surely result from that sinful nature. Now, I have tried to present the theological position known as "suppressionism" as well and accurately as possible, and though it may have sounded like it, I trust that it has not come across as flippant or casual or accusative in any manner.

The truth is, folks, that all Christians struggle with the old carnal nature, and it hurts us and embarrasses us and discourages us and saddens us if we truly love Jesus and desire His likeness within our hearts. Paul called the condition "wretched" and "domineering" and "enslaving" and "uncontrollable" and "not subject to the law of God." Paul went so far to say of the carnal nature that it was not only not subject to God, BUT COULD NOT BE"! (SEE Romans 8:7). When we understand how horrible and cruel and oppressive and unmanageable the old nature is within Christians, we cannot help but wonder why more and greater segments of the church don't look for a better answer and remedy than having to live with it and struggle with it and be overcome by it over and over! I wish that more preachers and teachers within the body of Christ would at least open the door to searching and seeking for some hope of a deliverance and a victorious life in Christ!!

Let us continue with two HUGE reasons why suppressionism, as a theology as well as in experience, SADDLES JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH COMPLICITY IN IT!! IF THIS WERE TRUE, (and I do not believe this!) HIS COMPLICITY WOULD HAVE TO HAVE BEEN A ROLE IN THE REDEMPTIVE SCHEME, that is, it would necessarily be a part of the PLANNING stage in humankind's redemption. I cannot believe that an almighty God, Who designed the redemptive plan, BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, this plan for His eternal, heavenly bride (redeemed humankind), would place His Son in a compromising position of covering or shielding sin.

The next step, if this were true, would in my opinion be an equally, if not greater fault. Remember that I do not believe these assertions that the suppression of the old nature in Christians was a part of God's original redemptive plan. My personal convictions on these very issues are so severe that if the dear Lord had not graciously met the need of my own heart, I WOULD STILL BELIEVE THEM! I believe so strongly in the perfect and powerful sacrifice of Jesus' blood being adequate for ALL SIN, committed AND carnal, that if there were no victory and relief for me and my heart, for whatever reason, I would claim that I just had not appropriated the remedy and the grace, and say it publicly.

Here is the second reason why I would do that. Suppressionists go on to teach that, at conversion, the Holy Spirit is introduced into the realm of the soul, and then a battle begins between Him and the old nature. When such a Christian agrees with the Holy Spirit, carnality and the flesh is defeated, but when we agree with the old nature and the flesh, then the Holy Spirit no longer has control. Incidentally, all Christian creeds, including holiness people, are in agreement with this picture of carnality in believers as I have described it.

Two sobering questions HAVE to arise to any thoughtful Christian. Is this the best that the sacrifice of Jesus has to offer His church? Is an "on-again, off-again" sometimes winning, and sometimes losing, some inner victories and LOTS of spiritual failures, God's best for His

children? So, the first question is, "Is this God's best?" The second question **THAT HAS TO BE FACED AND ANSWERED BY SUPPRESSIONISTS** is: "Did the triune God **DESIGN** it this way?" If He did, (and I do not believe that he would or did), then the Holy Spirit necessarily becomes a party to, not only the lifetime residence of the old nature, but the repeated commissions of deliberate acts of sin resulting from its presence, because it has not been cleansed and crucified.

One of the main reasons I am a heart holiness preacher is because I believe **THE DESIGN OF HUMANITIES REDEMPTION** through the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ **WAS A PERFECT SACRIFICE AND ATONED FOR ALL SIN**. Jesus' blood is adequate and available **TO BRING VICTORY OVER EVERYTHING SIN POLLUTED AND DEFILED**. It was never a part of God's design in humankind's redemption for either the Son of God or the Holy Spirit of God **TO TOLERATE SIN IN ANY DEGREE OR FORM**. This is contrary to the very nature of God, and I do not want to be misunderstood on this vital point.

IT IS IN THE DESIGN STAGE where I want our minds to work. Ephesians 1:4 clearly states that: (God) chose (us humans) before the foundation of the world **THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME** before Him in love." Our eternal redemption **WAS GRACIOUSLY DESIGNED** by the triune God before there were angels or seraphs or cherubs, and before there were stars and galaxies and solar systems, and before there was a physical universe, and before there was an earth to support human life, and before there was a human being with an eternal soul.

If Christians cannot be delivered from the inner defilement of the carnal nature during this lifetime, **IT HAD TO BE BY DESIGN**. It had to be a part of the Divine initial redemptive design. God never acts after the fact in anything. He never makes corrections or changes or adjustments, for He is a perfect Being. Nothing ever catches Him by surprise, and He never "jury-rigs" or "baling wires" anything. **THIS WOULD BE ESPECIALLY TRUE OF HIS REDEMPTIVE PLAN**. If the church subscribes to the "suppressionistic" view of carnality within believers, then it must be accompanied by an admission **THAT GOD PLANNED THE JOINT-TENANCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CARNAL NATURE** within us from the point of regeneration to the Christian's death. This is contrary to everything the Bible tells us about God in general and His attitude towards the carnal mind in particular. I repeat that I would not believe such teaching if I never experienced a victory and deliverance during my lifetime. If the blessed Holy Spirit had not cleansed my heart according to Acts 15:8 and 9. I would vigorously defend the doctrine and experience of heart holiness anyway and just confess to my loved ones and friends that I was a candidate and a seeker. I hope that you either believe this also or come to believe it.

THIS "GREAT GRACE that was upon them all" was in direct relation **TO THE INNER WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**. Please re-note in the context, verse 31, that in this instance of church history when this "great grace was upon them all", that "they were **ALL** filled with the Holy Ghost", and spoke the word of God with boldness. Before there was an **OUTWORKING**, **THERE WAS FIRST AN INNERWORKING**. I am fully aware that distracters and disclaimers of heart purity protest that this was merely one of many outpourings of the Holy Spirit, and that it was only an empowerment or endowment for service. There are two main objections to the "many outpourings for service" idea. One, there are too many former and later substantiations **OF THE CLEANSING ELEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** in His

operations within Christians to call "being filled with the Holy Spirit" mere and spasmodic infillings. Two, the CONTEXT, again!, supports something more and other than "mere, spasmodic infillings for service." Let us look at them.

Verse 32a says, "the multitude of them that believed WERE OF ONE HEART AND OF ONE SOUL." This is a direct fulfillment of Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17:17-21, and I quote:

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth.

"As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world.

"And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word.

"THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE; as Thou', Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, TEAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

I do not know how any of you think about this prayer of Jesus for His followers, but I never read it but what I am amazed beyond explanation. What astounds me is that Jesus PRAYS FOR US TO BE ONE (1) AS THEY ARE ONE, and (2) THAT WE MAY BE ONE WITH THEM. What does NOT amaze me is whether Jesus' prayer is answered. Of that I have no doubt, and it is another solid reason why I believe in heart holiness. THIS ONENESS ABSOLUTELY CANNOT OCCUR WITHOUT SOME RADICAL INNER WORK DONE IN CHRISTIAN'S HEARTS!!! The kind of oneness among God's children in the church, and the kind that exists between the Members of the Godhead, and any semblance of that oneness existing between God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit AND the members of His body, the church, CANNOT OCCUR WITHIN CARNAL, SELFISH, WARRING, OPPOSING, CONTROVERSIAL, ADVERSARIAL HEART ATTITUDES AND CONDITIONS. IT DID occur on the Day of Pentecost within and among the disciples of Jesus, AND it did occur at this time we are studying about, BUT IT HAPPENED BECAUSE THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST!!!

There are TWO, HUGE SEPARATE aspects of our Lord's prayer for His children in His prayer as recorded, and read, in John 17. One was, "SANCTIFY THEM" and two was, "THROUGH THY TRUTH." "Sanctify them" means, "consecrate them and make them holy." "through Thy truth" means, "without mixture of error." I will return to these two, huge prayer requests of Jesus later in this series of messages, but for now I want to keep us directed TO THE RESULTS of the answer to Jesus' prayer for the cleansing action of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's heart. THOSE RESULTS are discovered in part in verse 21 of John, chapter 17, and I quote:

"THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE.. .." What could we expect TO BE THE DEGREE OF SUCH A UNITY among believers? Jesus does not leave THE DEGREE unaddressed:

"... as Thou, Father, is in Me, and I in Thee, THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US." Jesus goes on to reveal THE RESULT of the unity that exists among the Godhead and the followers of Jesus:

".....that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

NOW YOU MUST KNOW WHY I HAVE PERFECT HATRED FOR SQUABBLES AND FUSSES AND DISSENSION AND CONTENTIONS AMONG BELIEVERS. Jesus prayed for His followers to be set apart as a special people, the church, the body and bride of Christ, and also made a holy and cleansed and pure vessel. We either subscribe to the prayer of Jesus and believe in its answer among ourselves as the body of Christ, or we reject it and say that it is not possible.

But follow this now. To those Christians who appropriate and discover THIS GREAT GRACE, there IS A ONENESS OF HEART and spirit and soul. THAT IS THE SAME ONENESS OF THE GODHEAD. For any Christian, Calvinist or Armenian, or somewhere in between, to deny this is to refute and reject the prayer of our Lord for its fulfillment. Hear me attentively now! THERE IS NO SCHISM IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, and we had not only better believe this, but we had better take our stand for it before everyone in the world and in the visible church! I simply believe God's Word! I repeat that there is no schism in the body of Christ. "Schism" means "a division or disunion into opposing parties." There has been, and is now, and will be in the future, division and disunity in the visible church, BUT THERE IS NONE BETWEEN OBEDIENT, SPIRIT-FILLED, HOLY HEARTED, HUMBLE, MEEK AND LOWLY members of the body of Christ. Where there is division and disunity and disharmony, there is always carnality!

What I state now is a settled issue in my mind and soul, and has been proven to me many times over through the years of mingling with and watching the saints. Whatever their doctrinal leanings, selfless, crucified, Spirit-filled, holy hearted Christians INVARIABLY EXPERIENCE THIS HEAVENLY UNITY OF SPIRIT, and their differences of opinions on dozens of issues, will not destroy that unity. CONVERSELY, "holiness people" (Please note that I did not say "holy people") who traditionally hold the doctrines of heart holiness, often have not experienced this grace, and fuss and fight and separate and divide and split!!

Jesus stated that the only way "the world will believe" is if it witnesses this unifying grace among professed followers of Christ. The implication here is strong! Jesus did not say they would believe in Him by witnessing the unusual display of oneness and mutuality among the true saints of God, but HE DID SAY THEY WOULD NOT BELIEVE WITHOUT IT!! This strongly says to my mind that, if the church intends to influence the unsaved world to Christ, one of their first orders of business IS A SPIRIT OF UNITY AND HARMONY. THAT CAN ONLY OCCUR BY A CRUCIFIX ION OF CARNAL SELF so that the Holy Spirit can have full and uncontested CONTROL of the hearts of individual Christians in the body of Christ.

It cannot, and it does not happen, by edict, that is, no one can legislate unity. It does not happen by ecclesiastical structuring, and this is where the entire so-called "ecumenical movement" of the past fifty years is 180 degrees flawed. When the church refuses to function according to God's prescribed manner, we end up with a mere fabrication an empty structure. Mere human effort will always produce mere human results. Christian unity can never come from mere human

effort, however sincere and diligent! It is an exercise in futility! It does not happen when church leaders get all of their adherents to dress alike and talk alike and act alike and worship alike and, in general, "be little duplicates of one another." DISUNITY CAN BE RAMPANT AMONG SUCH GROUPS! Christian unity and harmony WILL BE THE NATURAL AND CERTAIN RESULT OF CHRISTIAN "SANCTIFICATION"! Jesus asked the Father to "sanctify them... that they all may be one"! That says to me that this is the way it happens. When God does some thing, it is effective! It works! A heavenly and a Divine "sanctification" with and by the Holy Spirit invariably unifies and harmonizes and blends human hearts with the intents and purposes and attitudes of the Godhead.

My spirit is instantly softened, and consistently humbled, as I read In Romans 8:15 that,

"we have received the Spirit (capital "S") of adoption, whereby we cry, Father, Father!"

This is a cry from a sanctified heart, and because of that Divine work, it proclaims, (1) love and adoration, (2) closeness, (3) separation and consecration, (4) identity, (5) obedience, (6) submission, and certainly, (7) oneness. A heart that is self-centered and selfish is not a sanctified one. A heart that is "turning back to Egypt", that is, to the things of the world, is not a sanctified one. A heart that is willful and independent is not a sanctified one. A heart that is contentious and seditious is not a sanctified one. A heart that is unsettled and vacillating is not a sanctified one. Any and all of these characteristics in the heart of a Christian condemns us, AND THEY SHOULD. No Christian who loves Jesus feels good about carnality, and that condemnation should drive us to seek a solution from the Lord. I know that it did for me.

Please allow me to repeat that my hope and deep desire is that Christians LISTEN TO THEIR HEARTS. Is there a yearning for a peace to replace an unsettled heart? Is there a recurrent hungering for a rest from inner struggles and warfare? Is there a returning restlessness of soul that somehow seems to need a deliverance? Is there something down within that is distinct and separate from normal interest in growing and maturing? Is there a sense of need for a Crises correction?

The scripture in Acts, chapter 4 that we have been studying, continues to express specific results in the lives of Christians when this "great grace" was upon them all. Remember with me that this obvious outpouring and experiencing occurred because they "were all filled with the Holy Spirit." WE WILL ONLY COMPREHEND THESE UNUSUAL RESULTS AS WE ASSOCIATE THEM WITH THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S FULLNESS UPON AND WITHIN THEM. This was more than a passing phenomenon. This was more than an emotional action and reaction. This was more than a mere revival, and I will explain that. This was more than the expected "hype" that accompanies anything new. This was more than "the grand opening of the Christian church." This was more than a sign of "dispensational fullness."

Hear me now! THIS WAS THE "POURING OUT OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH" prophesied by the prophet, Joel, hundreds of years before. THIS WAS THE "ABIDING COMFORTER" Jesus promised when He was with the disciples. THIS WAS "THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER" Jesus told the disciples to "wait for in Jerusalem." This was the "endowment with power from on high." This was the arrival of the triune God INTO the hearts of God's children. As mentioned earlier, this was more than a mere revival, and what is meant by "mere" is

that this was more than something that came and went after a while. The infilling of the Holy Spirit was NOT ANYTHING PASSING! Jesus made this unquestionably clear when He told His followers in John 14:16:

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, THAT HE MAY ABIDE WITH YOU FOREVER."

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Chapter 16 GREAT GRACE -- Part 3

Now, we want to dig a bit deeper into the idea of "great grace", with the emphasis now in the adjective, "great". In this instance, the Greek word for "great" is MEGALAY, and means, "the highest degree of intensity." As surprising as it may seem, and often confusing, to students not familiar with original languages, there are NINE different Greek words variously translated "great" in the New Testament.

Just for interests sake, I am going to take us on a little side excursion in support of original languages, primarily Greek and Latin. Consider this complex aspect of our own English language.

A homonym is not strictly one word at all in the most accurate grammatical sense, because it really has TWO properties, and not just one. A homonym is -- both a "homophone" and a "homograph". "Homo" means "akin to, or alike." "Phone" means "voice or sound", and "grapha" means "write or written." So, "homophone" means, "having the same sound, but different meaning", and "homograph" means "having the same spelling, but differing meanings." Examples of homophones would be, "P A R E", "P E A R", and "P A I R". It is possible to add "PA Y E R" or one who pays, to that list of three. Examples of "homographs" are, "R O W" and "R O W", or a spat or fuss, and also, "S E W E R", and "S E W E R", or a seam stress. They are spelled the same, but with greatly differing meanings. English, grammar and spelling teachers should have our highest esteem and appreciation. At the same time, English speaking persons should not complain too loudly about the seeming complexities of original languages. It ought to encourage both students and teachers of the English language to know that it is one of the most difficult to master. So, do not give up!

Out of nine different Greek words variously translated "great" in the New Testament, Luke, the writer of Acts, used the word meaning, "the highest degree of intensity." In the effort to try to describe the unearthly magnificence of God's great grace, Luke used this one, "the highest degree of intensity."

Something exceedingly important from God out of His heaven was occurring here. God was reaching forth to humankind in a decidedly unusual manner. A greater manifestation of His grace was being bestowed on the children of men than had ever been demonstrated before. This may be described as "a CONCENTRATION of God's grace" at a particular place and in a particular manner.

God had always been gracious in His approaches to, and relationship with, humans. As already noted, if it were not for His graciousness, there would not even BE the human family. The grace of God that we already understand is mind-boggling. That God would share Himself in such a personal and intimate relationship with any other being is remarkable. That He would deliberately design a race of beings who had the ability to choose Him or reject Him is beyond imagination. That such a human being could and would degrade himself so horribly that his Godlike image became devilish and vile is amazing. **THAT SUCH ABOMINABLE DEFILEMENT COULD ONLY BE REVERSED BY THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB OF GOD IS UN IMAGINABLE!**

God's grace has been freely offered at every point in human history. We were conceived and designed and originated in the gracious mind of a gracious God. Everything relating to God and humankind is a display of God's grace. Not a single aspect of God's purposes in and for man was expected or required or of necessity. **GOD DID NOT OR DOES NOT, OWE ANY BEING ANYTHING!** It is ALL of God's grace because He is a gracious Being

But here, at this time in human history, we witness **AN EVEN GREATER DEGREE OF GRACE!!!** For some reason, God's grace is intensified and concentrated! Any thoughtful student of the Bible has to be instantly intrigued with the "why?" of this. It was as if **GOD WERE NARROWING THE FOCUS OF HIS GRACE** in a specific place and in a heretofore different manner. In the idiom of the day, **SOMETHING BIG WAS GOING DOWN**, even, by Divine standards!!

I trust that the excitement on the one hand, and the gravity on the other, of this heavenly action upon the church, and the world through them, can grip our minds. Something out of the ordinary, even by Divine measurements, was in progress. **WAS GOD TRYING TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF HUMAN MINDS?** Was this a way of getting us to see that God was sending a very special message to the world? It looks like it to me.

WE MUST NOT MISS THIS POWERFUL TRUTH!!! This great grace, which appears to be an "all-out, biggest and best of all" expression of God's generosity towards humankind, was the direct result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into their hearts! The display of this "great grace", and how it worked out in the lives and experiences of Christians, happened because "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." (SEE Verse 31).

I cannot speak for any other Christian, past or present, but **DISCOVERING HOW THIS HAPPENS** has been a serious, lifelong pursuit of mine. How are Christians "filled with the Holy Spirit"? Is it something that only occurred to the disciples in the early church, or is it something that we can anticipate and expect today? Did this "experience" continue to happen at other times in church history and to Christians in the church after this? Can we expect any or some of this great, unusual outpouring of God's Holy Spirit beyond this particular time in church history? Can we, and should we, expect this "great grace" today?

There is so much confusion and misunderstanding about this subject that most of us preachers would rather tackle something less controversial. I digress long enough to state that I am so glad that someone was brave enough to tell me about this wonderful grace that is still

appropriateable, today!!! Every hungry and sincere Christian who has discovered and experienced this "great grace" is SO GLAD THAT SOMEONE IN THE CHURCH TOLD THEM ABOUT IT!!! It almost seems like spiritual robbery for preachers especially to withhold such a precious and glorious message from Christians "who hunger and thirst after righteousness." I know how difficult it is for preachers to talk about this "great grace". There are lots of other subjects of biblical and Christian interest that are more agreeable and palatable to the church at large, and I am just asking the Lord to stand by me here and guide my mind as we try to peer into what this great grace addresses for the church today. One thing is undebatable. God is not a different God today from Who He has ever been. His operation within the hearts of humankind does not vary from one era of church history to the other. GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH IS THE SAME. TODAY AS AT ITS BEGINNING, and His grace and power is the same.

This extraordinary demonstration of God's grace must address two highly significant considerations: the timing and the recipients. We have already observed THAT THIS GREAT, UNUSUAL GRACE WAS HERETOFORE UNPRECEDENTED. Accordingly, this being a concentration, and an intense focusing of God's grace upon human kind, something exceedingly important had to be occurring!! WHY? I am not sure that I have this correctly answered, but I think the answer is held in the TIMING, AND THE RECIPIENTS.

Obviously, this was a crucial juncture in the history of humankind the birth of Christ's church! It almost seems, from a purely human viewpoint, that Jesus left us just when we needed Him the most! He gave His followers an impossible task "to go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature", and then returned back to His Father in heaven, denying us of His physical Person and Presence! All His followers had were His teachings AND His promise that He would send them ANOTHER COMFORTER in the Person of His Holy Spirit. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT BIBLE BELIEVERS CONNECT THIS CONCENTRATION OF GOD'S GREAT GRACE WITH THE PERSON AND OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!!

WHY? was God doing this, and WHY? at this time? BECAUSE IT WAS, AND IS, GOD'S FINAL CALL!!! God's purpose, in and through Christ, is to call out of humanity a holy group who has said "Good-bye!" to every sinful and evil attraction and influence of this world, and who will serve Jesus Christ as their eternal Savior, Lord and King. The church is God's final hope of everlasting life, and that is what makes THE TIMING critical. There will be no greater or more intense or stronger appeal to unbelievers among humankind than through Spirit-filled Christians. The call, through Spirit-filled Christians, IS AN ULTIMATE ONE AND A FINAL ONE!!

Then there are THE RECIPIENTS to consider. WHO are those unspeakably honored individuals to whom this great grace is given? They must be a special group indeed who experience this unprecedented manifestation of God's grace in the Person of God's Holy Spirit!

I need to caution and warn us here! The unusual and rare can become common, and this well-known truth needs to be constantly kept before our minds. We have known nothing BUT grace in our lifetimes. Because of its abundance -- because of its liberality -- because of its generous bestowals -- humankind as a whole has wasted and squandered it, recklessly and wantonly! It is fearfully human to waste what is abundant! I know of nothing more ominous than to squander the grace of God in general, and to ignore and reject God's Spirit of grace in particular. THERE IS A

DOWNSIDE TO GRACE, as wonderful and amazing as it is, and that fearful consequence is that EACH PERSON WHO HAS BEEN CARELESS WITH GOD'S GRACE MUST ANSWER FOR ITS ABUSE!! We are not left wondering about the accuracy of these statements just made, and I quote from Hebrews 10:28 & 29:

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

"Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, (here is the critical point) AND HATH DONE (INSULT) UNTO THE SPIRIT OF GRACE?"

There are, perhaps, many ideas of "how" this occurs. What concerns me, and should concern any serious Christian, is THAT IT CAN OCCUR. The Holy Spirit, Who Paul here characterizes as "the Spirit of grace", CAN BE INSULTED, to the point where there is no remedy or recovery. I call that serious business.

Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians of his day in 1, 4:7 and 8:

"For God hath not called us unto (immoral) uncleanness, but unto holiness.

"He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, Who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit."

My guess is that there are few of us who read this verse as it was written. It is most natural for us to place incorrect emphasis on the word "holy". If you were following in the King James Version as I read these two verses, you should have noted that the word "holy" is not capitalized. In this instance, God wanted us to recognize THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT and not just His name or identity.

The Amplified Version is more accurate in its translation, when it states:

"...(God's) very Spirit (Whom) He gives to you (is) holy, chaste, pure."

J.B. Phillips translation is so clear on this point that I have had it written in my King James Version for many years. He writes:

"It is not for nothing that the Spirit God gives us is called the Holy Spirit."

You may wonder why this seems to be so important to a pastor facing the world in the 1999 church? It is because my heart is so heavy and fearful FOR THE EXTREME LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT IN TODAY'S PROFESSED CHURCH. His graciousness and extravagant offers of mercy have been horribly abused in the modern church. The love of God has been used as a shield for sin. The grace of God has been twisted into an escape from the responsibility for sin, and God's mercy has become a dumping ground for behavior among church people that even unbelievers abhor!!

Personal holiness is almost laughed at by a modern church drunk on false perceptions of grace. Grace in any form does not provide a license for sin in any form!!! God's love never has or never will give any human an excuse for unholy actions! **JESUS CHRIST DID NOT DIE TO PROVIDE AN EXCUSE FOR SIN. HE DIED TO PROVIDE A REMEDY FOR IT!!!** Jesus did not die to provide a religious "ointment" for the superficial symptoms of human sin. **HE DIED TO DEAL THE DEATH BLOW TO IT!!** He died to **DELIVER** us from the power of sin. Paul adamantly stated to the Roman Christians in 6:14 that,

"...sin shall not have dominion over you",

and in verse 22,

"...now being **MADE FREE FROM SIN**, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

I do not know about the rest of you good people here, but I am regularly disheartened by the brazen challenges of so-called Christians today who openly flaunt the "freedom in Christ" that allows them just about any kind of conduct and lifestyle because they have been "born-again", and as such are a part of the body of Christ. Where is this coming from? How can professed Christians today drink and smoke and do drugs and sleep around and live together outside of marriage, and cuss and tell dirty stories, and divorce and remarry without biblical grounds, and abort babies, and excite themselves with vile pornography, and lie and cheat and steal? If I missed anything, I apologize. At least when I was a kid, people who lived like that and acted like that were classified as sinners. How did the church get in a compromising fix like this? **A LITTLE BIT AT A TIME. BY MAKING EXCEPTIONS AND ALLOWANCES. BY PREACHING A LOVE WITHOUT INHIBITION AND A GRACE WITHOUT RESTRAINT!!!** Dr Richard Taylor said it like this:

"When we whittle down the gospel, we soon whittle it away." Amen!!

We want to enhance this discussion with the observation that holy people, that is, Christians **WHO ARE IN CHARACTER WITH JESUS**, have a single, dominating, obvious manner of humility about them, and I refuse to allow today's church move my soul from this heavenly consciousness! At retirement age now as I write these lines, I have mingled with, and interestingly observed, God's children over a lifetime. Without exception, irrespective of church affiliation or doctrinal persuasion, godly Christians **INVARIABLY** manifest an absence of arrogance and self-importance. They characteristically are gracious and self-effacing. They habitually seek to serve and bless and help and encourage. **THE DIRECTION OF ALL OF THEIR LIVES IS AN OUTFLOW!!!**

Many of you are aware that I have been privileged to work as a builder through my life along with full-time pastoring. Other than the ubiquitous hammer (that means "ever present"), I cannot carpenter without a level and a square. Maybe a few of you would like to learn that a level and a plumb are the same tool. It is a level if held horizontally, but a plumb if used perpendicularly. God's Word refers to His laws as "being a plumb line", or that method by which

we determine truth and rightness. I have used this common example to illustrate a most critical point.

THE WAY JESUS LIVED, AND WHAT HE TAUGHT, AND WHAT HE REQUIRED, IS EVERY CHRISTIAN'S PLUMB-LINE. If we plan to get to heaven when this physical life is over, we are not going to be measuring our lives and conduct by any other Christian's, including pastors and parents, and so-called "born-again" movie stars and sports celebrities, and Christian authors and writers, and Bible commentaries, and religious music and musicians, and radio and TV programs and preachers. If we plan to make heaven our home when life is over, WE ARE GOING TO BURY OUR NOSES IN GOD'S WORD AND ALWAYS MAKE IT OUR FINAL MEANS OF AUTHORITY. We are going to be doing all within our ability to discover Who God is and what He expects and wants us to be like as we live for Him and His cause. DISCOVERING JESUS IS OUR LIFE AND CONSTANT GOAL. We have to be students of God's grace if we intend to be successful as a real Christian!

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Chapter 17 GREAT GRACE -- Part 4

There is no way I know about to "get inside of" the grace of God without seriously studying HIS GRACIOUSNESS His gracious nature. Knowing about Him is discovering how to be like Him. There is nothing more certain on this universe than that God wants to impart Who He is with ANY INDIVIDUAL who "hungers and thirsts" for Him! The church must insist on the fulfillment of Jesus' promises, or salvation through Christ has no validity at all! And His promise in this regard is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they SHALL BE FILLED." (SEE Matthew 5:6) We have the majority of the world's theologians and preachers and religious writers loudly and consistently telling us that "there is none righteous, no not one", and yet Jesus gave His followers a promise here that certainly sounds just the opposite. Among other certainties, He PROMISED that there was a righteousness THAT WAS OBTAINABLE, that there was A WAY TO OBTAIN IT, and that it was not only possible for His followers to get it BUT TO BE FILLED WITH IT!

Now, let the theologians squabble about what that all means if they want to spend their time doing that, but for the average "Joe Blow" Christians like me, I am just going to take Jesus at His word and believe that there is something wonderful and great that He has for me, and GO FOR IT!!! I say this humbly, but of necessity. These past few years have been for me like digging in a spiritual gold mine as the Lord has graciously shared Himself with my poor mind. It is like God has opened up to me the vaults of heaven's grace and knowledge, and I would be a liar if I did not tell anyone who would listen that GOD IS NOT ONLY A GIVER, BUT HE WILL SHARE HIMSELF WITH WHOMEVER WANTS TO KNOW HIM. If the hunger is there, He has promised to fulfill it.

BUT IT GOES FAR BEYOND THAT, and this is wonderful for me to talk to us about! GOD SHARES WHO HE IS WITH US SO THAT WE WILL BECOME LIKE HIM! He not only wants us to learn of His graciousness and generosity and big-heartedness, BUT HE WANTS US

TO KNOW THOSE THINGS SO THAT HE CAN MAKE US LIKE THAT!! This is what happened to the early disciples when this "GREAT GRACE" filled them in the Person and presence of the Holy Spirit!! God wants us to know Him better and better so that He can fill our hearts and minds and souls with His Presence and Person.

I have shared with us before about the kind of Person God is, and we are seeing that He is not Who we have pictured Him to often before. I have told us that God does not strut. He is great and mighty and powerful and awesome and glorious and magnificent beyond all human ability to comprehend, BUT HE DOES NOT STRUT!!!

The reason why "no flesh shall glory in His presence" is because NOBODY DOES! NO beings glory in His presence, because He does not glory in His own presence. "Glorying" is not an act of God, that is, He does not glorify Himself. He is a glorious Being. He is a glorious Being Who is worthy of being glorified. All other beings DO glorify Him because He is "glory-worthy". Who He is glorious. His presence is glorious, and the atmosphere all around Him is glorious, but still He does not glorify Himself. It is not a forethought of God or an act of God to glorify Himself. GOD IS NOT A SELF-ADULATING BEING-- THAT IS THE POINT!!!

He is naturally and characteristically HUMBLE. He does not strut. Only proud beings strut and aggrandize themselves. The reason they do that is that they are trying to be something they are not. That is why God does not strut, and He does not glorify Himself, because He IS glorious and gracious in Himself without needing to prove anything about Himself to anyone. There is nothing about God or in His nature that is self-promotional. GOD IS NOT EGO-CENTRIC. Only arrogant and proudful beings are ego-centric. God is gracious He is a giver. Exodus 34:6

God is a person, and I know this sounds trite to make such a seemingly common statement, but when we make this admission, I do not think most of us really believe it. We talk about Him as a friend, but I wonder if we really believe that? Do we really think He is approachable, and conversational, and relational? Or, is He only a "presence, and a far-removed figment of our imaginations?"

What we do know is that HE MADE A WAY TO COME NEAR TO US. He wanted us to know Him personally, and to find out Who He was and what He was really like. "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh, AND DWELT AMONG US... full of grace and truth.. ." (SEE John 1:1 & 14). Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, AND ALL WE HAVE TO DO TO DISCOVER WHO GOD IS, AND WHAT KIND OF A PERSON HE IS, IS TO STUDY JESUS What an unspeakable privilege we humans possess in coming to know Jesus!

Discovering God through Jesus is so obvious that I fear we overlook the specialty of it because He is so accessible! God is so awesome and magnificent and glorious and humanly overpowering in His Old Testament approaches to humankind that we almost overlook the simple, childlike, meek, quietness in which He revealed Himself through Jesus of Galilee! When Jesus described Himself in Matthew 11:29 as "meek and lowly in heart" He was NOT identifying a characteristic of His humanness but of His deity! One of the Savior's most difficult tasks on earth was the re-orientation of our human minds to His thinking and ways! And one of our biggest challenges is to not humanize God.

WE HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING OURSELVES THAT GOD NEEDED NOTHING, and does not need now or ever will need, ANYTHING FROM THE HUMAN RACE. Nothing He did in designing and creating and redeeming, and eventually glorifying, the human family DID ANYTHING FOR HIM. It was, and is, ALL FOR US! We are, we exist, because of His grace, and nothing else.

What we would bring to God was disappointment and pain and heartache and sadness that He never would have known without us. If God had not brought into existence our first human parent, Adam, IT WOULD HAVE COST HIM NOTHING AND WOULD HAVE SPARED HIM MORE THAN WE WILL EVER COMPREHEND. But He is a gracious Being! He WANTS to share Who He is with other beings. He does not want to be unknown and undiscovered. Jesus nailed down this incredible fact in John 4:23 when He stated: "... the Father SEEKS such to worship Him...." It is an AMAZING thought that God would actually SEEK a relationship with humankind! and these words of verse came to my mind some time ago.

AMAZED!

I am amazed that God would think of me
When robed in heavenly glory;
That One Who wore eternity
Would start the human story.

I am amazed that He would plan
Beings such as we --
Endowing minds and wills that can
Decide our destiny.

I am amazed that He would move our way,
Reserving a special place
Within His great and gracious heart --
Room for the human race.

I am amazed that He Who saw it all
And knew the deepest cost;
Looked far beyond our miserable fall
Agreeing to save the lost.

I am amazed at These great Three,
Who sees end from end;
Would effect a plan so perfectly
Designed to be man's friend.

I am amazed that He would care
Enough to invite the pain --
Long before He started there,

He knew would pierce His heart again.

I am amazed that He could see
It clearly at the start;
Knowing it would surely be
The blade aimed at His heart.

What kind of God is this
Who suffers in man's place?
What hope? What help? What love? What bliss?
IT'S CALLED AMAZING GRACE!

-- by W.L. Boone --
3/7/97

And so, if we would be a true Christian, our work is clearly set before us **TO BE LIKE JESUS!** Our work is not to hold offices within the visible church (remember how misguided James and John were in their kingdom ambition?). Our work is not to be recognized, and approved, and applauded. Our work is not to sing and play and teach and administer and preach. Our work is not even to pray mighty prayers or exhibit great faith! If we answer His call to follow Him, our job descriptions are **SINGULAR, DIRECT AND SIMPLE!** Jesus said plainly it was to "Get in My yoke here with Me, **AND LEARN OF ME!**" There is no bigger or more important job in Christ's church than to sit at His feet and discover Who He is, and let me quickly add, there is nothing about being a Christian that is more satisfying! **BEING CHRIST-LIKE IS OUR ONLY TASK!!** Everything else we are and do within His body, the church, is secondary.

I vigorously reject those flippant statements made by shallow church people that some Christians "are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good", and the idea in this statement is that, "we need to do more than read the Bible and pray." Such thinking has no validity at all, and in fact reveals to my mind at least, a clear absence of what real godliness consists.

This is the reason why the Holy Spirit wants me to talk to us about this matter of **GREAT GRACE** resting upon, and working out through, God's people. You cannot really know God without this graciousness of His getting into our minds and thought processes and actions. Since God is gracious, those who know Him are gracious, and if we are not thinking and acting graciously, **WE DO NOT KNOW GOD VERY WELL.** The more we really know about Jesus, the more we will be givers and servers. **GRACE IS AN OUTFLOW,** and I know I say this a lot, but we just are not understanding Who Jesus is until we start seeing ourselves **AS A SERVANT!!** We are in character with God when we have a servant's disposition when we see ourselves **AS INDEBTED** to those around us, saved **OR** unsaved. The Christians who know most about the Lord are the servers and the givers.

Now, this is not something you "can take on", or "assume". It is not "a role to be played." It is not "a position' to take" or an attitude to be assumed. **IT HAS TO BE IN OUR HEARTS,** and come from the heart or it does not last. As soon as it is disdained or unappreciated or misunderstood, it will be abandoned **IF IT IS NOT IN OUR HEARTS.** If we do not see

graciousness and serving and giving as being in character with the Lord, and if we do not see it as pleasing and approving to Him because He is like that, we will give it up and lay it aside.

There are TWO, HUGE areas of misunderstanding in the church on these two issues over which I have observed other Christians struggling, and with which I have spent myriad hours, and long sessions in prayer, of heart searching in my own mind. I repeat a truth here that I have consistently affirmed all through my ministry. None of us wants to "fail of the grace of God", and what is meant here is that serious Christians want to appropriate all of the grace God has provided for us. Serious Christians are not "looking for any loopholes" that would superficially provide allowances from "living up to" all of God's expectations in His redemptive grace. On the other hand, neither do we want to elevate expectations in attitudes and behaviors that EXCEEDS God's requirements and expectations. I know of no single issue in which Satan tries the hardest to confuse the church more than this one of heart purity and deliverance from the carnal mind.

Having said this, the two huge areas of misunderstanding over "the differences between repressing the carnal nature, and 'keeping our bodies under'", are these. They are (1) the distinction between, the mind and the heart, and (2) the distinction between carnality and humanity. If these two distinctions are not clarified, defined, and addressed, spiritual confusion and defeat reigns in the body of Christ. Happily, ALL FOUR ITEMS OF CONSIDERATION are clearly and distinctly different words in the Greek, the language of the New Testament. The word for heart is "cardias" and the mind, "neos". Carnal comes from the Greek word "sarx", and the physical body from the word "soma". In Romans 8:6, the Apostle Paul both complicates, and at the same time enhances, our understanding by the combination of the two. He says there,

"For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

I am just a shepherd/pastor with a Spirit-filled heart, and claim to be neither a theologian or a linguist. These efforts and thoughts that are presented to your minds are drawn from the well of my own walk with God, and constantly submitted to the inspection and surveillance of the faithful Holy Spirit for accuracy and clarity. My goal is to assist a specific group of Christians, and I do not hesitate to identify and define them. THIS STUDY IS FOR BELIEVERS WHO WANT ALL GOD HAS FOR THEM. It is for those who love God supremely, and who are holding nothing back from God in their devotion and commitment to Him. It is for those who have determined to walk in all the light God gives them whatever the cost, and ultimately make heaven their home. Christians who do not fit into the above WILL FIND A STUDY LIKE THIS DISTASTEFUL, DISAPPOINTING AND UNINTERESTING.

My dear listeners and readers, contrary to what many in the church accept and think, there are not varying levels of Christian commitment. There never has been "categories" of Christians, or "degrees" of love, or "stages" of devotion. GOD HAS ALWAYS DEMANDED TOTAL LOVE from His followers and always will. There are stages of development, and levels of abilities, and categories of talents and gifts among the followers of God, BUT ONLY AND ALWAYS FULL OBEDIENCE AND TOTAL LOVE!! Anything less than that has been consistently and summarily rejected by the Lord as inadequate!! God requires as much love from a brand, new Christian as He does a lifelong one. There is no state of grace or level of Christian experience that releases any of

us from "loving God with ALL our hearts, and ALL our souls, and ALL our strength, and ALL our minds.

I tell you that we still face the cross! We are still running the race, and we are still fighting the war, and our crowns are yet to be won! We have not yet "resisted unto blood, striving against sin"! There "is no discharge from this war" as long as we are in the body! **NO CHRISTIAN CAN ASSUME NEUTRALITY IN THE CHRISTIAN FIGHT AGAINST SIN AND THE FLESH!** We err greatly when we think that "getting saved and sanctified" ends the conflict. God's precious Word constantly **PROMISES PEACE, AND REST OF SOUL, BUT NEVER IN MIND, BODY, EMOTIONS, TEMPERAMENTS, TEMPTATIONS, TRIALS AND OFTEN CRUEL TESTS TO OUR FAITH.** THIS is what we address in this discussion of what to expect of Spirit-filled Christians.

I know of no better biblical illustration of these considerations than Paul's experience in Macedonia as he described it to the Corinthian Church in 2 Corinthians 7:5 and 6, and I quote:

"For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

"Nevertheless God, (Who) comforteth those (who) are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus."

I am amazed at contemporary preachers who depreciate and set in judgment on the Apostle Paul and our Lord, Himself, who both forthrightly and candidly state **THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE TROUBLES!!!** We are only kidding ourselves when we think we make our troubles and trials easier and better by putting a positive "spin" on them. I have this unshaken perception that Paul had to be temperamentally "normal", and I mean by that -- that he was neither a morbid pessimist or a ditsy optimist. I sincerely thank God that neither the gushy positivists or the hypocritical "health and prosperity" preachers of today did not write the Bible. **WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO HAVE FIRMLY SETTLED IN HIS SOUL, whatever his or her temperament, IS THAT GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR US!!!**

Hear me now! **GOD IS GOING TO TAKE US THROUGH!!** Whoever we are, and whatever our temperaments, and varying strengths and weaknesses, **GOD'S ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE IS ADEQUATE AND APPLICABLE!!** There is nothing about us or within us that God's grace cannot, or will not, minister to and support and elevate. God's grace will affect the classic optimist who smiles at catastrophes and shuffles when everyone else is running for cover. And His grace will see that His will is accomplished through those precious saints who see a crises in everything.

Whoever said that the Bible says that worry is a sin needs to point out the chapter and verse to me. I discovered long ago that those who condemn worriers never address the areas of their worries. What is a big bother to many of us is a breeze to others, and the opposite is equally true. Over the span of a lifetime of ministry, I have had to worry about many matters that were left unattended and unaddressed by others in the body of Christ. **RESPONSIBILITY BRINGS CONCERN**, and if you do not like the term "worry", then use "concern". And just to set the record

straight, the word "worry" is not even in the Bible, and the King James Version IS the Bible, you know! The point is that some of us are temperamentally suited to assume responsibility and leadership, and would in fact, be very unfulfilled and unchallenged in any other role. Others of us are temperamentally passive and compliant, and work the best in a structured environment.

Few of us have what I would term "extreme" temperaments, thank the Lord! You hear me often say that there are only marginal differences in any of us. Most of us Christians are combinations of all the various types of temperaments, and again we can thank the Lord for that blessing! Having said that, I promise you that Satan, our accuser, will do his worst to sell each of us on the idea that "we are one of those temperamentally weak Christians." My educated guess is that there is not a single one of us listening and reading just now who has not been told by Satan that "we were the weakest and worst and least valuable Christian who ever followed Christ"?

We may as well get used to the fact THAT THE DEVIL WILL MAGNIFY OUR WEAKNESSES! He will invariably try to make us think THAT THOSE WEAKNESSES PREDOMINATE US! If we could visualize our temperamental and emotional systems as a piano keyboard of 88 individual keys, or notes, and JUST ONE OF THE 88 were out of tune, the enemy of our souls would be would be pounding ON THAT ONE, vigorously and continuously!! Think of it! If all of the other 87 strings were in perfect tune, the old devil would be beating us up over that one, single weakness that was out of tune! THERE IS NO STATE OF GRACE THAT WILL PRODUCE PERFECT TEMPERAMENTS AND EMOTIONAL SYSTEMS, AND BODIES AND MINDS!! God's grace will never unify our temperaments and opinions and minds, and likes and dislikes, BUT IT WILL AND DOES UNIFY OUR HEARTS in a oneness of spirit, and constantly harmonizes our goals to discover HIS WILL AND PURPOSES FOR THE CHURCH.

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Chapter 18 WHO IS THE GREATEST?

Matthew 18:1-6

I am constantly impressed with how differently Jesus viewed people and valued things compared to the people who surrounded Him in His day, and also, compared to the people all around us today. I think that we can safely draw two rather defensible conclusions: one is that human nature doesn't change much from one generation to the other, and the second is that what God sees and thinks about us is generally unchanged. If this is a correct conclusion, and I trust that you are in agreement with it, then it seems to me that we might safely transpose ourselves to become a part of that group of disciples who surrounded Him on this occasion. We are His disciples and He is our lord and Savior, so it seems to me that we could properly visualize ourselves in attendance here with Peter, James and John and the others.

The Capernaum setting of this important occasion, and its all-important truth, is highly significant. The phrase in verse one, "at the same time", places this scene at Capernaum, or at least, somewhere in the immediate vicinity. Capernaum and its immediately surrounding area was actually more Jesus' home town than Nazareth, His childhood home.

Most of us can identify with this. We generally consider our hometown the place of our school days and teen-aged memories and experiences. I would consider Hermiston, Oregon my hometown, though we didn't move there until I was in the sixth grade. This was where most of the memorable instances of my school day's life occurred, and this would be the place where I would be remembered and where people still live who knew me. All three of our children would instantly identify Coeur d'Alene, Idaho as their "hometown", even though they were eight, five and four years of age respectively when we moved here. This may be the same for many or even most of us here this morning.

Even so, Capernaum is classified by historians and Bible scholars as "his own city" when referring to it in connection with Jesus. Capernaum was enough of Jesus' own city to be the place where He was taxed and paid His taxes. The last few verses of the preceding chapter (17) relates the story of Peter's catching a fish, at Jesus' specific instruction, and removing a large enough coin out of its mouth to pay both His and Peter's taxes. What a story! One wonders how Peter, of all people, could have ever doubted and denied Jesus. I realize that this is repetition and that I say it often, but miracles don't persuade people to believe in Jesus Christ. Out of the hundreds of individuals who were healed by Jesus, and out of the thousands of those who witnessed those miracles, you would have thought that SOME of them would have stuck by Him when He was condemned and crucified. But none of them did except His Mother, His Aunt Mary and Mary Magdalene.

Capernaum was where Peter and Andrew lived and, no doubt, it was somewhere near, along the seashore at the northwestern tip of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus saw them mending their fishing nets and led them to "follow Him and He would make them fishers of men."

Capernaum was Matthew's home. It was where many miracles maybe more than at any other one place, were performed by Jesus. Some of these were the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the demon-possessed son who the disciples could not heal, and the centurion's servant and the paralytic and also the "fish" story referred to above.

Capernaum was where His brothers and other relatives refused to believe in Him and criticized and rejected His deity and His mighty works. Some of the saddest words in the Bible are recorded in John 7:5, "For neither did His brethren believe in Him." Capernaum was where at another time, He could do no mighty works because of their unbelief." SEE Matthew 15:38

Capernaum was the place where Jesus pronounced one of His severest judgments, and I want to read this because of how it reveals the sobering results of rejected light and truth. It is found in Matthew 11:20-24 if you care to follow in your Bibles.

"Then He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works was done, because they repented not.

"Woe unto thee Chorazin! Woe unto thee. Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

"But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

"And thou, Capernaum which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to Hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day.

"But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

And so it is at Capernaum where the disciples of Jesus approach Him with this rather dubious question of "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"? I call it dubious because of its obvious similarity to a later request made by James' and John's mother that perhaps her two boys could be the two persons to occupy the two most prominent positions in His kingdom to come. I have to conclude that this question was a loaded one. The askers had some thing less than pure motives when the question was put. I don't think that the answer Jesus gave was anywhere near what they were expecting. What was the question? "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" What a coincidence. That is exactly the title of this morning's message.

There is considerable wonderment in my mind as to why any follower of Jesus would ever have such a question in his mind. My walk with God has led me to some rather shocking discoveries about both His nature, and accordingly, the natures of those whose highest motives become like His own.

Greatness as God knows it doesn't have the clout, or the place of power and honor in other words, that it occupies within humanity. Repeatedly Jesus showed us by both teaching and example that true greatness has more to do with serving and honoring than it did being served and honored -- the exact opposite of how mankind sees it. **THE MORE A PERSON LEARNS ABOUT GOD AND HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, AND THE CLOSER ONE GETS TO HIS HEART, THE MORE HE WANTS TO GIVE AND THE LESS ONE WANTS TO GET, both in this life and in the world to come.**

WHAT BECOMES IMPORTANT IN A PERSON'S WALK WITH GOD IS THE RELATIONSHIP THAT EXISTS BETWEEN YOU, NOT WHAT YOU CAN GET FROM ONE ANOTHER. It is more like two people who have loved each other for a long time, and how their love and devotion deepens beyond mere physical attraction. All of us have witnessed a spouse hovering over the shrunken and twisted body of a dying companion. See the love and tenderness expressed in the eyes and the gentle pressure of held hands? **THE STRENGTH OF LOVE IS IN THE RELATIONSHIP TO A PERSON. AND NOT A BODY.** The value of love is in a bond of devotion and confidence developed through experiences shared together that just the two of you knows about.

And so it is with our walk with God. As time passes, you build up a unique relationship that correlates very much with spousal ones here on earth. After awhile you have a "scrapbook of

experiences" that you find yourself going to increasingly, and you discover new and wonderful aspects that you never knew before about your heavenly Father.

JUST ONE of these discoveries about God is that He is a giver by nature and not a taker. A person seeing this and discovering this begins to slowly take on that same characteristic towards Him and towards those persons around him. Mark it down THAT A TAKING CHRISTIAN, A CHRISTIAN WHO WANTS TO BE SERVED PAID ATTENTION TO, RECOGNIZED AND HONORED, DOESN'T KNOW GOD VERY WELL. So, you can see how any reader or listener who has come to know much about God had immediate wonderment about the motives of this question. It is clear that HONOR AND RECOGNITION is the motive here, and Jesus' response was immediate, impressive and totally unexpected. His answer uncovered at least four aspects of greatness as understood in an eternal, heavenly context.

The FIRST ASPECT of greatness as God sees it is that a person must be converted and become as a little child. I can almost hear the "OOMPH" sound as the wind goes out of some intellectual sails. That wasn't anywhere near the expected answer! "Is that really what Jesus said? Did we hear Him correctly? That we have to become as a little child?" I can just visualize the old mental wheels spinning out in the superficial terrain of the praise of men. I can visualize these men's minds high centering on the unyielding rock of heavenly logic. Yes, Jesus meant what He said. He wasn't just joking or teasing. He didn't do that whenever He taught lessons of truth. THE FIRST STEP TO GREATNESS IN GOD'S SIGHT IS TO COME DOWN, and in a sense, start at the bottom.

No concept is simpler or more comprehensible to us than that of birth and growth, and Jesus used both ideas in His explanations of how people get into the kingdom of God. He said in John, chapter three, that we must be "born" into God's kingdom, that we must experience a spiritual birth. In this instance, He used the term "converted", or turned around, or changed.

Aren't you fascinated by Jesus' usage of the verb "become" here? I am. It sounds like a process, doesn't it? I understand this to mean that spiritual conversion, or being born again spiritually, starts a process of becoming AS A LITTLE CHILD. That sounds more like retrogression or regression, doesn't it? A conditioning begins to occur when a person is converted, and here is what that means.

It means that we have to re-learn a lot about ATTITUDES AND CONDUCT. It means that our thinking about what is right and wrong, and especially what God thinks is important and what is unimportant, has to be changed. And here is a strange twist along this line. It doesn't matter whether a person has been raised in the church or out of the church, he still has to be born again for Christian principles to work. Being raised and trained in matters of the Christian faith gets the principles into our heads, BUT THEY HAVE TO EXIST IN OUR HEARTS: OR THEY JUST WON'T WORK. That's why it is generally easier to disciple new Christians who are saved outside of the church than those saved in the church.

People saved "out of the raw", so to speak, don't have so much to unlearn before they can start learning. People who realize they are at "square one", are seeing themselves accurately, while people saved who have been raised in the church tend to start their Christian development

where they are intellectually. It's very hard to help them see that, even though they learned ABOUT Christianity all of those years of Sunday school and sermons, when they get saved, they are still a baby IN THEIR HEARTS: and the spiritual development process is just beginning, like any other new Christian.

This is why it is almost a curse for a person to continue to cram his head full of Christian facts if he hasn't had a heart change. We must not allow the church to EVER believe and preach that you can grow before you are born. This is a dangerous error, and it is just as true in the spiritual realm and it is the physical. Every Christian parent, every Sunday school teacher, youth worker and pastor must not fail to evangelize along with biblical teaching. WE MUST LEAD THE UNSAVED TO A SPIRITUAL BIRTH, or we will be as unsuccessful in disciplining as the effort to instruct a corpse

I know that I preach a lot about this, but God lays it on my heart and I see the results of such failure all over the church. I am not emphasizing the need of being truly born again any more than Jesus did. Repeatedly Jesus told His listeners that if they knew His Father, then they would accept Him that if they had been "born from above", they would believe Him -- that if they had spiritual life in them, they would love Him.

So, the very first plateau on the way to discovering the highest ground in the Christian experience, and the Christians who attain the highest stature in God's kingdom are those who are born again and BEGIN TO DEVELOP THE ATTITUDES OF A LITTLE CHILD. And every follower of Jesus is greatly relieved that Jesus goes on to explain what He means by this. That leads to the SECOND ASPECT of true Christian greatness as set down by Jesus in verse four.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself AS THIS LITTLE CHILD, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Humility is much taught, talked and preached about. What I hear and read about it is so watered down and explained away that I am both disappointed and depressed at the discussion. Hardly any Christian is willing to admit that it operates in his own heart, and that is understandable. Saying that God has placed true humility in our hearts would make us extremely uncomfortable, but neither can we be dishonest and, at least, recognize the change that grace has brought into our innermost heart-rooms. We certainly want to have the spirit of Jesus in all of our thoughts and heart attitudes, but we also want God to get the proper praise for what His grace has done, and is doing, in our lives.

In most Christian circles, true humility is viewed as so rare that the way we handle it is to place it as a high and lofty goal to be striven for but never quite attained. This just cannot be, and we must not minimize or abandon humility operative and active in our hearts for a very specific reason. JESUS SAYS HERE THAT IT IS A REQUIREMENT FOR GETTING INTO HEAVEN. Just look at it again in verse three.

"Except ye be converted, and become as a little child, ye shall NOT enter into the kingdom of heaven."

This looks to me like a person should place this rather high on his agenda of how to act and live the Christian life when getting to heaven depends on it!

There is no reason for confusion and no excuse for misunderstanding or misinterpretation about what is expected of Christians in this regard. The meaning is so simple that a child could understand it. The four words, "AS THIS LITTLE CHILD", explains the exact meaning of true Christian humility and comes to the church as the historic message of readiness and acceptability before God. Does it really matter how we are viewed by those around us? I know that we care what others think, but what they think about us and what the condition of our hearts is, is generally miles apart. Our intense interest must focus on what God sees in our hearts, and Jesus makes it perfectly clear here that He is looking for hearts that have the disposition of little children. They are the ones going to heaven.

If a Christian has a heart attitude of a little child, the blessed attitudes (or beatitudes) Jesus gave us in the sermon on the mount makes perfect sense, and His teaching about us having a servant disposition towards other persons brings smiles of comprehension to our minds, and it might even spread to our faces. It's a wonderful comprehension to truly sense in your heart that you are in debt to God and others, and that, rather than them owing you something, you are the one who owes them. Only Jesus can give us hearts like that. Only God's wonderful grace can replace selfish, grasping desires with serving ones.

You see, there is a world beyond this globe where there is no "pride of life" as identified in 1 John 2:16. It states that the "pride of life is not of the Father, but of the world (system)." It comes to most of us as a shock to realize THAT GOD, THE FATHER IS HUMBLE IN NATURE. He is powerful, but not pompous. He is almighty, but not arrogant, Contrary to most human thought, God has absolutely no interest in controlling other beings, including human beings. He seeks peace and harmony between individuals. He seeks love and respect and mutuality among all of His creation. In all of this vast universe, IT IS ONLY ON EARTH WHERE THERE IS FIGHTING, HATRED AND DISHARMONY. Only here will one find rivalry and treachery and cruelty and bondage and slavery. Only mankind subjects one another to a system of superlatives -- "Who's the greatest, and who's the best?" We're going to get some big surprises in heaven, but not because we were untaught or untold. Repeatedly Jesus tells us that there is a big difference in our values and in His. We generally just don't pay enough attention to what He clearly tells us about what is important to Him.

Jesus tries to tell us again and again that a holy heart is one that has a serving and giving attitude -- not because it is SUPPOSED to, but because it WANTS to. It is its thinking and its nature to. And the wonderful realization is that such a characteristic that is operative in a person's innermost being DOESN'T feel demeaned, or "put upon", or "put down", or abused or used. IT IS AN INTRINSIC COMPONENT OF GOD'S GRACE WITHIN US TO WANT TO spend and do and give for others -- to discover real happiness in making them happy -- in making their load a bit lighter -- in creating a pleasant atmosphere to those around us.

This is unnatural to our generally selfish dispositions, and is impossible without a change of nature. We all know that and therefore can see the need of a conversion. We need a character change that infuses us with a disposition that is like God's.

Two of my favorite scriptures are found in the Old Testament, and both of them come from the mind and nature of heaven's God. If you care to follow along as I read, you can turn first to Isaiah 57:15 and then to Isaiah 66:1-2.

"For thus saith the high and lofty ONE that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, WITH HIM ALSO THAT IS OF A CONTRITE AND HUMBLE SPIRIT, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the spirit of the contrite one."

And then, to chapter 66, verses one and two:

"Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? And where is the place on My rest?"

"For all of those things have Mine hand made, and all of those things have been, saith the Lord: BUT TO THIS MAN WILL I LOOK, EVEN TO HIM THAT IS POOR AND OF A CONTRITE SPIRIT, and trembleth at My word."

The THIRD ASPECT of God's definition of true greatness concerns the persons who treat God's favored people with love and kindness. In verse five Jesus makes another explosive statement when He says that receiving those whose heart attitudes are meek and humble as a little child IS THE SAME AS RECEIVING HIM. The way that Christlike people are being treated is viewed by God as the same as acting that way towards Jesus, Himself!

This should not be hard to understand at all. Any time, anyone we love very much is offended or hurt that offense doesn't stop there. Oh, no! You also hurt the persons who stand by their sides, especially spouses. The adage, "Aim at a child's head and you'll hit a parent's heart" is changeless and ever true. Statements or attitudes, whether they are positive or negative, have powerful effect on family members and loved ones. The truth is here: THE MORE A PERSON IS LOVED, THE MORE PAIN OR PLEASURE ACCRUES TO THOSE WHO LOVE THAT PERSON THROUGH THE ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEM.

Jesus is making a plain and powerful statement here. IF YOU OFFEND THOSE I LOVE, YOU OFFEND ME.

Now it should be loudly proclaimed here that if anyone wants to get and stay on the right side of Jesus, we had better make a concentrated search for the persons He has a special attraction to -- IT IS THOSE WHO HAVE CHILDLIKE ATTITUDES, the very attitudes depicted by Jesus here is the stuff out of which greatness is made.

If we could take a tour through the vault of heaven, that is, wherever God has His treasures and valuables, it would appear completely different from treasure repositories here on earth. Instead of gold, silver, precious stones and money, we would witness God's valuables: INTEGRITY, LOYALTY, PURITY, HUMILITY, SELFLESSNESS, KINDNESS, COURTESY, GRACIOUSNESS, FAITH AND CONFIDENCE, LONG-SUFFERING AND LOVE. God is far more interested in what we give of ourselves than what we give out of our pocketbooks. GOD IS

INTO PEACE AND HARMONY INSTEAD OF POWER AND POSITION. God is really concerned more with our attitudes towards and treatment of others than any of our religious posturing. Jesus made this specific statement so that all of us could take a solemn inventory of how we view and treat others, **ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WHO WALK CLOSE TO GOD.**

Jesus is giving a clear warning in this passage. He is warning us of how easy it is to overlook His special people. This is not to suggest that the Lord places His special people on a pedestal or that they are favored in the sense of receiving special treatment. It is favor in the same sense that parents have a special appreciation for those of their offspring who are more obedient and inclined to do what is right and good. A child who has a nature that tends towards virtue finds a special place in a parent's heart, even though his love is as great towards the rebellious and wandering ones. Any parent understands this, and it has nothing to do with preference. It has more to do with a similarity in values than favoritism.

The emphasis here is on being careful to place value in what God values, and this is why Jesus said that we must be careful to not offend those persons who He values highly because of their humility and meekness of spirit. The disciples failed to see this and manifested their oversight when they brusquely refused to let mothers and fathers bring their babies and children to Jesus so that He could touch them and be near them. Let me refresh our memories by reading about it from Mark 10:13-16.

"And they brought young children unto Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked them that brought them.

"But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.

"Verily I say unto you, **WHOSOEVER SHALL NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD, HE SHALL NOT ENTER THEREIN.**"

I have believed for many years that Jesus wanted to hold those little children in His arms, and press their tiny, beating hearts close to His own breast **BECAUSE HE SENSED A KINDRED SPIRIT.** The obedient, quiet, trusting, humble spirit of these little children was like His own.

Every time that I take the small hand of one of our grandchildren into my own and we cross a street or go into a store, I am powerfully impressed with their explicit trust in me. I could lead them absolutely anywhere, and they would unquestioningly and obediently and instantly walk along beside me, chattering and totally unconcerned about their care, safety and destiny. Why? Because they have absolute trust in their grandpa. I could fervently hope that I could have one half of the trust in my heavenly Father as my children placed in me, as a father, and now as my grandchildren do. I try to, but at times I draw away when I trust too much in my own understanding. We grown ups have much to learn from little children, not the least in the area of trust. Maybe God wants us to take a few lessons today. Maybe we would feel and sense more of God's tender care if we were to express greater dependence upon Him.

Maybe some of you are like me, when I get so involved with all of the decisions of life and living that I discover both of my hands engaged in the turning of knobs that don't want to turn, and pushing levers that don't want to be pushed, and pulling switches that don't want to pull. Sound familiar? Then I realize that I have let go of His hand in the press of daily living. We let go, not by being busy, but by failing to take Him into our choices and by not drawing upon His strength. When I realize that I have done this, I start reaching up so that I can connect again. HIS HAND IS ALWAYS THERE. Whenever I reach UP he has been reaching down all of the time. Oh, how we need to feel His hand in ours!

Jesus gave a FOURTH ASPECT of discovering greatness in God's sight, and though it is not an obscure statement, it may be a bit harder for us to get a handle on it. We don't think about this too long and hard. You'll see it discussed by Jesus in verse ten, and again, it comes in the form of a warning.

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

There is a danger of offenses against those persons particularly loved by God, reaching to their angels, their heavenly attendants. How many people have ever thought of such a thing? How many of us consider that, through our treatment of others, we might be offending their angel? What does come through loud and clear is that each of us who read and believe our Bibles need to be careful of our conversation about God's children. It is apparent that the Lord places much more importance to what is said and done against this special group of Christians with hearts filled with childlike virtues.

Pardon the repetition, but God views matters completely different from the way people do, in and out of the church. What may be considered just a simple opinion or statement about one of God's choice servants MAY IN FACT BE A HIGH OFFENSE IN HEAVEN.

I can tell you this. God talked to me about this kind of offenses many year's ago, and I have had to curb my tongue. It's hard at first, but if we will discipline our talk, AND CUT OUT ABOUT 90 TO 95% OF IT, we can change our offending to blessing. The Bible even tells us how to do it, in lots of places, but I hold one in highest esteem, and it is found in Ephesians 4:29

"LET NO CORRUPT COMMUNICATION PROCEED OUT OF YOUR MOUTH..."

....and I want to pause in the reading of this powerful verse to cause us to see what God's word defines here as "corrupt communication." It is not cussing or mean, sharp expletives or dirty language -- The Bible is it's own best commentary and "corrupt communication" is explained clearly here. Let's finish.

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, BUT THAT WHICH IS GOOD TO THE USE OF EDIFYING (building up, or constructive) THAT IT (that is, our talking) MAY MINISTER GRACE UNTO THE HEARERS."

Corrupt talking is set down here as what does not build up, or make better, or help the person being talked about. It goes a BIG step further by saying that corrupt talking is any conversation that doesn't extend grace to those who are hearing. What does that mean? Grace to the hearers?

It means that when we are talking we are encouraging and lifting up and healing and making the atmosphere better. It means that we are elevating the minds and feelings and faith of those who are listening to us. Let me get very personal about this. That's what pastors are for. HOW DO YOU LEAVE YOUR LISTENERS? LIFTED UP AND INSPIRED OR DEPRESSED AND DUMPED ON? Do you feel personal responsibility to elevate and bless your listeners? I fervently hope and pray so. If you think about this, you need to think about it some more. If you don't think about this much, I beg of you to take what Pastor Boone is saying here as serious. It is serious enough to get heaven's attention, even their angels are affected when offenses are experienced.

Jesus did go ahead and answer this question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven", but it is clear to any careful reader that He was trying to steer His emphasis in the answer from position to attitude.

There will be rewards in heaven, for the Bible refers to them, but I have the strong suspicion that hardly anyone there in the Glory will have much interest in them. The benefit of heaven will be its atmosphere, where we will be free from posturing and succeeding and bigger and better and more.

The pressure to excel and produce and endure and please will be lost in an environment of acceptance and harmony and mutuality. I get homesick for a heaven like that, and I have constant hunger for a heart like that, and I know that many of you do too.

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Chapter 19 LEARN OF ME

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

These three words, "learn of Me", release a torrent of memories upon my mind, for the faces and persons of my teachers happily inundate my thinking. I think of my first grade teacher, Mrs. Jones, who stood at her classroom door and had a hug and kiss for each student as he left for the day. She loved us. We were each one special to her.

I remember Mrs. Brown, my junior high school English teacher, who had the strange educational concept that her students were in class to learn English. We learned. Believe me, we learned. Daydreamers were routinely brought back to reality by a thump on the head. Goof-offs were publicly reprimanded, and class clowns had their faces soundly slapped. Please don't ask me how I know, but I know.

Dr. Robert Heckart placed more pastoral tools into my hands than any other one person. I was privileged to travel thousands of miles in his "Ford classroom" as he related endless stories of his pastorates, the problems that arose and how the Lord helped him to solve them.

Two of my favorite teachers were carpenters, Ed Watten and Al Krage, and they were as different as day and night. Ed was slightly-built, quiet-spoken and as easy to be around as a pussy cat. Al was a big, raw-boned Norwegian and worked like a bull in a China closet. His favorite expression was, "Get a bigger hammer." Ed never explained anything to me, while Al was constantly demonstrating in word and action how a certain construction procedure was accomplished. But I learned equally from them both. I learned the "biff, bam, pow", "get things done" aspect of foundations and framing from Big Al, and adopted the careful artistry of cabinetry and fine finish work by watching "Right on" Ed. That's what we all called Ed because of his stock answer to any measurement question: "Ed, do you want this a little over or a little under?" Ed's answer was always the same, "right on". I tell you quickly and fervently that I want to learn from the "right on Eds" of this world.

My father, Roscoe taught me how to handle money, the importance of fulfilling your obligations and how to always pay your bills on or before their due dates.

My mother, Ida, taught me how to laugh at myself and the importance of taking time to smell the roses and enjoy the sunrise.

TEACHERS ARE MY HEROES. LEARNING IS MY LIFE'S GREATEST PLEASURE.

Accordingly, learning about Jesus comes into sharp focus, and I am like a child set loose in a candy store. We really CAN have all that we want of Him! Listen to this most generous of all invitations. Look especially at the verbs, the action words, with me. "Come, take and learn." What an offer! Without money and without price! We can fill up and then get some doggy bags and take some along for a later snack.

We would be less than accurate to miss the importance of choice and selection. On Jesus' part, this is an invitation, but to us there stands a choice. This learning of Him is free for all, but it only comes to those who pursue and avail themselves. There are no compulsory education students in the classroom of grace. All are there because they have deliberately asked for the instruction. THIS NEEDS TO BEAR DOWN UPON US! The door to learning Jesus is wide open, but we must walk through it. I want to help us here, as the Lord has often and faithfully helped me.

I want to remind us that the birds can be singing without our hearing them. Beautiful music is constantly flooding the airwaves, but we will miss it if we don't tune in.

Just yesterday the faithful Holy Spirit led my gaze to the numerous statements in the Bible requesting readers, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit sayeth. . ." Every thinking person knows what Jesus meant by such statements. We can hear words and fail to understand their meanings. Just because we are sitting at a desk doesn't mean that we are in class.

Brothers and Sisters, truth must be pursued and sought out. Look at those three words again, "Come, take and learn." THE ONLY WAY THAT I KNOW OF TO KNOW ABOUT JESUS AND HIS WAYS IS TO HANG AROUND HIM: SPEND TIME WITH HIM. But Pastor, I simply don't have large blocks of time to spend with Jesus. I have a job and children to run after and a house to care for! NO! NO! NO! This misses the point completely. Satan would like nothing better than to confuse Christians here.

SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS IS A MIND SET. IT IS AN ATTITUDE ATMOSPHERE. It is unlimited in its time-frame or its location. Walking with Jesus is as much a relationship as anything or any experience on earth.

When Deloris and I are physically separated, we don't stop our spousal relationship. There is not a single change in our husband and wife association. We are as much married to each other and related to each other when we are physically apart as when we are together. In either case there is no actual difference. Together or apart I am still Deloris' husband and she is always Lester's wife. We think and decide and function on that basis, because of special commitments and expectations, and being physically apart doesn't change that relationship one little bit.

Christians would have a stronger and more meaningful walk with God if we could adopt this same thinking into our day by day living. I want to repeat that spending time with Jesus is more of a mind set than it is a location or specific time period that we set aside as a so-called "quiet-time". Quiet times to the learner of Jesus is every time that our minds are not actively involved with some secular task. A lover of Jesus Christ will find his mind following his heart every time. This is more than the pious words of a preacher. Since the day that I found Jesus real to my heart as an 18 year old, I go to sleep at night talking to Jesus and awaken in the morning with Him on my mind. It is as normal as breathing, and I'm not alone in this. Every person who truly falls in love with Jesus Christ has the same experience

Because my preaching appointments have taken me away from my wife and family hundreds of times over the years of our married life, I am in many people's homes and share their lives when they have never personally met my Deloris. BUT THEY KNOW HER. I don't carry pictures in my billfold so these people who know her, though they have never met her personally, have not even seen a picture of her. How can this be? How can they know her even though they have never met her or even seen a picture of her? It is because I carry her in my heart -- and I won't be with other persons a half of an hour before I have introduced them to my beautiful and gracious wife. I don't brag on her because bragging is not in my heart, but I certainly talk about her all they want to hear. She's half of my earthly life, so it is only natural for her to dominate the horizon of my earthly experiences.

Accordingly, you can't be around a Christian who maintains a constant walk with God but what his conversation will include Him. A person who spends much time with Jesus soon runs out of discussion material if the conversation doesn't include Him.

My friends, Jesus is Someone to know and talk about. You won't find a single inconsistency or contradiction or disappointment or inferiority in all of His person. His judgments are accurate. Did you ever ask Him for an opinion on a matter? No. Neither have I. Jesus doesn't

give opinions. He issues judgments, for He is the truth. This is a major reason for learning about Him. We live in a world of opinions, options and variables.

Our very existences demand the proven, the certain, the changeless. People all around us are emotional wrecks, adrift on a fearful sea of trauma and psychosis. They know that something is horribly wrong, but don't know what to do or where to go. So they seek out the counselor's couch. They insensitize their fears by alcohol and submerge their uncertainties in narcotics. Many jump into the car and run to the mall and gorge themselves with a spending binge. Mankind is demonically driven to do ANYTHING to rid himself of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. He'll do ANYTHING and go ANYWHERE to escape thinking about who he is and where he is going after this life is over.

I can't conceive of any Christian who truly knows Jesus needing to be taught how to elevate his self-esteem. I have lived among and spent my entire life with Christians, and never knew a one of them who lacked specific knowledge about who he was and if he had any self-worth.

This entire issue of Christians lacking self-esteem seemed to arise about the same time that we began to notice weak and superficial, so-called conversions. **PERSONS WHO TRULY KNOW JESUS ARE THE MOST SELF-ASSURED, SELF-CONFIDENT, SELF-SATISFIED PEOPLE I KNOW.** And I realize that the words I use here can be easily misunderstood. I don't mean satisfied and assured and confident with one's carnal self and ego. What I DO mean is that these Christians KNOW that their sins are all forgiven. They KNOW that they are accepted in the beloved. They KNOW that they have passed from death unto life. They KNOW that their names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

God's Spirit has witnessed with their spirits that they are the sons of God. They are people who are convinced that every promise in the Book is theirs. The promises of God give them strength for the day and songs in the night and light for the journey and victory over circumstances. They are people who know that they are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. They know who they are and where they are going. They have the peace of Jesus in their hearts not as the world giveth. Generally speaking, **REAL CHRISTIANS HAVE NO SELF-ESTEEM PROBLEMS,** unless someone has persuaded them so.

REMEMBER THAT A CHRISTIAN IS ONE-HALF OF A TEAM AND IS, THEREFORE, NEVER ALONE. Jesus invites persons INTO HIS YOKE, into His set of harness. One of the greatest promises of all time Jesus guarantees to His followers when He says "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." It doesn't matter how long the journey, is or how hot the day is or how heavy the load is or how steep the hill is, **THE WAY IS ALWAYS EASIER WITH JESUS BY OUR SIDES. HE WILL ALWAYS EQUALIZE THE LOAD. WE CAN COUNT ON IT.**

The scoffers and mockers of the Christian way do not intimidate me for a second. They used to bother me as a young Christian by their charges of "using God or Jesus or religion as a crutch", and the way they inevitably present this argument is somewhat like a small child running to its mother and hiding behind her apron whenever there were a challenge or threat. It is like Christians are cry babies and can't take the pressures of real life on their own, so they have to have a crutch, a shelter.

Those taunts haven't bothered me or intimidated me for many years, because we don't walk life's pathways too long before we discover **THAT EVERY BODY RUNS FOR COVER WHEN THE STORMS COME**. The only difference is where we go to hide and what or who we use for cover. So anymore, whenever some immature soul accuses me of using religion for a crutch, I just kindly ask them what their's is?

I make no apology for looking to my strong Helper and Yoke-Partner. I have learned to give my best on every pull knowing that **HE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE, TAKING UP THE SLACK**. When I am weak, then I am strong. Salvation through Jesus Christ is designed for the storms. Anybody can sing when the sun is shining brightly. Anyone can smile when the skies are all blue. You don't need grace to do that. When the bills are all paid and there is little or no pain in the body and nobody crosses you and your plans are all falling into place, it's easy then to be encouraged and optimistic.

But our days aren't all like that. Sometimes it seems that the only gear we can get our lives into is reverse. Some days just about everything goes wrong. There are occasions when nobody has an encouraging word regardless of what the old cowboy ballad "Home On The Range" says. I think the guy who wrote that song was a lonesome cowboy sitting in a New York City cheap hotel room on a humid, hot August afternoon.

There are too many times when our little cups are empty and every well we go to is dry. There are too many cruel experiences of life that strip off all of the veneer and removes every human support from around us and leaves us emotional wrecks with sobbing spirits. Then comes those fearful occasions when it seems that everything about our personal lives is out of control and nothing that we can do or think of to do works.

That's when **JESUS NEVER FAILS**. That's when the saints from time immemorial have fled to their Rock and found Him to be a safe refuge. I am unfailingly lifted in mind and in spirit when I read about the disciples fearing for their lives on a storm-tossed, angry sea. In the rage of the storm, there was Jesus walking on the waves as calmly as He would stroll through a garden path.

I wouldn't try to upset your Christology even a little bit, but my humble judgment is that **THIS VERY ACT** of our Lord's is one specific reason why Jesus left heaven and came to earth. He planned for this day and this storm and this instance of the fearful jeopardy in which His followers had found themselves. I can't think of another situation in His life among us that more clearly establishes His involvement with His followers extremities, His interest in their hopelessness and His absolute control over it all. Nothing that He ever did, with the singular exception of Calvary and His succeeding resurrection, has more encouragement and hope for the Christian, than this seemingly effortless walking through life's storms.

Jesus **WANTED** His followers to feel the fury of the storm. He **WANTED** them to feel the utter hopelessness of the situation. He **WANTED** them to sense the nearness of death and physical destruction. He **WANTED** them to see Him walking through each and every wind-whipped wave. He **WANTED** them to witness that He controlled and was unaffected by what threatened them.

Brothers and Sister in Jesus, I have been in that boat and I have been in that storm and I have felt the ferocity of the wind and the waves, and I have come to the conclusion that I was going down; that my present circumstances were certain to put me under the waves. And so have you. BUT JESUS WALKED THROUGH MY STORMS just as He did on the Sea of Galilee so long ago.

IT IS CRITICAL FOR US, AS IT WAS FOR THE DISCIPLES BEFORE US, TO SEE HIM WALKING THROUGH THE STORMY SEAS. They did not cease and abate as He walked. They were still tossing and rolling and roaring, BUT JESUS WALKED THROUGH THEM AS THOUGH NOTHING WERE THREATENING AT ALL, and, they weren't! Jesus did rebuke the storm and brought the elements under His control, and it's wonderful to know that He can, and sometimes will, calm the storms of our lives and restore their order. But as many times as I have thought about this I still don't know which aspect of the experience brings me the greatest comfort and encouragement: the calming of the storm or knowing that Jesus can walk through its fury and power and remain unaffected.

What I do know is that it means a great deal to me to know THAT HE WALKS THROUGH LIFE'S WORST STORMS, for they inexorably come. Life is filled with storms, some of them so fearful that survival is questionable and we get so turned around and tossed about that there seems to be no sense or order to anything. BUT IF JESUS IS THERE, AND HE IS, ALL IS WELL.

Some of you may not have known that our son, Mark, spent some weeks on a deep-sea fishing and processing vessel sailing hundreds of miles from the shore on the Bering Sea. Storms, much worse than ever experienced on the Sea of Galilee, were part of this kind of fishing.

The skipper named Colin of the 150 foot vessel, had the most modern navigational and weather devices available and was a seasoned captain. Generally they knew in advance of impending storms and would always find a harbor if they were close enough in to shore. But that was a rarity because of their fishing grounds being so far from any land. This resulted in their riding out most Bering Seas storms.

Mark said that the first storm scared him more than at any other time of his life and he prayed more than ever before. It was the pounding of the hull against the endless seas that brought greatest alarm. After a few of those horrendous crashes, you could anticipate the following one, hoping and praying that it would not be so vicious.

Everybody was below decks, having drawn in all nets and secured the upper decks as soon as the wind stiffened. The order was to stay put as best as possible, but after a long period of this fearful pounding, Mark decided that he didn't want to go down, as he assumed they most certainly would, in that tiny, little bunk in the darkness. He arose and made his way through the passages, up the ladders, through the bulkhead and onto the lurching, jarring, trembling main deck that was completely awash with foaming seas every time this small vessel nosed into another monstrous wave.

He already knew where the lifelines were and clung to them tightly as he made his way towards the bridge where he knew that the skipper was keeping the ship headed into each mountainous sea, like a puny toy on the stormy spans. At every plunge into each gigantic, thundering wave, Colin would literally bury that sharp, steel bow into the mass of seething destruction. Fully half of the ship would be enveloped in a watery embrace. It seemed that every plunge in succeeding, shuddering agony would certainly be the last, but up that little ship would come and for a few exotic seconds the heart would be light again.

Through all of this fearful agony Mark fought his way towards the bridge certain that he would hear from Colin that they were in dire danger, and wondering what their chances would be of rescue from other ships. Both ferocious winds and sucking seas fought to claim Mark's body as he struggled ever closer to the ship's cabin.

When he finally had fought his way close enough to see into the nearest cabin window, a scene emerged that forever would affect him, just as it did me as he told the story to me.

He fully expected to see a grim-faced man with a white-knuckled grip on the wheel. Instead of that, Colin was sitting in his wheel chair, smoking his pipe and trying, rather unsuccessfully, to read a newspaper. As you can imagine, Mark said that ALL of his fear and anxiety vanished immediately as he viewed that bridge scene. If the skipper were not afraid, why should he be?

Did the sea stop its stormy raging? Did the ship become larger or stronger or safer? Neither of the above. Mark's fears vanished because the captain of the ship was on the bridge and he knew that all was well. He had sailed through dozens of such storms before and knew how to ride it out.

It is such immeasurable comfort to know that our yoke-partner is Jesus, the Waver-walker and the Storm-calmer. I have never experienced a storm on the frigid Bering Sea in a small fishing vessel as Mark did, but I have sailed through many stormy seas of frustration and utter despair when it seemed certain that I was going down. I learned to go to the bridge, long before Mark and Colin were born, and look upon my Captain.

What blesses me half out of my socks is that all of that time that my fears were holding me hostage in painful jeopardy, my Captain had been in full control. He knows the path of the storm and the fury of the gale. Jesus is at home in the most fierce winds that we encounter on life's seas. They hold no fear and carry no surprises for Him.

Has any fearful heart ever come from the "bridge of the soul" with anxieties and unresolved fears? Has one person ever returned from a meeting with the Master still feeling his doubts and distresses? Did Jesus ever once indicate that He might not be able to handle this one? Not that I know.

Our problem is that we generally wait so long to go and talk to our Captain. I'm filled with praises today for such a dependable, capable yoke-partner. We can count on Jesus. He has never once let a single saint pull his load alone. And even when life is controlled and it seems that we

are getting along by ourselves, HE IS THERE, QUIETLY PULLING ALONGSIDE OF US, ALWAYS TAKING UP THE SLACK.

I have had a growing perception over the span of many years that God is much more involved in our so-called every day lives than we have ascribed to Him. The Divine help of which we have been made aware will be seen as minimal compared to what the Lord has actually done.

I see this interest and watchfulness extended to all mankind and not only to believers. Jesus clearly described God's graciousness as the "rain falling on the just and unjust", and encouraged us to mirror that mercy to others. God's care and enablement freely distributed to each person will be a MAJOR ASPECT OF EACH ONE'S PERSONAL JUDGMENT when we come to stand before the judgment bar of God. Each person will answer for every Divinely-bestowed gift of protection and provision and assistance that they failed to appreciate and acknowledge.

But over and beyond the care that God bestows upon all persons, the Christian lives a "plus life". He exists in an extra benefit environment because Jesus promised them that "the Comforter would come to live within them forever."

I'm being careful to avoid any irreverence here, but I don't know how else to say this to get and keep our attention. I can't believe that the Holy Spirit is within us as an inactive Agent, just hanging around and waiting for a crises to arise for us. I don't think that you believe that He is only there for the tearful, sobbing, clenched-teeth crises either, but unless we are sensitive to His ways, that's the only times that we will be aware of His presence.

God wants me to help us see that when we take His yoke upon us, JESUS IS ALWAYS THERE, PULLING QUIETLY ALONG BESIDE US. I know that I already said that once, but it needs to be emphasized. He is there pulling along beside us when we go about our live's familiar tasks at school, at home or on the job. When our minds are absorbed with our responsibilities and myriad decisions every hour of the day and we're not even thinking about Him, HE IS THERE, guiding us, helping us, encouraging us, cheering us, and warning us.

I have every reason to believe that one of the greatest surprises of heaven will be to review the winding pathways of our lives and discover how much Jesus was involved in our everyday living. We're going to incredualte at the images of angelic protection and assistance that totally escaped our awareness at the time.

I direct your attention to a single word of the very familiar verse we all can quote in Psalms 34:7. My guess is that we are usually so awestruck by the very thought of the verse that we tend to overlook the incredible significance of this one superlative word. Let me see if you can guess which word it is in this verse that holds me spellbound?

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them."

Yes, it is the word and meaning of "encampeth". What a thought! The Hebrew word literally means to "pitch one's tent" or to "make one's dwelling place." This means that a constant activity of God's angels is to dwell round about those who fear Him.

And the literal meaning of the adverbial phrase "round about" means to protect something or someone as an army would encircle it or them.

I know that we could all say, "Well, I have never seen the angel of the Lord, and am not sure that I have even felt him, or them, near." Does that make the world of the unseen unreal? Absolutely not.

The longer that I live, the more focused I become upon God's word. We are either nobodies upon this earth going nowhere to a grave and oblivion, or we are specially designed, unique somebodies destined for a shining, glorious future.

The salvation of the human soul is so priceless that God allowed His only Son to come to earth and die for it. How many of us who have sons could stand to witness them be beaten and spit upon and abused and hated and finally murdered? Would a one of us mothers and fathers just stand there and watch such a thing happen? God did.

Not a parent listening or reading this would even stop to think about it. If one of our children were suffering and we could stop it, we would cause it to cease in a second. If one of our loved ones were being assaulted, we would jump to their defense and throw our very bodies at the assaulters, even if there were an army of them.

But God stood aside and watched His Son stride purposefully up Calvary's hill. He waited and watched while His perfect, holy, loving heart broke -- a piece at a time -- with every taunt and jeer -- with each slap and blow -- with every crack of the hammer -- with every piercing stab into His innocent, quivering skin -- until, for reasons He alone understands, He had to stop looking.

And then He Who had ever been with His Son, His only Son, from all eternity, could watch no longer as the shadow of sin crept over the entire scene, and God left His Son to bear man's sin alone.

**THAT'S HOW MUCH HE LOVES US. THAT'S THE VALUE OF A HUMAN SOUL.
HOW MUCH WE ARE WORTH IS HOW MUCH IT COST GOD.**

How could anyone look at Calvary and wonder if God cares? How can any person view the supreme spectacle of God's sinless Son dying for mankind and question the necessity of a judgment?

That is what makes the yoke of Jesus Christ special.

These lines of a familiar song come to mind here. I sing them often.

"And He walks with me and talks with me.
And He tells me I am His own.
And the joy we share as we tarry there.
None other has ever known."

* * * * *

Chapter 20

"IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE SERVANT TO BE AS HIS LORD"

Contained in the scriptures we will read this morning, and if you care to turn with me, we will be reading from first, John, chapter fifteen, and then in Matthew, chapter ten in these two scriptures are some of the most intimate and rewarding thoughts about our relationship with the Lord Jesus. I direct your attention first to John fifteen, and we will start reading at verse seventeen:

"These things I command you, that ye love one another.

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

"Remember the word that I said unto you, THE SERVANT IS NOT GREATER THAN HIS LORD. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also."

Then turn with me to Matthew, chapter ten, for two similar verses, the first identifying the topic of today's message, "IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE SERVANT TO BE AS HIS LORD." Let us read verses 24 and 25:

"The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord.

"IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE DISCIPLE THAT HE BE AS HIS MASTER, AND THE SERVANT AS HIS LORD."

The central thought of discipleship is wonderfully discovered in these three intimate words, "IT IS ENOUGH." The purpose of a servant is to be so identified with his master; so lost in service to his master; so dedicated to the needs and pleasures of his master; THAT HE NEARLY BECOMES ABSORBED IN THE PERSON OF HIS MASTER. A true servant becomes an extension of his master. His identity becomes linked with his Lord to the point of corporation. Please note that I did not say "cooperation" but "corporation". Allow me to repeat the statement.

"(A true servant's) identity becomes linked with his Lord to the point of corporation."

In the loyal words of Ittai to David as recorded in 2 Samuel 15:20, and I quote:

"As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely IN WHAT PLACE MY LORD THE KING SHALL BE, WHETHER IN DEATH OR IN LIFE, EVEN THERE ALSO WILL THY SERVANT BE."

Ittai, the Gittite (a Philistine, if you please) had a loyal heart. Ittai understood the importance of undying loyalty. Loyalty begets loyalty. You do not have to worship a leader under God to stand by his side under any and all circumstances. Many people do not see this, and they think that you have to totally agree with a leader before you can be loyal to him. That is as silly as to suppose that you have to agree with a spouse to love him or her and be loyal to him or her. We do not know how many fighting men Ittai had under him and with him this day that he professed undying loyalty to David as he was fleeing for his life, but they instantly were with Ittai in his profession of loyalty and allegiance to King David of Israel. They were as ready to lay down their lives for Ittai, their leader, as Ittai was to lay down his life for King David. You cannot read over this story and Ittai's profession of undying loyalty to David and not be deeply moved -- sometimes to tears at least I am.

Ittai, being a great leader himself, understood the importance of a leader having undying loyalty under all circumstances. WHEREVER David would be, there you would find Ittai. Something about David, something within David, invoked from Ittai a corporation, a bonding, a oneness, a unity of heart and purpose that produced a synchronized team. Hear me carefully and wonderfully. David never had to wonder where Ittai was. Does that impress you as it does me? David never had to wonder where Ittai was. David instinctively knew that wherever he would go, and whatever he would be doing, and however he felt or in whatever his mental, physical or material condition was, ITTAI WOULD BE AT HIS SIDE. David could be walking, running, fighting or standing still, and Ittai would be there. You could count on Ittai. Ittai was David's "wingman". A "wingman" had ONE responsibility, and that is to stay on his leader's wing like a tick to a hound.

Jesus said, "IT IS ENOUGH" for the servant to be as his master. A servant's highest good is to be as his master. His consummate purpose, his constant efforts, his intense aim, his focus and attention IS CONCENTRATED AND RESTRICTED TO HIS LORD. Jesus used the term "single" in this regard in Matthew six as He was explaining what He meant by saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also", and followed it by the familiar claim that, "No man can serve two masters." In the very middle of these two great teachings of Jesus arises this word "single" (Greek, HAPLOUS), and only has one meaning (What else? how could the word "single" have multiple meanings?). It means "directed". Focused in one direction. Undivided purpose.

But the intensity of the phrase, "It is enough", comes from its intimacy. Note this. The power of the clause, "It is enough" comes not from its loyalty and exclusivity as much as from its intimacy. Here is loyalty that derives from trust and love in who that person IS. This kind of loyalty accrues from the character and nature of the person adored and respected rather than from any submission to his rank or status or recognition. I will declare as long as I have breath that JESUS CHRIST IS WORTHY BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS and not because of anything He does.

If what I am going to be saying now offends your theology, and especially your Christology, I apologize, but the dear Lord has graciously shared much of Who He is with my poor mind over the past few years.

JESUS WANTS TO BE MORE THAN YOUR HERO. HE WANTS TO BE MORE THAN YOUR CONQUEROR. HE WANTS TO BE MORE THAN YOUR LORD. HE WANTS TO BE

MORE THAN YOUR PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER AND COUNSELOR. HE WANTS TO BE MORE THAN THE ONE WHO HEARS AND ANSWERS YOUR PRAYERS. HE WANTS TO BE MORE THAN YOUR KING. HE EVEN WANTS TO BE MORE THAN YOUR REDEEMER!!! JESUS WANTS TO BE YOUR FRIEND!!! He wants you to know Him. He wants to share with you WHO HE IS. He wants to reveal to you and me the kind of Person He really is. How greatly I wish that we can get a grip on this!!!!

Just think!! A l-o-n-g e-t-e-r-n-i-t-y stretches out before those persons who have trusted Christ and been forgiven of their sins AND STARTED THEIR ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. Did you catch the power of those last four words? "STARTED THEIR ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP." It has already begun, dear followers of the Lamb! Your eternal relationship with Jesus started the split-second you were saved! What you and I have learned about Jesus and His thoughts and His ways and His plans during our walk with Him on earth IS JUST THE START!!

It is enough to BE as our Lord. It is enough to be in company with Him. It is enough to sit in His presence and sense His thoughts and allow His blessed, faithful, Holy Spirit impress upon our minds His plans and ways. It is enough to have Him corroborate His written Word to us. It is enough for Him to surround us and encompass us and envelop us and ennoble us and inspire us to eternal values and spiritual verities. It is enough to sense the infusion of His grace into our souls like the infiltrating rays of the sun on a summer morning. It is enough to sense our wills and purposes being merged with His own. It is enough to sense that He is praying through us and enabling us to address the matters that lay upon His heart. It is enough to feel the current of heavenly interests and Divine concerns flowing through our minds and souls as the Holy Spirit intercedes for the will and kingdom of God. It is enough to sense the strengthening of our weaknesses and the reinforcing of our wills. It is enough to feel the strength of His character and the firmness of His rightness and the confidence of His wisdom. It is enough to sense the building, the construction, the erection of the fortress of the soul where the battles of eternity are fought. It is enough to sense that we are engaging the enemies of our Lord and experience the calm assurance and confidence that accrues in consort with the God of heaven. It is enough to envision the strongholds of darkness crumble and fall before heavenly forces with whom we are in company. It is enough to sense the wide, wide, wide, river of God's grace that flows constantly and endlessly at our sides and that we can draw from its vast resources FOR ANY NEED AND AT WILL! It is enough to fill the cups of our seemingly endless needs with that unending grace. It is enough to be satiated entirely and completely IN HIS PRESENCE. It is enough to sense THAT WE NEED NOTHING BUT JESUS, and Jesus only.

No wonder Jesus was trying to get us to lift up our eyes and see that IT IS ENOUGH FOR A SERVANT TO BE AS HIS LORD!!! You do not need to GET anything from Him. You have all things in Him and because of Him, but IT IS ENOUGH just to be with Him and hear Him and experience a oneness with Him. Not a single person who ever sought TO BE AS HIS LORD ever left His presence impoverished or denied or diminished. The Lord invoked this kind of repletion and fulfillment in David thousands of years ago, when he stated in Psalms 16:11:

"Thou wilt show me the path of life: IN THY PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY; AT THY RIGHT HAND THERE ARE PLEASURES FOR EVERMORE."

What a thought for contemplation! We go into His presence empty and come out full! We can take in our biggest, old LaTourneau dump trucks and the off-road Ukes! We can get the "largest capacity hauling equipment" known to man and just try to come out from God's presence with part or half of a load We always come out from His presence FULL, pressed down, overflowing, running over, and everyone of you who know God know that my words are not exaggerated, dramatized or embellished. God will load us up every time and all the time and will never vary or stop however often we repeat our trips to His throne of grace.

The greatest times of being in His presence is when you can tell Him THAT YOU ARE STANDING AND KNOCKING AT HIS DOOR WITH NO AGENDA. "Lord, I am here now with empty hands. I do not have a "want list" with me today. I just want to be in Your presence and hear anything You have to say to me. I am not here for recognition or "points" or reward. I am not here to "get" anything from You. I just want to merge my thoughts and my will and my interests and purposes with Your own. I JUST WANT TO BE WITH YOU FOR AWHILE."

We need to open up ourselves to the invasion of His Person. We need to be willing to allow Him to walk all over our heart rooms, and through our mind offices. We need to have a big "WELCOME MAT" in front of every door of our souls with the doors and windows wide open to every room of our "house". We need to be unafraid to let Him wander throughout our heart homes and sift through every area of our beings.

Then we need to be unafraid to explore His Person. This is the part of Who God is that absolutely astounds my mind God is as willing to let us wander through His Person as He is to discover who we are! We need to be brave enough to investigate Him and explore His character and discover Him. The Lord welcomes all of this! In fact, He invites it!

When you really love someone what I mean is, when your love is full towards someone -- when you love them as much as you possibly can when you have no more capacity to love them any more or more greatly than is presently possible -- then making them happy and pleased is more important to you than your happiness and pleasure. Making them happy is your happiness.

This kind of love is often discovered in spouses, and it is natural with parents towards their children, but if God's love is operating in our hearts and minds, this kind of love WILL SPREAD TO EVERYONE. We just begin to peel off the first layer of God's love residing and operating in us when it breeches our love reservoir of spousal and family love and spills over into the lives of others who are not natural recipients of our love. We have not started to love until it moves beyond the natural boundaries of felial, or family, love.

Love is a great and mighty force and has unlimited capacities. GOD'S LOVE IS AN UNBOUNDED LOVE that stretches and reaches and surrounds and embraces and envelops. It knows no limit and recognizes no restrictions and sees no barriers and feels no discrimination. GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE A FLOOD THAT IS RANDOM AND UNSELECTIVE as it inundates everything and everyone in its path. You cannot refrain it or restrain it or contain it or refuse it or make it go away. AND I WILL INSIST UNTIL I DIE THAT WHEN GOD'S LOVE GETS INTO ANY PERSON'S HEART, IT WILL CAUSE YOU AND ME TO START LOVING LIKE THAT.

May I repeat a thought that you may have missed just a bit ago in my rush of words? "God's love is like a flood.. .random and unselective...". If our love does not reach out to and embrace everyone -- if it is selective if it is only for certain persons, while others are rejected and shut out **MARK IT DOWN, THEN, IT IS NOT GOD'S LOVE.** You may recall some verses in Romans 5:5-8 that we read last Sunday about this kind of love, and I requote them this morning:

"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

God's grace is one of the many faces of God's love, and they are so intertwined that it is hard for me, at least, to distinguish one from the other. I want to talk some more about God's marvelous grace, but by way of its introduction, make the comment that **GOD'S GRACE WILL START SHOWING UP IN OUR ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS IF IT IS RESIDENT IN OUR HEARTS.** Let me requote a sentence from the Romans 5 scripture I just read: "...the love of God IS SHED ABROAD in our hearts."

The Greek word rendered "shed abroad" (EKKEXUTI) means, "poured out and diffused, or flooded, or spread over the entirety." "Flooded with" or "inundated" are the very best descriptions of this Divine and redemptive action in the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit. We must not allow this truth to escape us. Where God's Holy Spirit dwells and operates, **HE BRINGS GOD'S LOVE WITH HIM, AND ITS NATURE IS TO INUNDATE: TO FILL TO CAPACITY: TO FLOOD!**

If any person man, woman, boy, girl, or youth -- gets saved, **EVERYONE AROUND THEM WILL KNOW SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED,** for a love and a tenderness, and a softness and a graciousness and a selflessness will characterize them. It **WILL HAPPEN** because of this "flooding of God's love" within them. Throughout my ministry I have witnessed a powerful and wonderful thing happen time after time. It has been, and continues to be, one of a preacher's most blessed experiences in all of his ministry. Lots of changes take place when a person really gets saved, but this one, huge change, that I have witnessed over and over, just blesses me down to my gizzard.

It is the softness and tenderness and sensitivity that characterizes persons newly saved, especially the men, but it is noticeable in all. Repeatedly I have heard newly-saved persons say something like this: "I just never was much of a crier, but since I got saved, God just touches my heart and the tears flow." Why? **BECAUSE GOD'S LOVE HAS FLOODED THE HEART ROOM OF THAT PERSON.** God's love has suffused the former selfishness and hardness and insensitivity with His graciousness and kindness and mercy.

Here is a new thought the Lord graciously shared with me a week ago. GOD IS NICE!!! He has to be nice, for it could not originate anywhere else! From where did nice come? How did it get into people? You just think of the nicest person you know and then wonder with me how that came to be? Did you follow my thinking on this, and did you especially notice my emphasis on the superlative suffix "est"? I said to think of the nicest person you know, and I realize that could take some time and thought, but just get one of the nicest persons you know in mind, so we do not get bogged down in the search and miss the rest of the message. HOW DID THEY GET TO BE NICE? How did they acquire their niceness? FOLKS, IT CAME FROM GOD. Thoughtfulness, courtesy, friendliness, pleasantness, softness and sensitivity, interest and concern for others, kindness, graciousness, impartiality, willingness to listen all of that and more describes what most of us considers "nice".

There are a lot of good people who are not nice, and we are always sorry about that, are we not? That is one of life's big puzzles. When I was a kid, it was always said that kind of a person "had a burr under his saddle", or in cultured terms, they have a constant irritant. Some of these good people add to this puzzle about their not being nice the element of unpredictability, and you are afraid of them. The fear is not of bodily harm from them, but afraid that you are not sure if they are going to be nice or not nice. One time they can be pleasant and friendly and loving and the next time they can be curt and unfriendly.

It is a blessing to be around Christians who are consistently nice. You can count on it, and what I mean by being "consistently nice" is that it is characteristic of them. Everyone has an occasional bad day and we all get burdened down from time to time with heavy crosses that drain the soul and bankrupt the emotions. But with those few exceptions, it means so much to all of us to have, among our circle of friends and loved ones, those you can count on to be pleasant and kind and courteous and gracious.

The point is that true Christians bear the image of the Divine, and if acting like a Christian is only the result of constant restraint and stern self-discipline, we are not only spiritually poor ourselves, but we are robbing our brothers and sisters of what they should rightfully expect from us, and at the same time, woefully shortchanging God's marvelous grace. We just have to have more than an overhaul of our human love. We must have an infusion of God's love that floods our hearts and minds!

Aside from niceness and graciousness that results from an infusion of God's love in our hearts and natures by getting saved, where do these traits come from when they are observed and manifested in the unsaved? I SUBMIT TO US THAT SUCH NICENESS COMES FROM A GOD WHO IS NICE. A person who is innately pleasant and easy to be around and is known to everyone as a nice person received those marvelous and appreciated traits FROM GOD. Call it genealogical and hereditary if you need an intellectual peg upon which to hang it, but both heredity factors and genes were lovingly and thoughtfully dropped into Adam's and Eve's chromosomes, and discovers themselves to varying degrees in each of us!

Without apology, I will belabor this truth, for it stays on my mind. God could not give what He is not. He could not impart to a being, especially one designed specifically in His image, what

was not an integral part of Who He is. My studied guess is that **GOD IS THE NICEST BEING ANY OF US WILL EVER KNOW**. God gets the bummiest rap of all bum raps, **AND THAT IS ONE MORE THING THAT MAKES HIM SO NICE!!!** He is falsely accused almost constantly and endlessly by earth's unthoughtful inhabitants, and that by saint and sinner alike. With all of that defaming and complaining and blaming and false accusations and questioning, **HE CONTINUES TO BE GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL AND LOVING TO US**. I call that really nice!!! He forgives us every time we humbly and sincerely ask Him, and I call that really nice!!! He does not put us on hold, or schedule an appointment, or asks us to take a number any time we get on our knees and come before Him. I call that really nice!! God is absolutely personal and impartial with **EACH** seeker after Him. I call that really nice. I hope nobody here does this, but if you choose, you can put Him on hold for many days on end, and whenever you come back, humbly and contritely and sorry, **THE LINE IS OPEN** and He is there waiting and listening. **THAT IS REALLY NICE!!!**

Now, how do we treat really nice people? How do we treat those whom we profess to love? **IF YOU REALLY LOVE SOMEONE, YOU ARE NOT EXPECTING SOMETHING FROM THEM**. This is the huge difference between true love and selfish love (if there is such a thing as selfish love?). **REAL LOVE SEEKS TO PLEASE THE OBJECT OF THAT LOVE -- ALWAYS!!**, and you can safely use this as a test about whom you love and whom you do not or whom you love and whom you merely tolerate.

If you love with God's love, **IT IS SELFLESS**. It is gracious. Remember the definition of being gracious. "**GRACIOUSNESS IS FINDING FULFILLMENT IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HAPPINESS**" (Boone) , and the reason I quote this so frequently is because we need to remember it and make it a part of our daily lives. The persons you know who are gracious **ARE THOSE WHO FIND THEIR HAPPINESS IN MAKING EVERYONE AROUND THEM HAPPY**. And this has to exceed family and loved ones. Making them happy is natural. Every normal person just innately seeks to please spouses and children and grandchildren. And the wonderful discovery is that showing and expressing appreciation to the family members of others does not detract one bit from your own. The truth is that it takes no special love to put oneself out for loved ones. We need God's graciousness to spill over onto everyone. Praise the Lord!

God's grace and love working in us is so inundating that it spills and slops over our inner reservoir and washes onto everyone with whom we come in contact, as I said earlier, "**RANDOMLY AND UNSELECTIVELY**." When that is happening in our lives, that is nice like God is nice. That is grace. It is a terrible consciousness to come to the realization that we can take steps to withhold God's goodness and niceness from some other person just because you do not like them or because they did something or said something that did not please you or with which you did not agree. I am scared to death of feelings like that! **SUCH PERSONS**, and all of us have them in our lives, **ARE THE VERY ONES WE SHOULD BE ALLOWING GOD'S LOVE TO SPILL OVER ON THE MOST!**

Obviously, I cannot see into your heads anymore than you can in mine, so I do not know if God talks to you like He does to me. If someone has hurt my feelings by criticism or harsh words, I have to be particularly careful about my attitudes towards them.. I need to go out of my way to be certain, before God and down in my heart, that I harbor no ill-will or resentment against them. It is a test in my heart about what God's love is doing and how it is working in such painful

experiences. I spend no time wondering about what is going on in the offender's heart, for I am too busy analyzing and monitoring my own. I need to add that, in both or either case, the saints need to be wise and realize that there is no state of grace that removes our emotional systems. **HURT FEELINGS HAPPENS TO EVERY CHRISTIAN, AND THEY ARE NOT CARNAL OR WRONG.** The wrong occurs **IN HOW WE FEEL TOWARDS THE OFFENDER?**

Hear me now. If God's love fills our hearts, **NO ILL-WILL WILL BE EXPERIENCED AGAINST THE OFFENDER AND THERE WILL BE INSTANT FORGIVENESS.** Sorrow will be the atmosphere. Sorrow will fill the heart. There will be no spirit of retaliation or "get even" because of the offense. You will be sorry for the misunderstanding or the miscommunication. You will be sorry for whatever caused the critical spirit or angry words of the offender. You will be sorry that you were not more sensitive or not more wise or not able to think more quickly to diffuse a bad situation. You will lament the humanness and frailty and poor judgment on both sides, and you will be sorry the devil was able to "blind-side" both involved persons. **THE PREDOMINATE ATTITUDE IN A HEART THAT IS FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE WILL BE FORGIVENESS AND SORROW.**

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Chapter 21 A DIFFERENT DRUMMER -- Part 1

I have been around churches and Christians since I was nine year's old so I think that I could be about as knowledgeable as anyone as to what "makes them tick", so to speak. I think that I could answer about as many questions about Christian thinking and behavior as anyone.

But there are also a great many aspects about Christianity that I can't explain and that I puzzle over myself. What we are going to talk about today is one of them. Obviously it must present a major problem to me, for it is at the forefront of my mind whenever such a subject arises. Here it is. "I wonder why there is mere lip service given to the golden rule standard as laid down by Jesus?"

Now, I want to tell you how I see the golden rule functioning in reality, that is, in common practice. This has been consistent throughout my life. It seems to be no better or no worse among professed Christians. The way that it works out in actual practice is **THAT IT FUNCTIONS WHEN WE WANT IT TO.** It seems to operated on an "at will" basis. We turn it on or shut it off as it seems to fit our fancy or our needs. My experience is that Jesus' golden rule is more of a motto to hang on the wall than any practical, day after day belief that is basic and changeless. It is more of a unique philosophy than a code of conduct.

I want to "shuck right down to the cob" on this and state that the golden rule won't work unless it gets past our heads and into our hearts. It has to impact our nature and not just our beliefs. It has to get into our hearts as a characteristic. We have the "feel" it as well as believe it. If it has to be engaged if we have to stop and allow anger to dissipate and self-interest to be corralled it is not in our hearts, but only in our heads as a belief system. Having made these introductory remarks, let's turn to Luke 6:27-36 and read over Jesus' words thoughtfully and prayerfully.

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, Do good to them which hate you.

"Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

"And unto him that smitteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.

"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

"AND AS YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE ALSO TO THEM LIKEWISE.

"For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

"And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners do also even the same.

"And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

"But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

"Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father also is merciful."

Let me share with you one of my strongest Christian convictions. Those of you who know me well and listen to my sincere attempt at preaching hear me say it quite often. **GOD NEVER MAKES IMPOSSIBLE REQUIREMENTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS.** If Jesus lays down a standard of conduct, **WE NEED TO INSIST TO OURSELVES** that we can do it -- that we can act like that -- that we can discover the grace to measure up. This is important. There are way too many voices in the church that dilute the strength of the gospel by backing down from its clear teaching. We miss both the victory and the witness in the process.

What I mean by that is that when we "water down" these requirements of Christian behavior and don't stay with it and go after the grace to perform up to them, **WE DENY OURSELVES THE REALIZATION OF PERSONAL VICTORY.** As in every level of Christian achievement, the greatest result is not what others may see working in and through us, but that **WE KNOW** that it works. But it is important that others see it also. The adage that, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one anytime" is true. The most effective truth is that that is lived out in the market place. Most of what we say about our beliefs will be forgotten, but the kind of persons that we are the way we react the reactions that occur when the pressure is on the attitudes that come through day in and day out year after year will win the respect of those watching.

So, as we think our way through these wonderful requirements of Jesus for His followers, let's do so with hopeful, yearning hearts. Let's believe that they are practical and workable and not just churchy idealism.

We want to determine the kind of behavior that God expects from followers of Jesus by first digging out the basic, foundational precepts. Here they are as I see them: (1) Better behavior is expected of Christians. You get that from the very first conjunctive word in the passage, "but". I'm paraphrasing the basic principle here. "Other persons around you act like this, but you don't act like that." (2) Better behavior must be predicated upon listening to HIS voice and doing HIS will and going HIS way than conforming to those around us. That principle also emerges from the first verse, "But I say unto you which HEAR." (3) Better behavior results from treating others like you would want them to treat you. (4) Better behavior is only possible by having His nature implanted into our hearts. Verse thirty-five states that, "Ye shall be children of the Highest." Children indicate likeness; offspring; progeny; "chips off from the old block" so to speak. Let's work through these one by one.

1. Better behavior is expected of Christians.

How I pray that a few; some Christians, will hear my earnest pleading along this line. There are wonderful, beautiful exceptions, of course, and I thank God for each one, but for the most part, the church that I know has abandoned this in practice. So few have found the grace and practiced it, for the most part, living a truly Christlike life is on the back burner of their thinking. I would be ashamed to talk about this or preach about it if God had not been working in my life about it and providing ongoing grace for the same. That is why there is so little heard in the church these days of practical, holy living. We simply don't want to live under condemnation, so the way out is just don't talk about it. I've watched this happen. "Truth that is minimized one generation will be discarded in the next.

A church that goes about identifying with the world it seeks to save will inevitably fall prey to this. No evil ever comes marked as such. We all know that. The effort to reach an unsaved world will sterilize itself if caution isn't taken here. I've been leery all of my pastoral life on this point. First of all just because of the "leery feeling". And secondly, just because I have sadly watched the results of using carnal methods to do spiritual work. I realize that I walk a tight rope here and that there is the threat of extremism on either side.

I hear the rationale of the church innovators: "Paul said that he became 'all things to all men' that he might win some." I would quickly point out that Paul was an exceptional church leader with unique Divine endowments of grace and wisdom. Paul had an assignment completely unique and unlike any before or after him. Paul had a "liberty" that baffles and intrigues the most perceptive among us. I've said all of that to say this: Few innovators whom I have known have the strength of character and depth of direction and conviction of purpose that Paul had, and the result has been that the innovators and the innovations have become the focus and pursuit. I've watched it happen so often that I have solid reason for alarm. Before we even realize that it has happened, mere human program have replaced the presentation of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. I fear that as I would a plague.

This is no stupid plea for doing things the same way until Jesus comes, or using different ideas or for not using new and fresh methods. Some of the church is so stuck in their habits that they would alter a method just because the world started doing it that way. That's ignorance gone to seed. What I am taking about is a philosophy a standard that is based upon Gods viewpoint. I'm emphasizing the need for seeing the church of Jesus Christ and God's Word as THE standard for human conduct and for social health and happiness rather than the failed philosophies of an unsaved world around us. **CHRISTIANS, OF ALL PEOPLE, SHOULD BELIEVE IN, ADOPT AND PRACTICE THE SUPERIOR STANDARDS OF CHRIST'S TEACHINGS.** We should believe that if they are followed and practiced, the result will be -- both in the short and long run -- healthier and happier lives for everyone, saved and unsaved. I hope that you caught that "both in the short and the long run" thought. Too often the teachings of Jesus are represented as beneficial in the long haul. They are superior for right now, right at the point of the nitty-gritty of life and living. It pays to serve Jesus every day and every step of the way.

The church has a right to insist that Christian principles ARE superior, and boldly point to the mess that we are in socially today because they have been largely abandoned. Let's get back to the claim that when there is a conflict between the behavior of our society and the clear teachings of God's Word, that **THE CHURCH WILL STAND UNALTERABLY ON GOD'S WORD!** I hope that all of us have that settled in our hearts today.

I'm glad that Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." I'll tell you who should be ashamed -- the liberal, permissive, decadent, loose-living society that has produced a generation of unprecedented alcohol and drug addicts, mushrooming divorce rates, the senseless slaughter of the unborn and a so-called sexual revolution that has destroyed both body and consciences. If there is to be any history beyond our generation, the epitaph over it would have to be, "THEY COULDN'T BLUSH."

I'll tell you this. I will not move my frail boat through the stormy sea of life guided my generation's stars! I don't look to today's politicians and journalists and media analysts and educators to set my course for a safe haven. And I'm sorry to say, though it must be said, neither can we safely trust in a liberal church to give us true direction.

That is the entire focus of this message entitled, "A Different Drummer." One of the saddest aspects of Jesus' life among us on earth was that His death was planned and sealed by the church leaders of the day. The Jewish people, who arrogantly called themselves "God's chosen people" lusted for His blood. They went about to kill Him. How could such a thing happen? How on earth could persons who knew about God and His words and His ways from the time that they could reason NOT know Who Jesus was? Jesus answers that better than any other person, and I'm taking the time to quote a lengthy passage of Scripture here because of its importance to the conduct of professed Christians in the 1990's.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

"And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth forever.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

"I know that ye are Abraham's seed: but ye seek to kill Me because My word hath no place in you.

"I speak that which I have seen with My Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

"They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.

"But now ye seek to kill Me, a man which told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

"Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to Him. We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

"Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceed forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me."

You see that I have read the entire context of this attempt to discover why God's professed people would want to kill Jesus, but please note Jesus' own stated reasons in verses thirty-seven and forty-two. "...ye seek to kill Me because My word hath no place in you," and "If God were your Father, ye would love Me." THERE IT IS! At the heart of a corrupt church is the failure to love Jesus! Whatever professed Christians SAY, when they can allow their beliefs, to run contrary to God's Word, THEY DON'T LOVE JESUS, pure, plain and simple. Jesus pins that down in verse 47.

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

My first point was that "Better behavior is expected of Christians."., and it arises from the conjunction "but" found in verse twenty-seven, and what then follows are classic, but largely ignored and abandoned, Christian conduct standards. "Love your enemies. Do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them which despitefully use you. Turn the other cheek. Give to every man that asketh of thee." These standards of human behavior are all turned around from what we know and experience from day to day. They are not slightly different. They are completely different!

A person is generally bewildered by such behavioral requirements when they are first presented. It is not unusual for us to label such requirements as "idealistic, but impractical", even "impossible". But followers of Jesus have discovered that His ways are like any other subject that is studied. THE MORE TIME THAT WE SPEND WITH THEM, THE MORE THEY ATTACH TO US. AND IMPACT US. Christian principles are not only possible and practical, but they are beautiful.

Many of us, myself included and particularly, have been privileged to know some beautiful Christians who characterized God's marvelous love and grace in their lives. I'll quickly admit that there were far more of the other kind, but somehow, God helped me to zero in on the few who lived and responded and acted like Jesus. THEY are the ones who impressed me. THEY are the ones who made me hungry for what they had discovered in Christ. THEY are the ones who I wanted to pattern my life after as human examples.

Everyone who knows me well has heard me tell about my Sunday school teacher, Sister Laurie. Some of you many times. The reason why I talk about her so often is because of the powerful impact she had on my life, and that impact came to me as a mid-teen, not as an adult. I could see the difference. A pimply-faced, awkward, peach-fuzzed kid could sense a heavenliness about this real-life woman. Don't think that kids can't tell! -- that they don't know! Maybe they are actually more perceptive of beautiful attitudes and dirty rotten attitudes than us case-hardened adults.

By the time I came to know Sister Laurie, she was a soft-spirited, warm, tender and caring kind of a person. THIS is the result of incorporating Christlike, behavioral principles into one's life. It doesn't happen over night, regardless of how much we would like to have it work that way. Our choice would be what I call "hopper religion", and I mean by that -- that God has a big hopper of grace that funnels it into our souls and all that we have to do is ask for kindness and patience and tenderness and warmth and beautiful spirits and He will unload some within us. IT DOESN'T WORK LIKE THAT. IT COMES BY THE REFINING FIRES OF TESTING AND TRIALS DAY BY DAY.

When we are born again we become instant saints. A person is as ready for heaven five seconds after you get saved as you will ever be. The only requirement for staying right with God is obedience, or walking in the light, we call it, and as long as a Christian says "yes" to God, he keeps the victory. Salvation is a perfect, complete work of grace in our hearts. We are never more saved than at the moment of salvation. So, we are saints as soon as we are saved, BUT IT TAKES A LIFETIME OF OBEDIENCE AND SAYING "YES" AND WALKING IN THE LIGHT AND LEARNING ABOUT JESUS AND BEING YOKED UP WITH HIM TO BE SAINTLY, that is, how to act like, a saint. Grace gets into our hearts when' we are saved, but it gets into our heads a lesson at a time. Even the necessary experience of heart cleansing occurs as a natural, normal progression of walking in the light and we say "yes" to God's revelation of that inner need.

The part of Sister Laurie's Christian testimony that really affected me was her genuinely sweet responses to her husband's unkind treatment. There is a sense in which Sister Laurie "preached" the Sermon on the Mount to me by living it before me every day. I saw it more than heard it. It was common knowledge in the entire community that Charlie was abusive to his wife when he drank. He would mistreat her for any reason, but he was especially agitated at her obvious love for Christ and her church. He would make unfair and unnecessary demands of her and do his best to keep her from going to church. When cussing and threatening didn't work, for she came to church every service, then he would physically hurt her.

Those were different days in more ways than one. Women weren't so quick to dump husbands and walk out on them as they are today. This is no defense for the subjugation and abuse

of wives. I have no respect for an abusive husband or father. In fact I personally think that such men should be legally punished to the same degree of their abusive treatment of the offended.

This is a strange paradox in our day. Spousal and child abuse is more socially disdained and criminalized than ever, and yet, abusers are molley coddled and housed in fine so-called prisons and jails for a while and back out onto the streets to do it again. Every article that I have read in my entire adult life agrees that imprisonment does not rehabilitate criminals and lawbreakers. Imprisonment is not an effective punishment. Try to find one reference to a prison in the laws of God as passed down to man. There are none. Other nations had them, but not God's people. Punishment was meted out on the spot. As soon as a judgment was issued by the proper authorities, punishment ensued. There were four forms of punishment handed down by God. (1) Restitution (2) Stripes (or beating) (3) Banishment, and (4) Execution.

Our American value system has been eroded by whining liberals who loudly insist that harsh punishments are both cruel and not a deterrent to crime. The Bible disagrees, and I stand by it wholeheartedly where it states in Ecclesiastes 8:11:

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

I believe God's word, and it says that immediate punishment IS effective -- that it DOES cause people to stop and think before they commit a crime or break a law. I find it hard to believe that murderers and rapists wouldn't stop and think before any premeditated act if they knew that they would be executed as soon as they were proven guilty.

I became a bit sidetracked on the abuse thing, but not too far. I just want it crystal-clear that I abhor abuses of any kind. However, they do occur, all of the time and in varying degrees to all of us, not just to children in abusive homes and wives in abusive marriages. As long as there is sin reigning in the human heart, there will be abuses. And that's exactly what Jesus made as a test of the difference in Christian conduct. **IN EVERY INSTANCE, JESUS IS TELLING US HOW TO REACT WHEN WE ARE ABUSED -- MISTREATED.**

Look at the run-down of abusive words in this passage: "enemies"; who "hate you"; who "curse you"; who "despitefully use you"; who "slap you on the cheek"; who "steal from you." How did Jesus say to respond to them? Love them. Do good to them. Bless them. Pray for them. Turn the other cheek. Give to them. Hear me carefully. **NEVER ONCE DID JESUS SAY TO LEAVE THEM ALONE OR IGNORE THEM OR TRY IN ANY WAY TO GET OUT OF THE ABUSIVE CIRCUMSTANCE.**

Now before anyone gets his defenses up, hear the Word of God out. Let's go on to the conclusion of the entire thought process. It's always good to get all of the facts in a row before making a judgment. Let me ask each one of us two questions to be mulled over in our personal thoughts. First, when ever you encounter an abusive situation, whether it is you or someone whom you are observing, and the offender is "properly told off and put in his place, (you know the thoughts and words here "They're not going to treat me like that and get away with it! God doesn't expect me to be treated like a door mat!")" -- in such situations like that, do you feel good about that

kind of a response after the heat of emotion has subsided? Of course not. Even for people who have no salvation and grace in their hearts, FEELING GOOD ABOUT PUTTING SOMEONE IN HIS PLACE IS A QUICK BURN -- IT'S JUST A FLASH IN THE PAN, and we all know it.

The second question is: "When you choose (for it is a conscious choice) NOT to retaliate, and in your view, refuse to assert your rights, isn't there both an immediate and long-lasting inner consciousness that you have done the right thing? Always. ONE OF A CHRISTIAN'S MOST VALUABLE POSSESSIONS IS THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE HAS ACTED IN THE CHARACTER OF HIS SAVIOR. Please hear me now. We grow up in Christ when we are much more concerned with our heart attitudes and our inner heart condition and our actions and reactions than those of the offenders and abusers. We grow up in Christ when we are more saddened at their pitiful pride that causes them to be mean and spiteful and abusive than we are our hurt feelings. And we err exceedingly if we suppose that such marvelous grace isn't possible and workable, for it couldn't be attested to if it weren't known and experienced. Jesus wouldn't frustrate and confuse us by laying it down as a Christian requirement if it were not attainable and practical.

All of this discussion is under the heading of "Better behavior is expected of Christians.

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Chapter 22

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER -- Part 2

The second consideration is that:

2. Better behavior is predicated upon listening to His voice.

We will certainly fail to live up to Jesus' standards for behavior if we don't keep checking it with HIS WAYS. I am persuaded that most Christians relieve their consciences of guilt along this line by comparing their behavioral responses to those of persons around them, rather than what Jesus says or thinks. That may salve over our consciences a bit, but it will never bring peace of mind or spiritual health and victory. We need to have the approval of the Lord. We need HIS smile upon our conduct. We need to hear what HE has to say about a matter. We need to get HIS judgment about how we are in our hearts. We need to know how pleased HE is with our responses to unfair accusations and what is really important in it all.

3. Let's move to number three. Better behavior results from treating others like you would want them to treat you.

I have already observed that this is rare, even among Christians, and I wonder why? The grace is there. Why is it so seldom witnessed? I think about this a lot, in fact, go over and over it in my mind. Why are there so many Christians who give mere lip service to the "golden rule" standard, but so few actually live by it? I think that the answer has already been mentioned. WE TEND TO GO WITH THE FLOW, instead of the standards set down by Jesus. I see this as dangerous. It is not a bland matter to be casually set aside. I don't view this as unimportant.

"Common practice" as an ethical measurement has been a historically demoralizing agent in any society. I want to tell you from a purely philosophical viewpoint how wrong that is, that is, that it is wrong to think that it is OK just because others are or aren't. **JUST TURN IT AROUND.** That's right. That is how easy it is to come to such a truth in the matter. **WHEN IT IS THE OTHER PERSON SAYING IT OR DOING IT,** it always seems worse. A "for instance" is advantage-taking. Why is it OK for us to get an advantage, but it is not OK if we are being taken advantage of? Another. Why is it OK for us to remain silent when an absent person is being misrepresented in our presence, but if it were us or one of our loved ones, we would immediately straighten it out? Why aren't we as concerned about inaccuracies being peddled about other people or circumstances that affect them as we would those that affect us? I can tell you why. We are more interested in self than others. The golden rule isn't working. We really don't believe in it. The truth is that in most cases we want others to treat us like they want to be treated, but we seldom take the thought and discipline to put ourselves in the other person's place. What is the matter? Self and selfishness sits on the throne of our hearts and not God.

Over and over Jesus emphasized His servant nature. He said that He came to serve and not to be served. If a person has a servant's heart, like Jesus had, it is not hard to place the desire and wants and happiness and well-being of others over your own. I yearn to see this grow and develop in the lives of church people. It can only happen when we pattern our heart attitudes and behavior after those of Jesus and flat out forget about the reactions and behavior and lifestyles of those around us as examples.

Why is it so hard to treat others like we want to be treated? Why is it so hard to put this principle into practice? The answer is easy. Some questions about living the Christian life are hard to answer. I still puzzle over many of them, but not this one. The reason why it is so hard to put the golden rule into practice the reason why it seems so difficult to treat people like we would want them to treat us is because we love ourselves more than we love them. We place our interest and well-being over theirs. "Pastor, you already said that. You're repeating yourself." I know. It must be said over and over.

"Well, how do you get the victory over that condition?" I'm so glad that you asked that question, for there is an answer and there is a way. First of all, **YOU HAVE TO GET SICK AND TIRED OF THE CONDITION.** As with any thing else we get from God, as long as we are satisfied with things as they are, they will no doubt remain that way. This has nothing to do with theology or doctrine, for mere beliefs never affect behavior in themselves. It deals rather with a deep, inner heart need and the way to get it met. Both from personal experience and from a common sense standpoint, I have never believed that there can exist a spiritual hunger of heart that God will not satisfy. That would be the height of Divine cruelty. Besides, there are multiplied thousands of saints who have given clear testimony to God's power and grace to meet all of our heart needs.

The Lord was so faithful to me, and nobody had to tell me about the doctrine of inner defilement and God's provision through Christ to remove it. **MY PERSONAL HUNGER KEPT ME SEEKING HIS FACE FOR A LIKENESS OF HIMSELF IN MY HEART.** And He met my need and cleansed my heart. That didn't give me a perfect head, but it did purify my heart. He answered my prayer of desire as I sought for a fulfillment of two of the great beatitudes in His

sermon on the mount. Jesus pronounced a state of blessedness on those of His followers who were "pure in heart" and who "hungered. and thirsted after righteousness." HE POSITIVELY PROMISED THAT SUCH PERSONS "SHALL BE FILLED."

I know that self will rule us until God deals with it. You who listen and read, or anyone else, who wishes to contest or not believe the doctrine of heart purity, can do so until the cows come home. I know what self-rule did to me and how it robbed me of inner peace and made me think and act in horribly selfish ways. I know how desperately I hated that within me. I also know how faithfully and patiently the Holy Spirit led me to a place of trust in His atoning provision, and I know the result.

I know what a genuine pleasure it is to WANT to serve others and WANT to make others around me happy and fulfilled. I couldn't produce on my own such an inner desire in a hundred lifetimes. We are naturally selfish. You cannot discipline that out. You cannot train or disciple that out. You cannot mature that out. It is a heart condition that must be dealt with by God's provision, grace and power.

I'm so glad that we don't have to live with that unChristlike disposition in our hearts all of our lives, even if most of the current doctrines and contemporary writers and teachers say that we do. I want to humbly proclaim with all glory to the triune God that Christians can have hearts that yearn after Jesus' own heart even when theology books say that you can't.

4. Better behavior is produced by having the nature of God implanted within our hearts.

We've already discussed under three headings that better behavior is (1) expected of Christians, and (2) it occurs when we keep comparing it to His rules and ways, and (3) when we treat others as we want to be treated. The fourth statement that Jesus made about better behavior from Christians rather gets to the heart of it all. We just can't be better people; we can't produce a superior behavior; we just don't have selfless and righteous living in us until and unless God places His love there. We have to have a heart change or we'll continue to live for ourselves.

This thought brings to my mind one of my favorite scripture passages. You recall with me how the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked Him to let her two sons set on His left hand and right hand in His kingdom when He came to power. Let's pick up the story from Matthew 20:20-28.

"And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

"But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

"BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.

"And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.

"Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

There in verse six is an all-time favorite verse of mine. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. No scripture more poignantly portrays better behavior among Christians than this. Followers of Jesus are servants, especially among themselves. THE CLOSER A PERSON GETS TO JESUS CHRIST, THE MORE SERVILE HE BECOMES. Christians who are affronted by lowly attitudes; who feel demeaned by service roles; who feel that certain tasks and labor within the body of Christ are beneath their gifts and abilities; who get out of fix in their hearts when they are ignored or passed by with work and positions they feel more qualified to fill; all such attitudes are indicative of self dominance.

When I think along this line, a vivid picture comes to mind that I heard many year's ago as a young minister. Samuel Logan Brengle, who would one day become General of the Salvation Army, had recently graduated from an American seminary and was being sent to London as an understudy of the Salvation Army's leaders. As soon as proper introductions were made and his quarters assigned, he was understandably anxious to begin his duties as one of the assistants of the General of the Army, as he and it were known. His first official assignment was to clean the muddy boots of the young preachers boys who were just beginning their ministerial training. Something very bad happened down deep within Samuel Brengle's heart as he silently burned with insult. As he scraped those dirty boots, he saw his heart just as dirty with pride, and pled with God for its removal. God gave Samuel Brengle a servant's heart that day until he felt that it was a privilege to clean and shine the boots of some of God's children.

You see, position and rank and status and superiority are all institutions of man. This is a major reason why we have trouble understanding the trinity of God. Anytime we see three persons functioning together or relating to one another, one of the first thoughts that comes to our minds is: "Which one is the leader? Which one is superior?" For the most part we humans, even among God's children, give mere lip service to equality. It is only something to talk about usually for the other person -- not us.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, founded and emanating from the love of God, levels all persons. As Paul states in Galatians 3:28,

"For 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."

And in 1 Corinthians 12:25:

"That there should be no schism (division) in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for the other."

One of the most amazing scriptures I know about is found in 1st Peter 5:1-6. I term it amazing because it is so diametrically opposed to human nature, to what we experience from day to day among our fellowmen, and to what we normally see in our church, home and family relationships. You've found your place, so follow along as I read.

"The elders (pastors and 'father-type' godly church leaders) which are among you I exhort, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed,

"Feed the flock of God which among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint (forced; because you must), but willingly; not for money, but of a ready mind. (eagerly, cheerfully)

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

"And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. YEA, ALL OF YOU BE SUBJECT ONE TO THE OTHER, AND BE CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

"HUMBLE YOURSELVES therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

We need to see the active agent of choice in all of this. WE DELIBERATELY CHOOSE to be submissive, and I'll tell us why in a bit. But look at verse five and six: BE subject one to the other. BE clothed with humility. Humble yourselves.

The reason why we have to choose why we have to make deliberate acts of choice why we have to act and react with an humble deportment is because, outside of these biblical guidelines and the inner compulsion of God's grace in our hearts, EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE THAT SURROUNDS US IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE. Our world is one of pervasive pride and self-glory and self-honor. Nearly our total environment is, "What's in it for me? How will it affect me?" There are exceedingly few voices raised these days representing true Christian selflessness and humility. It's a mostly forgotten and unemphasized Christian virtue. And I wonder why when it is so beautiful when it is genuine? You can't help but admire a genuinely self-effacing person a person who sincerely places the wants and desires of others over his own.

Few persons applaud the arrogant and proud, but nearly everyone will let its fires continue to burn in his own breast. We deplore it on the one hand and think that we can make it serve us on the other. It's the same twisted rule that we have stated earlier: it's bad for someone else, but OK for us. The cleverly-concealed truth about human pride is that we don't use it, it uses us and we serve it. Thinking persons hate what selfish pride makes them say and do, even to the offending of those we love the most. In fact, it generally DOES hurt those closest to us those whom we really don't want to hurt. That same selfish pride keeps us from making restitution and initiating reconciliation. Perhaps nothing keeps the human family in more "hot water" than the pride of life.

LET'S MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT A DIVINE CALL HERE. Let's NOT suppose that this thinking is some holiness preacher's emphasis, and that there is nothing that we can do about it that we just have to live with this and take it as part of the territory. Before I ever started

preaching, and long after my meager voice is stilled, these words were and are, and will be, in the Word.

1 John 2:15-17 "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

The pride of life is NOT of God, and IS of the world.

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Chapter 23

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER -- Part 3

It always saddens me to listen to a church that insists that there is no healing, no cleansing, no victory, over that thing that is within us that dirties us and our relationships and our environment because I know that it does not have to be that way. I have lived among, and watched and worked with too many sweet-spirited, selfless Christians. There are those who have gone to the Fountain filled with blood and had their inner defilement washed away. They, like Paul, have been crucified with Christ.

Please remember what I often and fervently maintain. We're talking about heart cleansing at this point and NOT perfect minds. There is no state of grace in this life that gives God's children perfect understanding, and perfect judgment, and perfect eyes and perfect ears and perfect tongues. No Christian is ever free from infirmities and weaknesses and faults, and, certainly, temptation.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO SEE THAT, AS ADAM AND EVE, A PURE PERSON CAN BE TEMPTED TO THINK AND PERFORM ALL MANNER OF SINS AND, UNTIL AND UNLESS, HE OR SHE YIELDS TO THE SOLICITATION, NOT BE GUILTY OF THAT SIN? WE SIN WHEN WE YIELD TO, SAY "YES" IN OUR WILLS AND HEARTS, TO A TEMPTATION. It is completely unfair to biblical interpretation to lump sin and temptation into one package. As long as a Christian is saying "no" to a temptation, he has not committed a sin, even if the intensity and repetition of the temptation makes one FEEL that way sometimes. This is important.

I am going to take the time to investigate this more deeply in accordance with God's Word. I become terribly frustrated with a modern church that is theologically top-heavy with the assertion that all Christians sin every day in thought, word and deed. The reason for this widely-held contention is because they refuse to differentiate between deliberate, willful sinning and sins of ignorance or omission. For the life of me, I cannot understand this, for the Bible ALWAYS makes a distinction between an unwitting sin and a premeditated one. Terms are uses such as, "if he had

not hated him in the past" (Deuteronomy 4:42, 19:4 & 6, and Joshua 20:5), or "without enmity" or "without laying of wait" (Numbers 35:22). These are directives from God Himself making a clear distinction between unpremeditated and deliberate sin. Then the Lord made sure that restitution and punishment was nothing, or much less, for acts unwittingly committed. All or any sins, premeditated or unwittingly done, must be confessed and made right when the offender becomes aware of it. But the Bible is clear in its teaching that God views deliberate, willful sin different from weaknesses and infirmities.

I'm not going to discuss this at length, but here is a verse in Isaiah 59:12 that some of you might want to chew on a while:

"For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them."

In one brief verse, three references are made to acts committed against God: "transgressions", "sins" and "iniquities". They are three, distinct, separate Hebrew words. If they all three mean exactly the same, why does God use them? That's enough of that for now, at least.

What we are discussing here is the difference between a sin and a temptation to commit sin. There is a strange verb in a verse that we quote often that needs analysis. You will find it in James 1:12, and it reads like this:

"Blessed is the man that ENDURETH temptation."

Have you wondered how to "endure" temptation? The idea of "enduring" is irrevocably connected with length of time, isn't it? Synonyms are, "continuance", "persistence", "lastingness", "longevity", "survival". The dictionary definition is: "To continue in the same state without perishing: to last. To remain firm under." So, enduring temptation means to remain firm and steadfast without capitulating to it.

You see, we generally don't see temptation in the light of enduring it. We usually view it as a "quick burn", somewhat of a sudden, overwhelming appeal that comes on us almost without warning. Temptation is often like a heavy over-cast that lays upon us with unrequiting repetition. Often it will "set up camp", so to speak, and dig in with its heavy guns trained on us like a siege, and there you are, with barrage after barrage fired at the same beleaguered, vulnerable weakness or infirmity. Satan is a master at battering and badgering and zeroing in on the same sore spot.

I have taken the time to try and paint for us the biblical portrait of a sobering, but obvious mental picture. Enduring temptation is a victorious action of the will even if we may feel like we are bloodied and dirtied from the assaults. Even if Satan tries to accuse us of giving into the temptation just because of its appeal to the flesh and its desirability. PLEASE NOTE. There is nothing sinful about our natural, normal human desires. God's word is explicit in this. For instance, the desire for possessions is not wrong. It is God-given. But giving in to the temptation to pile up and pile up endlessly IS wrong. The Bible condemns greed and covetousness and jealousy and thievery. A person can be tempted again and again, sometimes many times a day or night, to say "yes" to an illicit want, AND STILL NOT COMMIT AN ACT OF SIN.

Let's read the rest of this important passage of Scripture and lay down its clear teaching about temptation and sin. They are NOT the same. They are as wide apart as Heaven and Hell. They are not even close to the same. Turn with me to James, the first chapter, starting to read with verse twelve.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.

"But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust (or natural desire), and enticed.

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

If words have meaning at all, an act of sin is not committed until "lust hath conceived", and Bible commentators are generally agreed that James is using this metaphor to describe "agreeing to or assenting to." To the point of yielding to the solicitation, which is an act of the will, SIN HAS NOT BEEN COMMITTED, regardless of how long or severe the enticement came. WE KNOW WHEN WE GIVE IN AND WE KNOW WHEN WE ARE REFUSING. That's important. THIS VERSE HAS TO SAY THAT AN ACT OF SIN IS NOT COMMITTED WITHOUT A POINT OF YIELDING TO OR GIVING IN TO TEMPTATION.

I have taken the time to analyze the difference between an act of sin and a temptation to commit an act of sin so that we can see that even in a holy heart that has been purified by a Divine act of grace -- a heart that truly hungers and thirsts after righteousness -- solicitations to evil can and will still occur. There is no grace that places us above temptation. Jesus was tempted to "be somebody"; to exploit His great power for the sake of worldly recognition; to use His miracle authority to satisfy His hunger. Jesus was tempted to give in; to yield to Satan, His tempter. Paul makes the incredible statement in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was tempted IN ALL POINTS as we are, yet without sin. This HAS to be true, as hard as it may be for us to accept it. In three places, Paul insists that, as our High Priest, Jesus experienced the heat and solicitation of temptation FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF SHOWING US THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO GIVE IN TO IT. I read for our benefit Hebrews 2:17 & 18; 4:14-16 and 5:2, in succession.

"Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

"For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour (help, uplift) them that are tempted."

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, Let us hold fast our profession.

"For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; BUT WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED AS WE ARE, yet without sin.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

"He can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way (those who do foolish things); for that He Himself is compassed with infirmity."

Without becoming entangled with unanswerable questions about whether Jesus could have sinned if He had chosen to, we have to recognize this: If His temptations while He was here on earth to commit sin were not real and truly enticing to Jesus; if He could appropriate a power that is unavailable to us; then His being an example to us, especially in this matter of temptation, would be meaningless. I have to believe that the pull of sin on Him was every bit as strong; the appeal to the flesh had to be as tempting and alluring; or He could not truly understand us nor could He serve as our example of resisting and denying temptation.

The truth, Brother and Sisters, IS THAT WE CAN RESIST AND WE CAN SAY "NO" TO THE STRONGEST SOLICITATIONS TO COMMIT SIN, specifically because Jesus did as a man with the same, no more and no less, capacities that we have. There would be no instances, such as I have read above, given to us about Jesus over coming temptation, as our example, if we could not realize that same kind of victory. There would be no scriptures, such as I have observed, pronouncing blessings on Christians who endure temptation, if it were not possible to over come its power and solicitation. There would be no 1 Corinthians 10:13 if it could not be implemented and drawn upon, and I read:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.'

It would be cruelty of the highest sort, and God Almighty would be guilty of misrepresentation if He would have placed in His Word statements and promises of victory over temptation AND IT REALLY NOT BE POSSIBLE AT ALL. And in spite of this, we are told repeatedly that we have to sin every day in thought, word and deed and can't help it that we're all sinners at heart and can't help that. I ask again: IF THAT'S TRUE, WHAT'S THE POINT OF SALVATION FROM SIN? Why get saved? Why try? To be able to sin with license from then on? To sin with impunity from then on? I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT.

The reason for such a lengthy discussion about the temptation to sin is that there is widely-held beliefs within the body of Christ that if a person has a holy heart he could never be tempted to commit sin. The point is that Adam and Eve were certainly holy and they were tempted. Our Savior and Lord certainly was pure, and He was tempted, in all points as we are, and yet with out sin. I don't know how anyone could read through the sacred pages of the Bible and not observe

myriad statements of victory over temptation. We can love the Lord with one hundred percent of our affections and devotion and still be subject to the most severe and cruel temptations. We can be pure in heart and still make unpremeditated errors and blunders. We can be filled with Christ's righteousness and still be subject to weaknesses and infirmities of mind, body and strength.

I have lived among holiness people nearly all of my life and have had no doubt about God's ability to purify our hearts. The Bible promises it and I believe it and have watched it worked out in many lives. Just because we don't see it exemplified as much as it is professed is no reason to doubt God's promises or power over the sin of the heart. Many of us have done what David did and wrote about in Psalms 37:37.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

David must have done what you and I have done. We watch those who have touched God in a way that most people don't. We look with wonder and awe at the Enochs and Noahs who "walk with God." We closely watch the perfect, or some versions use the term "blameless" those persons who have a heavenly-mindedness about them that always brings us closer to God when we are around them.

We do not watch them to find something that is out-of-whack or sub-standard. People who watch other Christians to find something to criticize won't have to watch long, I assure you. There is no state of grace that destroys or removes our humanity, and the rejecters of holy living do great injustice to God and His grace when they untruthfully try to make heart purity into head perfection. Neither the Bible nor heart holiness doctrine teaches that perfect love in the heart gives us perfect understanding and perfect judgment. All of us have witnessed the sweetest, best, most loving saints we know make some very dumb decisions and say some very unsaintly things and do some very human deeds. WE ALL HAVE CLAY FEET. WE ALL HAVE WRINKLES AND WARTS. We all live in very frail, vulnerable bodies. We all get weary, sick, moody and hurt, and when we are like that, we don't act very saintly at times. You can be sleepy and grumpy and half dazed and glassy-eyed and still have a holy heart.

Just our temperamental differences can ruin tranquillity if we do not learn to be gracious and understanding. When our children were still at home with us, Miriam and I were the early risers, and I learned early on NOT to try to engage her in meaningful conversation when she arose. She couldn't even communicate beyond animal levels of grunts until she had showered and her brain came back to live within her skull. Somehow, it went on vacation during the night. I had to learn that. Are you listening? When I awaken, it is like a light goes on. My mind is in full gear the moment I wake up. I can count on my two hands during my entire life when it seems that voices are dimly calling to me from a deep, dense fog. Some of you, I know, experience that every morning.

Getting a holy heart will not change our temperaments. I am impressed with the differences in the temperaments of the twelve disciples whom Jesus CHOSE. Did you catch my emphasis there? Jesus chose twelve men who were temperamentally different, He wanted it that way.

One of the biggest, dumbest blunders of the holiness people has been the attempt to standardize everybody. It comes across like "if you don't talk, act, think, dress and say "hallelujah" the same way, then there must be some thing wrong with you. You just don't have the victory." I can tell you that any child could attest to the fact that God loves variety. I have long believed that if the Holy Spirit is leading and directing in any group of people, there WILL BE VARIETY. MARK IT DOWN THAT WHENEVER THERE IS A LEGALISTIC UNIFORMITY IN ANY GROUP, some leader is calling the shots and not the Holy Spirit. I have no fear in saying this. I've watched it all of my life. But, by the same measurement, there is something equally wrong in a Christian's heart when his conduct conforms to every changing whim and fancy and fad of the world around us. This message is about listening to the beat of a different Drummer. It's about following in His footsteps and listening to His voice. It is about ordering our conduct after His rules for behavior.

I have ordered my entire life from the springboard of this one, burning question, "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?." I'll tell you what that does. IT KEEPS YOU IN THE RULEBOOK. It keeps you on your knees looking at His face and searching out His ways. It keeps you hungering and thirsting after His righteousness. There is no hunger so great as the craving for more of God. It is as completely satisfying as it is irresistibly inviting. It is the one urge in the human life that produces no unhappiness or confusion or frustration.

What we are talking about is how Christian behavior is affected by experiencing the implantation of the Divine disposition in our hearts. None of us can ever hope to achieve the kinds of reactions that Jesus gives in these "golden rule" standards without a heart change -- a nature change. Would you look again with me at verses thirty-five and thirty-six?

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be children of the highest: for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father also is merciful."

Jesus is telling His listeners what God is like, BUT HE DOES THAT IN A COMPARATIVE MANNER. It would be so easy to miss the main point here, and Satan would like nothing better for God's people than to rivet our attention on the kind of a Person Who God is. Jesus' teaching here; His purpose here; the truth He is getting at is THAT WE WILL BE JUST LIKE THAT BECAUSE WE ARE HIS CHILDREN we are in His image.

Jesus is saying, "If you are children of God, you will have His likeness." That is why we must be born again to enter into the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus said that, "Ye must be born again", it wasn't a statement of insistence from an authoritarian or sovereignty basis. Jesus wasn't saying, "You have to do it this way because it is Our way, and if you want to go to heaven, you are going to have to abide by Our rules." Jesus was saying that we must be born again because any other effort or attempt would be impossible. You can no more get into God's family without being spiritually born than you can be come a human being without being physically born.

I want to make a very important observation at this point and emphasize it with as much intensity as I possibly can. This is perhaps the greatest reason for failed Christian living and unsuccessful attempts at being happy as a professed Christian. ONE OF THE GREATEST DANGERS TO EFFECTIVE AND FULFILLED CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES IS HOW EASY IT

IS TO MERELY SUBSCRIBE TO THE BELIEFS OF CHRISTIANITY. Until a person is truly born again, he can be converted intellectually and emotionally and still be spiritually dead.

I want to try to help us here by my own personal testimony. I first sought the Lord as a nine-year-old boy. I was deeply convicted of my sins and knew that they not only separated me from God, but that I would not get into heaven with them. I knew that I was a lost soul and that Hell was my certain destiny if I did not come to Jesus for forgiveness of those sins. I want to emphasize that I perfectly understood all of that as a nine year old.

From that time until I was a sophomore in college, my Christian experience was an on-again, off-again affair, but mostly off-again. I can't recall an occasion when God was dealing with the hearts of people in conviction when I failed to respond to an invitation. I couldn't tell you how many times I sought God for forgiveness at a public altar of prayer in earlier years, and then privately in later years, over that span of nine years. But for whatever reason, I just couldn't keep the victory. I was usually back into the sin business in a week or two.

Please hear me now. I can't remember a single day that I didn't want to be a Christian. Never once did I get hard of heart or bow my neck against the Lord. IN MY CASE, IT WAS THE PULL OF SIN -- IT WAS THE PLEASURES OF SIN THAT HELD ME FAST. I never spent a day or night in sin but what I wept tears of repentance and sought forgiveness from the Lord after the acts of sin. Many people can live just like that and call themselves Christians, but I wasn't raised that way. My church and pastors and parents faithfully taught me that deliberate, willful sin separates from God. But the greatest reason that I knew that wasn't right was because MY HEART CRIED OUT FOR SOMETHING BETTER!! Down in my soul was a demand for an assurance that God, through Christ, had provided a victory over that powerful pull of sin in my heart.

Through the years of doing my best as a pastor to be a safe guide to God and His heaven, I have been willing to believe that every person to whom I minister may not need such a definite, "know-so" assurance in his relationship with God. What I do know, and what I press each seeker to pursue, is that there is reality in knowing God. No person has to go through life wondering and questioning whether he can truly know the Lord. He will satisfy our deepest yearning for assurance and reality.

I have had questions about nearly everything to do with the way that God works in our lives, for I am an inveterate question-asker. There are far more aspects of God that I don't understand than what I do. I have sighed through my days of wondering where He was when my world was falling apart, and I have cried through my nights of endless disappointment and heartache when He seemed not to care and was remote and silent to my desperate pleas for help and relief. My faith in His goodness and fairness and concern for my plight has been tested in ferocious fights on a thousand battlefields. I know what it is to go through endless days, week in and week out, year after interminable year, asking for relief and seemingly getting none, and then witness the very circumstances for which I pled for deliverance, rather worsen.

I beg of you to realize that I am not describing great faith, for God knows that I had none. It was not faith at all, at least as we generally describe it. It was tattered and torn and weather-beaten and bleeding. It was a forlorn and fearful hanging onto God. It was an utter hopeless resignation to

whatever He willed. It was holding onto Him Who had made Himself real to me. This is the point of all that I am saying. The point is to not draw attention to any endurance quality of mine, for I would have given up and raised the white flag of surrender year's ago, **IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE REALITY OF HIMSELF TO ME.** If any person ever really meets God; if you ever really know Him; then it doesn't matter what comes into our lives down the road of Christian experience, the consciousness of His reality will only deepen. That is how real being born again is. It will not fade with usage and testing. It will stand the test of time and the very worst trials to faith if it is genuine.

The immortal insights of Fanny Crosby come easily to mind here:

"Savior more than life to me,
I am clinging, clinging close to Thee.
May Thy precious blood applied,
Keep me ever ever, near Thy side.
"Every day, every hour,
Let me feel Thy cleansing power.
"May Thy tender love to me,
Draw me closer, closer Lord to Thee."

This is one of the aspects of walking with God, as I mentioned earlier, that I don't understand. I don't know why the trying of our faith is so important to God, especially when it hurts so much. I can intellectually accept that, in God's estimation, the trying of our faith, according to 1 Peter 1:7, is more precious than gold that perishes. That is how great of a value God places on the trial of our faith, but I still don't understand it.

What I do understand, at least in my experience with the Lord, is that I **NEEDED** to really know God, and He knew that when we were wrestling around back there in March of 1953. As long as I live, and now I am thinking through out eternity, I remember how the battle raged in my soul on this very aspect of really knowing God. God sort of held me to really staying with the job until my heart was satisfied. I seldom describe the "blow-by-blow" aspects of the entire experience because I realized, then and now, that it was a very personal battle, and a very personal matter of record between the Lord God and me.

There are two eminently important reasons why I have been impressed to give my personal testimony and set it down in words and phrases. The first is to assert that **EACH OF US CAN AND NEED TO KNOW GOD.** The second is to assert that **KNOWING GOD PRODUCES CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR, FOR IT PRODUCES A CHANGE IN OUR NATURES.** There were immediate, knowable and measurable changes in Lester Boone when I was born again. It happened to me. I know it. You couldn't whip it out of me or argue it out of me. The passing of years and the aging of my physical body and facing the sunset years of my life coupled with the cruel testing by the enemy of my soul has failed to dim its victory and reality and glory. **WHEN GOD DOES A WORK IN OUR HEARTS, IT IS PERFECT AND FUNCTIONAL AND ENDURING.** Real salvation is for every day. It works in the marketplace where the rubber meets the road, or it just never "took".

I'm testifying to immediate, certain changes that occurred to me as soon as I was born again, and they are the same with every truly saved person. I've never seen it vary over forty years of witnessing genuine conversions. These don't develop. They are not the result of growing up and maturing. They occur because of a nature change. You can count on at least four certain results in any individual's experience of salvation. If any one of them is missing, we had better stop and take a second look at what we say has happened. And you can safely use this as a check list AT ANY POINT of a Christian's walk. Here they are:

(1) If a person is truly born again he will have an insatiable desire to talk to God. Prayer will immediately occur. **DESIRE IS THE KEY WORD** to all that I will be saying about these four results. The words that are said and how they sound is NOT what is important about talking to the Lord. The point is that those who are born of God want to communicate with Him. It is as natural as a newborn babies crying. A newborn baby will also instinctively have an insatiable desire for food, and that leads to the second certain result of being saved.

(2) When a person is born again he will immediately notice a desire for the reading of God's word. As the Bible was a closed book, it will beckon a converted soul to it like a thirsty person to a well of cold water. That's the point There will be a thirst. There will be a hunger.

(3) If a person is truly saved, there will be a desire to be where God's people meet and worship. I can tell you right now that this is not commercial time now. I'm not pushing the church as a product that needs to be sold. In fact, I am very sensitive about pressing people to come to our church for the simple reason that I am the pastor. I have always been bothered by preachers who work to get people to come and listen to their sermon. It might come as a surprise to you good people who listen to me Sunday after Sunday, that I have never once asked a single person to come and hear me preach. To do such a thing has always come across as just a bit egotistical, so I can't do that. I have joked about it at times when others brought the subject up, but the gospel message is a very precious matter than no man takes to himself. The church is the body of Christ, and regardless of how humanly faulty and frail it is at times, there is where Christ meets with His people and they are the only ones who can tell the gospel story. Having said that, the church is where Jesus comes to meet with His body. The church is engaged in the most important task on earth. The preaching and teaching of the Word of God emanates from His heart, and, if it is anointed by the Holy Spirit, carries an authority that is awful and superlative and heavenly.

I am deeply concerned about the 1990s church at this crucial point. I am puzzled at how easily professed Christians can absent themselves from the house of God on about any pretext. I see these people, whom I have known to be regular attenders in the past, stay home on Sunday nights and mid-week services for just about any reason that you can imagine. Some of the fault must be assumed by many dead pastors who don't have enough holy fire burning in their hearts to keep their own fires burning. **BUT THE MAIN REASON IS THAT DESIRE AND HUNGER FOR SPIRITUAL FOOD IS GONE.** One thing that I know is that I still want to be in the house of God on Sunday night. That is where my heart is. I don't go to church for a mid-week service because it is a habit, even though that IS a good habit. I go because I want to. That is where my heart is.

I've never seen it to alter about church attendance. Whenever people get saved, they **WANT** to be at every service and wonder why we don't have some more throughout the week.

That invariably happens. I need to ask us this question. What do you think is wrong when that changes? You and I know the answer. When you love Jesus, you just naturally want to be around those who are talking about Him and praying to Him and singing about Him. I would go to church just to hear His word read. I would go to church just to hear some one mention His name. I would go to church to sing the songs and hold a hymnal in my hands that speaks His name and tells of His love. I would go to church to step into a sanctuary that was built for the singular purpose of the telling of the gospel story. I would go to church to rub shoulders with the redeemed and the bloodwashed. I would go to church to escape from the hurry and rush and racket of the world. I would go to church to sit before God. I would go to church to open my heart to His voice.

(4) In the fourth place, if a person is genuinely born again, there will be an insatiable desire to see other people saved. I know that I can't get bogged down here, but it must be said that a spirit of evangelism is normal for newly-saved and truly saved individuals. It is a certain result of being saved and changed.

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Chapter 24

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER -- Part 4

Now, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus, just the opposite of all that I have outlined as certain results to genuine conversion, reveals either a backslidden or backsliding spiritual condition. When the above-mentioned attitudes are absent or waning within professed Christians, danger lurks. But think with me now. It is not the absence of praying and Bible reading and church attendance and a passion for souls that is most alarming. THE CONCERN IS WHY? You see, the obvious behavior is only symptomatic. The DISINTEREST in the means of grace, as we term them, are only symptoms of what has happened in the inner room of the heart. Love for Jesus and His church has died or these other superficial things wouldn't have surfaced. First love has been lost.

What I am describing is consistent and trustworthy as a measuring device of spiritual vitality. All of us who hear and read me now need to keep this four-fold check list ever before us. We don't even need a preacher to keep checking up on us if we are just faithful in matching up our present behavior with these four "first love" results. If we discover other activities displacing our prayer time or our time alone with God's Word, we need to ask ourselves "Why?" If we discover ourselves making excuses for failing to meet with God's people, we need to ask ourselves "Why?" "Why would I rather go somewhere else or do something else than go to God's house?" If we discover that our hearts are no longer burdened and broken over unsaved loved ones and friends, we need to ask ourselves, "Why is my interest in the things of time when they used to be they should be in God's things"?

A relationship with God always places value in spiritual and eternal matters rather than physical and temporal ones. That is why Christians must consistently have a personal check list handy. "How much of my time, interest and energy is spent on spiritual and eternal matters?"

I want to highlight a thought laid down by Jesus in verse thirty-five in respect to His reference of being like, or in nature with, our heavenly Father. He said, "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great." What do you make of that? What kind of a reward? Is this some kind of double talk? or maybe a paradox? Why would Jesus recommend a behavior that expects no reward, (give, hoping for nothing again) and in the same breath guarantee a "great reward"? We can certainly rule out a contradiction, can't we? The "great reward" has to be compatible with a gracious act that doesn't expect a return. So, what is a great reward that accrues to persons who aren't expecting one?

I mentioned it earlier, even though I am guessing that it was lost to many of us. Remember that the Bible is its own best commentary, and we can easily find the answer to what a word or phrase means by its context, that is, the surrounding verses. It is true here. The very next phrase says it, "and ye shall be children of the Highest." The greatest fulfillment of a Christian is to see the likeness of God in our hearts, that is, our attitudes and motives. There is no greater reward. Nothing that heaven will ever reveal, except the seeing of God face to face, can be a greater realization than knowing that your inner thoughts and desires and attitudes are as His own and that such heart desires please Him.

We CAN please God, you know. The Bible says that we can, even though so many in the church says that we can't. Listen as I read some scriptures:

Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

1 Thessalonians 4:1 "Furthermore we beseech you, brethren and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and please God, so ye would abound more and more."

Hebrews 11:5 "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation, he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

Hebrews 13:16 "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

1 John 3:22 "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

Likeness! That is the thought! and that is the goal! The children bear the likeness of the father. Remember how Jesus emphatically told the Pharisees who wanted to kill Him that they were "of their father, the devil", and that they would just naturally do the works of their father? (SEE John 8:44) Satan wasn't their biological father, so what Jesus was describing to them was that they were acting IN CHARACTER with the devil. They were doing what they were -- they were acting out what was in their natures. It can be no other way. We will naturally act and react what we really are on the inside.

THIS, my friends, is what drives honest and serious Christians into the mind and heart of God. So, what is He like so that we may know how to pattern? He is like what Jesus has laid down before us. It's all right here what we've been studying in this message. It's there in the last sentence of verse thirty-five and all of thirty-six. "FOR HE IS KIND..." There it is! He is kind. This is a totally different character sketch than God is generally accorded. He is kind. He is kind to the unthankful. He is kind to the evil. He loves His enemies. He treats well those who abuse, mistreat and misjudge Him.

And, Jesus is telling His followers to be like that! You can't see this any other way. WE CAN BE LIKE THAT. I hope that you don't get upset that I repeat this truth. It's unnatural, I know. I know that it is contrary to human nature. It's not what we are used to. It's not the way that people generally treat each other, but it is the way God is and it is the way that He says we should and can act.

Then there is verse thirty-six: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." Mercy is a Divine characteristic. It is one of the faces of God's love. It is one of the faces of God's grace. We're going to direct our thoughts for awhile on the difference between God's mercy and grace.

Mercy is a response and grace is not. Both emanate from the beneficent nature of a loving God. Both of them are undeserved. Mercy is undeserved and so is grace, but mercy is in response to deserved punishment or disfavor. Please don't think that I am hair-splitting here. A distinction is important. Mercy comes as a result of a punishment for guilt that has been established and is going to occur without the intervention of clemency. The introduction of mercy alleviates or totally nullifies that punishment.

GRACE IS NEVER A REACTION. Grace has no motivation of provocation. Grace functions preventively, that is, it anticipates and acts BEFORE! Grace is conceptual, that is, it designs and creates by purpose and fore thought. Please note in verse thirty-five again that Jesus expects His followers to think and act in a similarly gracious manner. He says, "Do good and lend, HOPING FOR NOTHING AGAIN." When what we do has no desire for a return, we are opening the door to gracious thinking. Let's see if we can step through that door. Self and selfishness and self-interest and self-centeredness and all other children and grandchildren of carnal pride must be left at the door of graciousness to enter. Remember that GRACIOUSNESS IS FINDING FULFILLMENT IN SOMEONE ELSE'S PLEASURE AND HAPPINESS.

Grace's landscape is a profusion of service, like millions of wild flowers that lavish their beauty and fragrance to no human eye or nostril. It offers a selfless service to those around them like a vast field of beautiful, blossoming flowers where happiness and satisfaction reach into an infinity of peace. Friend or enemy benefit alike. Self-interest, on the other hand, produces conflict where a collision of wills is certain. When that is removed, peace reigns. "Can I help you?" is the quest of any gracious person. Can we possibly imagine what our world would be like if all of us saw ourselves as servants one to the other? That is what God's grace produces in a holy heart, for that is the kind of a person Who God is. Graciousness emanates from God. It begins with Him. It flows from His inner nature. God is a giver by nature, and His grace in us makes us givers -- givers who seek and want nothing in return.

Wanting a return even if it is just a thank you or an expression of appreciation is what gets us out of grace and into deserts. We stop operating by grace when we start expecting something in return.

An entire new world opens to the gracious person. How different our personal world would be if we would start our day with the motive of, "I wonder how many people I can be a blessing to today?" and start at home, always. Start with a spouse, a child, a parent. Then move on to the persons with whom we work and those with whom we do business. Especially treat well that one or those with whom we have been colliding recently. I want to pose one of the most important questions any of us will ever ask ourselves. I want us to use this question as a basis for discovering the solution to all personal conflicts in our lives. I want us to take every aspect of that conflict and honestly look at it in the light of this question.

Here it is: "What would it really matter if I agreed with their opinion?" "What would it hurt to agree with their way?" You see, there is just one, real issue to any follower of Jesus, and that is "What is right", or the converse, "Is it sin?" **MOST PERSONAL CONFLICT HAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG.** The central issue is nearly always, "my way or my opinion or the way I see it or the way I want it."

One of my life's greatest revelations came to me (mercifully -- mercifully for me AND for all whose lives I would touch) as a young student in ministerial training. Preacher boys are generally strongly opinionated as they discuss theological issues among themselves. An uneasy awareness grew within me as these "theological debates" always ended in heated exchanges, hurt feelings and misunderstandings.

That growing awareness took the form of three outstanding observations, the first of which I have alluded already. No moral principle was being violated. There was really no right or wrong aspect about these hotly-contested issues. Ninety-eight percent of contentions among Christians have nothing to do with the violation of a moral principle. The second awareness had to do with atmosphere, by that I mean the general feelings that existed during and after the contentions. According to the Bible, the badge of Christianity the one, outstanding feature of the church's reputation is that they love one another. I quote from John 13:35

"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to the other."

The only reason why such an observation should be noteworthy is because such is not the case with society in general. We all know this. Here again, behavior within the ranks of professed Christians can acclimate to that of the unbelieving world that surrounds us **IF WE DON'T KEEP THE STANDARDS OF JESUS AS OUR GUIDE.**

Please hear me now. The maintenance of a loving, harmonious atmosphere within the church **IS A MAJOR CONSIDERATION.** It must gain prominence near the top of our congregational goals if we have the spirit of Jesus. Jesus raised this as a standard for His followers because it clearly depicts the harmony that exists in the Godhead. The greatest harmony, and unity success story of all time is that that exists within the Trinity. Fellowship among any

persons can only exist where there is harmony, and the church must, for its very testimony among unbelievers, bend every effort to maintain unity and love among us.

This is no plea for compromising right and wrong. You not only know me better than that, but, in all fairness, I have already made a clear point of being true to Jesus' standards. The point is: when a stand needs to be taken, WHY ARE WE DOING IT? That's the point exactly. We need to analyze whether our contention is worthy of the grace of God, that He has freely invested IN US. Are we being as gracious and thoughtful of other people as God has been with us? We need to quietly ponder this time after time. Am I dealing as mercifully to those with whom I disagree as God has dealt with me?

Here is a good check point that the blessed Holy Spirit talked to me about many year's ago. It's a little di-mono-logue that He taught me whenever I see or hear another brother or sister say or do something that looks out of line and I am tempted to get critical. Some of you are still back there with that new term I coined, "di-mono-logue", so I had better define it so that we can get back on track together. I think that you already know, but it's when you talk to yourself as though there are actually two of you in a debate.

Whenever I witness a Christian , or even an unbeliever, with a DRA (dirty, rotten attitude), especially if it is directed at me, and the response is to think badly of them, I start talking to myself (not out loud, of course). I say to myself, "Now, Lester, you just make sure that you don't act like that!" When rotten attitudes and dirty spirits and ungracious words and actions pollute our moral atmosphere, that's the time for us to take inventory. That is the time for us to turn the spotlight on our own hearts and see how we're doing.

I have given two of three aspects of an awareness that grew within me as I witnessed and participated in heated differences of opinion with other brothers in the Lord. One was that most all of all such contentiousness was for my opinion and hardly ever over a violated principle of right and wrong. The second aspect was that the results of contention was that it introduced an unharmonious atmosphere, and the third really touched my heart. A brother was hurt. A good friend was offended. A co-worker was torn down and not built up. Someone has wisely observed that "The church is the only organization that kills its wounded." That is not completely true, for the church has no monopoly on killing its wounded. Just about every organization I know about engages in such sadistic behavior. But I will agree that it seems worse in the church, for, as Jesus said, we are to love one another. That means that we can.

Do we have to agree with each other to show our love for each other. Is that what it takes to have harmony -- to always agree? We all know better than that. We wouldn't always agree if we tried extra hard twenty-four hours of every day. God gave us distinct personalities with a God-like individualism that can and does think independent thoughts. He gave us all different and unique personalities and that wasn't a mistake. He did that on purpose. That is one of the significant distinctions between human beings and all other creatures that came from God's creative mind and hands. **THIS VERY FACT IS WHAT MAKES ONENESS AND UNITY WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE. THIS IS WHAT MAKES GRACIOUSNESS AND A SPIRIT OF SERVICE AND SELFLESSNESS ALL THE MORE HEAVENLY AND BEAUTIFUL.**

I repeat that none of us can come to be this way without the introduction of God's grace within us. It is impossible without a heart change.

A question understandably arises from biblical teaching along this line. How Godlike can a Christian become? Who knows? My guess is that the answer here is designed to be open-ended. The capacity is as endless as eternity is. It is as great as God Himself. What is answerable, and incredible, I might add, from a human standpoint, IS THAT WE CAN HAVE AS MUCH OF GOD AS WE WANT. And this is infinitely more than just a clever Christian cliché'. It has been proven true by continual and growing discovery. Where there is a yearning to know Him and discover Him and see Him, there is fulfillment. That touches me deeply, and I think that it does you also. There seems to be no limit or restriction to the pursuit of His Person.

Doubt about the term, "there is no free lunch", stops at the door of God's grace. The most profound thought of all time emerges from the lips of Jesus Christ as He states in John 3:16, "God so loved.. .that He gave...." Before the creation of the universe; before the foundation of the world; before there were other beings of any kind; before there was any other thing or any other being; God the Father, God the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit, in perfect union and in perfect understanding of all that it meant, LOVED AND GAVE. God doesn't give for anything that He can get out of it, even though many Christians believe that the purpose for man's creation was so that God could have someone with whom He could fellowship. God doesn't need anything to make Him complete or fulfilled, not even you and me or your love and fellowship and mine. God was Who He was and is Who He is before and after you and I came along. God's grace isn't an investment that He is planning to get something out of by and by. God doesn't want a single thing from you and me, except one thing: HE WANTS TO SEE HIS GRACIOUS NATURE REPRODUCED IN US. HE WANTS US TO MIRROR HIS GIVING DISPOSITION.

People, we need to see that heaven is a place of grace. There are no attitudes of rewards or deserts there. How could there be? We must recall the fact that Jesus, the incarnate Christ, came to earth as our supreme example, as Paul repeatedly sets before us in 2 Corinthians 8:9;

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

And He uses the same example of Jesus' servile purpose for being among us in Philippians 2 to explain why he expects us to be,

".....like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind,

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind, LET EACH ESTEEM OTHER BETTER THAN THEMSELVES.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

"Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus.

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

"But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

I don't know of any aspect of God that has so impressed me in these past three or four years than that He is at His heart an humble Being. What Jesus was among us the attitudes and actions and the way He did things -- the way He lived, and especially, His commandments and teachings for us to follow **WAS ALL CHARACTERISTIC. NONE OF IT WAS DONE OR SAID PRIMARILY AS AN EXAMPLE** -- Jesus lived on earth the way He did because that is the kind of a Person he IS.

Talk about self-esteem There is no place or need for it in a holy heart. There is a freeing action in gracious attitudes. The horizons of doing good to others is absolutely limitless if a person is freed of what kinds of responses will accrue if the need for a reciprocation is eliminated. There is a bondage in selfishness -- when doing good is predicated upon how others respond to it. We can see how much sense all of this makes in the mind of Christ when He tells us to love our enemies and do good to those who mistreat us. We do it because of something within us that has their well-being and their happiness and their good in mind instead of ours. When you have the other person's well-being at the heart of your actions, and their response to how they treat you won't affect that, then all that matters to you is that you are acting in character with God, **AND THAT DETERMINES VALUE TO YOU.** It's easy to see that if that becomes the focus of a Christian if that is what determines value to us pats on the back are nice, but not necessary.

Approval is a powerful motivator to us maybe the greatest of all. But a question arises: How much of other people's approval merely feeds human pride? How much of so-called self esteem is but a thinly-veiled egotism? And the best question of all: Does approval really build self-esteem, or is it actually fueling a false impression a hypocrisy? What makes us better and stronger people? Approval, or facing and overcoming criticism? I'm not trying to be either philosophical or idealistic with these questions. I'm very serious, for I tearfully counsel often with dear, sensitive persons who struggle with this.

This message is about following Jesus, Whom I term "A Different Drummer." Perhaps no other religious leader of all humankind's history was as criticized, misrepresented, ostracized and rejected as Jesus was. Did all of this negative mistreatment and abuse destroy Who He was or devalue His self-image to Him? Did it cause Him to see Himself as a failure or a loser? I submit that it brought into His life just what it does to ours. It caused Him to do what it does to ours. **IT DROVE HIM TO FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH HIS FATHER. IT TOOK HIM TO A CONSTANT REFERENCING OF WHAT WAS TRUTH AND REALITY.** This world passes away. Its system of morality and justice is in a constant state of change. We all know that. Who and what are we going to follow?

I don't think that I need to tell you where I get my signals. God so graciously taught me as a brand-new Christian to check it all out with Him and His Word. They will always agree, as the Bible asserts in 1 John 5:7 and 8.

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

"And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

I have the strongest perception that the people of God in the 1990s are going to need to keep referencing our lifestyles by the Bible more closely than at any other time in the history of the church. We are witnessing right now an unprecedented attack on Christian values in America. What surprises me is how OVERT it is. Such opposition to Christian faith and practice in America is certainly not new, but until recently it has been subtle and hidden. It is no longer like that, but is open, vitriolic, hate-filled. It is like an open season on Christian values and is already "politically correct." Don't let that term throw you. It means the exact opposite of how it sounds. What it means is that you are taking your stand on the side of whatever is politically acceptable. It means going with the flow. It means that you are conforming to the prevailing mood. That is nothing new. It is just a new, polished-up term for compromise and conformity.

What is today's prevailing mood if a person wants to be considered "politically correct"? In one day this past week, June 2, 1994, four moral issues were at the forefront of national media attention. Our Surgeon General pressed for the legal adoption of legislation that would force the Girl Scouts of America to accept lesbians into their organization, and the Boy Scouts to receive homosexuals. Our President publicly differed with Pope John over the wrongness of abortion. I never thought that the day would come that I would side with the Pope of Rome against the President of the United States, but it has. The very term "family values" is eulogized by conservative and liberal alike, but they have totally different meanings.

On the third moral issue I am quoting from the results of an Associated Press survey.

"Asked whether the American people should be concerned about Clinton's marital fidelity, 71% of the respondents said that it was a personal issue 'just between him and Hillary', and that (62%) it wouldn't affect their vote if he ran for re-election."

In the same paper, and I quote,

"On Tuesday, the United States Supreme Court let stand a Georgia court's ruling that a Ten Commandments plaque be removed from a county courthouse in that state."

What is the moral mood of 1994? It's OK for the President to disregard his marriage vows, and a person's morals no longer affects his or her position and effectiveness as a political leader. It's OK to terminate the life of an unborn baby at any time for any reason. Homosexuality is normal and that is just the way that God makes some people. God's commandments are no longer an appropriate and recommended moral guide for the American people.

I see at least one positive result of the moral shift in our country. It will force Christians to decide whether they really believe God's Word or whether it is merely church creeds they have accepted. It will force all of us to evaluate -- which will necessitate serious study. Perhaps we are

witnessing the beginning of the end. Maybe, finally, the lines between mere profession and true conviction are being clearly drawn.

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Chapter 25

HEART HOLINESS -- A HIGHER LAW

A considerable number of contemporary religious thinkers have a very incorrect idea about there being no law in grace. They take too many interpretive liberties with the Apostle Paul's insistence that we are saved by grace through faith, and not by any adherence to the law. They present a dangerous viewpoint of Christian liberty as though grace provides allowances and latitudes that are above restrictions. It can lead to a smug, elitist thought process that places a Christian into a false sense of freedom from discipline and order. **NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.**

The fact is that Christian grace establishes a **HIGHER** law. It **EXCEEDS** common practices of thought and behavior. Grace's rulebook is the most demanding conceivable to human thought, for it emanates from the character of God. **THE FASCINATION IS THAT IT HAS NO RIGOR AND INVOLVES NO BONDAGE.**

Grace is a most paradoxical matter to the human mind. It draws and captivates and captures as it frees and releases. It restricts and isolates as it opens and broadens. There is an astronomical freedom in grace and at the same time a consistent regulation of what is right and what is wrong and what is true and what is false. Grace provides an eye-popping latitude of discovery and conquest within specific lines of appropriateness. Nothing known to the mind of man is so potential and predictable at the same time. The more one discovers about God's grace, the more "amazing" it becomes.

There are three specific superlatives about the higher laws of holiness that we want to think about in this message; Graciousness, Advantage and Servanthood. They rise above what is normally expected in human behavior and operate overtly, or openly. The higher laws of holiness are blessings, like sunshine and air, that flow constantly and randomly into the lives of all who come into contact with them. That is the unselective, unrestrictive nature of grace -- it is a gracious effusion. It is gracious like a flooding is -- full, inundating, unrepressible.

Let there be no misunderstanding in our minds about the meaning of graciousness. It is a prevenient or pre-emptory motivation. It functions without prompting or motivating. It is so different from what we witness on a daily basis, even often among loved ones and close friends. The general motive for our doing much of anything is a return. Even if it is for a "thank you". Few people continue to relate to those individuals who do not respond to them. A normal, human reaction is to avoid persons who do not respond to one's overtures of friendship, kindness or thoughtfulness. **THAT IS WHAT MAKE GRACIOUSNESS A HIGHER LAW.** It seeks the good and the well-being of others regardless of responses. Graciousness sees value in someone else's happiness and pleasure and success and well-being separate from its own.

Paul stated it as succinctly as you can get it in First Corinthians 13:5 by stating that, "...God's love within us seeks not its own." And we should vigorously reject the contemporary teaching that suggests this beautiful Christian attitude will only be realized in a glorified state. Such erroneous teaching not only shortchanges God's marvelous love and grace for the individual Christian, but it impoverishes the church by not allowing it to be manifested in the experiences of the saints. I praise God that we don't have to live on the low levels assigned to us by the theologians. God's grace has an indomitable buoyancy to it that will supersede and transcend the regulations of permissive and tolerant gainsayers.

It was true when Jesus described higher laws of conduct and attitude that discredited and angered the religious leaders of His day. He capsulated it all when He informed His disciples that their "righteousness had to EXCEED the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees" in Matthew 5:20. Jesus talked about a way of life that "went the second mile" and "turned the other cheek" and "gave to those who would defraud you" and "loved enemies, haters and despisers" and "did good to those who spitefully used you and spoke evil of you." Folks, if these well-known and specific requirements of conduct set down by Jesus here have not taken root in our lives, and manifested themselves, we are not even out of kindergarten spiritually. Again and again Jesus used this embarrassing comment, "Do not even sinners the same?"

If the saints are not experiencing a "higher law" in these areas of conduct than the unsaved around us, where is the testimony? What do we have to offer the world of the unsaved? Why should they see any value in a better way?

I personally thank God for two intense influences in my life along this line. Regardless of how little real Christian behavior I saw as a young Christian, and how little I see today, I SAW SOME. That was, and is, enough. How many examples do we need? God helped me to WANT to pattern my life and behavior after the godly, real, functioning saints, and not the permissive, tolerant and indulgent ones.

WE CHOOSE OUR ROLE MODELS IN CHRISTIAN GRACE AND VIRTUE just as we do in all other aspects of living. But a Christian pattern to follow is very different from any other. A Christian hero is like any other good teacher. A good teacher's consuming goal is to create an appetite for knowledge in his students. He wants to be seen as a torch bearer, not a torch. He wants to have someone to whom he can pass the torch of truth.

The same observation can be made of a wise and true counselor. His goal is NOT to keep his confidants, those whom he is counseling, coming back to him again and again. He is false to his purpose as a counselor if he establishes himself as an enabler. His goal is to teach a person how to cope -- to teach him to face and handle his problems. This separates the women from the girls. (Wisdom dictates that I phrase that like that sometimes.)

The point is that Christian heroes, or role models as they have come to be known, are truly embarrassed at the hint of adulation or worldly hero worship that would suggest something wonderful about themselves. Everybody needs to be loved and appreciated and told so now and again. But Christians who distinguish themselves by Godliness and Christlikeness are INEVITABLY LONG on genuine self-effacing meekness. The one is part of the other -- always.

A person who has been to Christ's cross of self-crucifixion like Paul describes in Galatians 2:20 will invariably discover the flowers of selflessness growing in his HEART. It's wonderful! It's wonderful that it is possible. It's wonderful that it can happen to you, and me, but mostly it's wonderful to WITNESS IT! What does it essentially matter what an individual claims in his profession of Christ-likeness? What matters is what is actually working in one's heart and life. What is incomparably wonderful is when YOU CAN WITNESS IT -- when YOU can see it really making a difference in your attitudes and responses.

This, my friends, is true worth. This is real treasure. When you can see gracious attitudes and selfless responses, IN YOUR INNERMOST HEART, to false accusations and abusive treatment and painful injustices, THAT IS VALUE beyond earthly comparison. Peter explained such a perceptively in his observation in 1 Peter 1:7 that, "the trial of your faith is more precious than gold that perishes." A smile from God is worth more than the awards and recognitions and honors from men.

I have been discussing one reason why I personally embraced the higher laws of heart holiness because I saw it exemplified in the everyday lives of some dear saints of God. But I remarked that there were two reasons. The second is, if good role models of Christlike behavior is absent, even assuming that a Christian could find none to appreciate and pattern, we have the clear teaching of God's word. It's standard for selfless living is not only clearly set forth, but it is given to us as POSSIBLE AND NORMAL.

Some Christians are so spiritually immature that they think , they have performed some Herculean, gargantuan spiritual feat when they "mightily abase and humble themselves" by asking someone to forgive them. Folks, that isn't valorous behavior above and beyond the call of duty at all. THAT'S NORMAL. WE SHOULD BE FORGIVING. We might think that we've done something noteworthy, but forgiveness among mankind is considered common in God's sight.

It's part of heaven's language. It's the character of the saints. It's the air we breathe and the food we eat. It's the way we think and the way we walk. When a person begins to live by the higher law of graciousness, I mean by that, thinking first of others, forgiveness is a prevailing attitude. It is a characteristic of heart, and believe me, it doesn't stay in our hearts. It impacts the mind and harnesses the emotions.

I would not remotely suggest that insults and defections and rejections do not hurt holy people. I have maintained throughout my personal ministry that gracious people may in fact FEEL the slights and hurts MORE BECAUSE OF THEIR INCREASED SENSITIVITY TO THEM. THERE IS NO GRACE THAT INSENSITIZES THE MIND AND EMOTIONS, and holiness teachers greatly err when they suggest such an idea or leave such an impression. Look again at what I stated earlier: "forgiveness is a prevailing attitude. It is a characteristic of heart... it impacts the mind and harnesses the emotions." Grace does not bypass the thinking or the feelings of its recipients. It transcends them. It supersedes them. It is higher than them. It functions through them, with them, and in spite of them many times.

If God's love has truly come into a person's heart, that heart will start pumping His love into one's thinking and feelings. That is why we have to have holy, loving HEARTS. IT HAS TO START THERE. Every time a Christian starts to try and train his head to accept Christian grace and virtue, it backfires. It doesn't work. You can't train grace into a Christian. You can't disciple grace. You can't learn grace. IT IS A DIVINE CHARACTER VIRTUE THAT IS INFUSED AND IMPARTED. The head can be trained, but not our hearts. That's God's domain. He fixes hearts. MEN INFORM, BUT GOD TRANSFORMS. We can change, alter and train our minds, but only God can change our hearts, and people who try to live by God's higher laws of selflessness by training and discipline only are disappointed, confused and discouraged when it doesn't work.

I referred earlier to Jesus' teaching on selfless attitudes and behavior in His so-called sermon on the Mount. Jesus wasn't alone in this teaching, but Paul fully backed it up in his First Corinthians 13 so-called "love chapter". No thoughtful Christian can meditate upon the products of God's love within us and fail to recognize a deep sense of inner need. I doubt that a Christian has ever lived, including Paul, the writer himself, who could have manifested such self-effacing virtues without a radical, internal heart overhaul. Paul called this kind of "higher-law living" a "more excellent way" in chapter twelve, verse 31.

I find it nearly incredulous that a few modern-day liberal teachers would place the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians into a future, glorified setting. It is obvious that such interpretive freedom is borne of an inadequate behavioral problem and is not at all consistent with overall Pauline writing. No scholar can contextually or hermeneutically place this "Divine love operative" behavior into a heavenly setting without jeopardizing many other scripture passages. Where does it translate into actual behavior? At what point can we expect to start acting like Jesus? Do we fit our actions and reactions to the Scripture or the other way around? Will we make God's word so "relevant" that it becomes so watered-down and humanized and "desalinated" that it finally fits our low levels of conduct? If we allow that, and many in the church do, what's the point? Why bother?

This introduces one of my strongest contentions about Christian conduct, and I have used it as a measuring device in my own simple walk with God. When God's word makes a requirement, let's seek for the grace and power to conform to it instead of trying to overhaul it to fit our experiences. That is the danger of so-called "relevancy". Christians must exercise appropriate caution in the effort to make God's word relevant, or more understandable. The devil is tricky and ulterior and will invariably appear as an angel of light.

We are all often enlightened, and in fact, clarified in our understanding of biblical meanings by the use of various translations and paraphrases. I personally appreciate any interpretive tool that can allow God's precious Word to speak to us more clearly. But I am more than considerably uneasy with the plethora of new and varied paraphrases that are currently inundating the church. Some of them seem downright disrespectful -- maybe even worse. Have you heard of the new "rap" bible? Some of us may not even know what rap is. I think that I do.

I never want to oppose change simply because it is change. That is ignorance gone to seed. But I am acutely aware of Satan's devices, and am bound as a true shepherd to keep them before us. ONE OF HIS MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS IS TO INTRODUCE SMALL AMOUNTS OF

ERROR WITH ANY CHANGE. I know that this sounds old-fashioned. So be it. I've watched the church lose her power and glory over change, so there's ample reason for fearing it. We all know that changes in many areas are as necessary in the church as they are in our personal lifestyles. Godly people will be wise. They will guard truth and right. They will guarantee the maintenance of Biblical purity in both interpretation and conduct. I know that this is a tall order, but someone has to be the keeper of the door of the church.

We have been talking about how the very nature of God's grace elevates a Christian's concept of conduct. It will conform to the lofty instructions of selflessness and graciousness. These demands always exceed those of law. I doubt that a catechism or a discipline or membership commitment or any other organizational list of "do's and don'ts" would come near to the requirements of grace. They all leave something out. They all fail to address every situation and choice that stands before us. God's laws are written on the "fleshly tables of the heart." Aren't we glad? The high law of grace omits nothing and relates to everything. Through the constant monitoring of the Holy Spirit of God within us, we have constant and instant judgment. And that's a shouting point if I ever knew one.

This is what makes the difference in Christians -- this instant application of a higher law. **HOLY PEOPLE DON'T ENGAGE IN UNHOLY BEHAVIOR AS LONG AS THEY KEEP IN STEP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Jesus promised that "He would lead you into all truth" in John 16:13, and Paul gave us a powerful promise in Romans 8:4, "For (the righteous).. .walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"; and again in Galatians 5:16, "...Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the desires of the flesh." **THIS IS THE POWER OF THE VERSES I HAVE JUST READ TO YOU: THERE ARE PROVISIONS IN GOD'S GRACE FOR PURE AND HOLY LIVING. THE PROVISIONS AND THE POSSIBILITIES ARE THERE FOR US.** If we can admit that it is possible for some other person to live a holy life, then we can see the possibility of claiming such a life for our own. Thank You, Lord!

Look especially at Jesus' promise concerning the operation of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life and walk with God there in John 16:13, "The Holy Spirit will lead you into ALL truth." What a powerful and precious promise! That's the saint's safety net from error! We may make poor investments. We may be the world's worst weather forecaster. We may buy more "lemons" than apples. We may have poor taste in everything from perfume to house paint. We may be a world-class pessimist or on the other hand a habitual risk-taker. We may be near-sighted, color-blind, uncoordinated, unprofessional, impractical, ignorant and humorous, **BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO BE IN ERROR SPIRITUALLY! WE CAN KNOW THAT WE ARE RIGHT WITH GOD AND THAT WE PLEASE GOD AND THAT WE ARE IN STEP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND UP TO DATE ABOUT WALKING IN THE LIGHT.**

There is a second law that rises above ordinary behavior, and I call it the law of "advantage". The Lord really talked to me about strongly developing this to us, because of its nearly extinct operation in people's lives. I am on solid ground here both biblically and experientially, and do not hesitate from preaching its probing truth. The Holy Spirit has faithfully and patiently led me in these very considerations, and I know that they work where they are implemented.

You may be shocked to hear me state that this world is the only place in the universe where advantages occur. There are NO advantages in Hell or in heaven. Only here on earth. ONLY PEOPLE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OTHER PERSONS. I'm certainly not excluding Satan, but we must somehow recognize the incredible, unique authority and power of human choice. Satan can do NOTHING outside of God's permissive will. I think that such a statement fits our theology. BUT MEN CAN DO WHATEVER THEY CHOOSE, all the way from the color of shoestrings we want to buy to the damning of our immortal souls and those of others by our wicked choices and actions. I've said that to emphasize the truth that it is only on earth that true advantages occur. WE HAVE THE OPTION OF BEING FAIR WITH OTHER PERSONS OR TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEM. You see, we can do that in our realm, and as a people, we do it constantly. It is so much a way of life that it is done without thinking. IT IS A DEPRAVITIZATION OF THE SOUL.

Some of you, or I hope all of us, may be thinking about now that we humans are really rotten inside. I can't possibly make it any worse than God's own word does in Jeremiah 17:9, where it states that, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?", and another version says it more plainly, "and no one can know how really bad it is!" I have been faithful all of my ministry telling my listeners that we humans have the potential of rising to the highest pinnacles of purity, goodness and loveliness and we also can sink to the lowest levels of wickedness and vile behavior. THERE ARE NO CREATURES IN HEAVEN, HELL OR ON THE EARTH WHO CAN RISE SO HIGH OR SINK SO LOW AS MANKIND. Does anyone attach wickedness to a grizzly bear that viciously tears apart a backpacker in Glacier National Park or an alligator that drowns and eats a child in Florida waters? No, because they are dumb animals. But a man will torture and dismember his wife and wrap her quivering flesh in packages and place them neatly in his freezer. A woman will sexually abuse her year-old baby boy, and another one will sacrifice her baby girl to the devil in a demonic rite. TORTURE IS PECULIAR TO MANKIND.

In such an environment we live and exist, and just because a matter of conduct is approved by us socially doesn't make it right in God's sight. That's why we need higher laws that operate in the heart through the faithful ministrations of the Holy Spirit. Let me repeat that taking advantage can only be discovered on earth among humans, and it is totally absent in heaven. Christians who live by the higher law of heart holiness will discover it absent in their hearts too.

We have another term for it in the idiom of the day, and we all understand, what it means to be "ripped off". Generally speaking, being ripped off is bad or wrong if it happens to you or yours, but it is OK if it happens to the other person or his. The entire scope of advantage taking is as sordid as Hell itself, but I confess that it is viewed as permissible in our culture -- sadly even in the church. I don't suppose that it is any worse among Christians, but it certainly seems like it. I can't tell you how many times I have heard the saying throughout my life, and I hear it more because I am a Pastor, "And he is supposed to be a Christian." People expect more out of a professed Christian, and they should. What puzzles me is that the world of the unsaved can tell you quite accurately what and how a Christian ought to be, but fail to establish their criteria as basic rules of right and wrong. I HAVE THE STRONGEST PERCEPTION THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE AN INNATE NEGATIVE REACTION TO ADVANTAGE-TAKING, EVEN WHEN THEY DO IT. Many do it because they see it as acceptable, as I have already stated. Many

Christians do it because they are strangely justifying it as "to the Lord." Hear me now, for the Bible speaks to it.

The Pharisees were absolving themselves of caring for their elderly parents; leaving them in want and poverty and loneliness; by establishing trusts (that's what we would call them today) for religious uses, or so they said. They called it "Corban". They were selling this idea to the populace, but it was not OK with Jesus. They were taking advantage of their elderly parents so that they could give the saved money to so-called religious purposes in the process, they had the use of the money for their own. How convenient! Did you ever wonder how those Pharisee's parents felt about this? I'm glad that Jesus took their part and painted it as wrong even if it did appear OK socially.

Our laws allow advantage taking. It is a "buyer beware" mentality. It's an "every-person-for-himself" concept, but I can freely proclaim that it is not heaven-borne. Nor is it Biblical. God required a "just measure and a just scale" in Leviticus 19:36 and Deuteronomy 25:15 and Ezekiel 45:10. In Proverbs 20:14 God condemns the person who inflates the value when he sells an item or depreciates its value when he is buying it, and I read it from the Amplified Bible,

"It is worthless. It is worthless! says the buyer; but when he goes his way, then he boasts about his (good) bargain." The price or the profit margin is not the issue here. The attitude of misrepresentation is. The attitude of taking advantage is.

I believe that Christians need to analyze WHY they are always wanting the advantage. Why is it that we wouldn't rather have the other person receive the advantage? Why not concede the point in a game? Why not allow the other person involved the benefit of the doubt? Why must we win? Why must we have the light end of the load? Why should we look good at someone else's expense? Why should we receive the credit, or the criticism, as the case may be?

I NEED TO ASK US THESE QUESTIONS ESPECIALLY WHEN NO ONE ELSE WOULD KNOW. THAT'S WHERE ADVANTAGES REALLY REVEAL A HIGHER LAW. That's when WE know what kind of stuff is on the inside of us. When advantage can be taken of another without anyone else knowing or seeing. THEN YOU KNOW whether you have a truly selfless heart or not. Pastor, what does it matter then? IT MATTERS BECAUSE THAT IS HOW GOD SEES US. IT MATTERS BECAUSE HE IS NOT LIKE THAT. GOD DOESN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE. IT'S NOT A PART OF HIS HEART OR CHARACTER, that's why.

Holy hearted people operate from a higher law. It is the law of the heart that has been made like God's own heart, and it springs from Divine love. Paul referred to this law when he plainly stated that we should allow ourselves "to be defrauded" in First Corinthians 6:7 and to allow ourselves "to be wronged." Both the New International Version and the Living Bible interpret this passage similarly, and I quote:

"Why not just accept mistreatment and leave it at that? It would be far more honoring to the Lord to let yourselves be cheated. But instead, you yourselves do wrong, cheating others, even your own brothers."

I can promise you that this is seldom practiced among Christians. THAT IS JUST HOW ACCEPTABLE ADVANTAGE-TAKING IS AMONG BELIEVERS. WE DON'T LISTEN TO THE WORD OR OUR HEARTS, because it is not practiced. And right here I want to repeat what I have mentioned earlier. When we witness OTHERS taking advantages we see and feel the wrongness of it; the "unChristlikeness" of it, but allow it to go on in our treatment of others. What in the world ever happened to the "golden rule" among Christians? And I'm not just talking about how this relates to money here, but also false reports or unfavorable comments or unfair criticism.

At the conclusion of this message I have added an original and unpublished article entitled "What Is Your CQ?", "CQ" referring to "Character Quotient." Anyone who wishes to engage in this kind of revealing self-examination may have a copy for himself. It is not for a comparison to any other person, even a spouse. It is strictly for your own information. There are ten questions about what kind of character you have, and a conclusive grade at the end. It assures absolute honesty, because none of us who are truly honest wants to fool himself. In the last two generations, much has been made of a person's IQ, or Intelligence Quotient, but little emphasis is given to one's inner strengths. This kind of a self-evaluation may be useful in pinpointing areas of spiritual lack. I hope so, at least. We can't come to God for help if we don't know where we need the help. This locates us in our hearts.

The final consideration of a Higher law is the one of servanthood. I like to call it "the secret of servanthood", for individuals with servant's hearts know a great deal more about their value and self-worth than is supposed. The lowliness of Christian servanthood is positive and confident and vibrant. It carries an identity and importance that belies the general understanding of servitude. A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST IS ALSO HIS BROTHER, HIS JOINT-HEIR, HIS YOKE PARTNER, HIS REPRESENTATIVE, HIS PRESS AGENT, HIS AMBASSADOR, HIS PRIEST, AND A CO-RULER OF HIS COMING KINGDOM. Unbelievers don't have a clue about all of this.

I think that Jesus smiles about His servants and those who look down on them. I think that Jesus always smiles about smugness, don't you? I think that He smiles at people who think that they are just about it and who think that they have it all together and that they are a number 10 for sure. I don't think that the "stuffed shirts" and the VIPs and the "high hats" and the arrogant anger or sicken Jesus. I think that He just smiles at them. "Poor people. If they only knew. If they could just see themselves as they really are. If they could just see what pride and arrogance really is?"

You have all noticed the fickleness of human pride, I'm sure. What I mean is how it will let you down and abandon you in the hour of reality? I heard of a snooty, refined, "high-brow" lady at an impressive banquet, who was trying to properly transfer a slippery deviled-egg half from the platter to her plate. It predictably slid off the server to the floor, and she politely lamented to the observing man on her left, "Oh, Senator, I do believe that I dropped my egg." His response was, "Well, cackle Sister, cackle." Pride is like that. It will faithfully embarrass and abandon you.

Seeing value in, and having desire to be a servant is as unnatural to the way we think and act as it is natural to the mind and thinking of Jesus. Jesus did not say in Luke 22:27 that "I am among you as he that serveth" because He wanted His act and words to be exemplary. Jesus Christ

never did something primarily to be an example. WHAT HE DID WAS CHARACTERISTIC. IT WAS INTUITIVE. IT WAS NATURAL. IT IS ALWAYS A SURPRISE TO DISCOVER WHAT GOD IS REALLY LIKE. God is not proud or arrogant. He is humble and actual and factual and genuine. He is what He is, and HE WANTS THAT SAME GENUINENESS REPLICATED IN HIS FOLLOWERS.

Jesus is gracious and selfless and giving. He was among us as He that served because that is the kind of a Person He is. He is a giver, and He serves because that is what His heart is. HE WANTS US TO BE LIKE THAT. He has grace to make us like that. He has laid another entire message on my heart about this matter of servanthood entitled "His Feet", and I'll share it with you in a week or two, Lord willing.

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WHAT'S YOUR CQ?

Measurements are at the same time interesting and frightful. Few of us can pass up any opportunity to see how we rate in skills. We are motivated and fascinated to know whether we are below average, merely average, or (as we generally anticipate) above average.

I think that it is possible to determine character quotient (CQ). We can discover what kind of stuff we are made of inside -- the kind of a person we really are -- by answering a few important questions. Here are some of those questions:

1. When you receive undeserving credit, do you usually (1) accept it and say nothing, NO POINTS; (2) correct the false impression, 1 POINT; (3) correct it AND give the proper credit where it belongs, 3 POINTS.

2. When there is a particularly distasteful or difficult task to be done, do you usually: (1) try to get out of it, NO POINTS; (2) do it reluctantly if asked, 1 POINT; (3) take "the heavy end of the load", 3 POINTS.

3. When something untruthful is being spoken about an absent person, do you usually: (1) let it pass, NO POINTS; (2) say nothing, but refuse to gossip, 1 POINT; (3) correct the falsity and stand up for the absent person, 3 POINTS.

4. When you can rightfully retaliate against one who has wronged you, do you generally: (1) think, "It's about time he/she got it" and let fly, NO POINTS; (2) don't retaliate, but let your bigness be known, 1 POINT; (3) let it pass quietly, 3 POINTS.

5. When you are away from home and any acquaintances, do you usually: (1) behave differently or inappropriately, NO POINTS; (2) maintain same moral and ethical standards, 3 POINTS.

6. When you can make a buck unfairly and undetected, do you usually (1) do it, NO POINTS; (2) do it, but feel guilty, 1 POINT; (3) won't make money unfairly seen or not, 3 POINTS.

7. Treatment of spouse. Do you usually (1) treat him/her worse than persons outside the home (dressing, smelling, talking, behaving, conversing with them with much more courtesy and sensitivity than a spouse), NO POINTS; (2) care much, but neglect to show it, 1 POINT; (3) make constant effort to let him/her know of your concern, love and respect, 3 POINTS.

8. Treatment of subordinates. Are you usually: (1) bossy and demanding, distanced and demeaning? NO POINTS; (2) friendly, respectful and appreciative of their efforts, 2 POINTS; (3) the preceding PLUS a personal interest in their well-being and development, 4 POINTS.

9. Treatment of the disadvantaged. (Poor, handicapped, sick, illiterate, aged, "abnormals" of any kind) Do you usually (1) give little thought or attention to them, NO POINTS (2) feel sorry for them but get on with your life, 1 POINT; (3) consider them personally equal and make an effort to relate to them, 5 POINTS.

10. When do you forgive? (1) Not at all or rarely, NO POINTS; (2) when you are asked for it, 1 POINT; (3) whether it is requested or not, 3 POINTS.

0 to 6 POINTS = Poor Character

7 to 14 POINTS = Average Character

15 to 33 POINTS = Excellent Character

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THE END