

Divine Relationships

*(Five Minute
Gospel Messages
From I Peter)*

Winford Claiborne

International Gospel Hour

% West Fayetteville Church of Christ
Fayetteville, Tennessee

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Dedication

Dedicated To:

Our Sons

Devout Christians, good husbands,
and good fathers

Doron Claiborne

(His wife, Kathee, and their two children,
Hannah and Mark)

Danny Claiborne

(His wife, Gina, and their son, Wesley)

Preface

"That Old Time Scholarly Religion"

Fayetteville preacher spreads word on long-running
International Gospel Hour

Kay Campbell, Columnist, **Huntsville Times**

After 57 years as a Church of Christ preacher, and nearly that many as a radio evangelist, brother Winford Claiborne has received a variety of responses to his work. But few amused him as much as a letter he received recently from a man who lives deep in the Montana mountains. That man had read a transcript of Claiborne's International Gospel Hour message criticizing hate groups and white supremacists. "He said he had read the first couple of paragraphs of the transcript and decided I'm a leftist," said Claiborne last week, discussing his ministry from the living room of his Fayetteville home. Claiborne made a wry smile as he recalls the letter, an expression that combines his amusement at the man's interpretation with his concern over the man's defense of militia groups. "I'm not a leftist," he says, "not by any stretch."

Balanced Preaching

In his dark suit and tie over a crisp white shirt, with his carefully shined wing-tipped shoes resting on the spotless beige carpet in the home he shares with Mary Lou (Molly) Claiborne, his wife of 52 years, and as he sits facing a photograph of their two sons' smiling families, Claiborne, 75, embodies a confident conservatism. Claiborne, preacher at the West Fayetteville Church of Christ, has also been the main preacher since 1995 of the International Gospel Hour, a radio broadcast heard in every state, Canada and Mexico.

He preaches old-time, scholarly religion. He

teaches basic Bible truths and unyielding morals. He promotes doctrines unsoftened with modern revisions such as the ordination of women, the acceptance of homosexuality as a valid lifestyle, or a belief in evolution. His is a message listeners seem hungry for. Since he became the main speaker for the 67-year old International Gospel Hour, the number of stations carrying the program has doubled, said W. E. Skipper, the program's general manager. Now, with some 160 stations—including ten clear channel mega stations—carrying the program, recordings of the Gospel Hour are broadcast across the United States 63 hours a week. Skipper, who was the minister of the Washington Street Church of Christ in Fayetteville during the 1970's, also worked with the Gospel Hour's founding preacher, V. E. Howard, in Fort Worth, and Texarkana, TX. "He brings balanced preaching to the program," Skipper said last week from the program's offices at West Fayetteville Church of Christ. "Dr. Claiborne preaches on biblical subjects and on subjects of the day, based on what the Bible preaches."

Stores, Insurance And Preaching

Raised as a member of the Church of Christ in rural Sumner County north of Ashville, Claiborne always enjoyed the challenge of public speaking. He was a member of his high school debating team and started preaching when he was a 17-year old freshman at Freed-Hardeman University near Jackson, TN, a college supported by the Churches of Christ. "I wanted to be a preacher for churches that couldn't afford a fulltime preacher," Claiborne said. So he studied English and history in addition to his Bible courses and completed a master's degree in public school administration from Murray State University in western Kentucky—the town where he began taping his own radio sermons for local broadcast.

His career, always including preaching at churches and taping of radio broadcasts, ranged from teacher and school president of Georgia Christian School near Valdosta to organize TranSouth Life Insurance Company, designed to help schools supported by Churches of Christ. He also owned four sporting good stores in North Georgia and East Tennessee.

When his sons finished college, he sold his businesses and took a post as professor of Bible, marriage and family at Freed-Hardeman for 14 years. Then, in 1993 he moved to Fayetteville to preach at the West Fayetteville Church of Christ. The assignment to preach at only one church full time, was for him, a sort of retirement. By that time, an aging V. E. Howard was looking for a replacement preacher for the International Gospel Hour, one of the oldest continuously produced radio broadcast in the world. The baritone-voiced Claiborne, who already had experience producing radio tapes and who was known to Howard for his work in organizing the annual Freed-Hardeman lecture series, was the natural choice.

What But The Bible?

The elders at West Fayetteville were willing to support the radio program as the church's mission project. Claiborne was willing to write and record the programs without extra pay—except for an extra book allowance each month, he says, smiling. And since Claiborne owns and flies his own airplane, he could visit other churches that support the broadcasts fairly quickly.

"Dr. Claiborne reads something like 125 books each year—and retains what he reads," said Skipper, his admiration apparent. "When I ask him about a book he had read, it's like I have the author sitting across the desk from me." Claiborne's home study, built over the double garage of his home, shows his

love for reading. "I plan to build some more bookcases," Claiborne said, as he and a visitor stepped around books stacked neatly by subject on the floor near the rows of bookcases that fill the room.

Bible commentaries, ethical treatises, classics of English literature, history and theology line the bookcases he has already built. Thick notebooks behind his desk contained typed transcripts for the programs he had already taped and recorded in the tiny closet. Those tapes are sent to the Gospel Hour's producer in Texarkana, where music by choirs from universities supported by Churches of Christ is added.

Claiborne's desk, dominated by the humming white hunk of new computer that he is still getting comfortable with, overflows with notes, books and newspaper clippings. He often mixes comment on current event into his Bible lessons.

With the approach of Timothy McVeigh's execution date, several of his next sermons will explore the biblical guidelines about the death penalty, he said. "A preacher wrote a letter to the editor of **The Tennessean** recently urging people not to use the Bible to support the death penalty," Claiborne said. "But if we cannot use the Bible, what can we use?"

Note: My thanks to Kay Campbell for her article on The International Gospel Hour. She has done us a great favor. We have received many favorable comments on her article (W. C.).

Introduction

When the elders of the West Fayetteville Church of Christ decided to oversee the work of the International Gospel Hour, three different formats became my responsibility: 5-minute, 15-minute and 30-minute. Periodically through more than a half century of radio preaching I have written and recorded thousands of 15-minute and 30-minute programs. But I had never done a 5-minute program. I struggled over what would be the best approach to such short programs. I even consulted preachers who had done 5-minute sermons. Finally, I decided to do five 5-minute lessons on 1 Peter one week, five on Jeremiah the next week, five on Matthew the next and so on. It has been one of the greatest challenges I have faced in my fifty-years of doing radio work. I sincerely hope and pray that my listeners have profited as much as I have from the more than 1700 5-minute sermons I have preached on the Gospel Hour in the last six and one-half years. The book you hold in your hands contains 155 of these 5-minute lessons. May they help you to understand this great book and may they bring glory and honor to our heavenly Father!

Every person in our world is involved in some kind of relationship: familial, governmental, religious, business, social or professional. Most of us are involved in several of them. The scriptures provide guidelines for every conceivable relationship. Sometimes those guidelines involve specific commands, such as, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. 5:23, 25). While the feminists and other radical elements in modern society may object to God's requirements for husbands and wives—especially for

wives—there is hardly any doubt about the import of scripture. The commands of God's book are not only specific; they are also emphatic. Rejecting what God has ordained for the home disrupts the peace that God desires for all people. It also brings the wrath of God on the heads of those who trample under foot the inspired word of our heavenly Father.

God has given in His word literally hundreds of generic or universal principles—those that apply to every human relationship. For example, "Let love be without dissimulation (or hypocrisy). Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Rom. 12:9-10). Just think of the changes that would occur in our society if every husband and wife, every employer and employee and every doctor and patient followed the great truths of these divinely inspired words! No wife would want to leave a husband who put her wishes above his own. An employee would be foolish to leave a company whose executives treated him kindly with brotherly love. And what patient would bring a lawsuit against the doctor who always looked after the best interests of that patient?

The Golden Rule may be the best-known passage in the New Testament, with the possible exception of the Golden Text of the Bible (John 3:16). Our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, do even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Every human relationship would enjoy great improvement if everyone would follow this powerful concept. But one group of evangelical businessmen was asked if they could be successful if they followed the Golden Rule. Tragically, more than half of the men answered in the negative. Would homes be happier, business and professional relationships

more enjoyable and more profitable if everyone obeyed the Golden Rule? But we are not to obey the rules of God's book just because we might make more money or be happier in our homes and in churches. That would be pragmatism. We are to treat others like we want to be treated because it is right.

Almost fifty years ago I was invited to speak during a college lectureship on the topic, "The Employer-Employee Relationship." The entire lectureship was devoted to the theme, "Divine Relationships." The lectureship was based on Peter's first epistle. Since that time I have preached many sermons on 1 Peter. In addition, while teaching at Freed-Hardeman University, I taught General Epistles (James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John and Jude) nearly every semester for fourteen years. The book has meant so much to me during my fifty-eight years of preaching and teaching.

The most difficult part of preaching five-minute sermons on any section of scripture is not to take a word or passage out of its context. I have tried to be honest with the text and not to get more or less from it than the inspired writer intended. I have sought to understand the original text and to apply the great lessons of 1 Peter to our lives. I am convinced that many problems in modern society could be ameliorated, if not solved, by a careful study of this great epistle. I pray that these brief studies will give you greater appreciation for this book in the divine library.

I am grateful to everyone who has been kind enough to study General Epistles in my college classes, to listen to these messages on radio and to attend classes I have taught in local congregations. You have contributed more to my growth than you probably realize. Churches in Michigan, in Kentucky, in

Tennessee, in Georgia, in Florida and in other places have heard all the messages in this book. I hope the Lord allows me to continue to live to preach from 1 Peter.

As in all the work I have tried to do in the past half century, Molly has been a tremendous force in my life. She allows me to spend countless hours in preparing and recording the messages for the International Gospel Hour. I cannot begin to express the depth of my gratitude and love for such a wonderful wife. Recently, Dr. Tom Holland asked people at a dinner sponsored by the International Gospel Hour to pray for sister Molly. (Molly has non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.) He then said, "Pray for brother Claiborne too because brother Claiborne needs sister Molly." How absolutely right he was!

Molly and I are grateful for the support and honor our sons—Doron and Danny—have given their parents. Long before they arrived on the scene, we prayed that we would have a good family. We have been blessed beyond our wildest dreams in having too such gracious and loving sons. They have been most attentive to their mother during her illness. We are also grateful for their families who have brought such joy into our lives.

May God use this book to bring us closer to his perfect will for our lives!

Winford Claiborne
March 12, 2002
Fayetteville, Tennessee

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Chapter 1

Peter's First Epistle

If you are a student of scripture, you know the place of the apostle Peter in God's scheme of human redemption. He was the great apostle who professed great love for Jesus Christ and yet denied his Lord and ours. He was the same apostle who impetuously cut off the ear of Malchus. But he was the apostle whom the Lord chose to preach the first gospel sermon to the Jews (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10 & 11). The apostle Peter was selected by God's Holy Spirit to write two books in the New Testament—1 and 2 Peter. Peter's sermons as recorded in Acts and his two epistles will live throughout time and will be known and loved in eternity.

Peter's first epistle has much to say about divine relationships—that is, those earthly and heavenly relationships which God Himself ordained and which he regulates through His inspired Word. 1 Peter 1 discusses man's relationship to God. We are His elect people who are kept by His power (1 Pet. 1:2, 5). We have been saved by the precious blood of God's Son. It is by the Son's blood that we are given the hope of eternal life (1 Pet. 1:10, 19). As God's elect nation, we are to be sober-minded, as obedient children and not live for the world (1 Pet. 1:13-14).

1 Peter 2 refers to God's children as a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." We have been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel (1 Pet. 2:9-10). As God's faithful sons and daughters, we are to obey the laws of the land, to honor all men, to love the brotherhood, to fear God and to honor the king (1 Pet. 2:13-17). We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, but we still live in this world and have obligations to one another and to our government.

1 Peter 3 addresses the duties of wives and husbands. Wives who are married to unbelieving husbands are to

exhibit true Christianity so that their husbands will see Christ living in them and obey the gospel of our Lord.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives (1 Pet. 3:1).

Husbands are commanded to give their wives the honor they deserve or their prayers will not be heard (1 Pet. 3:7).

1 Peter 4 warns the early Christians about the persecution which God's people may always expect. If we live righteously in Christ Jesus, we are going to be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). If they persecuted our Lord and Savior, how do we think we can escape? Peter warned the Christians:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you (1 Pet. 4:12).

Obviously, if a Christian suffers as an evildoer, he deserves no particular credit. He is simply reaping what he has sown. But if he suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed. He should glorify God in that name (1 Pet. 4:15-16).

The last chapter of 1 Peter has some specific instructions for elders of the Lord's church. Peter lists the duties of elders: Feeding (or shepherding) the flock; taking the oversight; being examples unto the flock. These are awesome tasks which God has assigned to elders of the church. Elders who love the Lord, work diligently to lead God's people in the right direction and are themselves examples of what a Christian ought to be will "receive a crown of glory which fades not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). The chief Shepherd himself—the Lord Jesus Christ—will personally bestow that great honor on faithful shepherds.

How desperately churches everywhere need to learn the great lessons on divine relationships from 1 Peter.

Chapter 2

The Recipients of Peter's First Letter

The books of the New Testament were not written just because Paul, Peter, James and John decided one day to sit down and preserve their thoughts for future generations. In every case—including Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—the New Testament books were designed for a particular audience, although in some cases, we may not know who the audience was. The inspired books of the New Testament were written to fill a specific need which some individual, such as, Timothy or Titus or Philemon or some church, such as, Ephesus or Colosse or Rome or Corinth had. The books of the New Testament had a broader application than to individuals or churches of the first century, but there is no doubt about the truth I am emphasizing.

The apostle Peter's first letter was addressed to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). The provinces Peter named were north of the Great Sea and belonged to the Roman government. These Roman provinces were predominantly Gentile, as can be easily discerned by the language Peter used of the people to whom the letter is addressed. The people of those Roman provinces are called "strangers." The word "stranger" literally means one who dwells alongside a strange land. The same Greek word is rendered "pilgrims" in 1 Peter 2:11.

The term "strangers" or "pilgrims" referred to people who were scattered throughout the provinces mentioned in this verse. The term "strangers scattered" could be translated "sojourners of the dispersion." Generally, the word "dispersion" (**diaspora** in the Greek) referred to Jews who had been driven from their homeland and scattered throughout the world. But in the current context, the word means that Christians are strangers and pilgrims in every

nation. As one of the old Christian hymns says,

This world is not my home;
I'm just passing through.
My treasures are laid up
somewhere beyond the blue;
the angels beckon me
from heaven's open door,
and I can't feel at home
in this world anymore.

The expression, "sojourners of the dispersion," almost certainly has a spiritual application.

My friends, the language Peter uses makes it clear that we are not made for this world and we shall not be here for eternity. There is no passage in all of God's word which makes this truth any plainer or more persuasive than these words from the very lips of Jesus Christ. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). If you are concerned about where you will spend eternity when this earthly pilgrimage has ended, Jesus tells us what we can do to receive a home beyond this world. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

I sincerely encourage you to learn about Jesus Christ, obey His gospel and inherit the mansions prepared for you from the foundation of the world. You may regret many decisions and actions which have characterized your existence up until now, but you will never regret turning aside from evil and embracing the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul explained that truth in these words:

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation
not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world
worketh death (2 Cor. 7:10).

Please think seriously about where you will spend eternity.

Chapter 3

Christians Are Elect People

I want to begin our brief study by asking you some simple and vital questions. Do you believe you are among the elect? What does the word "elect" mean? How did you get to be among the elect? Was the election wholly of God's grace or did you have some say in whether or not you were elected? Oddly enough, these are among the most controversial questions I could ask you. I encourage you to think about these questions as we briefly examine one verse from 1 Peter.

The apostle Peter wrote his first letter to Christians who were scattered throughout several Roman provinces—Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1). According to Peter, these Christians were,

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:2).

In this verse there are several words—elect, foreknowledge, sanctification, and obedience—which demand some discussion.

The word "elect" comes from the Greek **eklektos** and means selected, chosen. In fact, the Greek is always rendered "elect" or "chosen" in the King James Version. Most of the modern versions also translate the Greek either "elect" or "chosen." The verb form is always translated in the King James Version by some derivative of the word "choose." Paul tells us that Christians are "chosen" in Him, that is, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

Even though the word "elect" is not used in the book of Acts of those who obeyed the gospel and became New Testament Christians, can there be any doubt of these people's election according to the foreknowledge of God?

For example, Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch said to Philip, "Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?" Philip asked if the eunuch believed on Jesus Christ. When the eunuch confessed his faith in Christ, Philip baptized him. Do you believe the eunuch was among the elect? If he did not belong to the elect, what else could he have done to be elected?

The word "foreknowledge" in our text simply refers to the plan which God had ordained. God knew before the foundation of the world what men and women would have to do in order to be saved. He did not foreordain the individuals who would be saved; He foreordained the plan by which they would be saved. If He foreordained the individuals to be saved, they would not have had to believe and obey the gospel. But they did have to believe and obey the gospel. Foreordination as taught by John Calvin is not Bible doctrine.

The election according to the foreknowledge of God was through the sanctification of the Spirit. How does God's Holy Spirit sanctify those who come to God for salvation? Jesus prayed in His high priestly manner: "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). When one hears the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), believes that Word and obeys the Lord in baptism, his sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), and he is sanctified or made holy. Every Christian is a saint, that is, he is set apart by the blood of Christ to bring honor and glory to our heavenly Father.

Our election according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through Sanctification of the Spirit, has a serious purpose: It is unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. God expects Christians to live by His directions which are revealed in His inspired Word. In our obedience to the gospel, the blood of Jesus Christ continues to cleanse us from all sins (1 John 1:7). What an honor for ordinary human beings like us to be among the elect.

Chapter 4

The Blood Of Christ

It would be impossible for anyone to read the New Testament with any comprehension at all without understanding the place of blood in the scheme of redemption. A few verses will make that truth too plain for anyone to question. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:8-9). "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:11-12). The apostle Peter addressed the elect who had been cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2).

Genuine Christians in every age have humbly thanked God for His willingness to send His Son who voluntarily shed His blood for the remission of our sins. You would think that every person on earth who calls himself a child of the living God would gratefully accept what Christ has provided through His shed blood. But that is not the case. A group of feminists meeting at the University of Illinois rejected the biblical doctrine of blood atonement. They were repulsed by God's requirement that His Son die for the sins of the world. I am not surprised since I know how little the so-called "Christian feminists" respect the Bible.

Tragically, the feminists are not alone in their rejection of the Bible's teaching about being cleansed by the blood of Christ. In 1966 a liberal English preacher, Leslie Weatherhead, wrote a book which he called **The Christian Agnostic** (Nashville: Abingdon Press). Weatherhead objected to most of the fundamentals of the faith, but I will mention only what he says about Christ's blood. "Frankly

it is nonsense to say, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins'" (p. 114). You, no doubt, recognize Weatherhead's quotation as coming from Hebrews 9:22. How could a man who has preached for a half century be so arrogant in his attack on the Bible? If he believed the Bible's teaching on the atoning blood of Christ was nonsense, why did he not just give up Christianity altogether and not deceive people by letting them believe he was a Christian?

Weatherhead further wrote:

The writer of the book of Revelation, influenced by the mystery religions, goes further still from modern western thought when he writes of the Christians in heaven who have 'washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.' Apart from the slip, which any schoolmaster would correct in a boy's essay, that robes washed in blood would be red not white, and overlooking what is to us the revolting horror of the whole idea, we must note that the picture is taken direct from the mystery religion (p. 117).

There is one fundamental error in Weatherhead's idea of the origin of blood sacrifices: He does not know what he is talking about. The idea came from the mind of God and is discussed at great length—both in the Old Testament and the New.

Weatherhead asserts that,

the modern layman can well do without Paul's obsession about sin and the imagery of being washed in blood (p. 118).

I am not sure what the "modern layman" can do without, but I know what God in His infinite wisdom has ordained for the salvation of our souls. He decided on Christ's sacrifice for human sinfulness. How can anyone be so blatant as to challenge what God Himself has arranged for our eternal redemption? In Christ we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14). Would you prefer to trust your salvation to an agnostic theologian or to the living God?

Chapter 5

The God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Have you heard about **The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version**? This new translation of the Bible makes no attempt to be faithful to the original text. The translators could care less about what Peter or Paul or even what Jesus said. They have an agenda which involves "political correctness." The new perversion does not use masculine pronouns in reference to God or to Christ or to the Holy Spirit, although the Bible **always does—always**. The New Version uses gender neutral words or combines masculine and feminine. For example, our Lord taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father-Mother who art in heaven." Can you imagine anyone who has so little respect for the Bible or for his or her own scholarship? If a translator is going to be honest with the text—and why else would he translate?—he must attempt to get as near to the original as he possibly can. To do otherwise is to be dishonest, deceptive and diabolical.

The scriptures use masculine language **always** in speaking of God Almighty, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. These are Peter's very words in speaking of God:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

You may remember that almost the exact words are found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).

What motivated Peter and Paul to speak as "the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?" These two apostles—like the prophets of old—spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. These men were not speaking from their own hearts or from patriarchal prejudice; they were speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Am I saying that modern men and women—even feminists—should call God "Father," Jesus Christ "Son"—not child—and the Holy Spirit "he"—even though the Greek noun **pneuma**—Spirit—is feminine? That, dear friends, is exactly what I am saying because that is precisely what the scriptures teach. Who am I or who are you to alter God's inspired revelation to conform to the world of radical feminism or of any other group? How can anyone be so arrogant as to add to or to take away from God's book?

On several occasions during His earthly ministry, Jesus claimed to come down from God and to reveal God unto men. He said: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Please notice Christ's use of the words "Son" and "Father." Jesus is the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). He is God who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14). If He did not know the Father and reveal Him to mankind, then He has deceived us and is not worthy of our respect and love. But He did reveal the Father and enabled us to know more about God than any other people because we not only have God's revelation of Himself in nature and in the Old Testament; we have God's revelation of Himself in His Son.

Jesus never referred to God as Father-Mother or by any of the other designations which modern politically correct people have chosen for Him. Jesus used the word "Father" dozens and dozens of times. I have time to read just a few. "But the hour comes," Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "...when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). In His high priestly prayer, Jesus said to God: "...Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1).

Chapter 6

The Abundant Mercy of God

Do you know what human beings actually deserve from God Almighty? Since all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we all deserve to be banished from the presence of God and from the glory of His power. Paul vividly describes man's lost condition without the saving grace of God. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:11-12). We all deserve to die for our sins, but God intervened to save us from eternal destruction. This is the apostle Peter's explanation of that truth. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

When we meditate on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, we can understand why Peter used the expression, "his abundant mercy." "Abundant" comes from a Greek word meaning great or many or much, depending on the immediate context. "Mercy" comes from the Greek **eleos** and means, "...the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it" (Vine, p. 732). It is a very prominent New Testament concept. The noun form is used twenty-eight times and the verb form thirty-one times. Please listen to Paul's use of the word "mercy."

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded

(or literally "shut up") them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all (Rom. 11:29-32).

If all men were perfectly righteous—if they never sinned at all—there would be no need for God's abundant mercy. We would deserve God's blessings, including eternal life. But human beings rebel against God's law and deserve to die for their disobedience. An example from the state of Tennessee may be helpful in our understanding the true significance of mercy. When Cordell Hull served as judge in his home area, he had to sit in judgment on a young man who had committed grievous crimes. A jury found him guilty and sentenced him to a long term in prison. The young man's mother approached Judge Hull and pleaded for mercy for her son. Judge Hull said to the grieving mother, "Your son has violated the law and does not deserve mercy." The mother responded, "Judge Hull, if he deserved it, it would not be mercy." I suspect that mother understood more about the meaning of mercy than did Judge Hull.

The apostle Paul, perhaps more than any other New Testament writer, was constantly aware of the mercy of God which had been extended to him in bringing him out of bondage to freedom in Christ. One example will have to suffice.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief...Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (1 Tim. 1:12-13, 16).

But do you remember that God will not show mercy to us unless we show mercy to others? Our Lord said in His great Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Faithful servants of Jesus Christ will be thanking Him and praising Him throughout eternity for His abundant mercy.

Chapter 7

A Living Hope

Do you know how very vital hope is in your life? If you are heavily in debt and cannot see your way out, how do you handle that? Suppose the doctor says to you, "Your child has a terminal illness and will die in the very near future. There is no hope?" Can you deal with these tragic situations? As heartbreaking as these incidents might be, there is one which is immeasurably worse. What if you had no hope for eternity? Paul wrote of the dreadful condition of the Gentiles before the gospel came to them. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

"Hope" is a major concept in the New Testament, especially in Acts and in the epistles. It is used fifty-six times in the New Testament; thirty-five times in Paul's epistles. Three verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians should be helpful in our understanding of the significance of hope.

For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel...If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:5, 23, 27).

The apostle Peter wrote to the early Christians about hope. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). The King James Version

uses the expression, "lively hope," but a better rendering would be "living hope." Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can enjoy a hope which is living. Our hope does not rest on some manmade plan of salvation, but on Christ's death and resurrection. Paul has a beautiful discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. One of his statements relates to the hope we entertain because of Christ's resurrection and the promise of our resurrection. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). If hope does not reach beyond the grave, we have a dead hope which is not measurably better than no hope.

The Hebrew writer shows just how vital hope is to all human beings.

For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:16-20).

Hope is so very important to mortals here on earth. But, unlike love, it will not last forever. When you have passed over to the other side and have received the welcome into your eternal home, you will have no further need of hope.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for (Rom. 8:24).

I close today with these words from one of our most beautiful hymns: "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus Christ and righteousness."

Chapter 8

God Has Begotten Us Again

The New Testament teaches explicitly that everyone must experience the new birth. When Jesus said very plainly to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus thought Jesus was speaking of reentering his mother's womb and being born a second time. Jesus explained, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Later in Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, "Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again" (John 3:7). While the New Testament does not mention the expression, "born again," often; yet it says enough for us to understand what the phrase means. The apostle Peter wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

When Peter used the expression, "begotten again," was he teaching the same truth as Jesus taught in John 3? Peter uses a slightly different word in verse twenty-three: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". There does seem to be some difference in the meaning of the two expressions. I am not sure I can explain what it is. I am not even sure I know what it is. Guy N. Wood's excellent commentary on **Peter, John and Jude** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1979) offers this explanation:

The emphasis in this verse is on the word **again**. Peter and the other disciples of Jesus had been spiritually begotten before, but in the tragic hours of the Lord's condemnation and death their faith had failed and was not revived until the full impact and implications of the resurrection struck

them with its irresistible force. The reference here is, therefore, to the re-establishment of the faith of the disciples by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (p. 25).

If Guy N. Woods has the correct interpretation—and I lean in that direction—then the first begetting was when they believed in Jesus Christ and obeyed their Lord to become His faithful disciples. Since we are not told about the initial obedience of the apostles Peter, James, John and the others who followed Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry, let us take a brief look at Saul's conversion.

Saul was a bitter and angry persecutor of the Lord's church, although he was sincere in his efforts to rid the world of Christ whom Saul considered a great impostor. Saul encountered the Lord on the Damascus road. Jesus asked, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" When Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, Saul asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus did not tell him what to do to be saved, but instructed him to find a preacher who would tell him. God sent Ananias to Saul with this message: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:4-6, 22:16). Now please think about this question: "Do you believe Saul was born again in the process of obeying his Lord in baptism?" When he arose from the watery grave of baptism, was he born again? If he were not, what else did he have to do to be born again?

The apostle Paul later wrote to the Corinthians: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Through Paul's faith in Jesus Christ, the repentance from dead works and his obedience to the Lord in baptism, he was saved from his alien sins, added to the Lord's church and was born again. Will you follow Saul of Tarsus and obey the gospel today?

Chapter 9

Our Hope Guaranteed By The Resurrection

During my lifetime I have lost my father, my mother, three brothers and one sister to death. I have also lost dozens and dozens of church members where I have preached. Is there any possibility I shall see any of these loved ones, friends and brothers and sisters in a world which is far better than the one in which we dwell? In other words, have our Christian family members and friends perished? These are among the most important questions human beings could ever consider. The apostle Peter by divine inspiration provided this answer to our questions about life after death.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3).

One cannot read the New Testament discerningly without seeing the meaning of the resurrection in the scheme of human redemption. All four of the gospels mention the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of all the dead. John says very plainly,

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29).

Martha gently upbraided Jesus for not coming soon enough to prevent the death of her brother Lazarus. Jesus informed her that her brother would rise again. She said to Jesus, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he

live" (John 11:25).

The literal rendering of the Greek in 1 Peter 1:3 says, "God has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead ones." The word "dead" in this verse is plural and refers to all those who had died before our Lord came to this earth. The resurrection of Christ from among the dead ones assures us of the reality of the living hope of which Peter speaks. It would not be living hope if when we die we are going to stay dead. It is a living hope because it lives in the hearts of God's people and because in the resurrection we shall come to life never to die again. No New Testament writer says this more beautifully and more powerfully than Paul.

But now is Christ risen from the dead (that is, from among the dead ones), and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The word "firstfruits" suggests that Christ is the guarantee of every man's resurrection. None will be left in the grave; all are going to be raised. The Old Testament book of Daniel anticipated what would happen under the Christian dispensation. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

Can you imagine what this life would be like if you and your loved ones were destined for this world only? What a dreadful and discouraging existence to know that your loved ones have gone into oblivion—that life has played a cruel hoax on those who have believed and obeyed the gospel of Christ. But materialism and atheism are false. There is a final resurrection of all the dead. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). We are going to rise from the dead!

Chapter 10

What Will Heaven Be Like?

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? There are some strange ideas about heaven floating around in the religious world. For example, one religious organization believes each man will become a god and will have a heaven of his own somewhere on some distant planet. He will have many wives with whom he can produce enough offspring to people his own universe. Another American cultic organization thinks heaven will be on earth, especially for those who are not in the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation. The 144,000 will go to be in the immediate presence of God; the rest of the saved will inhabit a purified and renovated earth. All of these ideas are unscriptural and even antiscritptural. What does the Word of God say about the nature of our heavenly home? There are many passages to which we could turn to learn, but I want to dwell on one verse from 1 Peter 1. Peter speaks of the living hope which is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection from among the dead ones. And then he says,

To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled,
and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for
you (1 Pet. 1:4).

Peter's full thought is that we are begotten again to a living hope by Christ's resurrection from the dead. We are begotten to an inheritance. The word "inheritance" refers to our being heirs of God and receiving what he has promised His faithful children. We are not talking about houses and lands and stocks and bonds. We are talking about our heavenly home. Jesus Himself promised,

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2-3).

myself; that where I am, there ye may be also
(John 14:2-3).

Peter uses a number of descriptive terms of heaven which ought to add meaning to our longing for heaven. He affirms that our heavenly home will be "incorruptible." The Greek word translated "incorruptible" means imperishable, undying and immortal. Is there anything on earth which fits into that category? When you build a new house, it begins to deteriorate immediately. Your automobile has built-in obsolescence, but even if it did not, it will perish anyway. The home Jesus Christ has gone to prepare for us will never perish or decay. It will stand forever.

Peter uses the word "undefiled" in describing the eternal home of the soul. "Undefiled" means "without defect or flaw." James describes the kind of religion which God approves as being "pure and undefiled" (James 1:27). The Hebrew writer talks about marriage as being honorable in all and the bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4). I do not know any item or any person which has no flaws. We all have sinned and continue to come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), but in heaven there will be nothing which mars or detracts. Revelation 21:1-4 and Revelation 22:1-5 need to be read in connection with Peter's promises.

The glories and beauties of heaven will not fade away. The literal translation says our inheritance is unfading. The idea probably came from watching the fading of flowers. Eternal life is also said to be "reserved in heaven for you." The verb "reserved" means to keep in watchful custody. I do not have one question about the word "reserved" in 1 Peter 1:4. Is our eternal inheritance reserved conditionally or unconditionally? If it is reserved unconditionally, we can stop reading our Bible, praying to our heavenly Father and attending the services of the church and none of this world adversely affect our salvation. Is that what Peter is teaching?

Chapter 11

Kept By The Power Of God

When a man or a woman becomes a New Testament Christian, is there any possibility he can fall away from the faith and be eternally lost? In other words, is it possible for a child of God to fall from grace? This question has troubled the religious world since the days of John Calvin and Martin Luther. Both men believed and millions since have argued for what is commonly called "eternal security" or "once in grace, always in grace." It was not a problem in the early church because the doctrine simply was not taught. Oh, there were problems of men's and women's becoming unfaithful and falling away, but no one insisting that such could not happen. The Bible writers could not have more plainly and emphatically taught the possibility of falling away. James wrote, "Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1:16). Paul's words are simple and powerful. "Wherefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

But what about Peter's statement about being kept by the power of God? These are the apostle Peter's words. Christians, "...are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). One preacher in the state of Arkansas insisted that if a Christian ceased reading his Bible, quit attending the services of the church and even quit believing in God, he would go to heaven anyway. If he did not go to heaven, it would be the Lord's fault because the Lord had promised to keep every Christian. My friends, the argument with Calvinists has nothing to do with whether or not we are kept by the power of God but with whether or not we are kept unconditionally. In other words, does God keep us even when we do not want to be kept? Do men's attitudes and behavior have any bearing on whether we are kept?

The Greek word for "kept" means to guard. It would be the language of the military and refers to the keeping

be the language of the military and refers to the keeping of a garrison. Please take note of Paul's use of the word "keep" in this verse. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). The literal meaning of the word can be learned from this passage.

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands (2 Cor. 11:32-33).

There is one little prepositional phrase the Arkansas preacher conveniently overlooked. Peter affirmed that Christians are "kept by the power of God through faith." If we are kept by the power of God through faith or faithfulness, when we lose our faith or become unfaithful, are we kept anyway? If we are reserved or preserved unconditionally, then we are not kept through faith. We are kept in spite of our faith. But the scriptures do not allow for such an interpretation. Do you remember these words from our Lord's letter to the church at Smyrna?

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

If the Smyrneans did not remain faithful unto death, would they have received the crown of life in spite of that?

We should take great comfort in the power of God who wants us to be saved. His power through our faithfulness will keep us unto salvation "ready to be revealed in the last time." God has prepared a place for the souls of faithful men and women. That place will be revealed or made known in the last time. If we miss what God has made available to us, we cannot blame it on God. We are given the choice of accepting or rejecting His gracious order. We will be judged according to our behavior.

Chapter 12

We Rejoice In God's Goodness

One of the great and precious promises of the gospel is the protection God has provided for His children. We are not promised protection against physical death, but against being overwhelmed with the trials and temptations which come into our lives. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians about thinking that they were standing when they could be in danger of falling. But then he gave this assurance:

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 to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

The devil cannot lead us into sin if we do not want to be led. Christians,

...are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (1 Pet. 1:5-6).

The word "wherein" in verse six might suggest that we greatly rejoice in the salvation mentioned in verse 5. But the Greek will not allow for such an interpretation. "Wherein" should be rendered "in which" and refers to all the blessings Peter has mentioned in the preceding verses, such as, election, being born again, inheritance and salvation. When we contemplate what God has provided for us through Jesus Christ, we can exclaim with Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33).

Many of our worldly neighbors may not think of Christians as being joyful and happy. Is it because they do

Christians as being joyful and happy. Is it because they do not witness much joy in our lives? But Christians are exhorted to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4). Peter tells us we are to "greatly rejoice." Jesus used the same word when He instructed His disciples: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:12). Christians have the greatest reasons to rejoice of anyone in the world. We know our sins are forgiven and we are on our way to heaven.

We can and must rejoice even though for a little while we are going to have to suffer at the hands of God's enemies. Peter speaks of being in heaviness through manifold temptations. The word "manifold" simply means many, varied. The word "temptations" in this context almost certainly means trials rather than an inward pull toward immorality and ungodliness. James uses very similar language. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2-3). Most modern versions translate the Greek by the word "trials" rather than "temptations." I believe that was what both James and Peter were saying.

I can understand why Christians usually consider their trials as producing heaviness or grief. When persecution and heartaches come into our lives, we are prone to see only the tragic aspects of these. But when we stand up for the Lord regardless of the circumstances, we are going to benefit from the trials. It takes courage to do that, but we gain tremendously when we do so. The Christian life resembles that of an athlete who disciplines himself to endure whatever comes into his life. Paul had that in mind when he wrote: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). The trials, tribulations and persecutions toughen us and prepare us for the sorrows which prevail in this world of sin and suffering.

May our heavenly Father help us to remain faithful unto death that we may receive the crown of life!

Chapter 13

Tried By Fire

Both Peter and James speak at length about the trials which are inevitable in the lives of God's faithful children. Peter affirms that "the trial of your faith" is "much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried by fire." He prays that our faith "might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7). Please examine with me the great truths which are taught in this verse.

The words "trial" and "tried" in this verse are not our usual words for trial. Both words come from the Greek **dokimazo** and means proving, examining, approving. The word involves proving or trying with a view either to approving or disapproving. James uses the same word in the following verse. "Knowing that the proving of your faith works out endurance" (James 1:3). Paul used the same word seventeen times in his writings. The word has a background of working with metals. When ore was thrown into a furnace, the heat separated the pure metals from the dross or impurities. The Greeks used the word "tried" in speaking of the process of separating the gold or silver from the dross. We use the same kind of language when we speak of buying a new automobile. We go to the dealer to "try out" a car to decide whether it is the one we want to buy.

Our faith is tried by the persecution and oppression we have to face in this life. We may not understand why Christians have to suffer, but our,

...light affliction, which is but for a moment,
worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal
weight of glory; While we look not at the things
which are seen, but at the things which are not
seen: for the things which are seen are temporal;
but the things which are not seen are eternal
(2 Cor. 4:17-18).

The trials through which we have to pass separate the sincere and committed from the hypocritical and pretenders. If a man really does not believe in Jesus Christ and His gospel, he is not going to risk losing his life over pretensions.

Peter speaks of our faith as "being much more precious than gold which perishes." When gold goes through the purifying process, it is much more valuable. And when we pass through the trials of life, we also become much more valuable in the Lord's kingdom. And our faith is so much more precious than gold because gold perishes, but our faith will stand the test of time and carry us through to eternal life.

The little phrase, "tried by fire," means being proved. Dr. F. B. Meyer's devotional commentary on the book of 1 Peter has the title, **Tried By Fire** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950). That is an appropriate title for the book of 1 Peter because this book has more to say about trials than any other book of the New Testament, except the book of Revelation. Both 1 Peter and Revelation show very plainly that we are going to be persecuted—that we are going to be tried. Both books point out the blessings for God's children as they overcome the attractions of the world and find their hope in the truths of the gospel. Every one of the seven epistles which Jesus Himself dictated to John ends with an encouragement to be overcomers. Let me give you just one example. Our Lord said to the church at Ephesus: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

Let me conclude our brief study today by reading again 1 Peter 1:7. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." As you can see from this verse, there is a purpose behind our trials: "That our faith might be found unto praise and honor and glory when our Lord appears at the end of the age." May God help us to be faithful regardless of the trials which come.

Chapter 14

A Definition Of Faith

As you know if you read the Bible carefully and honestly, the Bible does not deal in the definition of words. The Hebrew writer says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1), but technically speaking, that is not a definition. The verse does not tell us so much about what faith is as what it does in men's lives. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us a great amount about what love does—not so much about what it is. However, we can discern from the contexts of Hebrews 11 and 1 Corinthians 13 what faith and love are.

The passage I will be discussing with you today does not provide a theological definition of faith, but it comes very close. Please listen to these words from the apostle Peter. Peter speaks of the appearing or revelation of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 1:7 and then says concerning him:

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8).

Again, I remind you that this is not a technical definition of faith, but we should have no difficulty in understanding what faith is from this passage.

The apostles and thousands of others in Galilee and in Judea lived during the days Christ walked upon this earth. They were privileged to hear Him teach and to witness the great miracles He performed. They believed because of what they saw and heard. No one in this world has seen Jesus Christ and yet we love Him. My friends, this is not blind faith on our part. We have an abundance of evidence that Christ lived, taught the great parables, raised the dead, turned water into wine, died on the cross and was raised again the third day. These great events were not matters of opinion. There were thousands of reliable witnesses to these great events. We have unimpeachable records of the

these great events. We have unimpeachable records of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Even though we personally have never seen Him yet, we love Him.

The people to whom Peter wrote had not seen the Lord. At the time of his writing (about 62 A.D.), they could not have any contact with Christ because He had ascended to the Father (Acts 1:9-11). But in spite of His physical absence from them, they believed in Him and were willing to die for the cause of Christ. Their belief in Christ caused them to rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Every child of God has the same blessings these early Christians enjoyed and the same reasons to rejoice.

But did not the early believers have an advantage over us? Some of them actually saw the Lord; they talked with Him; they saw His mighty works. The second generation of believers were much closer to Him in time than we are. Many of the first century Christians heard Christ's apostles and other immediate disciples of Christ. Are we not at a distinct disadvantage compared to the early Christians? One incident from the life of the apostle Thomas should be helpful. The other disciples told Thomas they had seen the Lord after He had been raised from the dead. Thomas said to them,

Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

A few days later Thomas was with the other disciples when Christ appeared. Christ instructed Thomas to feel of the nail prints and to thrust his hand into our Lord's side. Thomas responded: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:24-28). Now listen to what Jesus said to Thomas, "...because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). This faith in Christ leads us to rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Chapter 15

The End Of Our Faith

One of the great themes in the book of 1 Peter is "The Great Salvation," although that expression appears in Hebrews 2:3—not in 1 Peter. Peter speaks of our inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading and reserved in heaven for us. He assures Christians that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. He encourages us to rejoice in all the gracious provisions God has made for our salvation. Our faith in God and in His Word may be threatened by the trials and temptations which come our way, but through it all we shall come forth with our faith shining more brightly. Our faith and our faithfulness will bring praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Even though we have not seen the Lord, we love Him. We cannot see Him now, but we believe in Him and we rejoice with a joy unspeakable or unutterable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

When we have obeyed the gospel and followed our Lord through all the trials and temptations of this life, we shall "receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). There are some vital questions about this verse we must ask and answer. If we are saved at the point of faith and cannot apostatize, have we not already received "the end of our faith?" If we are saved at the point, how could the end of our faith differ from the beginning of our faith? Although there is a very real sense in which we are saved when we believe in Christ and obey His gospel, our ultimate salvation will come at the judgment. Please keep that in mind as we examine the topic, "The End of Our Faith."

Our faith begins when we first hear the gospel and accept it as being true. Paul affirms that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Our faith increases as we learn more and more about who

Jesus is and come to trust Him with our lives. When we come to the end of our days on this earth, we shall receive the end of our faith. "Receive" comes from a Greek word meaning to receive back, to get what is promised. The word "end" (*telos*) means conclusion, culmination, purpose, design. The very purpose for which we live in this world is to be approved of God and to receive the salvation of our souls.

Modernistic theologians often criticize New Testament Christians for placing too much stress on eternal salvation and not enough on this world's affairs. We certainly are not to be so concerned about going to heaven that we fail to fulfill our obligations in the community and in the nation. But if one spends all his time thinking about this world and none or very little time thinking about the world to come, his life will have been in vain when he comes to meet his Maker. Solomon tells us the real meaning of our existence. "...Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). If we miss heaven, it will not matter much what one has done on this earth. Heaven must be the goal of all right-thinking people.

Liberation theologians in some parts of Africa and of South America think of salvation as freedom from economic oppression and from racial discrimination. As evil as these activities are, freedom from the evils of this world is not what Peter had in mind in this great epistle. Peter was speaking of going to heaven to be with God, with Christ and with the saints of all the ages. Heaven will be the place where,

...God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow,
nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain:
for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Do you want to receive the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul? Then obey the gospel and live for God all the days of your life.

Chapter 16

The Great Salvation And The Prophets

When the prophets of the Old Testament predicted the coming of the Messiah and the salvation which would be brought to men at His coming, did they completely understand what they wrote? For example, did Isaiah who prophesied of the suffering servant of the Lord, fully comprehend what he was saying? Please listen to what Peter said about our receiving the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls:

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you (1 Pet. 1:10).

If they knew the meaning of what they wrote, why did they have to search and inquire as to its meaning? The great prophet Daniel had received a remarkable revelation from God Almighty. He did not know what it meant. Daniel was grieved in his spirit and the visions of his head troubled him. He said,

I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things (Dan. 7:15-16).

If the prophet did not understand in every case what he was writing, how did he always make accurate predictions and give true teaching? The answer to that question is given by the apostle Peter.

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21).

They could read the messages they were writing, but they often had no better insight into the meaning of their words than others who would read them. So those great prophets of God "inquired and searched diligently" into the great salvation they were predicting. The word "inquired" means to seek out, to scrutinize carefully. The expression, "searched

diligently," means to "trace out in detail, to explore, as one carefully sifts ore to find the precious metal" (Woods, p. 32).

Even though they may not have fully comprehended the meaning of their writings, they were prophesying of the grace which should come unto those of us who live under the new covenant. I will not take the time today to give you a complete list of the many predictions of the Christian age, but let me challenge you to read passages like Isaiah 53, Daniel 2, Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Joel 2:28-32. Although these passages were written between 600 and 800 years before Christ, they tell us much about the Messiah, the kingdom He would establish among men and the salvation He would provide for all people—both Jews and Gentiles.

Obviously, the Old Testament prophets did not outline in great detail what the New Covenant would entail. They did not, for example, give many features of the coming kingdom, what one would have to do to become a Christian, the eternal home which Jesus said He would go to prepare, but they did give a broad outline of the application of the new covenant. Jeremiah predicted that the new covenant would differ in many ways from the old. God promised to put His laws in our inward parts and write them in our minds.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

If the Old Testament prophets so plainly predicted the coming of Christ, the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost and the great salvation He would procure for us, why did the Jews have so much trouble accepting Him as the Messiah? There probably were many reasons, but one stands out—both in our Lord's statements and in apostolic writings: the hardness of hearts of the Jewish people. But whatever the case, we know who Jesus is and what we should do in response to the grace which has been brought unto us. We must believe and obey the gospel to be saved.

Chapter 17

Predictive Prophecy

Modern religious liberalism—like other philosophical approaches to religion—has many divisions and disagreements in its ranks. Some accept Jesus Christ as the Son of Almighty God; many others do not. Some accept some of the miracles of the Bible; others reject all the miracles. But there is almost universal agreement among liberal theologians on one point: Predictive prophecy did not happen. No man is able, they seem to reason, to look down through the ages and tell what will happen a hundred or a thousand years from the time of his predictions. One of my graduate professors affirmed that the prophets of the Old Testament were not “crystal ball gazers.” By that he meant, the prophets did not make predictions about the future. He could not have been more wrong.

The apostle Peter informed his readers that the prophets of the Old Testament “prophesied of the grace which should come unto you” (1 Pet. 1:10). How could anyone overlook the predictive element in the prophecies of the Old Testament? But Peter continued. They were,

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:11).

Did you notice in that reading the expression, “the Spirit of Christ...testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ?” If that is not predictive prophecy, I would not know what it is.

When the Old Testament prophets wrote of the great salvation which we would receive, they “inquired and searched diligently” and “prophesied of the grace which should come unto” us. They were searching what, or what manner of time all of their predictions would come to pass. They did not know the time because the Lord had not revealed that unto them. But they had “the Spirit of Christ” who guided them in their writings, so that they wrote only

the truth. Could the Spirit of Christ lead them into error of any kind? Could the prophets of God have been wrong about any event or teaching? If the prophet presumed to speak a word God had not given to him, or if he made predictions in the name of one of the heathen gods, or if his prophecies failed to be accomplished, the prophet was acting on his own authority; the Jews were not to pay any attention to him (Deut. 18:20-22).

How were the prophets able to give so much information about the coming Messiah? They were God's spokesmen; they were speaking as God gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The prophets made as many as three hundred predictions concerning Christ and all of them have come to pass, except the ones which will be fulfilled when He comes back to take His people to be with Him in glory. I will take time to read two prophecies from Isaiah.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

Both Matthew and Luke record our Lord's virgin birth as a fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35). If you are a mathematician, how would you figure the probability of a virgin birth? How did Isaiah know Mary would give birth to Jesus in a miraculous way?

Isaiah also predicted:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince
of Peace. Of the increase of his government and
peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of
David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to
establish it with judgment and with justice from
henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of
hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

Could this prophecy apply to anyone other than Jesus Christ?

Chapter 18

Predictions Of Christ's Sufferings

There are teachers and preachers called premillennialists who say that Christ could not establish His kingdom when He came the first time because the Jews rejected the king. They claim that the so-called "church age" was never a part of the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament prophets. Was the suffering of Christ a surprise to God and to Christ? Will you please listen carefully to the apostle Peter's statement about predictive prophecy? The prophets of the Old Testament were,

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. (1 Peter 1:11).

There are many passages in the Old Testament which forecast the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, the king who would reign over God's kingdom. Isaiah 52:13-15 and Isaiah 53 give us great insight into what was in store for Jesus Christ when He came into this world. Many were astonished at Christ when they saw how the Jews and the Romans had treated Him. His appearance was so marred they could hardly believe He was a human being (Isa. 52:14).

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isa. 53:3).

Can there be any doubt about whom the prophet had in mind? Is there anyone on the face of God's earth who has been more despised and abused? No wonder He was called a man of sorrows. His abuse was so great that men could not bear to look upon his sufferings.

Isaiah makes it plain that Christ's sufferings were to benefit the human family.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten

of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:4-5).

The people who actually witnessed our Lord's brutal and inhuman treatment, His illegal and unjust trials and His crucifixion thought he was being justly punished. They thought He had committed some heinous deed and deserved what He was getting. But His suffering was for us. "With his stripes we are healed."

Do you remember the sermon Philip the evangelist preached to the Ethiopian eunuch? When Philip approached the eunuch, he found the eunuch reading from Isaiah 53. He asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch wanted to know of whom the prophet Isaiah was speaking. The Bible says that Philip opened his mouth and started with Isaiah 53 and preached unto him Jesus. Following is the passage the eunuch was reading.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.(Isa. 53:7-8).

How could the sufferings and rejection of Jesus Christ have been unexpected by anyone who knew and believed the Bible? The prophets had foretold His sufferings. But so did Jesus while He was on earth. Mark records the confession the apostle Peter made about Christ's being the Messiah. Then Jesus

...began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31).

How did the prophets know that our Savior would have to suffer for the sins of the world? The prophets were divinely inspired. They knew because God revealed that truth to them. How can anyone deny predictive prophecy?

Chapter 19

The Purpose Of Prophetic Revelations

If you read the Bible regularly and understandingly, you cannot be unaware of the fact that God from eternity had a plan in mind for saving fallen man. Paul unquestionably teaches that truth. Paul was given the responsibility of helping

...all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9-11).

The Old Testament prophets gave an inspired outline of what would transpire when Jesus Christ would come into the world. Those prophets "inquired and searched diligently" and "prophesied of the grace that should come unto" those who would be blessed by the new covenant. They were attempting to learn what,

...or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Why did God reveal to the prophets so much about the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom? Was it primarily for the prophets themselves or for their generation? The apostle Peter tells us:

Unto whom [that is, the prophets] it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:12).

From this context, it seems certain that the prophets received divine revelation which they did not completely understand.

But the Holy Spirit was not giving them the revelation for their benefit, but for ours.

The word "revealed" means to unveil, to uncover. The Hebrew word rendered "reveal" means to make naked. The prophets were allowed a glimpse of what would occur when Jesus Christ would come into this world, but there were many concepts they did not have explained to them. Dr. A. T. Robertson made the following comment about the verse we are examining, "Here is revelation about the revelation already received, revelation after research" (**Word Pictures**, volume 6, p. 86).

The revelation which the prophets received from God almighty was not ultimately intended for them; it was designed for those of us who live in the Christian era. The prophets wanted to know the fulfillment of their prophetic writings; so did the angels. But the full knowledge of what God was providing was reserved for us. Peter said that "unto us did they minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit send down from heaven."

The words describing what was revealed are enlightening. The message the prophets predicted are now "reported unto you." The word "report" is one of the many New Testament words which refers to preaching. The word means to announce, to bring back tidings. The Greek word translated "have preached the gospel" comes into the English in our words "evangelize" and "evangelist." The word means to announce glad tidings or good news. What better news could anyone receive than that he can be saved by believing in Christ and obeying His gospel? This good news is ours because it was announced to us by the Holy Spirit which was sent down from heaven. It was and is such good news that the angels desired to look into it, but they were not permitted to do so.

How greatly you and I ought to rejoice over the wonderful blessings God has bestowed on us through Jesus Christ and His everlasting gospel.

Chapter 20

Christians Must Be Sober

When you are reading the Bible and you run across the word “therefore,” does it have any special significance or is it thrown in just to fill up space? You can know for sure that the word has deep and great meaning. It says that some observations or teachings have gone before from which the inspired writer is drawing a conclusion. For example, Paul used fifty-seven verses to discuss the resurrection of Christ as it bears on the resurrection of all men. He concluded the chapter by writing,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

There are dozens of examples of this approach in the scriptures.

Today I am discussing just one of those examples with you. The apostle Peter wrote:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13).

The word “wherefore” points to the wonderful provisions God has made for His children: “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away; reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). Based on God’s plan for saving men, we have an obligation to live according to God’s righteousness as revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17).

Peter instructed his readers to “gird up the loins of your mind.” That really is an unusual expression. Does our mind have loins? How can we place a girdle on our minds? Obviously, Peter was using highly figurative speech. He was referring to the habit of Eastern people who wore long, flowing robes and who had to gather these with a girdle or a sash so they could move rapidly. The mind may be

divided, confused and unstable. Christians are to have their minds brought into harmony with the revealed will of God. We are not to be doubleminded men who are unstable in all our ways (Jas. 1:8). Christians must be strong, stable and steadfast.

The expression, "be sober," comes from a Greek word meaning not to be drunk. However, the apostle is using the phrase in a figurative manner. The Greek *nepho* is used six times in the New Testament and always translated either "be sober" or "watch." In the biblical context, the word means to exercise self-control. If there is any greater need in our society than for men and women, boys and girls to control their appetites and activities, I would not know what it is. We are accustomed to giving free rein to whatever we choose to do. Many of us say, "But I have a right." If I want to drink or use drugs or engage in sexual promiscuity, who are you to restrict my freedom? The lack of self-control is destroying our nation.

Christians not only are urged to be sober, but we are encouraged "to hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The expression, "hope to the end," means to perfectly hope or to hope fully. Christians have a sound basis for hoping—the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And how very important hope is in the life of every human being—whether or not he is a Christian. How can we face life's battles unless we can have hope?

The final act of grace will be brought to human beings at the revelation of Jesus Christ. There are a number of words which describe the Lord's final appearance—coming or presence, epiphany and manifestation. The word "revelation" means uncovering, unveiling. What an uncovering that will be—when we see Jesus Christ in all His splendor and glory. The apostle John wrote:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Chapter 21

God's Obedient Children

Modern theologians sometimes strenuously object to the Bible's use of the word "obey"—whether it is applied to wives (1 Pet. 3:6) or children (Eph. 6:1) or Christians in general. They must imagine that obedience is in some way beneath the dignity of human beings. But it would be very difficult for anyone to be more foolish than are the modernistic theologians. Paul wrote of human beings "who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Actually, the word "obey" is a prominent concept—both in the Old Testament and in the New. The noun form is used fifteen times in the New Testament and the verb form twenty-one times.

The apos^t' Peter urges Christians to be sober, to hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13). We are to do all of this "as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance" (1 Pet. 1:14). The expression, "obedient children," means children who are characterized by obedience. Our whole lives are to be devoted to doing what God instructs us to do. The word "obey" does not appear in the following verse, but no one can miss the import of what Jesus said. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Many modernistic theologians would probably like to delete passages like this from the Bible, but they would be condemned for so doing.

As God's obedient children, we are not to fashion ourselves after the former lusts in our ignorance. The word "fashion" is the same word rendered "conformed" in Romans 12:2. The word describes the outward appearance. So many Christians in every age have been tempted to be like the people of the world. That was Paul's reason for charging the Romans:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Richard Trench translated Romans 12:2: "Do not fall in with the fleeting fashions of the world; nor be yourselves fashioned like them." Christians are not to be poured into the world's mold. We are to be obedient children, walking in the way of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a vital question with regard to obedience. If one does not continue to obey the Lord, would that in any way affect his or her eternal salvation? One preacher from Arkansas foolishly asserted, "If you quit going to church, quit reading your Bible and even quit believing in God, it would not affect your salvation." Do you get the impression from anything I am reading to you from 1 Peter or from any other biblical passage that you can be saved from your sins and preserved for eternity even if you do not obey the gospel of our Lord?

The people to whom Peter wrote this great letter were Gentiles in the flesh. They had lived to satisfy their physical lusts. I shall not take the time today to read Ephesians 4:17ff and Romans 1, but these provide excellent commentaries on how the Gentiles had lived before they learned about Christ and obeyed His gospel. They had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, without God, without Christ and without hope" (Eph. 2:11-12). Much of their conduct as Gentiles had been inspired by their ignorance. But they had learned about the Lord. God expected them to be obedient children and not to live as they had lived before they became New Testament Christians.

If you are a Christian, what is the manner of your life? If you are not a Christian, will you not today confess your faith in Jesus as the Son of God and obey from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to you (Rom. 5:17-18)?

Chapter 22

Are You A Saint?

Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, I am not a sinner and I am not a saint." Is there some position in between a sinner and a saint? Did you know that the words "holy," "saint," and "sanctified" all come from the same Greek word? If you are not a sinner, then you are a saint. There is no third category. But are Christians saints? If you mean by the word "saint" someone who is without flaw, then obviously no one belongs in that category. But that is not the meaning of the Greek word *hagios*. You know that is true if you have carefully read 1 Corinthians. Paul referred to the Corinthians as "called saints." You know how many sins are outlined in this great letter. The Corinthians were not perfect by any stretch of the imagination.

Peter explained what it means to be obedient children. We are not to fashion ourselves according to the former lusts of our ignorance (1 Pet. 1:14). Then he adds: "But as he who has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:15). God is the one who has called us into His service. His character is the standard of holiness. Since God is holy, He wants us to be holy. In fact, if we are not holy, that is, set apart for His service—set apart from the world—we cannot be His faithful followers. Fortunately, He has given us the means by which we can become holy, that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we obey the gospel of Christ, our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16) and we become holy in God's sight.

We are urged to be "holy in all manner of conversation." One who has not studied the Bible carefully may think Peter was speaking about our tongue-keeping our speech clean and pure. Holiness certainly includes that, but it is much more than that. The word "conversation" means manner of life. James asks,

Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom (Jas. 3:13).

Everyday—and not just on Sunday we are to keep our hearts and our lives pure. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

In order to reinforce his commandment for Christians to be holy, the apostle Peter quoted from the Old Testament. “Be holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16). This quotation is from that section of the Old Testament called “the holiness code.” The specific reference is Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7. God was as concerned in the days of the Mosaic covenant that His people be holy as He is today. He forbade them from engaging in any activity which would make them ceremonially and morally unholy. The weeping prophet refers to Israel as “holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase” (Jer. 2:3). It would not be inappropriate to use the same language of the church of the living God. Paul says that Christ at the end of the age will present the church

...to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:27).

I want to point out one more significant point about the verses I have read to you today from 1 Peter 1. Peter said, We are to be holy because “it is written.” As you know from your reading of the Bible, that little phrase appears over and over—especially in the New Testament. It means “it stands written.” The expression referred to statements of truth which were found in the Old Testament. Jesus and the apostles honored the Old Testament as their standard of authority. They said, in effect, this statement was written about 1,300 years ago and it is still in force. Do you think that those who walk in their own ways and maintain that God’s grace will take care of their sins understand the principle involved in the expression, “it stands written?”

Chapter 23

God Is No Respector Of Persons

There is hardly a community in the world where discrimination—racial, social, financial, and national—does not exist. It was rampant in virtually every civilization from the beginning of time. Many modern people—and I am one of them—think illegitimate discrimination is one of the major threats to the human family. There may be pockets of improvement in the United States and in other countries, but prejudice, bigotry and bias are facts of life with which we must come to grips. I beg you to pay close attention to our brief study today.

The apostle Peter instructed his readers to live as obedient children of almighty God. Being obedient means becoming holy in our conduct. "Because it is written, Be holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). Being holy and becoming like our heavenly Father also means we must not discriminate against others on account of race, or color, or national origin or social status. The apostle Peter writes:

And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (1 Pet. 1:17).

The expression, "if you call on the Father," was not intended to suggest any doubt. This phrase is called the condition of the first class and is assumed to be true. In modern English it should read, "Since you call on the Father...pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

Peter says concerning our heavenly Father, "who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work." The phrase, "without respect of persons," does not mean that God has no respect for anyone. The literal meaning of the Greek, according to J. Henry Thayer, the great Harvard Greek scholar, means "one who does not receive the face." How does God look on His creatures?

Does He judge us on the basis of our wealth, our cultural heritage, our academic achievement or the color of our faces? The Old Testament prophet explained: "The Lord sees not as a man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The word Peter used in this verse appears only in this text, but similar words are used by other authors. Paul used a different word, but no one can miss the meaning of Paul's letters. "And, you masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Eph. 6:9). "But he that does wrong shall receive for the wrong he has done: and there is no respect of persons with God" (Col. 3:25).

James instructs Christians not to have "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." He speaks of the temptation to honor the rich—at least, those who appear to be rich—and to have disregard for the poor. He concludes his discussion of discrimination by saying, "But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors" (Jas. 2:1,9). Discrimination, my friends, is not simply unwise or inappropriate; it is sinful.

When you and I stand before the Judge in the final day, we will not be judged by the color of our faces or our social standing. We will be judged on the basis of our work in the Lord's kingdom. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Knowing we shall stand before the God of this universe to be judged, we are to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear. The **Revised Standard Version** translates that expression, "Conduct yourselves in fear."

Chapter 24

The Price Of Our Redemption

How much are you worth to God almighty? I really cannot answer that question. But I can tell you this: The price paid for our redemption was the blood of the sinless Lamb of God. The apostle Peter referred to Christians as God's elect. He affirmed that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2). Later in the same chapter Peter instructs Christians to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers (1 Pet. 1:18).

We normally evaluate an item by the price we had to pay for it. Your automobile is more valuable than a ballpoint pen. Your house is more valuable than your automobile. If that is legitimate reasoning, what is your soul worth? Oh, you did not pay anything for it, but it cost our heavenly Father His precious Son. Does that truth provide you with any insight into what your soul is worth?

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).

Christians are redeemed people, but the price paid was not silver or gold but the precious blood of Christ. The word "redeemed" means we were released by payment of a ransom. Jesus tells us plainly what the ransom was. "For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). There is not enough gold and silver in the world to redeem one soul from sin. But the blood of Jesus Christ accomplishes that goal. "And without the shedding of blood

there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). If Christ had not shed His blood, the whole world would still be lost in sin.

The blood of Christ redeemed us from the vain conversation or manner of life which we received by tradition from our fathers. That clause would indicate that the recipients of Peter's letter were Gentiles. It is unlikely that Peter would have used that kind of language of the Jews. The law they received came not from the empty traditions of their fathers, but from the very mind of God almighty. The Gentiles, however, had lived by the evil and empty teachings they had received from their philosophers. A careful reading of Romans 1 and Ephesians 4 will help you to understand why Peter would write as he did about the Gentiles.

As you can see if you look at this chapter closely, there was a definite connection between the expression, "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear," and Peter's reminding these early Christians of the price which God had paid for their redemption. God has graciously provided the way of salvation; Jesus paid for that way with His blood; therefore, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ must pass the time of His sojourning here in fear. He must be constantly aware of what God has done for his salvation and live in such a way as to have God's approval. That does not mean anyone can deserve what God has done and is doing for us, but it does mean we are to live with God's will always in our mind. We must have the attitude of Jesus as expressed in this verse: "For I do always those things which please him" (John 8:29).

When Peter mentioned our being redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, he referred to Him as "a lamb without blemish and without spot." In other words, the One whom God chose to purchase our salvation was one who had not sinned. He met all the requirements for a perfect sacrifice our sins. Thank God that Christ was willing to die for our sins—for my sins.

Chapter 25

Before The Foundation Of The World

The Old Testament scriptures were written between approximately 2000 B.C. and 400 B.C. I say "approximately" because we do not know when the book of Job was written. The five books of Moses were probably written around 1400 B.C., but we cannot pinpoint the book of Job. There is hardly any doubt that Nehemiah and Malachi were written about 400 years before Christ. The New Testament was written between 49 A.D. and 95 A.D., probably. 1 Thessalonians seems to have been the first book of the New Testament and was written about 49 A.D. The book of Revelation was the last and was written no later than 95 A.D. and may have been written sooner.

I mention the dates of the Old Testament books and of the New in order to ask you a question. Which of these dates marked the beginning of God's thinking and planning for our salvation? Had He given it some thought in the days of Moses and the other prophets? There is absolutely no doubt God had our salvation in mind when He inspired Isaiah to write concerning the coming Savior:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

The New Testament makes it plain that God had our salvation in mind long before He created the human family. Is it possible to show that from the teaching of the scriptures?

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Now please listen carefully: "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in

these last times for you" (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

Peter affirmed that "the lamb without blemish and without spot" was foreordained to die for us "before the foundation of the world." The word "foreordained" has given a great number of people considerable trouble, primarily because they have been listening to John Calvin's followers rather than listening to Christ and to His apostles. The Greek word translated "foreordained" means foreknown, or to know beforehand. That word says that God knew what was going to happen with respect to men and planned before it happened how to remedy the situation. God knew man would sin and planned even then, that is, before man sinned to send Jesus to redeem us from our sins.

Incidentally, there are some problems for premillennialists when they try to explain this verse. If God knew before the foundation of the world that Jesus Christ would have to come to this earth and suffer for our sins, then the kingdom plan of salvation was not an afterthought; it was not a contingency plan. It was in the mind of God from the beginning of time. Paul explained it this way:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent [or for the purpose] that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

Even though God had the New Testament plan of salvation in His mind before the foundation of the world, He did not manifest it until these last times. The word "manifest" means to shine. This expression refers to the incarnation of our Lord. He came at the end of the Jewish age to reveal fully God's scheme of human redemption.

Chapter 26

Who By Him Do Believe In God

Do you ever remember not believing in God? I suspect that most of you have probably had about the same experience I have had. I grew up in a home and in a community where God was at least acknowledged by almost everyone I knew. My parents were devout Christians and put his kingdom first in their lives. God may or may not have occupied a very prominent place in your life, but you almost certainly had no doubt of His existence. Tragically, not every young person in this country has the same privileges and opportunities most of us older people enjoyed. But belief in God—at least, in some kind of God—still is the dominant view of most Americans. Annual polls by reputable research organizations, like the Gallup and Barna groups, still show that more than 90% of Americans believe in God.

Basically, faith in God comes through three avenues—natural revelation, supernatural revelation and God's Son. Natural revelation refers to learning about God through His creation. The Psalmist speaks of God's revelation of Himself in the world He has made.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard (Psa.19:1-3).

Paul says:

...the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

The supernatural revelation of God is contained in the Old Testament and in the New. As beautiful and

impressive as God's natural revelation is, there is so much about God we could not know unless He chose to speak to us in His word. Paul says that the things of God no man could know without divine revelation. "But God has revealed them [that is, the things of God] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 6:8-10). Without divine revelation we could know of power and divinity, but we could not know God and His will for our lives. When we read God's book, we can understand what He wants us to know and to do.

Not only has God revealed Himself in nature and in His inspired word; He has revealed Himself in His Son. The apostle Peter wrote of Christians' being redeemed by the precious blood of Christ who was foreordained for our salvation long before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for us (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Now please notice what Peter says about our believing in God through Christ: "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

Peter does not deny the influence of Old Testament revelation on men's faith in God. Certainly, men and women who had studied the Old Testament knew much about God. But we have a new source of revelation no other people in the history of the world have ever had. We have God's Son. The apostle John enlarges upon the thesis taught in 1 Peter 1:21. "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father has declared him" (John 1:18). The word "declared" means to explain, to reveal, to make known. God has been completely revealed in His Son. That was the reason Jesus said to Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Paul refers to Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15).

We believe in God through Jesus Christ. God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Through Jesus Christ we have absolute assurance of God's existence and of God's goodness.

Chapter 27

Obeying The Truth

If one listens to sermons on radio and on television, he may come away with some strange ideas about conversion. It is not unusual to hear some evangelist say, "If you want to have Christ come into your heart, just get down on your knees wherever you are and ask him to forgive you and to save you." It would be interesting and instructive if those preachers would turn to the great book of conversions—the book of Acts—and produce that kind of advice. Why do they not do so? There is no place in Acts where that kind of instruction is given. Instead, you hear Ananias say to Saul, "Why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Do you see any difference between what many preachers are teaching alien sinners and what the book of Acts teaches?

Did God's spokesmen in the first century emphasize obedience as being essential to salvation? Is that the impression you get from reading Peter's commands to the Jews on Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)? The same apostle wrote in his first epistle:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22).

The verb "purified" means to make clean, to take away the stain of sin. The tense of the verb is perfect. The verb places the action in the past with existing results. They purified their souls in their obedience to the truth and they will remain pure so long as they walk in the light (1 John 1:7). But does Peter mean that these early Christians actually had to obey the truth to be pure—to be forgiven of their

sins? Even though Peter's teaching runs counter to Calvinism, that is precisely what he was saying.

How did they purify their souls, according to an inspired apostle? Please tell me how language can be plainer than this. "You have purified your souls in obeying the truth." Are there any obscure terms in this verse? The great apostle Paul emphasized the same truth.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18).

Did you notice Paul's stress on obedience in these verses from Romans 6? If Paul is to be believed, obedience from the heart to the form of doctrine was not optional for those who wanted to be children of God. They became servants of righteousness when they obeyed from the heart. When were they made free from sin? When they obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to them. What a powerful and irrefutable argument for obedience to the gospel!

The book of Acts has many examples of what men and women must do to become Christians. I have already mentioned Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:16) and the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Let us look briefly at one more conversion in Acts. Paul and Silas left Athens and came to the city of Corinth. "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:1,5). What was the response of some in Corinth? "Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). When they believed and were baptized, were they saved? Were they purified by obeying the truth?

Chapter 28

Unfeigned Love Of The Brethren

Do you remember how Jesus said men would recognize His disciples?

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Did Jesus mean that there were no other identifying marks of Christians? If that is what He meant, then Muslims, Hindus, and even atheists could be His disciples. When we have obeyed our Lord by confessing His name, repenting of our sins and being baptized into Christ, then one of the true marks of God's faithful people is loving one another.

Peter's first letter was addressed to Christians scattered "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). Those people throughout the Roman provinces mentioned—most of whom were almost certainly Gentiles—had purified their souls by obeying the truth through the Spirit. God's Holy Spirit had provided the message and the preachers to teach those Gentiles the truth so they could obey it from the heart. Through their obedience they had their sins washed away and were added to the church of the living God.

But there was more to the Christian life than the initial obedience to the gospel. They were purified by obeying the truth "unto unfeigned love of the brethren." Christians are obligated and privileged to love one another because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The word "unfeigned" comes from the Greek *anupokriton* from which we get our word unhyprocritical. The same Greek word is used in the following passages. "By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned" (2 Cor. 6:6). James speaks of the wisdom which is from above. It is "without partiality and without

hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:17).

The apostle John does not use the same Greek word we are examining, but who can doubt his meaning? "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Hypocritical love is the kind which professes love to the face, but stabs the person in the back. When we tell people we love them, we must mean it or it may do great harm—both to us and to others.

The expression, "love of the brethren," comes from one Greek word *philadelphia*. That word appears often in the writings of the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Romans:

Let love be without dissimulation [that is, without hypocrisy]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12:9-10).

The apostle Peter encouraged his readers to add to their knowledge temperance and to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love (2 Pet. 1:6-7). The Hebrew writer says very succinctly: "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1).

And how does one show brotherly love? We show our love by the same way we show our faith—by works. There are hundreds of passages to which I could turn, but let me read two more verses from Hebrews 13.

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (Heb. 13:2-3).

We show our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ when we help, encourage and support them in every way possible.

Peter adds that we are to love one another with a pure heart fervently. The word "fervently" (*ektenos*) means to stretch. It suggests making maximum effort to show our love for one another. Could we have a better example of what love means than our Lord Jesus Christ?

Chapter 29

Being Born Again

During the 1980s, one of the most popular terms on radio and on television was “born again Christian.” Conservative religious teachers, such as, Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy, called themselves “born again Christians” and apparently took considerable pride in their beliefs. On the other hand, the public media had a field day with the term. They acted as if the expression, “born again Christian,” was equivalent to ignorance or bigotry or worse. One seldom hears the phrase anymore—either by those who claim to be born again or by the enemies of New Testament Christianity.

The term “born again Christian,” is a tautology. “Tautology” means a needless repetition of an idea, statement or word. To put it very simply: If one is born again, he is a Christian. If he is a Christian, he is born again. There is no possibility of one’s being a Christian without being born again. What is my authority for that observation? Will you please listen to Jesus Christ?

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Except a man be born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God....Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again” (John 3:3,5,7).

Is there any higher authority on earth than that?

The apostle Peter spoke of our having purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren. He then charged the early Christians:

...see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

The tense of the verb, “being born again,” literally reads “having been born again.” As God’s children, we are to love our brethren because we all have the same Father, the

God of heaven.

The new birth does not result from "corruptible seed," that is, the seed of a human being. The natural seed by which physical birth takes place will perish, but those who are begotten by the incorruptible seed will not. If they are faithful to God, they will live forever. Our Lord said to the church in Smyrna: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). May a child of God be disinherited? The Hebrew writer warned the early Christians: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12).

And what is that incorruptible-or imperishable-seed by which we are begotten again? Peter explains: "Being born again...by the word of God which lives and abides forever." Jesus Christ used a different figure, but the meaning is basically the same. He explained the meaning of the seed in the "Parable of the Sower": "The seed of the kingdom is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). That seed which begets and places us in the kingdom of God is the Bible-the word of God. There is no begetting without the seed, just as there is no crop of corn or of wheat without the seed. James wrote:

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (Jas. 1:18).

There are many examples in the book of Acts which show us how the process of begetting works. Paul preached the word in the city of Corinth. In other words, he planted the seed. "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:5,8). Were these Corinthians who heard, believed and were baptized born again? If they were not, what more did they have to do to be born again? Jesus said in the Great Commission:

...Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

Chapter 30

The Word Of God Will Live And Abide Forever

The pyramids in Egypt are among the most spectacular and most enduring structures men have ever built. The Great Pyramid, for example, was about 1,500 years old when Moses lived in the land of Goshen. That means the Great Pyramid is about 5,000 years old. But like everything of this world, it has begun to erode and will eventually perish from the earth—unless some way of renewing it is invented. All of men's works and inventions will disappear from the face of the earth, if not before, at least, at the time of our Lord's glorious second coming.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet 3:10).

"But the word of God lives and abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:23).

The apostle Peter wanted us to know how short and how passing life is. He wrote: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (1 Pet. 1:24). When Peter affirmed that "all flesh is as grass," he was in no way belittling human beings. He was simply saying that we were not designed to live on earth forever. Our physical bodies wear out and we die. Peter quoted the words of the prophet Isaiah regarding man's life on earth (Isa. 50:6-8). James stresses the same truth.

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live,

and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil (Jas. 4:13-16).

We all understand about man's temporary existence on this earth. We know we are not here forever. We are like the grass which withers and then fades away. "But the word of the Lord endures forever." Men's productions serve their purpose—at least, in some cases—but then they fail, regardless of their usefulness during their lifetimes. Our houses, our clothes and all else we own will disappear. God's word, on the other hand, never ceases to meet men's most basic needs and it always will. That was David's reason for writing: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105). Not only will God's book designed to bring us unto God for the salvation of our souls (Jas. 1:21), but it will judge us in the last day. James writes: "So speak, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas. 2:12).

And what is the word which lives and abides forever? "This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:25). We know the meaning of the word "gospel." It refers in the New Testament to the good news about Jesus Christ and His way of saving men. Paul had preached the gospel at Corinth. They had received it; they were standing in it and they were saved by it (1 Cor. 15:1-2). He then explained the meaning of the gospel:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

The saving events in the life of Christ had to be made known so men and women could render obedience to the gospel. We are not saved just because Christ died for us and was raised for our justification. We are saved by believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing the name of Christ before men and being baptized for the remission of sins. If you have not obeyed the gospel, why not obey it today?

Chapter 31

The Difference Conversion Makes

Have you observed those who claimed to have been born again? Did you notice any difference in the way they acted after they were converted than before they were converted? If they did not behave any differently, did you wonder if the conversion was really genuine? If they did conduct themselves in a more godly fashion, do you have any explanation for that? The apostle Peter wrote to Gentile Christians in several Roman provinces:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Peter's admonitions to these Gentiles is very plain and pointed: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Pet. 2:1). The word "wherefore" in this verse suggests that because we are born again a new life is demanded. His language is similar to what one reads in some of Paul's epistles.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light (Rom. 13:12).

Some of the attitudes Christians are not to practice anymore are mentioned in the verse we are examining. The tense of the verb, "laying aside," should be rendered, "having laid aside," that is, when one became a New

Testament Christian he was supposed to have put off the old man and put on the new (Col. 3:8-10). We are no longer to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Christians are to lay aside or to put off "malice." This word could be translated wickedness and refers to vice of any kind. Sometimes the Greek is rendered "evil," "wickedness," "maliciousness," and "naughtiness." In order to determine what malice or wickedness is, we must examine the Bible to see what God has said on the topic.

Christians are also to put off "guile." The Greek word translated "guile" was used of bait used to catch a fish. The verb is sometimes translated "deceive" (Matt. 7:22), "enticed" (Jas. 1:14) and "allure" (2 Pet. 2:14). The word describes the behavior of men and women who try to deceive others. Whatever our motivation, we have no right to deceive anyone—even if we believe it is for their own good.

"Evil speakings" in the verse we are studying is in some versions rendered "slander." The literal meaning of the word is to speak against. How tragic that anyone—especially Christians—would speak evil of others and destroy their good name. We would do well to remember these words from the very mouth of Jesus Christ. "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

Peter also mentioned in our text "hypocrisies and envyings." Surely, we all know both by reading the scriptures and from experience what hypocrisy is and how abominable it is. Jesus Christ was not consciously giving a definition of hypocrisy in this verse, but it would be difficult to find a better one. "This people draws near unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8). "Envy" is the hateful attitude of feeling displeasure at someone else's good fortune. Peter expected that Christians had laid aside these unchristian attitudes and actions. Have we really?

Chapter 32

Do You Long To Know God's Word?

National surveys in the last several years have revealed gross ignorance of the Bible on the part of millions of Americans. For example, the majority of Americans cannot name all four gospels. They do not know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Why are so many Americans ignorant of the word of God? Are we less intelligent than our ancestors who knew the Bible much better than we do? Or does our ignorance stem from a lack of desire on our part to know what God has revealed? Have we allowed television and our daily routines to interfere with our study of the Bible?

The apostle Peter instructed members of the body of Christ among various Roman provinces to lay aside "all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" and "as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word" that they might grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). All of us know how desperately newborn babies want to be fed. If you are a parent, you know how your baby awakened you at two or three o'clock in the morning because he was hungry. It did not matter that you may have had only a hour or two of sleep. His stomach was empty and he wanted someone to fill it. Incidentally, the lord made babies so they would cry when they were hungry. Otherwise, they would perish since they cannot get up and go to the refrigerator for food.

In the same way babies want to be fed with physical milk, Christians are to "desire the sincere milk of the word." The word "desire" comes from a Greek word meaning to long for, to yearn for. The word involves intense longing, earnest desire—the same kind of desire a baby has for its milk. The verb is an intensive form of the word usually rendered simply "desire." While different verbs are used in the following passages, there is no doubt about their meaning. "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after

righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). The Psalmist wrote: "As the hart [or deer] pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul after thee, O God" (Psa. 42:1).

I am sure every preacher has had someone to say to him, "I wish I knew the Bible as well as you do." Do you know how diligent Bible students know the Bible? By being diligent in their study of the Bible. There are no shortcuts to knowing the word of God. It is a matter of spending hours and hours with your Bible and asking God for the wisdom which comes from above (Jas. 1:5-6). Just as we studied our English and math and history in our public schools, we must study the Bible to be proficient students of the Bible.

If we realize the absolute necessity of knowing and doing God's will, it ought to stimulate us to study diligently. Do you remember that Jesus said, "You shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? Paul wrote as follows about the Bible:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Paul said to the Ephesian elders: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to save your souls" (Acts 20:32). How could we not desire the word of truth when we know it makes us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15)?

Peter referred to God's word as "the sincere milk of the word." The word "sincere" comes from the Greek *logikos* which means rational, reasonable, logical. Paul used the same Greek word in this verse:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1).

I close today with this question: Do you long to know God's word?

Chapter 33

Tasting The Lord

Have you ever tasted the Lord? I know that may seem like a strange question, but it really is not. It is not the kind of language most modern men would use of our relationship to the Lord, but students of the Bible understand its significance. The apostle Peter encouraged early Christians to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." He then added: "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:2-3). The idea of tasting would be more understandable for most of us if the word "experience" were used instead of the word "taste."

The King James Version uses the word "if" in reference to our tasting the Lord. That word in our language usually suggests some doubt as to the reality of our experience. That was not true of the original Greek. "If" in this verse is what Greek scholars call "condition of the first class." Rather than suggesting doubt, the word describes reality. In modern English the word "if" should be rendered "since." Let me give you another example. Paul wrote to the Colossians: "If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). Paul was not expressing doubts about the Colossians' obedience to the gospel. Earlier in the letter, he had said to them: "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). Paul was exhorting the Colossians: "Since [not if] you have been risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

The Christians to whom Peter wrote had tasted that the Lord is gracious. The Greek word translated "taste" (*geuo*) is the common word for tasting food or drink, but it is used figuratively in the passage I am examining. Let me give you some other examples of the word from the New Testament. The Hebrew writer said concerning the Son of God:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

Jesus used the same word in a negative way when He spoke about the coming of His kingdom.

Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt. 16:28).

The Hebrew writer used the word "taste" of those who had believed the gospel and had obeyed it.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).

These biblical verses help us to understand the significance of the word "taste" in reference to God, His Son and His Word. We taste the Lord when we read His word, believe that word with all our hearts and render obedience to it. In other words, when we experience salvation from the Lord, we have tasted the Lord.

I am aware that the word "experience" has been abused by many in the religious world. They have made experience the test of truth. That is not scriptural or legitimate. But there is nothing wrong with the word "experience" if we base our behavior on the truth of the Bible. Experience can be good or bad—comforting or deceptive. But if our experience is based on the truth, we can certainly enjoy our blessings. Peter speaks of tasting the graciousness of the Lord. Surely, all of us who have believed and obeyed the gospel can understand how gracious our Lord is. If you have not tasted Him, why not turn to Him now for the forgiveness of sins and know that He is gracious?

Chapter 34

Jesus Christ – The Living Stone

The Old Testament sometimes refers to God as a rock, indicating the strength He provides for those who trust in Him. The Psalmist wrote:

I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower (Psa. 18:1-2).

Did you know that the New Testament uses similar language of Jesus Christ? The apostle Peter wrote of men's tasting that the Lord is gracious. Then he said of the Lord Jesus Christ: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" (1 Pet. 2:4).

The tense of the verb "coming" suggests we are continually coming to the Lord for strength, hope and comfort. The one to whom we are coming is a "living stone." Some critics would refer to this expression as a mixing of the metaphors. How can a stone be living? But there really is no problem with the language if we want to learn what the Holy Spirit intended. Jesus Christ is the foundation stone of men's lives. Paul used a building metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3. He called Himself "a wise masterbuilder." He warned men about building on any other foundation than the Lord Himself. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). But Jesus Christ is not a dead stone; he is a living stone. He is alive and He furnishes life to those who believe in Him and obey Him. "I am come," Jesus said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

But the living stone was "disallowed of men." God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world, the Lord of life, but what many men saw in Christ they did not like. The

Jews were not looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from sin, but one who would remove the yoke of Roman oppression from their shoulders. When Jesus came, they were disappointed and "disallowed" Him. The word "disallowed" means to reject after examination. In other words, the Jews examined Christ's claims to be the Messiah and decided He did not measure up to their expectations. This same Greek word is used in the following passage: "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests, and be slain and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22). Incidentally, one form of the Greek word is rendered "reprobate" (Rom. 1:28).

Peter affirms that the one whom men—primarily the Jewish leaders—rejected the Lord God elected. The Greek work for "chosen" is the word *eklekton* from which we get our English word "elect." The word means chosen, selected or elected. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ selected his Son to come to this earth to save men from their sins. An angel of the Lord said to Joseph about the coming of the Messiah through his espoused wife:

...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:20-21).

When you realize what Jesus Christ came to accomplish, you can readily understand why Peter would refer to Him as being precious in the eyes of God and in the eyes of good men. The word "precious" means worthy of honor. God honored His Son and the Son honored the Father. We must love the Son and through our obedience to Him we bring honor to His precious name. How could anyone examine the life and death of Jesus Christ and not agree with Peter's assessment that He is "precious."

If you have not confessed the name of Christ and been baptized in His name for the remission of sins, can you really say you have honored Him?

Chapter 35

Christians Are Living Stones

Did you know that the word "Peter" in Greek (*petros*) means "stone?" When Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, the Lord said to him, "You are Simon the son of Jonah: you shall be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). On another occasion when Simon Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, Jesus said to him,

Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona [that is, Simon son of Jonah]: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:17-18).

The Greek word *petros* and the Aramaic word *kephas* both mean stone, but obviously the church of our Lord was not built on a man. It was built on the truth Peter had confessed—"that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God." But it is significant that Peter was called a stone. The same apostle used similar language in telling who Christians are. "You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Peter uses a different word in this text from the one I have been discussing, although they mean basically the same. Peter calls God's people "lively stones." I am not sure why the King James translators used "living" in reference to Christ in verse 4 and used "lively" in verse 5. Both words should be rendered "living." Our Lord Jesus Christ is a living stone; we are living stones. He has life within Himself; we take our life from Him. "I am come," He said on one occasion, "that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). We live because He lives. We shall live eternally because He rose

from the dead never to die again. Paul affirmed: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22, 57).

As living stones, we are built up a spiritual house, that is, we are the church of the living God. The "spiritual house" of which Peter writes is not a church building, but the people of God. Paul wrote to a young preacher:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

The church of our Lord is composed of "an holy priesthood." My friends, no church has a right to choose some men or women and designate these as priests or priestesses. There is no special class of men in the Lord's church who are priests. We are all priests. Later in 1 Peter 2 Christians are called "a royal priesthood" or kingly priests. Please notice also that Peter refers to Christians as "an holy priesthood." That word "holy" is the same word translated "saint" and means one who is set apart for holy purposes.

As a kingdom of priests, we are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God." The verb "offer up" is the Greek word which is usually used in speaking of the offering of sacrifices under the law of Moses (Heb. 7:27). But what are the spiritual sacrifices which Christians are to offer? The Hebrew writer provides some insight into this question.

By him [that is, our high priest, Jesus Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:15-16).

These sacrifices from an holy priesthood are acceptable unto God because they were ordained by Him and they are offered through Jesus Christ.

Chapter 36

Jesus Christ – The Chief Cornerstone

Peter's first epistle calls Christ a "living stone" (1 Pet. 2:4). He used the same language in referring to Christians. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). The apostle Peter then adds: "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Pet. 2:6). Peter said to the Jews in Jerusalem: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

The scripture from the Old Testament which Peter quoted in 1 Peter 2:6 and Acts 4:12 comes from Isaiah 28:16. "Wherefore it is contained in the scripture." Isaiah, which is called "scripture" in this verse, was predicting the coming of the Messiah and His rejection by the Jewish nation. But their rejection of Christ was ultimately a rejection of Almighty God. "He who rejects me," Jesus said, "and receives not my words, has one who judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Even though His own people rejected Him, it was in the plan of God that Christ would become the chief cornerstone. He would become the one on whom civilization would be built and the one who will judge all men at the end of the age. The reason our nation and most nations of the earth are in such deep trouble—morally and spiritually—is their rejection of the Son of God. There will be no way to remedy the situation unless men and women turn back to God and honor His Son Jesus Christ. if we could get

along without Him, there would be no justification in calling Him the chief cornerstone.

Millions of Americans are deeply disturbed and discouraged about the senseless killing and other forms of violence in our nation. We are troubled that one million teenagers become pregnant out-of-wedlock in the United States every year. Can we not understand how absolutely essential it is that we believe in Christ, obey His gospel and live by the precepts of His word? Is there any other possible solution to the heartrending problems we face—both as Christians and as non-Christians?

Because God has laid in Zion a chief cornerstone—the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—all men and women should recognize Him as “elect, precious.” The word “elect” (*eklektos*) means chosen, selected. God the Father knew what human being would need—not only to save their souls from eternal punishment— but to provide a moral and spiritual basis for our living. He selected Christ to meet all our legitimate needs. Peter also calls Jesus “precious.” That word indicates the value God almighty places on his Son and how we should react to Him and His will for our lives. Who could be more precious than the one who came down from heaven, died on the cross to redeem us for our sins and ascended to the Father to prepare a place for His faithful children?

If you believe on Christ as the chief cornerstone—elect and precious—you are not going to be confounded. I do want to ask you in passing if Peter is teaching belief alone? If you simply believe and do not obey, would you be confounded? The word “confounded” means to be put to shame. If you put your trust in the Lord and obey from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to you, you are never going to be ashamed. Put your faith in the chief cornerstone—not in the shifting sands of false religion and false philosophy.

Chapter 37

The Stone Which The Builders Disallowed

The Old Testament scriptures specifically predicted that the coming Messiah would be the very cornerstone of the church and of civilization.

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture,
Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect,
precious: and he that believeth on him shall not
be confounded (1 Pet. 2:6).

Millions and millions of people since Jesus came into the world have accepted Him as the Son of God and as the Savior of the whole world. When men and women commit their lives into His keeping, they are never going to be ashamed or disappointed. Even though living for Christ might entail severe persecution and even death, faithful Christians will remain devoted to Him throughout their lives. They will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). But what about the unbeliever? Is Jesus precious to the unbeliever also?

"Unto you therefore who believe he is precious: but unto them who be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner" (1 Pet. 2:7). As you can discern from this reading, Christ is not precious to everyone. Isaiah predicted about seven hundred fifty years before Christ came to earth: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:3). If we believe in Him, accept Him at His word, He is precious—more precious than all of earth's riches and even life itself. Through Him we shall gain eternal rest with God, with Christ and with the saints of all the ages.

The King James Version uses the word "disobedient" in 1 Peter 2:7, but most manuscripts have the word

"disbelieve." The difference is minor since the disobedient are at heart unbelievers. The unbelievers or the disobedient "disallowed" the stone which God Himself has made the head of the corner. When Peter speaks of the builders, he was referring specifically to the leaders in the Jewish nation, but it applies far beyond the Jewish leaders. It refers to any and all leaders who attempt to build without taking Christ into consideration. These would be the materialists who see no need for any spiritual understandings. They believe they can operate without God and without Christ. But they are tragically and sadly disappointed and will be more so at the judgment.

The builders "disallowed" Christ because they did not fully understand who He was or they did not like Him interfering with their immoral plans. They were like many Jews and Greeks in the first century who thought Christ did not meet their narrow expectations.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:23-24).

The word "disallowed" is a very common word in the New Testament. It means to reject after examination. The positive form of the word involves examining or trying with a view of either accepting or rejecting. Paul uses the negative form of the word in the following passage. "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:28). The truth contained in this passage is simple and powerful. The Gentiles tried or examined God and then decided He did not fit in with their plans; so they rejected Him. Incidentally, the word "reprobate" is from the same Greek word. When the Gentiles rejected God, He in turn rejected them.

You can certainly understand from this verse how serious it is for the builders and for their followers to reject the very foundation of life—Jesus Christ.

Chapter 38

Jesus Is A Stone Of Stumbling And A Rock Of Offense

If Jesus Christ is all the Bible claims for Him—the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Savior of the world, the way, the truth and the life—why would one of His apostles refer to Him as a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense?” Peter calls Him a “living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God, and precious” (1 Pet. 2:4). He is the “stone which the builders disallowed [or rejected] and whom God made the head of the corner” (1 Pet. 2:7). But in the very next verse Peter writes: “And a stone of stumbling, a rock of offense, even to them who stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto they were appointed” (1 Pet. 2:8).

The word “stumbling” involves cutting against. It means to collide with something, thus suffering injury. The word “offense” comes from the Greek *skandalos* which means scandal. Paul uses the word *skandalos* in the following passages. Paul commanded the Roman Christians not to “put an occasion to fall” in a brother’s way (Rom. 14:13). In fact Paul uses the two words—stumbling and offense—in this passage from Romans.

Let us not therefore judge one another any more:
but judge this rather, that no man put a
stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his
brother's way (Rom. 14:13).

Paul uses the word *skandalos* in speaking of the cross. “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased” (Gal. 5:11).

Paul does not mean and neither does the apostle Peter that Jesus leads men into sin—that He causes men and women to fall. Peter is depicting the attitude of the world toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Please listen again to his

words: Jesus "is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" - to whom? Even to them who stumble at His word, being disobedient." The person, for example, who looks to Jesus for support and comfort for his sinful life will be disappointed in Jesus. Our Lord's sinlessly perfect life and His uncompromising opposition to sin causes those who want to continue to walk in sin to turn their backs on Him. The disobedient will invariably reject Him as the Savior of mankind. If he is not the kind of Savior and Lord they want, He becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to them. No better example can be found in the New Testament than this from Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

Neither the Jews nor the Greeks wanted the kind of Savior God sent into the world; so they rejected Him.

And what does God have in mind for those disobedient people who reject Jesus as the Messiah? May they do so without any serious consequences? Peter speaks of the ultimate fate of the disobedient when he says, "even to them who stumble at his word, being disobedient, whereunto they were appointed." Is Peter saying that the disobedient were ordained to be disobedient? If that were the case, God-not the disobedient-would be responsible for their behavior. But God never leads anyone into sin. So what or who were appointed? The obedient have the promise of eternal life. That is the reward appointed for them. The disobedient are appointed to eternal hell. Dr. A. T. Robertson quotes a theologian by the name of Bigg who says, "Their disobedience is not ordained; the penalty of their disobedience is" (**Word Pictures**, volume 6, p. 98).

My plea with you today is that you will accept Jesus Christ as God's elected representative to man and obey His will. Your sins will be forgiven and you will be on your way to heaven.

Chapter 39

Christians Are An Elect Nation

Some of America's founding fathers believed and argued powerfully that the United States was an elect nation. A few modern American theologians and politicians—or better—American theologians who are politicians—have advanced the same argument. Former president Ronald Reagan referred to the United States as a “city that is set on a hill.” In the eyes of many patriotic American citizens, the United States comes close to occupying the same position in the mind of God that Israel did in the long ago. And, there is no doubt that a scriptural viewpoint that Israel was an elect nation under the Jewish covenant. God commanded the Jews to destroy the pagan nations in the land of Canaan (Deut. 7:1-5). Then the divinely inspired writer added:

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deut. 7:6-8).

But what nation in our day occupies the special place in the heart of God which Israel did in ancient times? Is it the United States or Great Britain or France or Germany? It is none of these great nations. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is now the chosen people of God. Will you please listen to these words from Peter's first epistle?

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should

shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

The apostle Peter had said of Christians earlier in his epistle:

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.... (1 Pet. 1:2).

The word "chosen" in 1 Peter 2:9 is the same word rendered "elect" in 1 Peter 1:2. Both words come from the Greek *eklekton* from which our English word "elect" derives. The word simply means selected or elected or chosen. There is nothing in the word itself which gives us any insight into the nature of the election-whether it is wholly of God's doing or whether man has some part in the election. The truth of the gospel on the matter of election is very simple and powerful. The plan by which man is elected to be a part of God's chosen nation is wholly of God's choosing. He is the one who decided how men would be elected. But whether we are elected to salvation and are a part of God's holy nation depends on our response to God's gracious offer of salvation. If men were wholly elected by God's grace-as the Calvinists teach-there would have been no reason for our Lord to say, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). If God alone decided who will be saved and who will be lost, no one could come to Christ even if he wanted to and it would not do him any good if he did.

The church of our Lord is a chosen generation because the members of the church have believed the gospel, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized for the remission of sins. If you have not yet rendered obedience to the gospel, you are still lost in sin and without any hope for eternal life. Our Lord wants you to obey His gospel. We earnestly pray that you will.

Chapter 40

Christians Constitute A Royal Priesthood

Confusion over who should be priests and what their duties are has characterized the religious scene for many years. Some religious groups believe and teach that a special aggregation of men must serve as priests in the Christian era. Others believe that every Christian is a priest. We have no priest above us to plead our case with God almighty except our great high priest, Jesus Christ, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. What is the Bible's teaching on this controversy?

The apostle Peter wrote about all Christians:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

As you can readily understand from this passage, Christians not only constitute a priesthood, we are a "royal priesthood." The word "royal" comes from a Greek word meaning kingly. Christians are a "kingly priesthood." The concept of a "kingly priesthood" comes from the Old Testament. God said to the Jews through Moses (Exod. 19:5-6):

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

The book of Revelation does not use the word "royal" in reference to Christians' being priests, but it does call all of God's children "priests."

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5-6).

Any religious system which has a special contingency of priests is operating in violation of God's plan for the church. Under the New Testament pattern, no one has a right to set himself up as a mediator between God and man. We do not need any other human being intervening on our behalf with God almighty. We need only our high priest to intercede for us. The Hebrew writer puts all of this in the right perspective.

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 an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like 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 (Heb. 4:14-16).

Later in the book he writes:

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself (Heb. 7:25-27).

The priests under the law of Moses served many vital functions for the children of Israel. Some of the priests were corrupt and immoral, but, as a rule, they were devout and faithful. But the priestly system of the Mosaic law was taken out of the way, nailed to cross and does not operate with God's approval under the new covenant. Every Christian is a priest of God our heavenly Father. Through Jesus we are to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15). As every priest under the old law was required to be faithful, so Christians must be faithful as "kingly priests."

Chapter 41

Christians Are A Holy Nation

If you claim to be a Christian or if you know anyone who claims to be a Christian, have you noticed any unusual difference between those claiming to follow Christ and the people of the world who make no such pretense? Do those who call themselves Christians go to the same places, engage in the same activities, use the same language as do unbelievers? A survey was conducted a few years back to determine how young Christian people or those who claimed to be Christians differed from their worldly counterparts. Tragically, the difference between the two groups was not all that great. Christian young people used almost as many illegal drugs as the people of the world. The sexual activity outside marriage was about the same for both groups.

Is that the way our Lord wants His people to conduct themselves? Does He want us to use illegal and destructive drugs, engage in sexual promiscuity, read books and magazines who make fun of biblical morality and associate with ungodly people who could care less about New Testament Christianity? Are not Christians supposed to be a separate people? The apostle Peter wrote of Christians:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Are Christians indeed a holy nation? Are we separated from the world and dedicated to the cause of Jesus Christ?

God has always expected His people to be holy. God said to the Jews through Moses: "You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). God commanded the Jews to destroy the altars of the heathen nations in Canaan, to break down their images, to cut down

their groves and to burn their graven images with fire. "For you are an holy people unto the Lord your God" (Deut. 7:5-6). Throughout the whole of the Old Testament—especially in the writings of the prophets—great emphasis is placed on holy living. The prophet Amos provides one example of the gross immorality which prevailed among God's people in the eighth century before Christ.

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name: And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god (Amos 2:6-8).

The word translated "holy" is one form of the same word rendered "saint" and "sanctified." It involves a Christian's separation from worldly pursuits. Peter wrote:

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Peter's quotation from the Old Testament is Leviticus 11:44. The apostle Paul commanded the Corinthians who had come out of immoral living:

But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman (1 Cor. 6:17-18-7:1).

How can Christians harmonize their calling and election with immoral thoughts and conduct? We must so live that others may see Christ living in us and turn to glorify their Father who is in heaven.

Chapter 42

Christians Are Peculiar People

Have you ever thought of Christians as “peculiar people?” The apostle Peter describes Christians as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9). There are probably hundreds of thousands of Americans who think that all religious people—especially fundamentalists and evangelicals—are peculiar. And they do not understand the word “peculiar” in a positive sense. Tragically, many worldly people do not know why Christians act—or are supposed to act—differently from non-Christians. They have little understanding or appreciation of the Christian’s commitment to godly thought and conduct.

The word “peculiar” comes from a Greek word which really means and ought to be translated “a people for God’s own possession.” Like some of the other expressions in 1 Peter 2:9—“a chosen generation...an holy nation”—this word is rooted in Old Testament imagery. God said of His people,

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a **special people** unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6).

Malachi does not use the same figures, but his meaning cannot be misunderstood.

And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him (Mal. 3:17).

The noun form of the word rendered “peculiar” is translated “purchased possession” (Eph. 1:14), “to obtain” (1 Thess. 5:9), and “saving” (Heb. 10:39). The verb form of the word is used in Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made

you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

The expression, "has purchased," suggests that the price Jesus paid for our redemption means that we belong to God. Paul does not use the same verb, but he teaches the same truth in the following verses.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The verb form is also translated "purchase" in 1 Timothy 3:13.

What are the implications of our being a people for God's own possession? Paul tells us very plainly. "We are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits." That means that everything we own and everything we are belongs to God. How can a Christian pretend that his business, his home and other worldly possessions are really his? What we have been given must be used to glorify our heavenly Father. Even our time does not belong to us. We all know we are living on borrowed time. And, besides, God expects us to use our time to extend the borders of His kingdom and to worship and serve Him while we live on this earth. That does not mean we are to be reading His word every minute of the day or attending worship services all the time. These are vital activities for Christians, but we are also serving God when we work to make a living for our families-when we take the time to teach our children about God and about His word. But the true Christian will always strive to follow his Lord in every activity. Paul expressed that truth in this beautiful passage: "Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Jesus said, "He who sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things which please him" (John 8:29). How can Christ's followers do less?

Chapter 43

**Christians Show Forth
The Lord's Praises**

Every living human being should have a desire to serve God acceptably so that when he dies he will go home to live with God throughout eternity. Otherwise, what is the real point of living? If, when this life is over, we die and spend eternity with Satan and his angels, life on this earth will have been worse than useless. Is that what Jesus had in mind when He said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26)? We ought to learn what God wants us to do and then do it with all our might—not to earn salvation, but to have His divine approval.

But enjoying the salvation of our souls is not the only reason God has brought us into His kingdom. Please listen carefully to these words from Peter's first epistle. "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Why has God blessed us so abundantly through Jesus Christ? The answer is very simple and powerful: "That you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The expression, "show forth," means to publish, to tell forth, to divulge, to declare abroad, to celebrate. The particular Greek word in this passage—*exangello*—is used only in this text in the New Testament. The verb helps us to understand the responsibility of Christians' so living as to point others to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The word does not remove our duties to speak verbally to other people about their obeying the gospel. But it shows what a great influence for good God's people can and ought to be. We demonstrate by our devotion to God the great blessings men can enjoy when they are faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

The expression, "the praises of him," means virtues, moral worth. In fact, the Greek is translated "virtue" in the following passages. Paul urged the Philippians to think about the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. Then he added: "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Peter commanded his listeners: "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge" (2 Pet. 1:5). The New American Standard Bible translates *aretas* by the English word "excellence" or "moral excellence." By the superior life Christians lead, they show forth the excellence or moral excellence of Jesus Christ.

According to the apostle Peter, Jesus Christ "has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." The calling of men and women out of darkness signifies our turning away from the evils of the world to embrace the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it is through the gospel that Christ calls us from darkness. Paul says that Christ has,

...chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

While we are walking in darkness, there is no hope for us. We are lost and will spend eternity in torment unless we believe in Christ and obey His gospel. Paul says that Christ "has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated (or changed) us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). After we have been "called out of darkness" or "delivered from the power of darkness," we must walk in the light as Christ is in the light. When we do, we have fellowship with others of like mind and enjoy the continual cleansing by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

Chapter 44

Gentiles Are Now God's People Also

There has never been a time since human beings were created and placed on this earth that they could not have known God and something about His will. Paul tells us that the Gentiles did not have the law, but they did by nature the things contained in the law and became a law unto themselves (Rom. 2:14). The law of Moses was given specifically to the Jews, but some Gentiles became proselytes to the law or they lived as if the law of God was their law also. The latter group of Gentiles became "God-fearers." Cornelius belonged among the God-fearers (Acts 10:2). There also seemed to have been God-fearers at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16).

The coming of Jesus Christ changed forever God's dealings with human beings. Christ's death removed the law of Moses and gave all men the opportunity of obeying the gospel and becoming members of God's family. Peter refers to Christians—including Gentiles—as being a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" who are to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). The Gentiles to whom 1 Peter was addressed in time past were not a people, but under the Christian dispensation are the people of God. Under the law, they had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:10).

If you have studied this verse—1 Peter 2:10—you know it is based on the book of Hosea. Hosea—whom Dr. Kyle Yates calls "the prophet of unrequited love"—married Gomer, "a wife of whoredoms" (Hos. 1:2). Hosea and Gomer had three children—Jezreel, Lo-ru-ha-mah, and Lo-ammi. The latter two of these children—Lo-ru-ha-mah, and Lo-ammi—were given symbolic names. The name of the daughter—Lo-ru-ha-mah—means "no mercy." The name of the son—Lo-ammi—means "no people." Hosea explained the reasons these two children were given such unusual names.

Call her name Lo-ru-ha-mah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away....Then God said, Call his name Lo-ammi: for you are not my people, and I will not be your God (Hos. 1:6, 9).

The apostle Peter used the prophecy of Hosea to teach a very impressive lesson about the Gentiles' being members of the body of Christ. The Gentiles in ancient times were not a people, but are now the people of God. This quotation is from Hosea 2:23 and refers to the Gentiles under the new covenant. The Hebrew word Lo-ammi meant "not my people." The Gentiles under the Jewish covenant certainly fit that description (Eph. 2:11-12). Now the Gentiles along with the Jews are God's people, that is, if they both have confessed their faith in Christ as the Son of God and have obeyed the gospel.

Under the law of Moses, the Gentiles had not obtained mercy but now they have obtained mercy. Remember that one of Hosea and Gomer's sons was named Lo-ru-ha-mah meaning no mercy or not-pitied. The Revised Standard Version renders the Hebrew: "I will have pity on not-pitied." Peter tells us very plainly—as do many other New Testament passages—that all men—both Jews and Gentiles stand on the same footing with God in the Christian era. The Galatian letter explains very forcefully:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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 if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Our Lord came into this world to reconcile all men to God and among themselves (Eph. 2:14-17). If you do not belong to God today, will you not obey the saving gospel of Christ?

Chapter 45

Christians' Conduct Before Unbelievers

Have you sometimes wondered why fewer people obey the gospel than you think should? Could it be that the gospel is so difficult to understand? That could not be the answer. Many uneducated people through the ages have understood the truth of New Testament Christianity and have embraced it with their whole hearts. Could the influence of atheism, agnosticism, secular humanism and other forms of unbelief prevent men's and women's obeying our Lord? I have no doubt that is the case with some people. But there have always been unbelievers and scoffers. May I suggest another barrier to people's believing in Christ and becoming New Testament Christians? How about the ungodliness and hypocrisy of professed Christians? Does the conduct of Christians convince many persons in the world that there is not really much difference between the way they live and the way we live? What is the advantage of becoming Christians if they do not live very differently from non-Christians?

The apostle Peter and other New Testament writers were constantly concerned about the way Christians lived. Peter wrote:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Peter pled with his brothers and sisters in Christ whom he calls "strangers and pilgrims" to "abstain from fleshly lusts." The two words—strangers and pilgrims—are very similar in meaning. The word "strangers" means one who dwells beside another. The word "pilgrim" means to sojourn by the side of natives. Both words are intended to remind us of our short stay on this earth and of the fact that this world

is not our home.

Peter knew the temptations Christians face. He urged them to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." The word "abstain" means to hold yourselves from and is generally used of keeping oneself from evil. Peter used the expression, "fleshly lusts," which refers to the grosser sins of the flesh. The "fleshly lusts" war against the soul. The "war" comes from the Greek *strateuontai*-from which we get our word "strategy"-and means to carry on a campaign against the soul. James uses the same Greek word when he asks, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members" (Jas. 4:1)?

If you have the slightest doubt the warfare which Christians face, these words from Paul's letter to the Galatians should be helpful.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law (Gal. 5:16-18).

Both Peter and Paul speak of the constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit which occurs in every child of God. The only way we can win the battle is to put our trust in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. We can win the battle, but only if we walk with Christ and do His will.

But what if we do not believe in God's promises and walk according to His plan for our lives? There will be two grave results: We will lose our own souls and we will stand in the way of others' believing and obeying the gospel. Do you know how serious it is to prevent others from obeying our Lord? He would be better off if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matt. 18:6). As Christians we are to live in such a way as to lead men and women to the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Chapter 46

Unbelievers Watch Christians

Christians are obligated to bring glory and honor to the name of our God. Paul encouraged the Corinthians: "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). One of the ways Christians glorify the name of Christ is by being examples of what we profess. That was Peter's reason for writing as follows to some early Christians:

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Peter knew that worldly people would be watching Christians to see if they lived by their profession. He encouraged the early Christians and us to have our conversation (or manner of life) honest among the Gentiles. We must do right because our Lord expects us to do right. But we must also live above reproach because of the possibility of letting outsiders see Christ living in us. Jesus exhorted His disciples: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We must never deceive ourselves into believing that outsiders are not watching us.

The men and women of the world often criticize faithful Christians—the more faithful to more criticism. But if Christians walk in the light of the gospel, the criticisms will not be taken seriously by right-thinking, honest people—even by many non-Christians. Non-Christians in many cases can examine our works and determine we are not so evil as many of our enemies claim. Just a few nights ago, Michael Medved, a Jewish film critic, condemned those who mistreat

and misrepresent Evangelicals and fundamentalists. Medved knows of the bigotry of many liberals in the news media and understands how biased many of their criticisms are. But whether or not unbelievers ever come to accept Christ because of the good works they see in Christian conduct, we are to remember who we are and what God expects of us. Paul encourages Christians to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16).

Regardless of your conduct, there will be worldly individuals who will question your honesty and commitment. We will not be able to stop such prejudice, but we should not furnish any ground for attacks against the church of the living God. Instead, we should strive to model our behavior after that of the Son of God. Do you remember these words which Peter spoke concerning Christ at the house of Cornelius:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Our Lord's devotion to the truth should be an example to all Christians in every age.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

Have you ever thought how meaningful it will be in judgment to be responsible for the salvation of the souls of men and women, boys and girls? How fulfilling it will be to know there are people in heaven who watched you daily and decided to follow Christ because of your devotion to the cause of Christ! The "day of visitation" refers to that day when Christ shall come to judge all men. Will there be anyone in heaven because of us? Or have we led them in the opposite direction?

Chapter 47

Submission To Civil Rulers

Civil rulers—whether presidents, prime ministers or kings—have wondered for hundreds of years about the attitudes and activities of Christians and of other religious people. Will Christians be good citizens or will they interfere with the operations of civil government? Will they vote, pay taxes and promote the general welfare or will they be a constant source of unrest and rebellion? Since Christians confess allegiance to a higher power, will they refuse to obey earthly powers? These are legitimate questions and deserve answers from those who profess to follow our heavenly king—Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The apostle Peter commanded the early Christians and us:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well (1 Pet. 2:13-14).

If you listened carefully to this reading from 1 Peter 2, you can know for sure where New Testament Christianity stands on the Christian's relationship to civil government. Peter's command is very plain and powerful: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13). By divine inspiration, the apostle Paul wrote: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).

Both Peter and Paul used the Greek *hupotasso* in ordering a Christian's duty to civil government, although the Greek is translated somewhat differently in the two passages. *Hupotasso* which is rendered "submit" in 1 Peter 2:13 and "be subject unto" in Romans 13:1 means to array

or to arrange under. The word binds Christians to obey the laws of the land except where there is a conflict between what God demands of Christians and what the government requires. When man's law contradicts God's law, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Peter instructed Christians to "submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." The word "ordinance" (*ktisei* in the Greek) means creation or institution. The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek "human institution." In very simple language, the laws of our land are to be respected and obeyed—even if we do not like them—except in the case I have already mentioned. That does not mean that all laws which men enact are perfect, but try to imagine what it would be like if there were no laws to govern us on the highways, in our communities and in business dealings. Without laws we would not be safe on our highways and in our communities. It is bad enough as it is, but think how immeasurably worse it would be without any laws.

We are to observe our speed laws, our game laws and others—not only for our safety and for the safety and well-being of others—but because that is what our Lord demands of His children. God knew and we ought to know that an orderly society could not exist without some laws governing human conduct. Women liberationists, gay liberationists and other radical groups in society may object to laws—all laws—except those which protect these radical elements, but they and we should have enough common sense to know how essential laws are to any community or to any nation.

God knew the need for human law and Himself ordained human government. No, I did not say He ordained democracy or monarchy, but He did arrange for human government. "For there is no power but of God and the powers which be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). We contribute to lawlessness and anarchy when we fail to pass just laws and fail to obey them.

Chapter 48

What Form Of Government Did God Ordain?

What is the most efficient form of civil government? What is the fairest form of government? Which form of government do you prefer? I have no special insight from God to answer these questions, but I would like to offer some suggestions. The most efficient form of government is almost unquestionably a monarchy—a king, a one man or one woman ruler. When he or she speaks, his or her word becomes law and is carried out immediately. Why then do Americans and most other people prefer some other type of government? The answer is very simple: We know the sinfulness of human beings and do not trust absolute monarchs. But they are more efficient than other kinds of government.

What is the fairest type of government? The truth is that none is perfectly fair because there are no perfectly fair people. But there is less likelihood of a government's becoming oppressive where the people have a voice in it. That is the reason many of us—perhaps most of us—prefer our American representative form of government. We want a government which is responsive to our needs and to the needs of others. Or to use the words of Abraham Lincoln in "The Gettysburg Address": We want a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

What form of government does God prefer? The nations of Israel and of Judah had monarchies, at least, for a part of their existence. That was not what God preferred, but He did allow it, as I am sure you have read in the Old Testament. These are the apostle Peter's words pertaining to the kinds of government under which Christians have lived:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for
the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;
Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by

him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well (1 Pet. 2:13-14).

Whatever the kind of government Christians happen to live under they are to honor and to obey. Personally, I do not like kings because I know the temptation of kings to abuse their power. Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." If you will read what the Old Testament says about Ahab, about Manassah and about other such kings, you will quickly understand why most Americans fear any absolute monarch. We just do not trust them and for good reason.

The term "governor" in 1 Peter 2:14 does not refer to the governor of one of our American states. The term does not refer to any particular kind of leader or governor. It is broad enough to apply to virtually every kind of leader—prime minister, president or even to governors or mayors. So long as a government is fair and honest with the people, we can and should live at peace in that government. We might prefer some other kind of government, but Christians have to be very careful about their attitudes and actions.

After all, the government under which Jesus was born and grew to manhood was not exactly a model of honesty, freedom and morality. It was oppressive and treated Christians as if they were enemies of God and of the state. Thousands and thousands of Christians were beheaded, burned at the stake or killed in some other hideous way because they would not worship the Caesars and because many of them spoke out against the cruelty of the Roman Empire. Do we have the obligation to speak out against unjust laws, corrupt rulers, and crooked judges? How can we remain silent in the face of any evil—whether in the government or elsewhere? How can Christians fail to vote? I beg you to take your citizenship very seriously. In addition, please pray for all men in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Chapter 49

Governments Exist To Punish Evildoers

Sometimes governments—including our own—intrude themselves in areas where they have no business. For example, the United States government has made a tragic and inexcusable mistake by virtually taking over welfare. It is a tragic mistake for many reasons. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been worse than wasted on the administrators of the programs. The poor, the downtrodden, the unfortunate have realized only a small portion of the money our government has appropriated for welfare programs. The vast majority of the programs have been grossly mismanaged. The government can bankrupt the nation if we do not find ways to stop bureaucrats from stealing our money. In addition, we have made a generation of poor people dependent on the generosity of the government. Some may call this compassion, but it is a travesty.

The Bible is very specific regarding the responsibilities of civil government. The governments—whether kingdoms or democracies or dictatorships—exist for two primary reasons: To punish the evildoer and to praise those who do well. Why do not earthly rulers concentrate on doing well the duties God has assigned to them and leave for other people and institutions what those governments can not do well and have no business trying to do?

The crime situation in America has become a national and an international disgrace. For many years the national government and some state governments have grievously neglected their responsibility to punish evildoers. O, I have heard all the excuses why governments do not punish evildoers, but not one of them makes sense. As a result of our refusal to punish criminals, many of us are afraid to be

on the highways and in many of our cities without being armed. When small children are killed on our streets and in our schools by thugs who never really have to pay for their crime, we are ignoring what the God of this universe obligates governments to do.

When an especially brutal crime has been committed by a juvenile, it is not at all unusual for the teenager or his lawyer to say that the criminal will be back on the streets by tomorrow. Many of the vicious criminals in America are not afraid of the law. The chances of their being caught are minimal. When they are caught, they seldom come to trial. In too many cases, they work out a deal with the prosecutor and the judge and spend little or no time behind bars. If they are convicted, they spend as little as 20% of their time in prison. Judges have been free to say that the prisons are overcrowded and release some criminals long before they have served their time.

What kind of message are we sending to criminals—both young and old? We are telling them they can rob, kill, steal, rape and commit other grievous offenses and nothing—or at least very little will be done about it. Is that what we want our people to believe? Many of the young hoodlums already believe it—whether or not we want them to. And who, pray tell, are we going to hold accountable for this deplorable condition? The prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges and other officers of the court must be given the lion's share of the responsibility! But what about preachers, teachers and other leaders in our communities who lack the courage to speak out and to make some changes in our legal system? We must work at convincing everyone concerned with our criminal justice system that we are not going to put up with the way things are. We are going to make some changes for the good—even if it means replacing judges and others who are soft on crime. The time for making these changes is NOW.

Chapter 50

Governments Exist To Punish Evildoers (No. 2)

You probably know that very few criminals actually serve time in our prison system. Those who do almost always serve a small fraction of the time they should. Do you know why that happens? The prosecutor, the defense attorney, the judge and the criminal arrange for a deal. A deal? A deal for criminals? Tragically, yes. In our day when crime has brought so many deaths, heartaches and destruction, many of our court officers abdicate their responsibilities and make deals with criminals and their lawyers. They call it "plea bargaining," but it amounts to little more than putting justice on the auction block. Justice is available to the highest bidder.

I have read the arguments prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges offer for their compromises with injustice and crime. The prosecutors are usually heavily burdened with criminal cases and want to make sure they can get a conviction. Rather than go to court where they might lose the case, they plea bargain. Then when they are up for re-election, they can boast of the high percentages of convictions. Defense attorneys, especially those who are court-appointed, often make very little money in defending poor clients. So they prefer to plea bargain so they can get on with the business of defending wealthier clients. Judges approve of plea bargaining so they can keep their dockets clear. They like to boast of having their cases up-to-date.

My question to you today is: When is the public served in all this bartering of justice? I also want to know what has become of the government's responsibility to punish the evildoer? Tragically, many of those who make a living from criminal activities make fun of our criminal justice system. They know they can commit grievous criminal acts and get

off with a gentle slap on the wrist. If they can arrange for the right attorneys and for judges who are soft on crime—judges who believe in rehabilitation and not punishment—they have little to fear from the law. Such criminals are in and out of our judicial system like a revolving door.

And what about judges who release repeat offenders—professional criminals—on technicalities? If a murderer or a rapist has not been given his “Miranda rights” or if the police failed to get a search warrant, many times the evidence which is found is thrown out of court. I believe prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges should be very careful in trying people for crimes, but when evidence for a crime is so strong it cannot be disputed, it makes no sense to throw it out and allow the vicious criminal to walk free. It is a mockery of justice.

The point I want to make today as strongly as I am able is this: Governments of our world exist to punish the evildoer. When governments fail to do that, they are weakening our criminal justice system; they are responsible for Americans’ disrespect for the law; they create an atmosphere where crimes of all kinds proliferate. I am not saying that the officers of our courts—including defense attorneys—are totally or even mainly responsible for the dreadful conditions which exists in many communities across our nation, but they have failed the American people. The situation is not likely to improve in the foreseeable future. It will require an overhaul of our criminal justice system before the situation improves.

As Christians, we ought to demand that our legislators, judges and other leaders rework our justice system. We ought to vote only for those political leaders who pledge to make some changes in our dealing with crime. Then we ought to hold them accountable for keeping their promises.

Chapter 51

Governments Should Praise Good People

The American people are by no means agreed on what their own government should do. Millions of American citizens believe the government should take care of all the poor, the sick, the distressed and the ne-er-do-wells and should provide universal health care and a guaranteed wage for everyone—whether or not they are willing to work. Our government—whatever the motivation of those involved—has attempted to become all things to all people. They ignore the teaching of scripture with regard to governmental functions or else they do not know what the scriptures teach.

Both Peter and Paul give some insight into the responsibilities of civil government. Paul calls the government “a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him who does evil” (Rom. 13:4). Peter affirmed that kings or governors or other civil rulers are sent by God “for the punishment of evildoers” (1 Pet. 2:13). Our governments have made grievous mistakes in failing to punish many evildoers. In fact, in some cases we actually award evildoers. For example, Dan Rostenkowski apparently stole about \$500,000 from the taxpayers. He has been caught, convicted and sentenced to a few months in jail. He will also be required to repay some of the money he stole, but he will still profit greatly by his betrayal of his constituents and by other American citizens.

While we have often failed to punish the evildoer, I wonder if we have not also failed as a nation in praising and rewarding those who do good. Paul insists that,

...rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13:3-4).

Peter uses very similar language. Kings, governors and other civil rulers are sent by the God of heaven for the "praise of them who do well" (1 Pet. 2:14). Have our federal government, our state governments and our local governments been aware of the need to "praise them who do well"? Have we actually carried out that function of government?

As many of you remember, Ronald Reagan sought to reward those who were involved in what he called "voluntarism." He encouraged our citizens to get involved in our communities and then asked governments to praise them for their involvement. George Bush had a program to honor the "thousands points of light" of our communities and of our nation. Good works-voluntary work and other kinds of work which are well done-should be recognized by governmental leaders and by others throughout the United States.

Our young people are told from the time they are just children that they will be punished for stealing, for driving under the influence of alcohol and other dangerous drugs, but they are not informed of the honor they should receive if they pay their taxes, volunteer for good works in their respective communities and obey the laws of the land. It should be one of the goals of every organization in the nation-whether religious, political, social or educational-to praise men and women, boys and girls for doing good. Those who believe in being positive in the rearing of children and in the encouragement of others to obey the law should remember to support those who do so much good in every community throughout the United States.

Governments could go a long way in removing crime if we would remember these divinely inspired words: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Chapter 52

The Will Of God

In Cecil B. DeMille's movie, **The Ten Commandments**, the Jews asked the wife of Moses what has happened to Moses since he has been on Mount Sinai for so long. They apparently believed he had run away or perhaps had died on the mount. Zipporah said that Moses had gone to receive the will of God. Dathan, the former Hebrew overseer, asked with a smirk: "And who knows the will of God?" Oddly enough, there are religious teachers in our day who ask the same question and often with a smirk. I want to ask you to think seriously about Dathan's question to the wife of Moses, "Who knows the will of God?"

The apostle Peter commanded Christians to submit to civil rulers—as those who are sent by God for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them who do well (1 Pet. 2:13-14). Then he adds very succinctly: "For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15). Is Peter implying that ordinary people like you and me can know the will of God? Can finite people know the mind of the infinite? Modernistic theologians deny the possibility of our knowing any idea—including the will of God. But Bible writers never take such a ridiculous position. In fact, they all believed we can know the truth and must know it. "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Paul wrote as follows to the Romans:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Peter does not tell us in 1 Peter 2:15 how we can know the will of God, but the apostle Paul tells us very plainly.

But God hath revealed them [that is, the things of God] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of

God....Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:10,12-13).

How can a man look into the mind of God and discern the will of God? Paul affirms that the Holy Spirit has done that for us. "For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows not man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11). Christians can and must know the will of God; their earthly welfare and their eternal destiny depend on it.

And what is the will of God for our age? We know it is not the law of Moses because the book of Hebrews tells us:

Then said he [the Son of God], Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first [the law of Moses], that he may establish the second. By the which will [the second, the gospel of Christ] we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:9-10).

Now that we have established that we are not living under the law of Moses, we need to ask again: What is God's will for this age? In our text (1 Peter 2:15), the apostle was speaking specifically of Christians' obeying the civil laws of the state, but the expression goes far beyond that. The will of God for the Christian era includes all God requires of men and women to become and to remain faithful children of God.

Those who have named the name of Christ must confess their faith before men, repent of their sins which separate them from God and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. Then they must walk according to God's inspired revelation. When and only when we have walked in the Lord's way can we receive the crown of life which fades not away. I urge you to learn and to obey the Lord's will today. Tomorrow may be too late.

Chapter 53

Putting The Ignorant To Silence

Most of the civil rulers of Christ's day—probably all of them—including Pilate—had difficulty understanding a spiritual kingdom as contrasted with an earthly one. Pilate unquestionably thought the kingdom Jesus came to establish would usurp the prerogatives of the Roman Empire. Jesus told Pilate:

...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. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:36-37).

The people of the Roman Empire—including many Jews—had trouble understanding how a kingdom which Christ came to establish would not in any way rival Caesar's kingdom, at least, it needed not do so. Many of Christ's contemporaries probably thought Christ's followers would give their allegiance to Christ and have no respect for the laws of the land. But that was not God's plan for His children then and it is not His plan today. Peter commanded the early Christians:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (1 Pet. 2:13-15).

So what is the will of God? Who can miss Peter's emphasis? Obeying the laws of the land when they are not in conflict with God's law is the will of God.

If the non-Christians expected God's people to rebel against every law which was enacted, they were sorely mistaken. Instead, the early Christians—and Christians in every age—have been and are to be the best citizens of any country. When Christians had to disobey the laws of any nation—and they have been obligated to do that sometimes—they were not to be ugly-spirited but committed to the will of God above their allegiance to any human institution. Christians are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). We cannot be salt and light when we oppose governmental regulations just because we do not like them. We must have conscientious reasons for not obeying the government.

When Christians were obedient to the laws of the land—and they have been most of the time during the Christian era—by their good works “they put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet 2:15). “Well-doing” in this context and elsewhere must be defined by God's standards—not by humanistic ones. Our respect for law and our obedience to it stop the mouths of the critics.

The word “silence” in our context means literally to put a muzzle on. The same word is rendered “speechless” in Matthew 22:12. When outsiders know that Christians observe legitimate laws of the land, their objections to Christian behavior lose their punch. They no longer make sense when they criticize Christians. Our generation of unbelieving critics need to listen carefully to what Peter says about Christians' obeying the laws of our nation.

The expression, “ignorance of foolish men,” refers to a type of ignorance which we would call “wilfull ignorance.” Many of the church's most persistent and bitter enemies actually knew the devotion of the early Christians to obeying human ordinances. But they hoped to make many believe the Christians were rebellious and stubborn. They wanted to make the lives of Christians as miserable as they knew how. Tragically, not all such enemies of the cross are dead yet. But let us as Christians never give them any room for calling us law-breakers.

Chapter 54

Free Slaves

Many modern people think of Christianity as being oppressive and even as enslaving since the New Testament specifically and emphatically forbids fornication, adultery, homosexuality, greed, and such like. Christians know and appreciate the great freedom we enjoy in Christ. The apostle Peter encouraged the early Christians and us to live as free men, "and not using your liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of the Lord" (1 Pet. 2:16). Can we live as free men and women and be enslaved to Jesus Christ? I am aware that the language may sound illogical but it is not when we fully understand Peter's message.

Living as free men does not mean we have no restrictions and obligations. If you want to be free while driving on our streets and highways, you have to observe the laws which govern our travel. If you drive as fast as you please when and where you please and everyone else does the same, our highways and streets would be death traps. The same can be said about drinking, taking drugs and engaging in sexual conduct. When one becomes addicted to alcohol or other drugs, is he really free? When one lives primarily to engage in sexual activities, he is a slave to sex.

Peter understood the freedom we enjoy in Christ, but he was concerned about those who might use their liberty as a "cloke of maliciousness." The word "cloke" means a covering. How easy it is to believe that our freedom permits us to do what we please when we please. In fact, many modernistic theologians interpret the Bible as removing all moral and spiritual restrictions. They pretend that the grace of God will take care of our sins, even as we know we are doing wrong. Paul asked the Romans, "Shall I continue in sin that grace may abound? Absolutely not" (Rom. 6:1-2).

“Maliciousness” is a generic word referring to evil of all kinds, wickedness or naughtiness. Please take note of the word’s use in other contexts. The apostle Peter instructed Simon the sorcerer: “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). Incidentally, this verse from Acts teaches that thoughts may be wicked and not just overt acts. Paul commanded the Corinthians:

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

If Christians are free people, why does Peter call us “servants of God?” The word “servant” in this verse is *doulos*—slave or bondsman. Peter recognized and so do other Bible writers that human beings are going to be slaves to someone or something. That was Paul’s reason for asking the Romans:

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Rom. 6:16).

The Roman Christians had been servants of sin, but they had obeyed from the heart the doctrine which had been delivered to them and had become free of sin. They had made themselves slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). What difference will it make in the day of judgment if you have been a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness?

Tragically, there were false prophets in Peter’s day who were promising liberty to those who turn away from Christ. But the false teachers themselves were the slaves of corruption, “for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage” (2 Pet. 2:19).

Chapter 55

Honor All Men

Sometimes in the Bible there are brief but powerful summaries of truths which are designed to guide men's and women's lives in the church of the living God. Most of us are familiar with this example. "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing....Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:16-17, 19-22). These short statements are packed with teaching every child of God needs to live successfully in God's service.

Another example is from the book of 1 Peter. "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17). I shall concentrate on the first of these inspired admonitions: "Honor all men." The word "honor" comes from the Greek *timao* and means to value, to esteem, to revere. The Greek is rendered "precious" in the following verse.

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious:
but unto them which be disobedient, the stone
which the builders disallowed, the same is made
the head of the corner (1 Pet. 2:7).

The Hebrew writer says concerning Christ:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower
than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned
with glory and honour; that he by the grace of
God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9).

Christians certainly understand the honor which we owe to God the Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ, but we may not understand and may not practice the honor we ought to other human beings. Yet, the Bible clearly commands Christians to honor all men. Let me give some examples of the people whom we are to honor. Both the Old Testament and the New encourage us to honor our parents. Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees, "Why do

you transgress the command of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor your father and mother: and, He who curses father or mother, let him die the death" (Matt. 15:3-4). The apostle Paul has a whole chapter devoted to the church's responsibility to widows. He told Timothy:

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. Honour widows that are widows indeed (1 Tim. 5:1-3).

But I know people who are not very honorable. How can we honor the thief, the fornicator, the homosexual and the murderer? Peter is not requiring us--nor does the Bible anywhere--to like what others do. God Himself does not like and cannot approve of the behavior of many people in the world. Even though God loves all men and sent His Son to die for all, He does not love the sins of which many of us are guilty.

Incidentally, the Greek does not say, "Honor all men"; it says, "honor all." Christians have moral obligations to honor male and female, black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. We must discriminate on the basis of race or color or national origin or similar situations or circumstances. The scriptures specifically forbid such discrimination.

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons....But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:1, 9).

If only we could get across to our world the idea of honoring all, just think what a great world this would be. It would eliminate or drastically reduce the violence which has become so much of modern life. It would prevent our treating those who differ from us as if they were worthless.

Honoring one another must be initiated in the home and continually emphasized in the churches of our land.

Chapter 56

Love The Brotherhood

The New Testament pictures the church of Jesus Christ as a family. Paul was hoping to visit with Timothy in a very short time, but he was not sure he would be able to do so. He wrote:

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

Throughout the New Testament God is called our Father. Jesus Christ is our elder brother and we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we are members of the body of Christ, we are all heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. That kind of language makes it very plain that we are family.

One of the commands the Holy Spirit has given family members is: "Love the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17). The Greek verb translated "love" is *agapao*—not the verb usually rendered "love the brethren." The tense of the verb can be translated "keep on loving the brotherhood" or "love the brotherhood continually." Since we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be able to comprehend the command to "love the brotherhood."

The common Greek word for brotherly love is *philadelphia* from which Philadelphia, PA—the city of brotherly love—derived its name. The Hebrew writer urged his readers: "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). The apostle Peter stressed the same truth.

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22).

Add to your patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness (2 Pet. 1:6-7).

Although the Greek word in the expression—"love the brotherhood"—is different from these other biblical passages,

I have serious doubts any difference was in the minds of the inspired writers. We are to love the brotherhood continually.

These biblical expressions do not rule out love for those who are not members of the church. We have special responsibilities toward our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as we have peculiar obligations to the members of our earthly families. Paul commanded the Galatians:

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

If we have to make any differences among human beings—and we really have no choice at times—we must give preference to members of the church of the living God.

What does loving the brotherhood mean? Obviously, there are both negative and positive aspects of loving our brothers in Christ. Love of brothers and sisters forbids our gossiping about them or treating them in unkind and unchristian ways. We cannot take advantage of them simply because they love us and we love them. Paul makes that truth plain in his great chapter on love. Love “does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, thinks not evil” (1 Cor. 13:5). If we truly love others—whether or not they are Christians—we are going to seek their welfare.

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 (Phil. 2:3-4).

If we truly love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are going to encourage them to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). We are going to consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). If we love people, how can we fail to support them in their growth in the Lord’s kingdom?

Chapter 57

Fear God

Is it possible that parents, preachers and teachers have filled our children's minds with cringing fear of the God who made us and loved us enough to send His only Son to die for us? We may not use the crude language the television character Maude used—"God will get you"—but we may have used God as a means of disciplining our children. If we do so or have done so, we should begin now to tell our children about the love of our Father who is in heaven. He does not want anyone to perish but to come to repentance and to be saved eternally. He does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked. He does not delight in punishing anyone, although there are times when they give Him no option.

If we have made a mistake by instilling cringing fear in the hearts of others, how do we explain the Bible's use of the expression, "Fear God" (1 Pet. 2:17)? I have never taken time to count the times that expression or similar ones appear, but the number is impressive. The Psalmist wrote: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them who fear him, upon them who hope in mercy" (Psa. 33:18). Solomon gave this advice: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Following are probably the best known verses dealing with the fear of God.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this
is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring
every work into judgment, with every secret
thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil
(Eccl. 12:13-14).

In view of the verses I have read to you from 1 Peter, from the Psalms, from the book of Proverbs and from

Ecclesiastes, what does fearing God entail? Does the word ever involve being afraid? How do you explain this passage: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:10)? The word "terror" in this verse is *phobos* and is usually rendered "fear." The Hebrew writer used similar words in the following passage: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). If men and women tread under foot the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, they have good reason for being afraid of God's punishment of their evil deeds. There are hundreds of examples in the Old Testament, as you know, if you have read it carefully. I have time to give you just one example.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deut. 28:15).

Generally speaking, the New Testament uses the word "fear" of God to mean respect, reverence, awe. Paul told the Philippians:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

Peter instructed the early Christians:

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (1 Pet. 1:16-17).

There could be and probably is a measure of cringing fear in these passages, but they generally refer to the respect and reverence we owe to our heavenly Father. But, as I have already shown from the Bible, if we fail to honor God by obeying the gospel of Christ, our souls are in danger and we have every reason to be afraid of God. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

I urge you today to fear God and obey His commandments.

Chapter 58

Honor The King

Some of the most disreputable people who have ever lived on God's good earth were kings, prime ministers, pharaohs or presidents. The United States of America has had its share of high officials who had no respect for God or for man. Their main interest apparently was feathering their own nests. The nation of Israel had kings, priests and prophets who had the morals of barnyard animals. I need only mention the names of Manassah and Ahab and Zedekiah to prove my point. In view of these immoral leaders, why would an inspired apostle exhort the early church, "Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17)? How can we honor a leader who lies, commits adultery, approves of the killing of innocent people and engages in any kind of activity to be elected or reelected?

Like many of you in my audience today, I have lived through the presidential administrations of a number of American leaders. I remember Dwight D. Eisenhower's lie about the U2 spy planes. General Eisenhower was the first man I ever voted for for any office. When he was accused by the media of lying, I was devastated. I could not believe my president would lie. It is now difficult for me to believe I was so naive. I was also deeply hurt by the deceptive behavior of Richard Nixon. How could these leaders so betray their constituents? I keep asking myself that question every time a public official engages in illegal and immoral activities.

Tragically, the men and women who enter public service are still men and women with sinful desires and appetites. Just going to Washington does not make ordinary people super-people. On the contrary, going to the nation's capital as presidents, senators and congressmen may present these ordinary persons with temptations they are not prepared to handle. But whatever the case, the office of president or governor or senator deserves our honor. There

are men and women who have held public office for whom I did not vote and would not vote, but I still respect and honor the office they hold or have held.

The tenses of the verbs in 1 Peter 2:17 are most interesting. Let me read the verse taking into consideration the significance of the verb tenses. "As the occasion arise, honor all men. Love the brotherhood continually; fear God always; continue to honor the king." The truth of the matter is: All of these duties are continually binding. We are always under obligation to honor and respect all men. We must live in fear of our heavenly Father. We must continue to love our brotherhood. And we must honor the ruler of our cities, states and nation. These duties are not optional; they are obligatory.

Let me give you an example of what honoring the king or president means. John Fitzgerald Kennedy was grossly immoral—as even his most ardent admirers will concede. His father, Joseph Kennedy, spent millions of dollars and made deals all across the country to get John Kennedy elected. I did not vote for him because of his liberal economic and social policies. I could not have voted for him if he had lived to run a second time. But I deplore the violence which caused his death. I would not have harmed one hair on his head because I have too much respect for human life and because he was the president of our nation.

The Bible furnishes us with an example of how a king is to be honored. King Saul was an evil man. He was jealous of David and did all within his power to destroy David. David had opportunity to do harm to king Saul but he refused to do so. David said to his men,

The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord (1 Sam. 24:6).

Even though Saul was evil to the core, he was still the king. David could not violate God's commands regarding the ruler of his people. We certainly can learn from David.

Chapter 59

Christianity And Slavery

Preceding the War Between the States, during that war and even after there was an intense and bitter controversy over what the Bible teaches on slavery. Northern preachers and theologians argued vigorously that the Bible demanded the abolition of slavery. Southern preachers and theologians insisted that the Bible permits—perhaps even requires slavery. Churches on both side of the Mason-Dixon Line seemed to have no doubt about its stand on slavery. There are parts of our great nation even today which are still fighting the civil ward. It makes one wonder how many generations must pass before the enmity which slavery engendered will be forgotten.

Some modern biblical critics accuse the Bible writers of endorsing, or at least, not condemning slavery. But what is the real teaching of the Bible on the subject of slavery? Does the Bible endorse it? Does it specifically condemn it? Will you please listen carefully to these inspired words? "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and the gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Pet. 2:18). Similar commands can be found in Paul's writings (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 6:1-2). Paul instructed the Corinthians:

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men (1 Cor. 7:20-23).

The word "servant" in every one of the passages I have read to you, except 1 Peter 2:18, comes from the Greek *doulos* and means slave, bondservant. In Bible times, the Roman government had captured men and women from

many countries and made those people bondservants or slaves. In other cases, men and women had gotten so heavily in debt they had to sell themselves to pay their debts. The latter were called "indentured slaves." They remained in the service of their masters until the debt was paid in full. Then they were free to carry on their lives as they saw fit.

In view of the biblical passages I have read to you, there are some conclusions we can reach. The Bible writers did not attack the institution of slavery head-on. If they had, many slaves would have rebelled and would have been killed in the process. How could a few hundred thousand slaves rebel against the mighty Roman empire? It would have been suicide for the slaves. Furthermore, a Christian could still be a Christian and serve an earthly master. But if the Christian had the opportunity to be free, he or she was to use that freedom to further the gospel of Christ. Besides, the slave who was called into God's kingdom was the Lord's freeman. He could be free in his soul even if he belonged to some master.

Here is a fact which our critics have overlooked: Whenever the gospel has been preached in its purity and power, slavery has disappeared. Even though the gospel does not directly attack slavery as an institution, how could any Christian own another in view of passages such as the following:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4). "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12:10). If all human beings are made in the image of God—as the Bible so powerfully teaches in Genesis 1:26-27—how can we justify owning another?

These and many other considerations destroyed slavery in country after country.

Chapter 60

Christianity And Slavery (No. 2)

When Christians in the early years of the church's existence or even hundreds of years later in the United States found themselves in bondage, how were they supposed to act? Paul gave Timothy the following instructions:

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort (1 Tim. 6:1-2).

Peter told the early Christians who were slaves:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (1 Pet. 2:18).

The servant or slave was to be subject to his master with all fear. The Greek for "be subject" means to array or to arrange or to rank under. The word "masters" is from the Greek *despotais* from which we get our English word "despot." The word in the Greek and in the English means absolute owner. Whether the slave had been captured in a battle or had become a bondservant because of indebtedness, he or she was owned and expected to render obedience to his master. Of course, the masters, if they were Christians were to treat their servants fairly. If they did not, they needed to remember that they had a master in heaven and with Him there is no respect of persons (Eph. 6:5-9).

The servants were to be subject to their masters—not only to the good and the gentle but also to the froward. If masters treated their servants with respect and paid them honest wages, they would be foolish not to obey their masters. But what if the masters were harsh, ugly-spirited

and mean? Christians were to obey them too. The word "froward" in the King James Version is from the Greek *skoliois* which means crooked. Our English word *skoliosis* comes from this Greek word and refers to a medical condition known as a crooked spine.

If the Christian submitted to his master—even a crooked and harsh master—"this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Pet. 2:19). No one likes to be mistreated, but there have been many times in the history of New Testament Christianity when Christians had to endure grief. When they do, Peter says it is "thankworthy." The word "thankworthy" comes from the Greek *charis* which is almost always translated "grace." Peter was simply saying that it did not take much courage and patience to obey a good and gentle master, but obeying a mean and stubborn master was service above and beyond the call of duty. Because of Christians' relationship to Christ they were motivated to behave in a more honorable way than were people of the world.

Christians know that this life is not the only life. They act differently from others because they know they have a reward awaiting them in heaven. They will endure grief because their conscience toward God must be pure and undefiled. Christians through the ages have often suffered wrongfully because of their desire to show their love for God and His word.

My friends, no New Testament passage encourages or endorses slavery; but the word of God does regulate slavery. The regulations are fairly simple and plain. Servants must obey their masters from the heart. The masters must treat them as equals—never threatening or abusing them because they are servants. But please remember: Where the gospel has gone, slavery has disappeared. The Bible's teaching has simply destroyed slavery in all those countries where men and women have obeyed it. Slavery is an abominable institution and the gospel and the gospel alone has the remedy for it.

Chapter 61

A Christian's Response To Suffering

First Peter 2 has a brief section on the duties of Christian slaves to their earthly masters. The slaves were commanded to submit to their masters—not only to the good and the gentle but also the stubborn. If they obeyed their good masters, that was no more than was expected of them, but if they submitted to their harsh and crooked masters, that was “grace” or going beyond what was expected of them. “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Pet. 2:18-19). “Suffering wrongfully” indicates that the Christians had done nothing to warrant their suffering. They were suffering unjustly. Jesus used similar language in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10-12).

The apostle Peter asked the early Christians:

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God (1 Pet. 2:20).

When men disobey the law of the land and are punished for their misdeeds, there is no particular glory in their suffering even if they take it patiently. The word “buffeted” in this verse literally means to strike with the fist, to pummel. The word is used of the mistreatment which Christ received prior to His crucifixion (Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65). Paul also used the word when he spoke of the hardships he had experienced for the cause of Christ. “Even unto this hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place” (1 Cor. 4:11).

The word “patiently” in 1 Peter 2:20 does not mean to endure without complaining. This word means to bear up under or to remain under. “Stedfast” is a good translation of the Greek. If we bear up under suffering we have deserved, we do not deserve any particular credit. But if,

when we do well, and suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable. Later in the book we are studying, Peter enlarges on the concept of suffering for doing the will of God.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

No sane person likes to suffer for any reason. We prefer for everyone to approve of our behavior, or at least, not to attack and mistreat us for it. But our world has known and still knows some of the most inexcuseable abuse and misuse of other human beings. But, generally speaking, persecution does not discourage the committed; it only weeds out the hypocrites. The strong get stronger; they are not afraid of what the devil and his minions can do to us.

When Christians take patiently the suffering which the world brings on us, Peter says that is "acceptable with God." The word "acceptable" is the same word rendered "thankworthy" in verse 19. The word means grace or behavior beyond what we normally expect of human beings. For us to be able to endure suffering when we do not deserve that suffering, we need the grace of our heavenly Father. Without His help and support, we surely could not endure. God has provided a way for us to escape—to bear up under whatever the world sends our way. Besides, if we are killed in the process of faithfully serving our God, there waits for us on the other side a crown of righteousness which the Lord shall give us in that great day. "Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Chapter 62

Following In Christ's Steps

God's people have always had enemies who persecuted them because of their devotion to the cause of Christ. The apostle Paul was abused in many ways in various cities where he preached the gospel. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention (1 Thess. 2:1-2).

If Paul had suffered from killing someone or from committing some other crime, his suffering would have been appropriate. But he patiently suffered for the cause of Christ and brought honor and glory to his Lord.

The apostle Peter wrote:

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God (1 Pet. 2:20).

The inspired apostle added: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). The word "hereunto" indicates Christians are called to suffer for the name of Christ. In His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

Peter affirms that Christ suffered for us. His suffering was not a result of any wrongdoing on His part; He suffered for our sins. The idea in this verse occurs many times throughout the New Testament. Jesus was our sacrifice; He died in our stead. Paul listed that truth along with Christ's burial and resurrection as constituting some of the basic elements of the gospel. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our

sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Christ's death was substitutionary. He died for our sins so that we would not have to die for them. Isaiah predicted:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed....and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:5-6).

By the operation of God's Holy Spirit, Isaiah knew Christ would have to suffer. Isaiah 53 is unquestionably one of the greatest chapters in all the Bible dealing with the suffering and death of the Messiah. Jesus also mentioned His sufferings and what His followers could expect.

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 (John 15:20).

There is a difference, however, in our suffering and Christ's suffering. His suffering brought about the redemption of those who believe and obey the gospel. His suffering was vicarious. It also needs to be said in passing that the suffering of Christ was not unexpected. God knew before the foundation of the world what would be necessary for the salvation of fallen men. Christ's suffering and death were according to God's plan.

Our Lord's sinless life, His suffering for righteousness' sake and His submission to the will of God are examples for Christ's followers in every generation. The word "example" in this verse literally means to write under. It involves imitating a good model. Christ is our perfect example in loving God and obeying His commandments. There is a purpose for Christ's leaving us an example: That we would follow in His steps. Jesus used a different Greek word, but the meaning is basically the same when He said to His disciples after the footwashing episode: "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done unto you" (John 13:15).

Chapter 63

Following In Christ's Footsteps (No. 2)

Every Christian knows the duty of Christ's followers to walk in His steps, figuratively speaking. After our Lord has washed His disciples' feet, He said to them, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done unto you" (John 13:15). The apostle Peter wrote of Christ's sufferings on our behalf or in our stead and then he added: He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). Both of these passages show in some way that Christ is an example for those who claim to love Him and to be His disciples. But in what respects is Christ our example? He is not and cannot be our examples in every area of Christian responsibility. Let me explain my reasons for saying that.

As you know if you have read the Bible carefully, Jesus lived under the law of Moses. Jesus was not a Christian and did not live one day under the new covenant. There is absolutely no doubt that Christ kept the sabbath, joined in the offering of animal sacrifices in the Jewish temple, burned incense in worship unto God and observed all the regulations of the Old Testament. In truth, Jesus was the only human being who ever kept the law perfectly. But His death on the cross removed the law of Moses—all of it—so that no one is bound by the law anymore. If we try to be saved by the law of Moses, we have fallen away from grace (Gal. 5:4). To make this truth very plain, let me repeat it: We do not keep the Mosaic law even though Christ did. Christ is not our example in reference to the law of Moses.

Christ is our example in showing respect for what God has revealed unto man in His word. Had you ever noticed in your reading of the words of Jesus that He never criticized the Old Testament for any reason? He criticized the Jews for not keeping the law or for making it of no effect by their traditions, but he never questioned the

inspiration and authority of one Old Testament quotation—not even one. On the other hand, he constantly appealed to the Old Testament to settle questions which the Jews had raised and to establish His own claims and authority. Do you remember our Lord's discussion with the Sadducees over the resurrection? Jesus told the Sadducees who denied the resurrection:

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29-32).

Jesus is also our example in His devotion to the will of God. Uppermost in His mind always was total submission to the will of God. Jesus said to His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). No passage in all of the New Testament teaches that truth more powerfully and plainly than the following: "He who sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things which please him" (John 8:29). What Christ did to obey the will of God may be very different from what God requires of us, but he always did whatever God demanded. Our Lord commented in another setting: "I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

There were many attitudes and activities in the life of Christ which we must emulate—humility, courage, kindness, gentleness, compassion. We must strive everyday to live as nearly like Christ as humanly possible. We cannot be sinless as He was, but we can certainly walk in His steps so we can have His approval. May God help Christians to exemplify the attitudes and behavior they learned from Christ.

Chapter 64

Christ, Our Perfect Example

I have known many men and women—and I suspect you have—who were devout Christians—men and women who lived as close to the Lord as they were capable of doing. I have never approached one of these individuals and asked if they were living without any sin in their lives, but I have no doubt what their answers would be. They would probably say, as Paul did, we all have sinned and continually come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Bible students generally do not deceive themselves into believing they are free from sin. They know the frailties which beset the human family. They understand they are fully human and therefore weak and sinful.

But Jesus Christ, our perfect example, did not sin—not even once. The apostle Peter affirmed: Christ “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22). You may recognize these words as coming from Isaiah 53:9: “Because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” How was Jesus able to confront His enemies, the temptations to which human flesh is heir and walk among sinful human beings and never sin? I may not be able fully to explain why He did not sin, but we must remember that He was God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Besides, He had the total support and endorsement of His heavenly Father. But whatever the explanation, Jesus did not sin.

Earlier in the book of 1 Peter, the inspired apostle wrote of Christ’s being a lamb without spot and without blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). The Hebrew writer speaks of Christ’s being our great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

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 an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:14-15).

Matthew 4 records the temptations which Satan placed before our Lord, but it also says that Jesus did not yield to any of these temptations. He completely lived above us. He never lied, nor committed adultery, nor engaged in homosexual conduct—contrary to what some in the Gay Liberation Front assert. He never committed any sin of any kind.

There have been theologians and others who have accused Jesus of making mistakes and of having sinned, but their accusations are without foundation. Dr. Albert Schweitzer thought Jesus was mistaken about the time of His second coming. But Dr. Schweitzer was the one who was mistaken. Some modernistic theologians have been critical of Christ for cursing the fig tree and for His casting the demons out of the man and allowing them to go into a herd of swine. But these criticisms are wrong-headed and foolish.

I am aware that none of us can ever live above sin, but we at least have a perfect model to strive to imitate. We can never achieve perfection in this world, but with God's help, we can work to bring our behavior into harmony with the will of God. Paul instructed the Philippians:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

The apostle Peter urged his Christian brothers and sisters:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:10)..

Peter also teaches in our text that there was no guile found in Christ's mouth. The quotation from Isaiah 53:9 uses the word "deceit." The word "guile" (*dolos* in Greek) was used of a bait to catch a fish. Our Lord Jesus Christ never deceived anyone. He was honest and above board in all His dealings with human beings. His purpose in coming to earth and in teaching was to bring men and women into the kingdom of God. He could not accomplish that purpose by deceiving or beguiling persons.

Chapter 65

Christ, Our Perfect Example (No. 2)

No one with whom I am familiar wants his acquaintances to make fun of him or to ridicule his faith and practices. We do not want men and women to assault us for our faith in Christ and our obedience to His will. Yet that was precisely what occurred in the early days of the church's existence. Christians were often driven from their homes and sometimes from their countries. They were imprisoned for being enemies of the state. In ancient Rome, they were put in an arena where they were killed and devoured by lions.

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:37-38).

When we are persecuted and oppressed, how should we react? Our example is the Lord Jesus Christ who suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps. He did not sin, neither was guile found in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:21-22). Now please take note of Peter's next observation:

Who [that is, Christ], when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (1 Pet. 2:23).

Christians in every age should react in the same way our Lord did. He did not retaliate for the wrongs which were done to Him. Neither should we.

When Jesus Christ was reviled, He did not respond by reviling. The word "revile" is elsewhere translated "railed at" and means abusive speech. The imperfect tense of the verb suggests that Christ constantly suffered from being reviled. But when He was reviled, He continued not reviling

or speaking abusively of those who were mistreating Him. In other words, His constant response to being reviled was not to revile again. The tense of the verb suggests that not responding in kind was habitual with our Lord. He made a habit of not taking vengeance on those who abused Him.

When He suffered from the bitter attacks of His enemies, He did not threaten. Again the tenses of the verbs "suffered" and "threatened" are imperfect and denote continual suffering—one time after another. But regardless of the suffering inflicted by Christ's enemies, our Lord continually refused to threaten His persecutors. He had the power to call to His aid ten thousand angels, but He would not do so. His submission to the will of God obligated Him to bear His burdens without reviling or without threatening.

In the face of such pressures and abuse, Christ "committed himself to him who judges righteously." The word "committed" means to give oneself over. The tense of the verb says Christ kept on giving Himself over to the one who judges righteously. If you are tempted to think, "But Christ was God and could not feel the heartaches and sorrows we feel," you have misunderstood Christ's humanity. When He was struck on the face or spat upon, He felt the same pain and shame we would feel under similar circumstances. When He was ridiculed and reviled, He hurt just as we do. But He knew the will of God completely and determined to do that will regardless of the cost in humiliation and anguish. Nothing His enemies could do would make Him behave in any other way than what God desired of Him.

Our Lord's mission on this earth was to bring God to man and man to God. He did not respond to His persecutors by wiping them off the face of the earth—which he could have done. Instead, he knew a final day would come when all men—both the righteous and the unrighteous—would give an account of their behavior. So Jesus Christ continually committed Himself to God almighty because He knew God would judge righteously. What a great example Christ is to all of us.

Chapter 66

Christ Died For Us

The world—including many modernistic theologians—does not understand why my Savior came to earth. It is obvious that many worldly people do not understand why Christ left heaven and came to earth. If they knew and cared, they surely would respond by believing and obeying the gospel. Modernistic theologians do not accept the death of Christ as being essential to the salvation of fallen men. They may honor Christ for the great sacrifice He made on the cross, but they are unwilling to preach His death as the apostles preached it. It is tragic that men do not read or fail to understand the Bible's teaching on the death of Christ.

The apostle Peter affirmed very strongly: Christ in His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). The death of Christ was vicarious, that is, it was substitutionary. Christ bore our sins on the tree. We deserved to die because of our great sins. Jesus did not deserve to die because He had done no sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth. But He took our sins in His own body and died on the tree that we might not have to die eternally. The apostle Paul said very plainly:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly....For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:6, 10).

Was there no other way for fallen man to be reconciled to the God of this universe? My friends, I am not privy to the inner counsels of heaven. I do not know what God could have done for our salvation, but I know what He has done. By His infinite grace, He sent His only Son to give Himself for the sins of the world. I, for one, am not concerned about what God might have done. I am thankful to our heavenly Father for the arrangements He made for our salvation.

But is the death of Christ absolutely essential to our salvation? Are there not other ways for men to be saved? The apostle Peter provides the answer to that question. He mentioned the stone which the builders had disallowed or rejected and then he wrote: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). As you can see from this passage, God has only one way of saving men and that is the way of the cross. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but to us who are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

When we accept the death of Christ on our behalf and obey His gospel, we become dead to sins. That does not mean that Christians never sin anymore. It means we become dead to the love and practice of sin. When we believe in Christ, confess His name before men, repent of our alien sins and are baptized into Christ, we become new creatures. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:3-6). We die to sin when we do what God tells us to do to become dead to sin.

One of the purposes of our obeying our Lord and becoming dead to sin is that we "should live unto righteousness." How tragic that many who accept Christ and obey the gospel turn back to the world and forsake their Lord. Can we really turn back and become unfaithful? How else can you explain these verses from Hebrews?

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb. 3:12).

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:38-39).

The word "perdition" in that verse means destruction. Can we be lost if we draw back?

Chapter 67

By Christ's Stripes We Are Healed

Isaiah 53 has so much to say about the coming of the Jewish Messiah. It was this passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when God sent Philip the evangelist to preach to the eunuch. Luke says, "Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scriptures [Isa. 53:7-8] and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). It would take many weeks to unravel the greatness of Isaiah 53—if any mere mortal could accomplish that task. But there is one verse the apostle Peter uses in his first epistle. After speaking of Christ's bearing our sins in His own body that we should live unto righteousness, Peter concluded: "By whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Please listen as I read Isaiah's statement of that truth.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:4-5).

The Greek word translated "stripes" means bruises or bloody wounds. Is there anyone who has read and believes the gospel who does not see Christ in these words from Isaiah 53? Who else has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows? Who but the Son of God was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities? All of this says that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 and is the one who has so graciously sacrificed Himself for our sins—yours and mine—and for the sins of the whole world. The apostle John calls Jesus Christ "the propitiation for our sins" and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

As you can see from Peter's words and from many other passages, Christ's death on the tree is the hope of our salvation. Paul referred to Christ as our "passover" or

paschal lamb and affirms that He was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). My friends, if you reject our Lord's death, there remains no more sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:26). Salvation is only by way of the cross.

The word "healed" is from the Greek *iaomai*. The word is most often used of physical healing. Matthew mentions a centurion who desperately wanted to have his servant healed.

And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed (Matt. 8:5-8).

There are many other examples in the gospel records of Christ's healing the blind, the lame, and many other physical ailments. But the Greek is also used of spiritual healing or saving. The Hebrew writer urges his readers:

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (Heb. 12:12-13).

That Jesus came to heal physical ailments and did heal them cannot be questioned—if one accepts the biblical record. But did the death of Christ on the cross necessarily include physical healing? If one is a Christian, does that mean Christ's death will heal all his diseases? The so-called "health and wealth gospel" of modern times says that physical healing is included in Christ's atoning sacrifice. But they ignore some very plain passages which teach otherwise. Paul called Epaphroditus "my brother, and companion in labor, and fellow soldier." He then comments that Epaphroditus was at the point of death but was healed. If physical healing is included in the death of Christ, why was Epaphroditus ever allowed to be so close to death (Phil. 2:25-30)? And why did Paul leave Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20)? If physical healing is included in Christ's atoning sacrifice, why do Christians ever experience death?

Chapter 68

The Shepherd And Bishop Of Our Souls

Do you believe God's people can ever go astray? If they can and do go astray, will that in any way affect their eternal salvation? I am asking you if a child of God can fall from grace? Can we Christians so sin as to be eternally lost? The apostle Peter paraphrased Isaiah 53:6 as follows: "For we were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). As you know from your reading of the scriptures, God's children are often referred to as sheep. The inference from this passage is that sheep can go astray. Jesus taught the same truth in His parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10 and in other passages. Are we in danger of being lost if we do go astray? Why warn about going astray if there is no real danger?

The word translated "going astray" means to wander away, to deceive, to seduce. The Greek is rendered "err" in the following verses.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jas. 5:19-20).

The Greek comes into the English in the word "planet."

Both Isaiah and Peter were warning of the grave danger of wandering away from the truth of God's plan. They wanted men to return to God's way—not continue in their stubborn rebellion against God. Peter said, but you are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. The word "returned" means to turn. The Greek is translated "be converted" in Acts 3:19, but should be translated "turn." But how could they turn or return if they had never gone astray or if going astray had no repercussions? Paul addresses that question in these words.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

The apostle Peter speaks of men's turning or returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). As you know from your reading of the scriptures—both the Old Testament and the New—the idea of a leader's being a shepherd is very prominent in the Bible. One of the best known passages in the Bible begins with these words: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" (Psa. 23:1-2). In the New Testament, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Incidentally, elders of the Lord's church are shepherds also. The King James reads: "Feed the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2). The Greek verb should be rendered "shepherd" or "tend."

Jesus is the Shepherd and He is also the "Bishop of our souls." The word "bishop" comes from the Greek *episcopos* and should be rendered overseer (as it is in Acts 20:28) or superintendent. The literal meaning of the Greek is to watch over. The verb form of this word is translated "visit."

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27).

My friends, if you have not turned your life over to Jesus Christ—the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls—please think seriously about doing that today. Jesus asks you to believe that He is the Christ the Son of the living God; He requires you to repent of your sins and to confess His name before men. He commands you to obey the gospel in baptism. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). After your initial obedience to the gospel, you are to give your life into His keeping. When you do that, you are not going to fall and so an entrance shall be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

Chapter 69

The Subjection Of Wives

There are few words in the Bible which irritate feminists more than these words from 1 Peter 3:1:

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives (1 Pet. 3:1).

On many occasions, the apostle Paul used similar language, but I shall read only one passage.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body (Eph. 5:22-23).

Do any modern people actually believe these words written almost two thousand years ago are binding on modern women? Surely, we are too advanced and too sophisticated to accept such dated advice.

Did you notice the reading from Ephesians 5? Submission of the wife to the husband is in the same context as Christians' submission to the Lord. If a wife does not have to submit to her husband, how can we be sure a Christian has to submit to Christ? My friends, a wife's submission to her husband is not merely a suggestion; it is God's law. When that law is ignored or violated, the home invariably suffers and those involved are endangering their souls. Besides, there has to be some kind of order in the home or it will not serve its God-ordained purpose. God's order is that wives should submit to their husbands "as unto the Lord." We can argue about it and dispute it, but the command still stands and will unto the end of the age.

The word "submit" is not an ugly word. It means to arrange or to array or to rank under. The verb form is used forty times in the New Testament and the noun form (subjection) is used four times. The word simply says there must be order in our homes, in the nation and in the church

of the living God. When wives are not in submission to their own husbands, children to their parents, citizens to their government and members to the elders, confusion will reign. Could some of the crime and violence in American society be directly related to disorder in our homes, in the churches and in society in general? How can any institution—including the family—operate successfully and peacefully without following God's arrangements? God's arrangement in the home includes wives' being in subjection to their own husbands.

But are not Paul and Peter writing of "mutual submission?" Paul said, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). Does not the term, "submitting yourselves to one another" mean "mutual submission?" Oddly enough, many reputable Bible teachers answer that question in the affirmative. But they have ignored the context. Paul does say, "Submit to one another," and then he illustrates what he means. Wives must submit to their husbands; children must submit to their parents; servants must submit to their masters. Can we say that the latter two should be mutual submission? Besides, in the same context, Paul says that Christians are to submit to Christ. Would Christ also be required to submit to us?

The "mutual submission" approach to the husband-wife relationship was developed by some theologians to appease the women's liberationists. It is not a legitimate interpretation of the New Testament text. And why would anyone make any concessions to a radical movement like the so-called "Women's Liberation Movement?" Most of the radical feminists are enemies of New Testament Christianity. It makes no sense to compromise with those whose intentions are to destroy all patriarchal religions—including Christianity and Judaism. I, for one, am more interested in what God has revealed than what the feminists are demanding. The feminists are unquestionably responsible for many of the heartaches which confront the homes in our nation. Feminists are enemies of the home and I do not intend to sit idly by and allow them to gain any further ground.

Chapter 70

Does Subjection Mean Inferiority?

Many Americans resent any kind of submission or obedience. We want to believe we are free from any restrictions or prohibitions. Freedom to such people means no obligation, no responsibility and no rules. That is not the kind of freedom our constitution guarantees and not the kind of which the Bible speaks. In fact, the Bible tells us very plainly not to use our freedom as a cloke of to cover up our ungodly intentions and behavior. Peter wrote:

For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God (1 Pet. 2:15-16).

Peter also wrote of false teachers who were promising their followers "liberty" but they themselves are the servants of corruption (2 Pet. 2:19).

The women's liberationists vigorously object to any kind of submission on the part of wives. To be perfectly honest, they use vicious and ugly language when wifely submission is even mentioned. They see submission or subjection as making wives inferior. Whether they are sincere in their approach to submission, I have no way of knowing, but I know the Bible does not indicate that submission means inferiority. How do we know that? Let me give you some reasons.

Do you remember when Joseph and Mary had temporarily misplaced Jesus? They found Him in the temple with teachers of the law. He was hearing the doctors of the law and asking them questions. "And all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46-47). Mary gently upbraided Jesus by asking, "Son, why have you dealt with us in this manner?" Jesus told her that He had to be about His Father's business. After their

discussion in the temple, Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph "and was subject unto them" (Luke 2:48-51). Is there anyone in my audience today who imagines for a moment that the Son of God was inferior to Mary and Joseph? He was subject to them but that did not make Him inferior. To suggest otherwise is very foolish indeed.

Christians are commanded to submit to their government. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers which be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). Am I inferior to the president of the United States or to the governor of my home state or to the mayor of my city because I have the moral obligation to be in subjection to them? Many of our political leaders are grossly immoral, have only their own interests at heart and would do virtually anything to get reelected. Am I inferior to that kind of person because of his political position? How could anyone ever imagine that Christians are inferior to anyone? Some of us may not have the responsibilities which political leaders have, but that does not make us inferior to them.

While our children are in our homes, they are commanded to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). Many of us have children who are much more intelligent than we are. Are they inferior because they are to obey their parents? They are to obey their parents because there is no other way for children to be brought up in an orderly fashion. If they are not taught to obey their parents, they almost certainly will not obey their school teachers or the law enforcement officers or anyone else. The homes of America are in great turmoil and to a great extent because of the failure of parents to teach their children submission or obedience. Wives who fail to submit to their husbands are setting an example for their children which will further contribute to the confusion and turmoil which are wrecking the homes of our great nation. I urge all of us to follow God's pattern for the home.

Chapter 71

Winning A Husband To Christ

In the first century of the Christian era, there were many husbands and wives who were married to non-Christian mates. Some may have married outside the church, but most of them probably were converted from paganism and Judaism after they were married. When Christian married partners find themselves married to unbelievers, how do they go about converting their spouses to Christ? The apostle Peter does not address the duties of husbands to convert their wives, but he does speak of wives converting their unbelieving husbands. Will you please give attention to his inspired words:

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives (1 Pet. 3:1).

The expression, "if any obey not the word," refers to husbands who have not believed and obeyed the gospel. "The word" means the inspired word of almighty God. All of us know how essential it is for all human beings to know the word and to obey it if they want to be saved eternally. Paul spoke as follows to the Ephesian elders:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

James encouraged his reader to get rid of all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness "and to receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

If the word of God is necessary to save the souls of all human beings—including unbelieving husbands—why does Peter speak of the husbands being won without the word? If you will take the time to read any other version

than the King James version, you will notice that the definite article does not precede the "word" in the second expression. The passage should read—and does in most other versions—"if any obey not **the** word, they may be won without a word by the conversation of the wives." Is Peter discouraging wives from teaching their husbands or anyone else about Christ? Absolutely not! If a non-believing husband asked his wife about her beliefs, is she supposed to ignore his questions?

The truth is: Many husbands would resent their wives teaching them about their faith in God, in His word and in His Son. They would especially object to the wife's constantly urging them to attend the services of the church, to read their Bibles to learn the gospel truth and to talk with preachers about obeying the gospel. Wives do not make good points in the conversion of their husbands when they nag their husbands about becoming a New Testament Christian. Peter understood the necessity of being very wise in dealing with an unbelieving spouse.

If all of this is true and it unquestionably is, then how should a wife seek to lead her husband to the cross of Jesus Christ? Peter uses one word which sheds great light on the process of conversion. The husbands may without a word be won by the conversation of the wives. As you know if you have studied the King James Version of the Bible, the word "conversation" does not mean speaking with or talking to. At least, that is not all which is involved. The word in Greek means manner of life, conduct, behavior. The King James always renders the Greek by the word "conversation," but behavior or conduct is a better modern translation.

If you wives offer your husbands arguments for his becoming a child of the living God, he can invent objections to whatever you say. But if your life is filled with love, graciousness, kindness, humility, compassion and steadfastness, it is not possible to offer any excuses for not seeing Christ living in you. Christian wives—like all other Christians—are to be salt and light. There are no guarantees, but this is a good start.

Chapter 72

Winning A Husband To Christ (No. 2)

It has never been wise for young people to marry outside their religious faith. If young people are truly committed to their beliefs, why should they marry someone who is not friendly toward those beliefs or who is actually antagonistic toward them? The Old Testament strongly condemns the Israelites for marrying outside the chosen people. The truth of the matter is that king Solomon's downfall was directly related to his marrying women from among pagan nations. The idolatrous practices of those heathen nations were brought into Israel through intermarriage with "strange women." The book of I Kings makes these comments about king Solomon's foolish mistakes in marrying outside the nation of Israel.

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father (1 Kings 11:1-4).

But what if you find yourself married to any unbelieving husband? Do you put pressure on him through teaching or nagging to get him to go to the worship services with you or to be converted to New Testament Christianity? The apostle Peter exhorted Christian wives:

...be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without

the word be won by the conversation of the wives;
While they behold your chaste conversation
coupled with fear (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Obviously, Christian wives should respond to any questions the unbelieving husbands have concerning the Bible or the church, but she must not constantly nag him about obeying the gospel. Constant nagging will likely embitter him against the church.

There is a much better way of winning a husband to Christ, and that is, living sobering, righteously and godly before him. Peter used the word "conversaton" which in the Greek means manner of life or conduct. If Christian wives demonstrate by their lives what it means to be a genuine Christian, the husband will probably pay close attention and may turn from his unbelief to faithful service in the Lord's kingdom. He may not—and many husbands never do—but that is a better approach than pressuring the husband to become a Christian.

How can a husband ignore a sweet, gentle and humble Christian wife? Peter mentioned that the husbands behold the chaste conversation of the wife coupled with fear (1 Pet. 3:2). The word "behold" literally means to be an overseer, to view very carefully. The husband has an opportunity every day to see how belief in Christ translates into behavior or conduct. He knows his wife is not being a hypocrite; she is genuine through and through. Her behavior is bound to make an impression for good on her husband.

The word "chaste" (*hagnen* in Greek) means moral purity in all areas of life—not just in sexual matters. That means she is pure in thought, in dress, in action. She never gives him any ground for suspecting she does not daily live for the Lord Jesus Christ. I suspect every gospel preacher in the world has baptized husbands who were pointed in the direction of Christ by the good life of their wives. And Christian husbands can have the same good effect on their wives. A Christian example is a powerful influence on unbelievers.

Chapter 73

Winning A Husband To Christ (No. 3)

If you are married to an unbelieving husband and want to win him to faith in Christ, how should you dress? Will jewelry, make-up and expensive clothing be major motivating factors in bringing him into the kingdom of God? Peter wrote as follows of women leading their husbands to Christ:

Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel (1 Pet. 3:3).

Is Peter teaching that Christian women must not plait their hair or wear gold? Let us examine carefully what Peter is saying.

The word "adorning" in this verse is from the Greek *kosmos*. We get our word "cosmetic" from this Greek word. The same word is used in Paul's instructions to women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel" (1 Tim. 2:12). Elders must be of "good behavior" (1 Tim. 3:2). The expression, "good behavior," is from *kosmion* and means orderly, decorous. Christian women who are concerned about their husbands' obeying the gospel must learn that outward decoration of the body is not the means for teaching their husbands how to become Christians.

The Greek word rendered "plait" means to inweave. "Putting on gold" probably referred to wearing gold jewelry. Does Peter by divine inspiration forbid a woman's having her hair as attractively arranged as she can, wearing gold earrings or necklaces? Tragically, there have been some religious groups which have shamed their women for wearing makeup of any kind and for wearing jewelry. I attended a denominational university many years ago where the women—both students and teachers—were not allowed to wear makeup or jewelry. One of my professors made light of the prohibition. He wondered why men wear ties and have gold watchbands. He could see through the

inconsistency of that church's restrictions. He knew they were binding what God had loosed.

If the Bible strictly forbids any plaiting of hair or wearing of gold, it also forbids the wearing of clothes. Listen again to Peter's instructions to Christian wives: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting of the hair, or of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel." There are two major emphases in this verse. Peter discourages women's being more concerned about their outward appearance than about their hearts. If women believe they can win their husbands to Christ by emphasis on how they look and not how they behave, they are sadly mistaken. But would not that same principle apply to converting those outside the family?

Nothing in this context or elsewhere discourages a woman's dressing attractively and appropriately. Beautiful-but not overly ornate-hair styles, modest jewelry and attractive clothing have their place in the life of Christian women. The book of Proverbs speaks of a woman whom we often describe as the "ideal woman" of having clothing of silk and purple. But she did not depend on these for influencing others to live for God.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple....Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness (Prov. 31:22, 25-26).

You may have encountered women who were dressed in the finest clothing money could buy. They wore expensive jewelry and had their hair arranged in the latest styles, but their moral and spiritual values bordered on those of Jezebel. Regardless of a woman's outward appearance, the real woman comes through in her words, in her attitude toward others and in her relationships to her family. Solomon taught this same truth. "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

Chapter 74

Winning A Husband To Christ (No. 4)

Like virtually every gospel preacher in the world, I have had Christian wives to come to my office or to my home to discuss ways of winning their husbands to Christ. Some of them seem to believe there may be a secret formula they can use to turn their husbands from sin to salvation. But there is no such secret method of converting people—whether husbands, wives or others—to Christ. The apostle Peter instructs wives to be models of Christian conduct. The husband cannot be won by the fancy dressing on the part of the wife, but by her devotion to her husband to the cause of Christ. Peter does not discourage looking our best, but he does point out that these are not factors in leading others to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Peter says, in effect, it is not the decoration of the outward man which influences others to become Christians; it is in inward life of God's children.

But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price (1 Pet. 3:4).

Let me repeat what I said a moment ago: The Bible does not condemn our dressing well and comfortably. It does teach explicitly that these behaviors will not convert people. Christians must live the gospel if they want others to see their good works and glorify their Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

Peter used the expression, "the hidden man of the heart," to describe the inward thoughts, beliefs and attitudes. The phrase is probably equivalent to the "inward man" (2 Cor. 4:16) or the "new man" (Col. 3:10). These concepts tell others what we are—not just what we look like on the outside. Even worldly people are generally able to discern

between the person who looks good on the outside and the person who is good on the inside. And nothing is more powerful in leading the lost to Christ than to see Christ living in His people.

Outward dress, according to Peter, is corruptible, but the inward man of the heart is not corruptible. The word "corruptible" means perishable. Regardless of how beautifully you dress, your outward garments, your gold and your hair styles will all perish. But Christian character will last through eternity. It is your character—not your dress—which is of lasting value and has a lasting effect for good on the lives of non-believers. That was Paul's reason for writing as follows to the Philippians:

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain (Phil. 2:14-16).

There is a kind of clothing, dear Christian wives, which is always appropriate, always beautiful: "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." The Greek text has no work for "ornament" or "apparel" in this text, but one of these words is probably implied. The book of Proverbs provides wonderful insight into what being a godly woman means. "She girds her loins with strength, and strengthens her arms....Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in the time to come" (Prov. 31:17, 25).

According to the apostle Peter, the meek and quiet spirit of Christian wives may win their husbands to Christ and such a spirit is of great price in the sight of God. May I appeal to all Christian wives who are married to unbelievers to live every day in such a way as to manifest the love of God to all with whom they are associated?

Chapter 75

Ancient Examples For Christian Women

Do I need to remind you of the Bible's emphasis on the power of example? Jesus Christ, our great example, said on the occasion of His washing his disciples' feet:

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you (John 13:14-15).

The apostle Peter reminded Christians of the sufferings they should expect and then added: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

The apostle Peter gave some guidelines for Christian wives' converting their husbands. He told them that fine clothes and jewelry would not suffice.

But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price (1 Pet. 3:4).

Godly character—not spectacular hairdos or outlandish clothing or expensive jewelry—will have an effect on non-Christian husbands and on others. The meek and quiet spirit makes a good impression on thinking people and is of great price in God's sight.

The meek and quiet spirit was also valued in ancient times, as Peter makes plain:

For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:5).

The tense of the verb "adorned" is significant. It means the women of old time were accustomed to adorning themselves

with a meek and quiet spirit. It was their habit. We do not know who the women were—except in the case of Sarah—but there were unquestionably many of these godly women. Hebrews 11 provides this brief insight into the holy women of ancient times.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised....Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35).

The holy women, Peter affirmed, “trusted in God.” The word “trusted” should be translated “hoped.” Those holy women had learned of God’s gracious promises to the Hebrew people and hoped in the God who had made those promises. How very vital hope is—not just to the women of ancient times—but to all of God’s children. The Hebrew writer calls hope “an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which enters into that within the veil” (Heb. 6:19). Hope is no less vital today for all Christians.

These ancient women set the right example for modern Christian women by “being in subjection to their own husbands.” Incidentally, the words “submission” and “subjection” are translations of the same Greek word. The word means to array or to arrange or to rank under. But one new version of the New Testament renders the Greek by the word “commit.” My friends, there is no question of the need for a wife’s being committed to her husband. I have preached that truth all of my preaching life. But “commit” is not a legitimate rendering of the Greek in this passage. The translation is a deliberate and dishonest attempt to remove the duty of a wife to submit to her husband. The new version has been influenced by the radical elements in the Women’s Liberation Movement. The word is submit, or be subject to; it is not “commit.”

The women of the old covenant serve as examples of wifely submission for the followers of Jesus Christ and of His apostles.

Chapter 76

Sarah Obeyed Abraham

About thirty-five years ago, I received a call from a splendid young Christian woman asking if I would perform her wedding ceremony. I knew both of the young people involved and had good reason to believe they would have a good marriage, and so far as I can discover, they have had a good marriage. The young woman who called asked if I planned to include the word "obey" in the marriage ceremony. I told her I did and asked her if there was a problem with using it. She said she had hoped I would not include the word. I asked if she planned to obey her husband. She replied in the affirmative. So I told her I thought I should include the word and she agreed. Incidentally, dear friends, there is not a dime's worth of difference between the words "submit" and "obey."

Do we have a biblical injunction regarding a wife's duty to obey her husband? Do we have a divinely approved example? Will you please listen carefully to Peter's instructions to Christian wives? The holy women of old time adorned themselves in a meek and quiet spirit and were:

...in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Pet. 3:5-6).

But surely we can soften the word "obey" and have it mean to commit or to respect or to honor. My friends, the feminists and the liberal theologians can do with the word whatever they choose, but it still means to obey. The Greek *hupakouo* is used twenty-one times in the New Testament and is always translated "obey" except in one passage where it is rendered "hearken." Paul wrote: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). But does that not place women on the same level

as children—as some of the feminists foolishly charge? As a matter of fact, everybody obeys someone in life, whether the government or the elders or parents or his employer. Life could not operate without some line of authority. The feminists had to learn that fact the hard way.

But what about that business of Sarah's calling Abraham "lord?" Does it not sound a little pompous for a wife to call her husband "lord?" I have to admit that I have been referred to as "lord" by a certain woman who shall remain nameless, but I never got the impression that I was being complimented. When I have acted pompously, I have been called "lord." The word "lord" is used in reference to both God the Father and Jesus Christ. But the word has a much broader application than that. When the Samaritan met Jesus Christ without fully knowing who He was, she said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4:15). The word "sir" in this context is from *kurios* which is almost always rendered "lord."

Sarah had great respect for her husband Abraham. She obeyed him and called him "sir" or "mister" or "master." The word unquestionably shows the great reverence Sarah had for her husband. Modern Christian women are the daughters of Sarah "as long as they do well, and are not afraid of any amazement." Since Sarah was a good wife to Abraham, she serves as an example for Christian women in every age. Women who want to be daughters of Sarah, figuratively speaking, must be women of faith. They must walk in obedience to God's will just as Sarah did.

The last expression in this verse, "and are not afraid with an amazement," is a very difficult phrase. The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek: "If you do right and let nothing terrify you." The Revised Version translates it: "You are not put in fear of any terror." Whatever the case, women who want to be godly and have lasting relationships with their husbands and with God should study and emulate the example of Sarah. She was not perfect, but she was a good woman.

Chapter 77

Dwelling According To Knowledge

How many husbands ever go to marriage counselors and admit they are having problems with their marriages? I have been working with troubled families and speaking on marriage and the family for most of my adult life. In all of that time, I have no more than four or five men who made the initial contacts about their marriages. Most of the time it is wives who buy the books on marriage, attend the seminars which are devoted to that topic and seek help when their marriages are in trouble. I am not sure I know how to explain these facts, but they are unquestionably true. Do men have less interest in their marriages or are we just stubborn and think we can handle our problems by ourselves?

The Bible has much to say about husbands. We husbands dare not ignore what the God of this universe says about the duties of husbands. I direct your attention to what Peter writes to husbands.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [that is, your wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

In recent years, I have read these words to every groom in the marriage ceremonies I perform. I honestly believe every husband ought to hear what Peter says and ought to abide by this simple teaching.

The first six verses of 1 Peter 3 are devoted to teaching Christian wives about winning their unbelieving husbands to Christ. Peter then addresses some very powerful information to husbands. "Likewise, you husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge." The word "dwell" denotes domestic association. The particular word

Peter uses appears only this one time in the New Testament. The tense of the verb says, keep on dwelling with your wife according to knowledge. When the ardor in the relationship begins to cool, we husbands are still obligated to keep on dwelling with our wives according to knowledge.

The expression, "according to knowledge," means, according to Marvin Vincent's **Word Studies of the New Testament**, "with an intelligent recognition of the nature of the marriage relationship" (volume 1, p. 651). I do not wish to disagree with Marvin Vincent, but Peter seems to be speaking especially of husbands having an intelligent recognition of the nature of wives. Is Peter affirming that men and women are different—not just anatomically or physiologically, but intellectually and emotionally? He certainly is not saying that men are superior to women, except physically—the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7). Does a man need to study women in general and his own wife in particular to understand the nature of female human beings?

Where do we get the knowledge which will help us to keep our wives happy and our marriages together and reasonably happy? Is there some marriage manual which will provide this information for husbands? There are marriage manuals which can be very helpful, but the best source of information on all human relationships is the inspired word of God. Although the verses I am about to read were not specifically addressed to husbands, can you think of any advice which would be more helpful for husbands? "Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). "Let love be without dissimulation [or hypocrisy]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Rom. 12:9-10). Are these principles a man needs to know to be a good husband?

Chapter 78

Dwelling According To Knowledge (No. 2)

Men are commanded to dwell with their wives according to knowledge. That knowledge encompasses at least two major ideas: We must know the nature of the marriage relationship and we must know the nature of female human beings. The very best source of information about marriage and the family is the Bible—God’s inspired marriage and family manual. The Bible discusses human relationships—including marriage and parenthood—from two different angles. It provides specific directions for husbands, for wives, for parents and for children. We are examining some of the specific regulations in 1 Peter 3. But the Bible also gives us generic or universal principles to guide us in all human relationships. For example, Paul wrote: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). If that biblical injunction were practiced every day by husbands—and by wives—would it not make a world of difference in the happiness and permanence of marriages?

There are some excellent books on the market which help us to make an application of the Bible’s teaching to our marriages. I think especially of Dr. James Dobson’s outstanding book, **What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women**. Dr. Dobson helps husbands to know about their wives’ needs, desires, appetites and behavior. You may not agree with all Dr. Dobson says, but you will find considerable help in this and other books he has written. His book, **Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives**, is another source of information for married people. In addition to God’s book and other books on marriage and the family, there are many successful wives and husbands who are willing and eager to help young couples to have strong and stable marriages. Young people can learn to such from some

of these older couples who have been married forty or fifty or even sixty years. Parents should set good examples of what being married partners means.

Are we providing the knowledge our young men need to prepare for the enormous responsibility of being a husband? What is the church you attend doing to help strengthen marriages? Let me make a few suggestions which ought to be useful in getting our young people ready for marriage. The primary obligation rests on the shoulders of parents. God charged parents to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The word "nurture" should be translated "discipline." "Discipline" includes the whole training of a child. If a boy needs to know what being married means, then his parents have a sacred obligation to give him the right information and the right attitude.

Churches should have regular classes dealing with every phase of marriage and the family. Young people need to be taught about their bodies, about human sexuality, about the rearing of children, about courtship and mate selection. If we fail to instruct our children about the beauty and holiness of the marriage relationship, we are preparing them for failure. Besides, we are failing our Lord. He has given parents instruction about the rearing of the children. "Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

If husbands are going to dwell with their wives according to knowledge, someone must help our boys to understand what that means and how to apply their knowledge to their marriages. The family is in deep trouble in the United States. Some of the trouble stems from the neglect on the part of parents and of the churches to get our young people ready for marriage. May God help us to teach our young people and to be good examples before them.

Chapter 79

Giving Honor Unto The Wife

Every human being on this earth deserves honor. Obviously, some deserve honor more than others, but because we are made in the image of God, every person regardless of race or color or national origin or physical condition should be honored. Paul commanded the Roman Christians: "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom. 13:7). Peter exhorted: "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:17). The word "men" in the first sentence of this verse has been supplied by the translators. The Greek reads: "Honor all." That includes men, women and children—all races, all nationalities and all stations in life.

But Christians have special obligations to honor some people. For example, Peter commanded husbands:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [that is, your wives] according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

The word "giving" in our text means to assign or to portion out. Husbands are obligated to give wives the portion of honor they deserve. I am obligated to honor all human beings, but I owe special honor to the woman who has shared my life for the past forty-seven years. If I fail to honor her as I should, is it a grievous sin or just inappropriate behavior? If I do not honor her, there is no point in my praying. God will not listen to my prayers.

Have you ever wondered why an inspired apostle ever designated the wife as "the weaker vessel?" Was Peter guilty of chauvinism or sexism? The radical feminists see red when they think of the term "weaker vessel." Was Peter saying that women are weaker morally or spiritually or

intellectually? My friends, if you have read the Bible discerningly, you know better than that. If you have done much work among religious organizations or in community programs, you know the moral and spiritual strength of women. If you have ever taught school, you know women are not weaker intellectually. So, in what respect are women the weaker vessel?

Peter can only mean that women are weaker physically than men are? Does that imply that all women are weaker physically than all men? You know better than that. But, as a rule, women are weaker in their upper body strength than men are. The women weight lifters or exercise freaks can work from now till doomsday, but men will still be stronger physically than women. Does that make women inferior? Does that give men the right to abuse and misuse women? Any man who takes advantage of a woman because he is stronger than she is a bully and a coward and should be jailed for his blatant disregard for the law.

Dr. A. T. Robertson's **Word Studies of the New Testament** says that both husbands and wives are "designated vessels or parts of the furniture in God's house" (volume 6, p. 110). Just because the man is stronger physically gives him no right to treat his wife with contempt or disrespect. God expects and commands husbands to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). Wives are to love their husbands and to teach young women to love their husbands (Titus 2:2-5). Both should show respect in every facet of the marriage relationship.

Would you please think how marriages could be improved and our lives made richer if we observed the Lord's instructions? Husbands must give unto the wife the honor to which she is entitled. May God help us husbands to be what God desires us to be.

Chapter 80

Heirs Together Of The Grace Of Life

Radical feminists would like for the American people to believe that the Bible is oppressive toward women. Dr. Letty Russell called Paul the "supreme male chauvinist" and affirmed that we ought to call the God "she" half the time and the Holy Spirit "she" all the time. What the feminists choose to ignore is that fact that Christian women are the most liberated women on earth. No, I do not mean liberated in the sense that they have no obligation to their husbands or to their children. I mean liberated to choose to serve the living God, to have homes without pressures from the radical elements in our society and to contribute to the progress of humanity in the way they choose to do so.

Peter refers to wives and husbands "as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). The expression, "heirs together," means joint heirs, fellowheirs. Surely, Peter cannot be saying that women are as precious in the sight of God as men are. My friends, that is precisely what He is saying. God loves women in exactly the same way He loves men. He gives them the same grace and mercy He extends to males. Few passages in the Bible make that truth plainer than these verses from Galatians 3:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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 if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

But if what I have read from 1 Peter 3:7 and Galatians 3 is true—and it is unquestionably true—why did God appoint the husband as head of the wife and make men preachers, elders, deacons and other leaders in the church? How can

men only serve as heads of their homes and leaders in the church without discriminating against women? My friends, God ordained that every institution—whether civil, religious or familial—should have some order. He knew these institutions could not function without that order. He decided in His infinite wisdom to require men to be the heads of their homes and the leaders in the church. Since God Himself made those decisions, who am I or who are you to question His wisdom?

What if all husbands and wives had to make the decision at the beginning of their marriages regarding who would be the leader in the home? Do you not see God's wisdom in making arrangements as to who would be the head of the home and the leaders in the church? It removes the vying for position which would inevitably follow if He had not made those decisions.

Am I saying that all husbands have been and are being good leaders in their homes? The truth is that many of us husbands have mistreated our wives—not necessarily physically—and our children by failing to be the kind of husbands and fathers God wants us to be and which our families deserve. We have been derelict in our duties and have brought shame, confusion and heartaches into our families. My fellow husbands, there is no excuse for such behavior on our part. We are heirs together of the grace of life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is directed to all human beings—both male and female. Each of us has the opportunity and the obligation to listen to the words of life, believe in the gospel message and obey it from the heart. Each of us will be judged according to the deeds done in the body. All of us have the same promise of eternal life—if we live for God Almighty. And there is no distinction (Rom. 3:22).

Chapter 81

That Your Prayers Be Not Hindered

One of the Christian's greatest blessings, opportunities and obligations is prayer. The New Testament continually stresses our duty and privilege to pray to our heavenly Father. Paul commanded the Thessalonians: "Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:17-18). Paul wrote as follows to a young preacher:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

But does prayer do any good? Is it not merely a spiritual exercise with no special benefits?

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Jas. 5:16).

The literal rendering of the Greek in James 5 says, "The prayer of a righteous man is very powerful in its working."

But are all prayers heard and answered according to our wishes and desires? Solomon gives this answer to that question: "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Prov. 28:9). What would prevent God from listening to our prayers? Will you please listen to these stirring words to husbands:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7)?

The word "hindered" (*engkopto* in the Greek) literally means to cut into, to interrupt, like someone's cutting a telephone line while we are talking. The Greek verb is used

only four other times in the New Testament. I want to read two other passages where the word is used.

For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you (Rom. 15:22). Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us (1 Thess. 2:18).

Let me return to our text for just a moment. Is Peter actually saying if a man does not give his wife her portion of honor his prayers will not be answered? If that is not what Peter is teaching, then I have to confess that I do not understand this passage at all. But why should that kind of instruction give anyone any difficulty? Will God answer our prayers when we are living in direct opposition to His arrangements for our lives? God commanded husbands to give the wife her portion of honor because they are heirs together of the grace of life. If he fails to abide by God's commandments—either in the husband-wife relationship or in any other—how could he expect God to listen to his prayers? Solomon did say, "He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Prov. 28:9).

One of a man's most sacred obligation is to be a good husband to his wife. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it. In the same chapter, Paul adds:

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church... Nevertheless let everyone of you in particular love his wife even as himself (Eph. 5:25, 29, 33).

"Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Col. 3:19).

Loving a wife and providing for her is not one option among many for husbands. God's law requires a husband to love his wife and to treat her with respect. If he does not, there is no point in his praying. His prayers will go no higher than the ceiling—and not that high if there is a high ceiling.

Chapter 82

Generic Instructions

The Bible provides two kinds of instructions—specific and generic. There probably are not so many specific instructions as some people have imagined. But there are some which I shall read at this time.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right....And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1, 4).

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1).

There are many other specific commandments in the New Testament, but these should suffice to illustrate the meaning of specific advice. But what about generic or universal laws and regulations?

The Bible is literally filled with these instructions—the kind of instructions which apply to all people at all times under all circumstances. For example,

Let love be without dissimulation [or hypocrisy]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another (Rom. 12:9-10).

Do you believe these words from Romans 12 apply only to husbands or only to wives or only to brothers and sisters in Christ? They are universal admonitions—always applicable.

The apostle Peter gave these generic or universal principles which were designed for Christians in every age and under all conditions. "Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8). I hope you are able to understand how these admonitions apply to husbands and wives, to parents and children, and to all other relationships in life.

If only we would follow Peter's inspired advice, all of life would be so much more pleasant.

Christians are urged to be "of one mind." Whatever our relationships, we are to strive for unity and harmony. Paul exhorted the church at Philippi: "Fulfil my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). In the same epistle, Paul pled with two Christian women: "I beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord" (Phil. 4:2). How can God's people fulfil their mission—either in the home or in the community or in the nation—if we are severely divided?

Peter commanded the early Christians to have compassion one of another. The Greek for "having compassion" is *sumpatheis*, from which we get our word "sympathy." The Greek word and its English equivalent mean to feel with. When you see a family member or a fellow church member or a fellow human being suffering, can you identify with that person? Can you enter into his feelings to know—as much as humanly possible—what he or she is experiencing? Is that not what Paul had in mind in the following passage: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26)?

Paul encourages Christians to "love as brothers." And how do brothers love? In our earthly families, we are physical brothers and should be helpful to each other. In the church of the Lord, we should always seek the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus Christ said,

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35).

The love Jesus mentioned would revolutionize all human relationships, including family relationships. May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us to implement these divine instructions.

Chapter 83

Generic Instructions (No. 2)

Did you know that the Greek *agape* is used of husbands' loving their wives but never of wives' loving their husbands? The word *philos* which also means love is used of wives' loving their husbands but never *agape*. So what is the point to this brief discussion—that wives do not have the same obligations to love their husbands that husbands have to love their wives? The truth of the matter is: The Bible has thousands of generic or universal principles which apply to all situations and to all relationships. Wherever the Greek *agape* is used, as in 1 Corinthians 13, it applies to women as well as to men. When Jesus commanded His followers to have love one for another (John 13:34-35), He included women as well as men in that command.

Peter exhorted the early Christians:

Finally [literally, to this end], be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous (1 Pet. 3:8).

I want to dwell in this brief study today on the last two expressions in the preceding verse: "be pitiful" and "be courteous." In the first part of this verse, the word "compassion" is used, but the word *sumpatheis* ought to be rendered "sympathy," although the English word probably does not bring out the full meaning of the Greek.

The Greek word rendered "pitiful" is the word which is most often translated "compassion." The Greek literally means tender-hearted, full of pity. This exact Greek word is used only one other time in the New Testament and is translated "tender-hearted" (Eph. 4:32), but a very similar word is used several times of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the word is used only of Jesus Christ. I shall give you just one example. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd"

(Matt. 9:36). If we would seek to cultivate the same attitude toward our family members, toward our brothers and sisters in Christ and toward all other human beings, this world would be a much better place and Christians would have a far greater influence than is currently the case.

Christians must also be "courteous." There is some confusion over what Greek word was in the original in this text. The manuscripts from which the King James Version was translated uses the word *philophrones* which means friendly, gracious. The adverb form of the word is rendered "courteously" (Acts 28:7). Other manuscripts of the Bible have the Greek *tapeinophrones* which means humble-minded. That Greek word appears seven times in the New Testament and is translated "humility of mind," "lowliness," and simply "humility." Frankly, I do not know which of these two Greek words appeared in the original text; nor does it really matter. Both concepts are found in the scriptures.

If the Greek should be rendered "courteous," it shows an attitude of friendliness and graciousness which ought to characterize God's people everywhere—whether in the home or elsewhere. Can you imagine the changes in the atmosphere if both husbands and wives were always courteous, gracious and friendly? If we treated our spouses as courteously as we do our neighbors and friends, would not all marriages improve? How can we justify being discourteous or ungracious or unfriendly to the people we profess to love the most—our life's mate?

If the Greek ought to be translated "humble-minded," it makes us understand how lowly we Christians ought to be. Our Lord used one form of the Greek when He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). The same word is used in the following passage: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). Do we not want to be humble so that God will be gracious unto us?

Chapter 84

Christians Must Not Retaliate

1 Peter 2 and other New Testament passages inform us that Jesus Christ is our example. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). After our Lord's washing His disciples' feet, He said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done unto you" (John 13:15). Peter tells us some of the areas where Christ serves as our example. He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:22-23). The same apostle delivers these generic principles to govern our behavior.

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing (1 Pet. 3:8-9).

The word translated "rendering" means to give back. The word is translated "recompense" in the following passage. "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17). When men and women mistreat us, we are not to return evil for the evil they perpetrate against us. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:15). Incidentally, the word "evil" (*kakon* in Greek) is a generic word which covers a broad scope of sinful activities.

Christians are forbidden to render "railing for railing." The word "railing" is sometimes translated "reviling" (1 Pet. 2:23). The word refers to abusive speech—the kind of speech which surrounded our Lord at His trial and at His crucifixion. How tempting it is for all of us to cut others

to pieces with our tongues when they have spoken evil of us. Personally, I hurt deeply when others speak abusively of me or of my loved ones. I have to stifle the urge to tell them off in so many ways. But the Lord forbids His children to engage in such abusive speech—even when the one speaking abusively deserves to be told off.

What may Christians do when they are being abused for the cause of Christ? Instead of rendering evil for evil and railing for railing, we are to render a blessing. The word "blessing" is a present active participle and means to continually render a blessing. The word "blessing" comes from the Greek *eulogountes* from which we get our English words "eulogy" and "eulogize." Are we able to comply with the Lord's instructions in our dealing with evil, abusive and disrespectful people? As you and I both know by experience, it is not easy to do. The natural inclination to retaliate is difficult to control, but Christians must work at obeying their Lord's will for their lives. If He could endure persecution, reviling and even crucifixion, surely we can be faithful in the face of the hardships and heartaches we have to face.

Christians know they are called that we should inherit a blessing. Many people—especially those who are in the world or those who are worldly-minded—have problems with the Bible's restrictions regarding getting even with those who take advantage of us. But we must remember what our Lord had to endure. Christ was spat upon—a very great indignity; He was crowned with thorns; He was mocked and ridiculed. But He did not return the same vicious and ugly attitude toward His tormentors. He meekly submitted because He knew of the ultimate benefit for fallen man.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18).

May you and I so live that we may inherit the blessing God has in store for His faithful children.

Chapter 85

How To Love Life And See Good Days

So-called "Christian bookstores" are literally filled with books with titles somewhat as follows: "The Secret to Successful Living," "Living a Fulfilled Life," and "I'm OK; You're OK." Some of these books may have some good advice and information in them, but most of them are pure fluff. They are rooted in pop psychology and not in the word of God. Some, like Thomas Harris's book, *I'm OK; You're OK*, are misleading and even dangerous. The truth of the matter is: Modern psychology has not discovered any truth which the Bible writers did not know. God's book and His book alone provides the true keys to successful Christian living.

One very vital passage relating to Christian living reads as follows:

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

Can you imagine any simpler advice and yet any advice more badly needed among sinful human beings? Some may want their advice expressed in psychological terminology, but if it were, the majority of us could not understand it and it probably would not be worth understanding in the first place.

Christians surely love life and want to see good days, or do we? Are we willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to have the blessing God promises? The Greek in this verse literally reads: "He who wills (*thelon*) to love (*agapan*) life, let him refrain his tongue from evil." Both verbs are present active participles and could be rendered: "He who continually wills or wishes to keep on loving life." These words 1 Peter 3:10-12 are taken almost verbatim

from Psalm 34:12-16 and generally follows the Greek text of the Septuagint-not the Hebrew text.

My friend, do you will to love life and see good days? Then you must "refrain your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile." Do we need an exposition of what it means to love life? There are no guarantees that you shall not experience hardships, disappointments and illnesses, but generally speaking, those who follow the example and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ will experience a full and useful life. Jesus assured His immediate disciples and us: "I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). "Good days" refers to happy, useful and profitable days. If Christians want to love life and see good days, they must refrain their tongues from evil. Are you and I tempted to speak evil of others-even our own brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we not know how much damage we can do to others and to the cause of Christ by misusing our tongues? James called the tongue "a fire, a world of iniquity, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (Jas. 3:6, 8).

Do we ever think that our tongues hurt only others? Actually, our misuse of our tongues hurt us worse than it hurts others. How can we live fulfilled and satisfying lives when we constantly criticize others and question their integrity? How can we be pleasing in the sight of God and of good men when we use our tongues to mislead and to beguile others? Peter urges Christians not to use their lips to speak guile. The word "guile" (*dolon* in the Greek) was used of bait for catching fish. In other words, we use our tongues like fishermen use their bait. We intend to deceive and to lead people astray from God's revealed will.

Instead of using our tongues to lead others astray and to destroy their good reputations, let us use our tongues to build up and to glorify God.

Chapter 86

Negatives And Positives In Christian Living

Some modern preachers in all religious organizations are very critical of those who use negative language in preaching the gospel. They have decided—in the words of a song which was popular some forty years ago—that we must accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. One preacher I know will not read negative messages from his congregation or from anyone else. He requires his secretary to read to his mail and throw away any negative letters. On the other hand, there are preachers who were born—as one of my college professors loved to say—in the objective case and in the kickative mood. They never, or at least, almost never, see any good in anyone. As they read the Bible, they are more impressed by the negative messages than by the positive ones.

Both of these positions are indefensible, as you can see from the following verses.

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

I am not telling you—because I do not believe it—that the balance between the positive and the negative in these verses is the one which ought to characterize our preaching and our living. But you cannot read these inspired words without seeing the need for turning away from evil and for embracing the good. Paul admonished the Roman Christians: “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). He also wrote to the Thessalonians: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all forms of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21-22).

The Greek for “eschew” is *ekklino* means to avoid. It is rendered “gone out of the way” in Romans 3:12. The word lets us know that there are attitudes and activities we

most avoid or turn away from. Time will not allow an extensive list of those activities, but you can certainly discover what they are by applying the word of God to your life. For example, you know fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lying and murder are always wrong—always contrary to the will of God. But what about gambling, drinking alcoholic beverages, abortion, suicide and infanticide? Are they always wrong? Must we always turn away from these behaviors? They are wrong—always wrong—and should be avoided.

But avoiding all kinds of evil is only a part of the Christian's life—although a very important part. We must also do good. What does Peter mean by good? Good is defined by what God says—not by what some man says. Visiting the sick, feeding the poor and preaching the gospel to the lost are good works according to the word of God. Paul exhorted the Galatians:

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:9-10).

Please listen again to the apostle Paul:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men (Tit. 3:8).

If someone criticizes you for opposing evils, such as, abortion and homosexuality, please remind him of passages like the ones I have read to you today. But remember that refraining from evil does not constitute the whole of Christian living. In addition to avoiding evil and opposing it, we are to let our family members and friends see goodness, honesty and truthfulness in our daily lives. Is that what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:16)? May our Father help us all to avoid evil and to do good to His glory.

Chapter 87

Seeking Peace And Pursuing It

Do I have to tell you that we are living in a divided and confused world—not just divided and confused over religious and moral values—but over almost every aspect of life? You do not have to go overseas to Bosnia or to Chechnya or to the Middle East. Just look around in your community, in your state and in the United States. We are often divided along racial lines, over economic, political and educational issues. Even brother is alienated from brother—whether we are speaking of our earthly families or of the family of God. Paul specifically had the church in mind in the following excerpt, but the principle applies in every area of life.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The prophet Isaiah outlined the nature of Christ's work among men.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

When the Messiah actually came, the angel of the Lord said concerning Him, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). As our Lord Jesus Christ was preparing His disciples for His ascension to the Father, He comforted them by saying,

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

The apostle Peter gave an inspired formula for loving life and seeing good days.

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

The three verbs are all commands (first aorist active imperatives) and demand immediate action. They could be rendered: Immediately turn away from evil and seek peace at once and follow it now. If you read these verbs in that light, you can understand the urgency of doing what God commands in promoting peace among human beings.

My friends, I am fully aware of our Lord's statements in passages like Matthew 10. Jesus said to His disciples:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matt. 10:34-36).

If Jesus came into the world as the Prince of Peace, how could He use such language in speaking to His disciples? The answer is really very simple. Jesus knew there would be people in every family, in every community and in every nation who would accept His words and live by them regardless of the pressures and persecutions. He also knew there would be others—even in our earthly families—who would resent our love for Him and our obedience to His will. Have our Lord's words actually been fulfilled? They have been fulfilled in every generation since our Lord returned to the Father. Conflict, controversy and confusion reign supreme in many parts of our world—even among religious people.

Peter urges the followers of Christ to seek peace immediately and to pursue it with great vigor—right now. The apostle Paul wrote: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). May the peace of the God of peace be with you.

Chapter 88

The Lord's Concern For Men

The apostle Peter's inspired formula for loving life and seeing good days reads as follows:

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

What is the real motivation behind our following God's plan? "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). The words I have read to you are borrowed from Psalm 34:12-16. There are slight differences between the two passages, but they teach the same powerful truths about life.

Peter's statement about the Lord's eyes being over the righteous and His ears open to their prayers must be examined from two viewpoints. We should understand our Lord's constant concern for our welfare. Our Lord reminded His disciples about God's continuing love for mankind.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-31).

Jesus expressed the same truth in His Sermon on the Mount:

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (Matt. 6:26).

These passages and hundreds of others assure us that God watches over us, knows our every need and cares about what happens to us. He may disappoint us by not giving us what we want, but He always gives us what we need. He has provided for our physical needs and for our spiritual needs as well. Peter urged His fellow Christians

to cast all their cares on the Lord because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). When the apostle Paul prayed three times for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, the Lord responded: "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

But there is another application of the Lord's eyes being over us. When I was a boy we used to sing, "There's an all-seeing eye watching you." That concept may have produced fear in the hearts of children and young people, but it is the truth of God's word. God watches over us and cares for us, but He also knows the evil in our hearts and in our lives. Is that not what the Hebrew writer meant when he wrote: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13)?

We may think that because we can fool our wives and our friends and neighbors by hiding our conduct that we can also fool God. Do you remember these words from Psalm 139:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Psa. 139:7-12).

The Lord's eyes, according to Peter, are over the righteous and His ears are open to our prayers. He wants us to pray to Him. In fact, He commands us to do so—not because He does not know what is on our hearts—but that we may express our needs, our love and our adoration through prayer. "Pray without ceasing," Paul commanded the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:17). But let us not overlook Peter's statement in 1 Peter 3:12: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

Chapter 89

Should Christians Expect Persecutions?

The book of 1 Peter discusses many vital topics, such as, a Christian's relationship to civil government, the husband-wife relationship and the atoning death of Jesus Christ—but none of greater significance than the persecution of God's people. F. B. Meyer calls his devotional commentary on 1 Peter **Tried by Fire**—a very appropriate designation. The apostle Peter admonished his readers:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

In view of these and other passages dealing with the persecution of Christians, why would Peter ask: "And who is he who will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good" (1 Pet. 3:13)? Is Peter attempting to assure his fellow Christians that they need have no fear of being abused and misused because of their faith in Christ and their devotion to His word? If that were the case, this verse would contradict what Peter had written in other passages in his epistle. The whole text of the epistle would be against such a meaning. Instead, Peter wanted the early Christians and us to know that the enemies of the cross could not do permanent harm to Christians. They can beat us, confiscate our property, mistreat our family members and even kill us, but in the end we—not they—shall be victorious. Is that not what Jesus had in mind when He said to the church at Smyrna: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10)? The expression, "ten days," relates to the fact

that the enemies of New Testament Christianity cannot do permanent damage to Christians. In the final analysis, God's children are going to win. We shall receive the crown of life which fades not away (1 Pet. 1:4).

In view of the New Testament's predictions concerning Christians' suffering for righteousness' sake, let us examine Peter's question: "And who is he who will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good" (1 Pet. 3:13)? The expression, "he who will harm you" can be rendered, "One who wishes to harm you or one who does harm to you." We are not specifically informed about the nature of the harm which the devil's helpers will do to God's people, but all one needs to do to learn is to examine church history. The book of Hebrews provides a list of the kind of suffering Christians would have to endure. Some

...had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:36-38).

Why did and do God's enemies persecute God's people? The children of God were and are followers of that which is good. The word "followers" comes from the Greek *mimetai* and means imitators or mimics. Incidentally, the Revised Version has the word "zealous"—zealots for good—rather than imitators. Either word fits the context very well. Peter is not teaching that evil men will not persecute the righteous if they do right. He is teaching that we shall overcome—whatever oppression and pressures we have to face. God will see to that. Jesus promised, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Chapter 90

Do Not Be Afraid Of God's Enemies

Human suffering has been and still is one of unbeliever's major criticisms of New Testament Christianity. If God is all-good, why does He allow people to suffer from various debilitating diseases? If He is all-powerful, could He not put an end to all suffering? Unbelievers fail to take several factors into consideration. Human suffering can result—and often does—from the poor choices we make. If we choose to use drugs, drink beverage alcohol and engage in sexual promiscuity, we are sowing what we shall reap. Sometimes people suffer because of the choices others make. If our fellowmen hate God, Christ and the Bible, they may make us suffer for our convictions. That was the case the apostle Peter discusses at length in his first epistle. Christians were suffering because others had the freedom to choose to persecute God's children. Would we take away the free will of human beings—even if it meant an end to Christians' suffering for righteousness' sake?

The apostle Peter provides assurance and inspiration for those who are suffering because of their faith in Christ and their commitment to His cause.

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled (1 Pet. 3:14).

Peter leaves absolutely no doubt that Christians will suffer because of their devotion to the cause of Christ. He knew of the suffering of godly people throughout the ages. He also knew what Jesus Himself had said about Christians suffering.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord (Matt. 10:23-24).

If evil men and women persecuted our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, how do we imagine we shall escape being abused and misused?

We do need to remember that some suffering is not for righteousness' sake. If human beings engage in sexual promiscuity and develop sexually transmitted diseases—including AIDS—they cannot say they are suffering for righteousness' sake. They are simply reaping what they have sown. But if we suffer because we are living by the teaching of God's inspired word and suffer for that, we should consider ourselves very fortunate. The King James renders the Greek "happy," but "blessed" or "fortunate" would be a better translation. It is the same Greek word used in Christ's beatitudes in Matthew 5 and translated "blessed." You and I may not be happy when others mistreat us because we are Christians, but we should consider ourselves fortunate that we are permitted to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter encourages Christians in every age not to be afraid or troubled by the enemies of the cross. The word "afraid" is from the Greek *phobeomai* from which we get our English word "phobia." He urges Christians not to be influenced by the terror which was being perpetrated by their persecutors. The Revised Standard Version renders the expression, "Have no fear of them." But how can we keep from being afraid of Christ's enemies? We can know that our Lord stands by us and suffers with us. We can also know that our ultimate victory will come—not in this world—but in the world to come. Our enemies may take our lives, but they cannot destroy our souls. These we commit to our Lord for safekeeping.

Peter used the word "troubled" of the effects of bitter opposition from our Lord's enemies. The word can be translated "disturbed," although the King James always translates the verb by the word "troubled." Can we not understand why Peter would use that word? But if we are faithful unto the end, we shall receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Our enemies cannot take that away from us.

Chapter 91

Getting Ready To Defend Our Faith

Has anyone ever asked you, "Why do you believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Bible and in eternal life?" Have individuals ever inquired about your church attendance, your belief about New Testament worship, the teaching of the Bible on moral issues, such as, premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, abortion and such like? When you have been approached about these and other topics relating to your convictions, how did you respond? Did you tell the questioners, "I cannot explain what I believe, but let me call our preacher. He can tell you what we believe on these subjects."

Do you know what the scriptures teach about our giving answers to those who ask about our beliefs? Please give attention to these words from the apostle Peter.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Maybe you think Peter was addressing preachers or teachers. There is no indication in the context of this verse that Peter was speaking primarily to preachers or teachers. He was encouraging every Christian to tell what he believes and why he believes it. Are you able to do that? If not, are you preparing yourself to do it?

I am aware that no individual—whether preacher or otherwise—can know every answer to every question which someone may direct at him or her. Surely, you can tell your friends and family members why you became a Christian, but you may not be able to answer the charges of evolutionists, cultists, New Age adherents and others. We do need the help of specialists in some areas, but we certainly should work at giving an answer to most people about our faith in the word of God and our being New Testament Christians.

Peter commanded Christians to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The word "sanctify" comes from a Greek word which means to set apart. The Greek verb is also rendered "holy." What does it mean to set apart Christ in our hearts? It means that we "seek first Christ and his kingdom" (Matt. 6:33). It means that we think about things above and not things on the earth (Col. 3:1-2). It means we must have the attitude of Christ when He said, "I do always those things which please him" (John 8:29). Our first step in getting ready to evangelize the world for Christ and to answer questions about our faith is to give Christ the place of honor in our lives.

We are instructed to "be ready always to give answer." To get ready simply means to be prepared for questions about our faith and challenges to what we believe. Now let me ask you a question: How do we get prepared to provide answers to those who ask us about our faith in God and in His inspired word? Obviously, I cannot give you a great number of suggestions, but let me provide a few. We must make an intense investigation of God's word—the Bible. That means more, dear friends, than merely reading a chapter a day or a week. That means looking up words you do not understand, comparing scriptures on the same topic, using your Bible dictionary and other study aids, reading good commentaries and talking with knowledgeable Bible students. We are wonderfully blessed in our day with thousands of good Bible study programs—many of which are on computer software. There is no excuse for not being able to study and to learn God's word. We must also seek the Lord's will through prayer (Jas. 1:5). What part does living our faith daily have in teaching others about Christ? Did not Jesus say something about being salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16)? A good example is a very difficult argument to answer.

Chapter 92

Giving An Answer

Denominational preachers often criticize churches of Christ for their emphasis on New Testament baptism. They actually charge or at least imply that we are guilty of legalism, that is, trying to earn our salvation by law-keeping. Those same preachers call us narrow-minded because of our opposition to mechanical instruments in the worship of the Lord's church. They may admit that they cannot defend the right of churches to use mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship, but they think we are too picky by refusing to use them and by actually preaching against their use. My topic today is not what kind of music the church ought to use, but giving an answer for whatever we believe and do as Christians. Is that not what the apostle Peter and other New Testament writers require of Christians?

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Incidentally, I am not criticizing those who ask us why we believe what we believe. If someone has honest questions about our beliefs and practices, they have every right to ask us about them. Even if our challengers are not honest, providing us an opportunity to explain our beliefs is a wonderful blessing. Let me illustrate what I mean. About twenty years ago, a church in Georgia asked about ten of us from different religious groups to tell what we believed on certain topics. The master of ceremonies asked each of us what we believed about baptism, the Lord's supper and other topics. The setting was not a debate forum. Each person simply told why he believed what he believed and then could say no more. It was a very enlightening period. I would not hesitate to attend such a meeting to explain who churches of Christ are and what they preach and practice. The members of that church had a right to ask

what we believed; we had an obligation to respond to their questions.

Peter charged the early Christians to be "ready always to give an answer." Have you done any serious thinking about the word "answer?" The Greek word is *apologia* from which we get our word "apology." Does Peter mean that Christians are to apologize for their faith? That is not what he means. The word is rendered in other contexts "defense" and "clearing." Let me give you some other examples of the use of the noun and of the verb. The noun is used in the following passages. "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear my **defense** which I make now unto you" (Acts 22:1). "To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver a man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to **answer** for himself concerning the crime laid against him" (Acts 25:16). Paul said to the Corinthians: "My **answer** to them that do examine me is this" (1 Cor. 9:3). The Greek is rendered "clearing" of the Corinthians' coming to terms with their past behavior (2 Cor. 7:11). Two of the best known examples of the word's use appear in Philipians 1.

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace (Phil. 1:7).

But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the **defense** of the gospel (Phil. 1:17).

Paul wrote to Timothy:

At my first **answer** no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge (2 Tim. 4:16).

I have time to give you just one example of the verb's use. "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with his hand, and would have **made** his **defense** unto the people" (Acts 19:33). May I repeat what Peter told Christians: "Be ready always to give answer?"

Chapter 93

Giving An Answer (No. 2)

Radical feminists and other groups in American society have attacked God's pattern for the home. Betty Friedan, for example, compares a woman's staying at home to care for her husband and children to people's being led to the German concentration camps. Many feminists think the home as God ordained it is oppressive to women. They accuse Christianity of relegating women to positions of inferiority. Some of the feminists are demanding an end to the home as we know it.

If you were to encounter these criticisms of the home, could you answer them? Could you show from the scriptures and from relevant research just how utterly ridiculous and destructive radical feminism is? The apostle Peter demanded of Christians:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Does Peter's admonition include being able to answer what the feminists are teaching about marriage, the family, childrearing and human sexuality? My friends, you know it does. It means responding to every charge and criticism and question—no exception.

The word which is translated "answer" means to give a defense. The Greek word *apologia* is the basis for courses on apologetics which are taught in many Bible schools and colleges across the country. Years ago, I taught a course on Christian evidences. The textbook, **A System of Christian Evidence**, by Leander S. Keyser, defines the word "apologetics" as "the scientific vindication of the divine authority of the Christian religion" (p. 21). Dr. Edward John Carnell, late president of Fuller Theological Seminary, in his book, **An Introduction to Christian Apologetics**, says that "apologetics is that branch of Christian theology which

answers the question, Is Christianity rationally defensible" (p. 7)?

To boil all this information down to its simple components, let me say that apologetics requires all who claim to be Christians to tell why they believe in Christ and in His gospel. There are at least two reasons for this obligation. We want to remove all impediments to men's and women's accepting the gospel of Christ. If they believe the Bible oppresses women, makes unreasonable demands on human beings, fails to meet our basic needs and is hundreds of years behind the times, they are not going to become Christians. We must show how unreasonable all of these attitudes and charges are. We should then have valid reasons based on the scriptures why every living soul should give up his old life of folly and sin and commit himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we succeed at the first responsibility and fail at the second, we have not gained much—except perhaps some intellectual satisfaction.

These are people—both in various religious groups and outside—who think of giving reasons for our faith as being unnecessarily argumentative. But Jesus did not hesitate to have such discussions with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The great apostle Paul defended what he believed and how he had acted. If Christ and the apostles provided answers to those who challenged them, do we imagine we know more about preaching the gospel and defending our beliefs than they knew? Do you remember how Jesus responded when the Sadducees questioned His teaching on the resurrection?

Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God....As touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt. 22:29, 21-32).

We must be prepared to give an answer and have the courage to do it.

Chapter 94

Giving An Answer (No. 3)

Liberal theologians, like John Shelby Spong and Leslie Weatherhead, have attacked virtually every fundamental of the Christian faith. Bishop Spong has criticized the Bible as being "full of contradictions." He has denied the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and the bodily resurrection of our Lord. He approves the homosexual lifestyle and thinks we should not oppose individuals' living together without being married. Morally and spiritually, Bishop Spong ridicules and lampoons those who accept the Bible as the inerrant word of God.

When you encounter theologians or others who mount such vicious attacks against the scriptures and its moral values, what should be your reaction as a believer in God and in His word? Do we just roll over and play dead when nationally or internationally known writers and scholars destroy or seek to destroy the basis of our hope in Christ? Are we so cowardly or so poorly prepared that we do nothing? The apostle Peter commanded Christians in every age:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

My friends, there are answers—good, solid, scholarly answers—to every charge Bishop Spong and other theological liberals have aimed at the word of God. Let me illustrate what I mean. Not many years ago, modernistic theologians and other enemies of the Bible accused the Bible writers of inventing some of the heathen nations which are mentioned in the Old Testament. The Hittites which appear prominently in the Old Testament were supposed to be the figment of some writer's imagination. The Hittites were thought to be a very strong argument against the Old Testament's

historical trustworthiness, that is, until archaeologists uncovered a great amount of material in what today is modern Turkey. The Scholars found hundreds of pieces of material which prove beyond any doubt that the Hittites were a genuine people. The Bible was right; the critics were wrong.

In the early part of this century, some New Testament scholars insisted that the book of John was written in the second century of the Christian era. If that had been true, the apostle John could not have written it. Fortunately, a fragment of the book of John was discovered in Egypt which dated around 127 A.D. If the book were written in the middle or latter part of the second century, how could the fragment of John get back into Egypt by 127 A.D.? The critics had to take back water and admit they had been wrong.

The reason I give you these two examples is to show that good answers can be supplied to the charges against the Bible. You may not have those answers readily available, but they can be found. There are hundreds of good books on archaeology, biblical criticism, the Dead Sea scrolls available from reputable publishers. Besides, your preacher probably has many of the books which he would be more than happy to share with you if you have problems with biblical critics.

Generally speaking, you probably will not encounter men and women who openly criticize the scriptures. But you are likely to meet and talk with people who attack what churches of Christ teach on church membership, New Testament baptism and such topics. You should also be prepared to address these topics to show why one must become a Christian in order to go to heaven. It will take considerable time and effort for you to be prepared to respond to the critics. But it may lead the critic to the Lord. Besides, it will strengthen your faith as you learn more about the Bible.

Chapter 95

Giving An Answer (No. 4)

Have you ever seen people get into an argument over religion and get so angry they could hardly talk? What do anger and arrogance tell the person to whom you are talking or who may be overhearing what you are discussing? Is it possible you may lose the argument—not because you do not have and know the truth—but because of your attitude and demeanor? How can we expect to win others to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ when we violate the very spirit of Christ? The apostle Peter exhorted the early Christians:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

Did you notice the expression, “meekness and fear?” What did Peter mean by these two words? “Meekness” does not mean weakness. We can never present a powerful case for obeying the gospel if we are weak in our beliefs and in our presentation of the truth. How easy it is for us to think we are being meek when we are weak and vacillating. If you say to someone, “This is what my church teaches or this is what our preacher says,” you are likely not to make a good impression on the person you are teaching. Instead, you should turn to the scriptures and say, “This is what Jesus said” or “this is what Paul taught.” Jesus Christ and Paul have far greater authority than your church or your preacher.

Sometimes we may think we are being meek and humble when we express doubts about the conclusions we reach on a given passage or proposition. If you say, “Well, I am not really sure about what I am saying, but it is what I think.” You need to be sure—not necessarily dogmatic—when you are teaching the lost or the mediating critics. If you are not sure, delay the discussion until you have studied sufficiently that you can take a stand on the word of God.

You will make a much better impression for good if you know whereof you speak and present the gospel in love and concern.

The word "fear" warns us against being ugly-spirited, know-it-alls. Teaching others the word of God entails a grave responsibility. Is that not the reason James wrote: "My brethren, be not many teachers; knowing we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jas. 3:1)? What you teach your friends and family members will almost certainly influence their earthly behavior and their eternal destiny. You surely do not want to be guilty of teaching someone soul-condemning error. You do remember our Lord's warning about the blind leading the blind? If you teach the truth in an offensive manner or teach error, you may well be leading someone into eternal punishment.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, knew he had been called into the apostleship and had received direct revelation from almighty God. And yet, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he said very humbly:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

The word "fear"—both in 1 Peter 3:15 and in 1 Corinthians 2:2—does not mean Paul was afraid to preach. It suggests the enormous responsibility God had given to him. Preaching must not be done lightly. It is one of the most serious duties any human being can have. That is the reason we must give an answer to every man who asks "in meekness and in fear." Both our own souls and the souls of those we teach are at stake. May our God help us to be kind and loving and generous in our presentation of the gospel.

Chapter 96

A Good Conscience

About twenty years ago, my wife and I owned a sporting goods store in the state of Georgia. One of my customers was a young man who had divorced his wife. At the end of the divorce trial, his wife's sister—just sixteen years of age—told the young man she would live with him. The couple had been living together for a few months when he told me the story. I asked him if his conscience ever bothered him about the arrangement. He responded, "My what?" I asked him if he ever had any moral regrets about living with a woman out-of-wedlock? He said he did not. Apparently, he had never been taught about right and wrong and his conscience did not condemn him for his immoral conduct.

How important is it to you that you have a clear or good conscience? The apostle Peter wrote:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

We must prepare ourselves to give reasons for our belief in God, in His Son, in His word and in His church. But we must defend our beliefs "with meekness and fear"—not arrogantly or angrily. If we are not kind and generous in our defense of the gospel, we commit sin and are guilty before God as evildoers. If we teach in kindness and in love, we should be able to do so with a good conscience.

Defining the word "conscience" is not the world's easiest task. Someone has called the conscience a God-ordained radar system which tells us when we have violated our moral values or lived according to them. For example, if you have been taught that drunkenness is morally wrong,

when you get drunk your conscience will almost certainly bother you. On the other hand, if you think drinking alcoholic beverages is morally neutral, when you get drunk, your conscience probably will not smile you at all.

Have you ever heard someone say, "Let your conscience be your guide?" My friends, the conscience is not a guide. The conscience is a kind of afterthought. It tells you that you have done right or wrong depending on what you have been taught. Paul provides some insight into the function of the conscience in the following verses:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another (Rom. 2:14-15).

If you violate your beliefs, your conscience will accuse you. If you live by your convictions, your conscience will excuse you.

Have you ever wondered where the conscience is located and how it got there? Paul connected the conscience with our thoughts. Our thoughts come from our minds. So, the conscience operates from our minds. And God implanted the conscience in every human being. How could the evolutionists explain the fact that the animals do not possess consciences? If we are descended from the animals, where along the line of our evolutionary development did we discover we had consciences? The evolutionary theory of man's origin and development makes no sense at all, especially when it pertains to man's conscience. Yet, it is almost universally admitted that men and women do possess consciences. The evolutionist cannot explain that phenomenon. Only those who believe we are made in the image of God can offer a reasonable explanation.

Please think about your conduct. Is it in harmony with your beliefs? If it is not and you have a guilty conscience, you can remove that guilt by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21).

Chapter 97

Suffering For Well Doing

Only people with twisted minds actually enjoy suffering for any cause. Technically, such people are called masochists. But well balanced individuals endure suffering if they believe they are suffering for a good cause, such as, their religious or political convictions. The apostle Peter had Christians in mind when he wrote: "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing" (1 Pet. 3:17). As many of you know by your reading of the Bible, suffering for righteousness' sake is the theme of Peter's first epistle. He later wrote in 1 Peter 4:

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (1 Pet. 4:14).

If you listened carefully to my reading of 1 Peter 3:17, you probably noticed Peter's use of the expression, "the will of God." Modernistic theologians sometimes deny that finite human beings can know the will of God. However, not one Bible writer—either in the Old Testament or in the New—ever made such a foolish blunder. What did Jesus mean when He said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32)? You and I may not know the will of God, but it is not because human beings are incapable of knowing it. It is because we have chosen to ignore what God has revealed in the scriptures. Jesus said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He takes away the first that he may establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). God has given us His word in plain enough language that we can understand it.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (John 7:17).

According to Peter, "It is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." If you steal, commit adultery, murder and have to spend time

in prison or have to go to the electric chair, you would have no basis for complaining that you were suffering for righteousness' sake. You would simply be receiving your just recompense of reward. "He who does wrong shall receive for the wrong he has done: and there is no respecter of persons with God" (Col. 3:25). Peter asks,

For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God (1 Pet. 2:20).

It is a big temptation to fight back when we are abused and misused because of our commitment to Jesus Christ. But we are forbidden to retaliate. Paul told the Romans: "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20). Christians will be able to bear whatever comes from the enemies of the cross of Christ. The Lord will stand by us and sustain us regardless of the magnitude of our heartaches and sufferings. Besides, He had to endure more than we can even imagine.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

I do not wish to be pessimistic, but the day may come when we are called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ. Even in the United States there are forces which are seeking to destroy New Testament Christianity. They are doing it in the name of tolerance and pluralism, but they will not rest until Christianity has become a purely private religion. Such forces in our country may bring suffering and heartache on God's people. We need to take comfort from our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake" (Matt. 5:10).

Chapter 98

Christ's Suffering Was Vicarious

Preachers and theologians sometime use high sounding words to get across a vital message. One such word is "vicarious." **Webster's Third New International Dictionary** defines vicarious as follows: "performed or suffered by one person for another; substitutionary" (p. 2549). This word is used to tell about the death of Jesus Christ. He suffered and died on the cross that you and I might not have to die eternally. The Old Testament predicted the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa.53:4-5).

Liberal theologians, like John Shelby Spong and Leslie Weatherhead, and feminist theologians claim not to understand why Christ had to die in our stead. But whatever their views, we know what the scriptures explicitly teach.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (1 Pet. 3:18).

Peter had earlier written concerning Christ:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (1 Pet. 2:24).

The sacrifices of the old covenant had to be repeated weekly, monthly and yearly. The high priest entered into the most holy place annually to atone both for his sins and for the sins of the people. But "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin to salvation"

(Heb. 9:25,28). Peter said Christ once suffered for our sins. The word "once" (*hapax* in the Greek) means once for all, once never to be repeated. Christ's sacrificial death made it possible for all men to be saved. That does not mean that all men will be saved, but there is enough power in His blood to save everyone who comes to Him for the remission of sins. Those who would enjoy the forgiveness of sins must believe and obey the gospel.

Further evidence that Christ's death was substitutionary can be found in these words: He suffered for our sins, "the just for the unjust." We were lost without any hope for eternity. But Jesus Christ came and died for our sins—"the just for the unjust." The Roman letter spells this truth out as plainly as any passage in God's book.

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 (Rom. 5:6-8).

Christ's death was not simply that of a good man who was willing to give Himself for a righteous cause. It was designed to "bring us to God."

Our Lord's death on the cross and His burial in Joseph's new tomb were not illusions. He did not just swoon, as some theologians in times past taught. He actually died. But death could not hold Him. He was and is the Son of God. Peter affirmed that Jesus was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit." The word "quickened" means to make alive. He rose from the dead the third day for our justification. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20-21).

My friends, if you have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ will profit you nothing. You must believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God and render obedience to the gospel to have your sins remitted (Mark 16:15-16).

Chapter 99

Christ Preached To The Spirits In Prison

The work of Jesus Christ while He lived on earth encompassed so many facets of the will of God.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:18-19).

There are a number of pertinent questions relating to this verse which deserve our attention. What prison did Peter have in mind? When did Christ preach to the spirits in prison? What spirits were in prison? Some of these questions can be answered by a careful reading of verse 20. Peter writes of Christ's going and preaching to the spirits in prison,

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water (1 Pet. 3:20).

In the spirit, Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison. The spirits in prison were those multiplied thousands of people who lived during the period immediately preceding the flood. They were in prison in the sense that they were living in the grossest sins and unable by themselves to free themselves from that prison. Peter does not mean that Christ Himself appeared to Noah's generation, but Christ in the person of Noah preached to the wicked people who were destroyed by the flood. Guy N. Woods wrote concerning these verses: "It should be noted that Peter does not declare that these who were the objects of his preaching were in a disembodied state and in prison when the preaching was done; such was their condition when he wrote." I agree with these thoughts.

The time of the preaching was immediately preceding the great flood. The people who needed the preaching were the wicked people who did continually what displeased

God. They were the spirits which were disobedient when the ark was being prepared for the salvation of the human family. Peter mentions God's longsuffering. He could have simply wiped the wicked off the face of the earth. But instead, He raised up a preacher of righteousness to provide the antediluvians an opportunity to repent and turn to Him for the remission of sins. God's love for the wicked people kept Him from destroying them until they had an opportunity to change. Please take note of the expression: "When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah."

The apostle Peter did not specifically have the generation preceding the flood in mind when he wrote these words but they always apply to God's attitude toward men:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet.3:9).

How grateful we ought to be for God's longsuffering, but we must take advantage of it. We need to turn from our rebellion and disobedience to serve the true and living God.

The men of Noah's day thought he had lost his mind. There never had been a flood. So how could he expect them to believe his word—even if he claimed to speak for God almighty? Tragically, there are millions of people in our world who are skeptical about God's revelation through Jesus Christ. They neither acknowledge Jesus as God's spokesman; nor do they obey His word. They will not be destroyed by water, but by fire. God is giving men and women today opportunity after opportunity to hear His word, believe and obey it. Some do and for that we are grateful, but multiplied millions do not. That is very sad for all who believe in God and want to see other human beings saved.

God sent a preacher to tell the people of impending doom. That preacher built an ark to save them from disaster. They did not listen, but "eight souls were saved by water or through water."

Chapter 100

Baptism Also Now Saves Us

Do you believe baptism has any bearing on modern men's salvation? Or have you subscribed to the Calvinist doctrine of salvation by grace alone? If people believe and preach the essentiality of baptism—as faithful churches of Christ do—are we guilty of preaching salvation by works? Have we become legalists, as some of our religious neighbors have maintained? Will you please listen carefully to an inspired apostle?

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water (1 Pet. 3:18-20).

Now please take note of the next verse.

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Eight souls were saved by water, according to the apostle Peter. Peter then added: "The like figure whereunto even baptism does now save us." When Peter used the expression, "the like figure," was he arguing that men are figuratively saved by water? What is the significance of the term, "the like figure?" The word "figure" is translated from the Greek *antitupon* and literally means "antitype." Let me use a typewriter to illustrate the meaning of the word "antitype." As you know if you have worked with typewriters, the type is that instrument which makes an impression on the paper. When the type strikes the paper it makes a mark. The mark is the antitype, literally against the type.

In the verse we are studying, what is the type? "Eight souls were saved by water" (1 Pet. 3:20). What is the antitype? "The like figure whereunto baptism does also now save us." The eight members of Noah's family were saved by or through water. Men and women today who believe in Christ and want to be saved by the gospel must obey the Lord in baptism. It is by baptism that we are now saved. Is that interpretation of 1 Peter 3:21 in harmony with the rest of the New Testament? "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus, a penitent believer, "And now why are you waiting? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16).

The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) translates verse 21 as follows: "And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (p. 365). While I have many problems with this particular version, the translation of this verse is excellent and brings out the full meaning of the original Greek.

Peter explains that baptism was not intended to wash the dirt from our bodies. It has a deeper spiritual meaning. It was designed to wash sin from our souls—not because there is any inherent cleansing power in the water—but because God Himself gave baptism as the means of washing away our sins and placing us into the church of the living God. "For by one Spirit are you all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Our baptism, Peter writes, is an appeal to God for a clear conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In truth, there is a great likeness between our being baptized and raised to a new life and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). How can anyone reject baptism when God designed it to save us from our sins?

Chapter 101

Second-Chance Theology

When men and women die outside of Christ's kingdom, will they be given a second chance in the world to come? One religious group in the United States practices "proxy baptism." That cultic group teaches that living saints can be baptized for those who have died without being baptized. Other religious groups believe that everyone who dies out of Christ will be given ample opportunities in the world to come to respond to the Lord's invitation. An American theologian affirms that time, death and hell are not boundaries to God's saving grace. In his view, the love and grace of God will eventually bring all persons to the new creation.

Many of those who believe in and preach a second chance attempt to base their unscriptural position on these words from Peter's first letter.

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water (1 Pet. 3:19-20).

Do these verses even hint at a chance for salvation after one has lived for the devil all his life? A theologian has to read into these passages his own ideas before he can find second-chance theology in them.

Not one word about life after death appears in these verses from 1 Peter. Peter identifies the people to whom the preaching was done and the time of the preaching. The people were those living "when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." The ones to whom the preaching was done were the people Noah was attempting to turn from their wicked ways to the God of Noah. Jesus through Noah was attempting to reach

those who would be destroyed by the flood and would be lost eternally because they had turned their backs on God's will. I readily admit the difficulty of this passage, but no one can get a second chance from these verses.

Besides there are numerous serious objections to second-chance theology. From a purely logical viewpoint, the doctrine does not make sense. If a man can delay his obedience until the next world, why would he give his life to serving God? Why would he sacrifice any pleasure which appealed to him in this life? Why would he endanger his life by serving God when thousands of people might threaten his safety because of his devotion to the cause of Christ?

The scriptures make it very plain that our destiny is sealed when we die. Paul wrote as follows to Titus:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:11-12).

Did you take note of the little prepositional phrase, "in this present world?" Incidentally, the Greek word translated "world" should be rendered "age." "In this present age" refers to the Christian age. We have an opportunity to obey the Lord during our life time on earth, but there is no promise that we shall have any opportunities in the world to come. We are deceiving ourselves and our listeners when we preach a second chance of life after death.

The Hebrew writer nails the door shut on second-chance theology when he writes, "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). There is no indication that a second chance is inserted between death and the judgment. When we die our destiny is sealed forever.

If you are not a New Testament Christian, will you not obey the gospel today and devote the rest of your life to serving God?

Chapter 102

Christ Ascended To The Father

Jesus Christ came into this world from His Father's throne in heaven. On many occasions, Jesus informed His disciples and others that He had come to earth from heaven. "For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John 6:50-51).

But Jesus not only told of His coming to earth from God Almighty; he also spoke of His return to heaven.

But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? ... (Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you (John 16:5,7).

The apostle Peter wrote of the eight souls who were saved by water.

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him (1 Pet. 3:20-22).

Peter makes several affirmations which we need to examine briefly in this study.

When Jesus Christ had completed the work on earth the Father had sent Him to do, He ascended to the Father. The record of Christ's ascension is found in Luke 24:50-51 and in Acts 1:9-11. I shall read only the record in Acts.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

When He ascended to God in heaven, He was seated on the right hand of the Father. That was one of the main emphases in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter spoke of Christ's being crucified by the Jews and the Romans, of His resurrection from the dead and then He added: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has shed forth this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). The Hebrew writer speaks of Christ's being "the brightness of God's glory, the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power." When Jesus Christ had "purged our sins," He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).

Oddly enough, there are modern theologians who refuse to use the kind of language I have read to you from 1 Peter, from Acts and from Hebrews. **The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version** (New York: Oxford University, 1995) renders 1 Peter 3:21 as follows: "Who had gone into heaven and is at God's side, to rule over angels, authorities and powers" (p. 365). According to the translators of this perverted version, speaking of Christ's being seated at the right hand of God might be offensive to people who are left-handed. The translators want to be politically correct—even if it mean deliberately mistranslating the original language. There is no excuse for such unscholarly and unreasonable use of any document—whether scripture or otherwise. The expression, "the right hand of God," means a special place of honor. "At God's side" does not carry the same meaning. Let us stand by what inspiration provides—not what some modernistic theologian imagines.

Chapter 103

Be Prepared To Suffer As Christ Suffered

My friend, if you believe becoming a Christian will protect you from suffering physically, financially or socially, you would do well to avoid Christianity altogether. In the first century of the Christian era, countless thousands of men and women were martyred for their convictions. They often suffered the loss of status in their community and even were robbed of their property and goods.

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Heb. 11:37-38).

Is it possible you and I could experience the same suffering?

The apostle Peter writes: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Pet. 4:1). The central theme of 1 Peter is suffering for righteousness' sake. Our great example of suffering is the Lord Jesus Christ.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

But our suffering—even when it is for righteousness' sake—is different from Christ's suffering. "Christ suffered for us," that is, in our stead. His suffering and death were substitutionary. "But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Modernistic theologians deny that Christ's suffering was vicarious or substitutionary but there is no question about the Bible's teaching on that topic. Peter affirms that Christ

in "his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Without the death of Christ for our sins, salvation would not be possible.

Christians are instructed to arm ourselves with the same mind, that is, with the mind willing and ready to suffer for the kingdom of God. The word "arm" (*hoplizo* in the Greek) suggests putting on the whole armor of God that we may be able to combat the devil and his cohorts. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11). We are told to arm ourselves with the same mind which Jesus possessed. Paul told the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). If we are to become like Christ, we must learn to think like him.

The apostle Peter added: "For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Peter was not arguing that all suffering is honorable and will bring blessings to the sufferer. The suffering must be for righteousness' sake. When a man has suffering in the flesh, has he completed ceased from sin? The answer is no, but sin no longer has dominion over his life (Rom. 5:14). We all sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), but we cease allowing sin to be on the throne of our hearts. The apostle John puts all of this in the right perspective.

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

We sin because of the frailties of the human flesh, but we do not make a practice of sin. Dr. Charles Williams gives this translation of 1 John 3:9: "No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning, because the God-given principle continues in him and so he cannot practice sinning, because he is born of God."

Chapter 104

Living For The Will Of God

The Bible almost from beginning to end stresses the need for God's people to be holy or sanctified. The words "holy," "sanctification" and "saint" come from the same Greek word. The Greek means to set apart, to be separated. Jeremiah delivered this word from God almighty:

Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord (Jer. 2:2-3).

The New Testament also stresses the absolute need for holiness among Christians.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1).

The Hebrew writer pled with his readers: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

The apostle Peter reminds his readers of the ultimate sacrifice Christ made that their sins might be forgiven.

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

These verses should encourage us to think about our reasons for being on this earth. Men and women should no longer live the rest of their time in the flesh to the lusts of men.

The word "lust" comes from the same Greek word—*epithumia*—which is rendered in other texts "desire." How do Greek scholars determine whether the word should be translated "lust" or "desire?" You, no doubt, have heard this explanation before, but it is correct. It depends on the context. Where the text speaks of honorable and worthwhile desires, the Greek is rendered "desire." For example, Paul told the Philippians: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). When the word refers to forbidden activities, the word is rendered "lust."

Peter and other New Testament writers make it very plain that we are not here to fulfill our fleshly appetites. We have a right to eat, but we are not to be gluttons. We cannot survive with drinking, but we must not destroy ourselves by drunkenness. The sexual appetite finds its legitimate fulfillment in the bonds of holy matrimony, but premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, bisexuality and incest are an abomination in God's sight. These sexual acts are not God approved for Christians or for anyone else. Paul wrote concerning these: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5).

If our sojourn here is not fulfill our fleshly appetites, then why are we here? Peter says we are to live the rest of our time on earth to the will of God. That means that you and I cannot use our time more wisely than discovering what God wants us to do and doing it. No Bible writer has said this more succinctly and more plainly than king Solomon.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this
is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring
every work into judgment, with every secret
thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil
(Eccl. 12:13-14).

Chapter 105

How The Gentiles Lived

At the time the New Testament was written, the people of the world were divided into two camps: Jews and Gentiles. The word "Gentile" (*ethnos* in the Greek) did not refer to a race or a nationality. The word simply meant nation or people and encompassed everyone who was not a Jew. There was no in-between group; you were either Jew or a Gentile. The people to whom Peter wrote his first epistle were Gentiles. These words from Peter's first epistle establish that fact. "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3)

Peter's words provide us with some insight into the unbelievably evil practices of the Gentile people, but there are numerous other scriptures which shed further light on the conduct of the Gentiles. Paul wrote as follows to the Ephesian Christians, most of whom had come from a Gentile background.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3).

Later in the same chapter, Paul wrote:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers

from the covenants of promise, having no hope,
and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11-12).

Peter wanted his Gentile readers to know they were not to live as they did before they became New Testament Christians. Many of the Gentiles—although certainly not all of them—had committed the most violent acts. They had been devoted to all kinds of sexual immorality—premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, and pederasty. All one needs to do to confirm the fact that Paul and Peter were not exaggerating the moral condition of the Gentiles is to read any reputable history of the first century. Edward Gibbon's **Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire** provides an excellent commentary on the moral values of the Gentiles at Rome. Romans one gives us God's view of how the Gentiles were behaving during the years before the gospel was preached.

One cannot read the New Testament without understanding how God had changed the hearts of Gentiles at Rome, at Corinth, at Ephesus and in other cities and communities. Paul asked the church at Corinth:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

The Christians at Corinth had wrought the will of Gentiles. But a moral revolution had occurred in the lives of many of the Gentiles. They had been grossly immoral, but they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God Almighty (1 Cor. 6:11). Do you know how the changes among the Corinthians took place? Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. "...and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). They were converted by the power of God when they believed and obeyed the gospel. That is God's way today is forgiving men's sins and making them members of the New Testament church.

Chapter 106

Lasciviousness

One mistake preachers should avoid making is arguing that modern America has more violence, more promiscuous sex and more of other kinds of immorality than at any other time in history. I am not attempting to downplay the depths of American degradation, but we must not forget the condition of the world immediately preceding the flood. The Old Testament provides this brief description. "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Neither should we forget the perverted behavior of the people of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other cities of the plains (Gen. 19). Ancient Babylon, Greece and Rome were also hotbeds of the grossest kinds of ungodliness. And how can we forget Nazi Germany, communist Russia and other nations which have majored in rebellion against God and against decency and honor?

The Gentile nations during the first century of the Christian era were characterized by every imaginable evil. Romans one, Ephesians 4 and other biblical passages allow us to look within the hearts and lives of people who were living when Jesus came into the world. The apostle Peter wrote of those who had "...wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3). All of these words deserve our examination and understanding, but I want to concentrate on the word "lasciviousness" in our brief study today.

"Lasciviousness" is translated from the Greek *aselgeia*—a word which is used only nine times in the entire New Testament. The word is always rendered either "lasciviousness" or "wantonness" or "filthy." I shall give you one example of each of these translations. Paul wrote concerning the Ephesians who had been Gentiles in the flesh: "Who being past feeling have given themselves over

unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19). The same apostle warned the Roman Christians: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying" (Rom. 13:13). The apostle Peter reminded his readers that God had delivered righteous Lot who was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7).

The Greek word rendered "lasciviousness" or "wantonness" or "filthy" means "wanton insolence that is lost in shame" (William Barclay, *NT Words*, o. 62). Dr. J. B. Lightfoot, the distinguished English scholar, says that such a man "shocks public decency" (Barclay, p. 60). The word involves unbridled lust. W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* gives the following definitions: The word "denotes excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness" (p. 640). Guy N. Woods says the word refers to outward acts—not to lusts only.

As you listened to these definitions and biblical usages, did it dawn on you that you might have been reading today's newspapers? Almost daily we read of the most abominable acts perpetrated by doctors, lawyers, preachers and other leaders in modern society. If you listen to the songs on MTV or on radio, you will discover that many in our society either practice these ungodly behaviors or endorse their practice. My friends, I am not talking about ordinary sins—if there are any such entities—but the most despicable kinds of behavior. One biblical example will have to suffice.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves (Rom. 1:21-24).

Chapter 107

Lusts

The apostle Peter used the common word for "lust" in the following verse.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (1 Pet. 4:3).

The Greek word translated "lusts" in our text appears in one form or another in the New Testament fifty-five times. The verb form of the word is rendered either to lust after or to desire, depending on the context. The noun is translated "lust," "desire" and "concupiscence." Why did the translators make this distinction in their versions of the New Testament? When the word *epithumia* referred to legitimate longings or wants, the word is rendered "desire." When the word applied to the forbidden, it is translated "lust." Our Lord used both the noun form and the verb form of the word in the following passage.

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer (Luke 22:14-15).

Paul used the word in this verse: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

Most of the time in the New Testament, both the verb and the noun are translated "lust." For example, Peter encouraged his first century readers and us not to live any longer in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2). Paul reminded the Corinthians of the ungodliness of the Israelite people. He then observed: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6). Both Peter and Paul were urging the early Christians not to live as they

had lived while they were Gentiles. The same admonitions are sorely needed by Christians in every age.

Most Christians know how easy it is for us to become entangled with the world and to allow the world to dictate our thoughts and behaviors. That was Paul's reason for saying to the Romans, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Paul admonished the Corinthians:

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

The apostle John has provided us with what one gospel preacher called "a definition of worldliness," although technically that is not correct. John does give great insight into what constitutes worldliness.

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, and 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 for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

Many of us may be tempted to think of lust as it applies only to sexual appetites. That is the meaning of the expression, "the lust of the flesh." But the "lust of the eyes" is just as much a part of worldliness as "the lust of the flesh." "The lust of the eyes" covers such sins as covetousness, extortion and greed. Lust for material possessions can just as easily destroy God's people as sexual promiscuity. And so can "the pride of life" or "the vainglory of life." How tragic when God's people are more interested in the world's estimate of them than in God's estimate of them. Did you notice that John said, "The world passes away and the lust thereof, but he who does the will of God abides for ever?"

Chapter 108

Excess Of Wine

Most of the first century churches outside Judea were composed of Gentiles. There were some Jews in most of the churches, as is evident by reading the epistles, but most of the members were from Gentile backgrounds. Many of the Gentiles had been devoted to some of the worst forms of behavior human beings could imagine. Peter wrote of those who had wrought the will of the Gentiles, "...when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3). The apostle Peter used three expressions in this verse which apply to the use of beverage alcohol—excess of wine, revellings and banquetings. I shall concentrate today on the phrase, "excess of wine."

The word translated "excess of wine" is *oinophulgiaia*. *Oinos* means wine and *phluo* means to bubble up. The word is rendered "drunkenness" in some versions. Do I have to tell you how appropriate these words are for modern America? These words from king Solomon ought to challenge the thinking of all who are devoted to strong drink or to those who approve of it.

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Prov. 23:29-35).

In view of what the scriptures say about strong drink and in view of what we know about its effects on individuals, on homes, on businesses and on society in general, how can anyone support the legalization of beverage alcohol? How can anyone participate in any activity which does so much damage to all Americans? The following statistics may be overwhelming, but they need to be mentioned. 50% of all divorces are directly related to someone's drinking beverage alcohol. At least 50% of all crimes in the United States are caused by someone's drinking. Almost 50% of highway fatalities are caused by drinking. We have no hard figures relating to child abuse and spouse abuse, but every social worker, every preacher and marriage counselor knows that alcohol contributes significantly to family violence.

Did you know that thousands of American sailors and soldiers were drunk—and the Japanese knew they would be drunk—the night the Japanese air force struck Pearl Harbor? Officers and enlisted men were so drunk they could not respond to the attack. I have stood on the memorial at Pearl Harbor and grieved over 1,500 American boys who are buried in the USS Arizona. Was strong drink the only culprit in the infamous attack against Pearl Harbor? No one believes that, but what if the men in Honolulu had all been sober the night the Japanese struck, would it have made a difference? Are men so dedicated to drinking that they endanger their own lives and the lives of many others by their devotion to a drug—and alcohol is a drug!?

Many of the Gentiles in Christ's day were unquestionably given to excess of wine. Should we not have been able to learn in two thousand years what alcohol did to the city of Rome and to other ancient cities and civilizations? Three thousand years ago king Solomon warned: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

Chapter 109

Revellings

If we think the United States is a nation of drinkers, we should remember how almost universal drinking was among the Gentiles in the first century and before. The overthrow of ancient Babylon occurred on a night when virtually everyone was drunk.

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone (Dan. 5:1-4).

That was the night the Medes and the Persians took the city of Babylon.

The apostle Peter reminded some of the early Christians that they had come from such a background. They had worked the will of the Gentiles when they walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banqueting, and abominable idolatries (1 Pet. 4:3). Three of these expressions—excess of wine, revellings and banqueting—are related to the drinking of alcoholic beverages. I shall dwell briefly on the word “revellings.”

The word rendered “revellings” is *komos* and is used only three times in the New Testament. *Komos* comes from the Greek verb *keimai* which means to lie down. W. E. Vine’s **Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** defines

the Greek to mean "carousal, the concomitant and consequence of drunkenness" (volume 3, p. 293). In the King James Version the Greek is translated "rioting" (Rom. 13:13) and "revellings" (Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 4:3).

The word was originally used of innocent "village merrymaking, but later came to be applied to rioting, drinking parties." J. Henry Thayer, the distinguished Harvard Greek scholar, says the word involves "feasts and drinking-parties which are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry" (p. 367). If you listened to these scholarly definitions and discussions of the Greek, did you see anything in these discussions which reminded you of modern America? Did you know that American college campus life is characterized by excessive drinking—that many of our young people cannot excel in their academic pursuits because of their devotion to strong drink? Some of our college young people actually drink themselves to death because there are no—or at least-very few restrictions on campus drinking.

Tragically, beverage alcohol is robbing this nation of some of its brightest minds. In 1959 Upton Sinclair wrote a very disturbing book with the title, **The Cup of Fury** (Great Neck, NY: Channel Press Inc., 1956). Sinclair points out that eleven of America's most successful and influential writers ended their lives by their own hands. All of them were heavy drinkers. Jack London drank all of his adult life. He decided he would drink "more skillfully, more discreetly than ever before." He vowed never again to be a peripatetic conflagration. Upton Sinclair makes this observation: "Thus, proudly, Jack London concluded his story. He went on with his drinking, 'more skillfully, more discreetly,' for two or three more years. And then at the age of forty he gave his last word on the subject of liquor by taking his own life" (p. 12). Can America afford the brain-drain which liquor and other drugs cause every year?

Chapter 110

Banquetings

Many years ago when Molly and I lived in another state, a friend of mine told me of having attended a Christmas banquet. Those attending the banquet included some of the city fathers, doctors, lawyers, school administrators, and prominent businessmen. Apparently everyone was drinking and having a good time—at least, they thought they were. My friend told me of one of the gynecologists in the city. He drank so much he fell out of his chair and slid down under the table where he was unable to get up and return to his chair. I knew the doctor well. He had a beautiful family, a good practice and was highly respected in the city. It was hard for me to imagine that a man so well dressed, so influential would allow himself to drink until he acted like a hog.

If you think such drinking is a purely modern phenomenon, please do some historical research. There may not have been a nation on earth where such excessive drinking was not the rule. Even among the Jews—God's own elect nation—drinking destroyed many lives and put the nation in jeopardy. The prophet Isaiah who lived about 750 years before Christ describes the drinking in the nation of Israel.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning,
that they may follow strong drink; that continue
until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp,
and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are
in their feasts: but they regard not the work of
the LORD, neither consider the operation of his
hands (Isa. 5:11-12).

Later in the same chapter, the prophet wrote:

Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine,
and men of strength to mingle strong drink:
Which justify the wicked for reward, and take
away the righteousness of the righteous from him
(Isa. 5:22-23).

The apostle Peter reminded his first century readers of their past conduct. They had worked the will of the Gentiles by walking in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (1 Pet. 4:3). Of the six words Peter used to describe the former life of the Gentiles, three of them related to strong drink which gives us some insight into the alcohol problem in the first century. Beverage alcohol was almost universally consumed in the early decades of this era. It is still widely used all over the world—especially in France, in Italy and in the United States. But it probably is not so widespread in modern times as has been in some ancient countries and civilizations.

I want us to look briefly at the word “banquetings” in 1 Peter 4:3. The Greek *potos* is used only in the text I have read to you. The word *potos* comes from the Greek *pino* and means to drink. Guy N. Woods says the word involves “drinking matches in which the parties sought to outdo each other” (Woods, p. 109). How utterly foolish that human beings will use such dangerous substances so carelessly! Do they not realize they can die from large amounts of beverage alcohol? A few years ago some young men on a university campus engaged in a drinking contest. One of the young men died from acute alcohol poisoning.

My friends, alcohol is a drug—a narcotic. It is always dangerous, but it is especially dangerous when combined with other drugs. I know a case where a young man furnished liquor and drugs to his younger sister. She drowned in her own vomit. That probably has happened hundreds and even thousands of times in the United States in the last fifty years. When are we going to learn about the destructiveness of beverage alcohol?

When the citizens of a county or city vote to legalize the sale of beverage alcohol, those who vote for it must accept some of the blame for what alcohol does to individuals, to homes and to our society.

May God help Christian people to fight against this monstrous evil. He will hold us accountable for failing to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Chapter 111

Abominable Idolatries

What would you think if a young woman propositioned you to engage in sexual acts and then informed you that she was doing it to raise money for her temple? Would you think she had lost her mind or was simply using a new trick to make money for herself? The truth of the matter is: in ancient times many temples used prostitutes to raise money for the temple treasury. For example, the temple of Aphrodite in the city of Corinth housed a thousand young women who were dedicated to harlotry. These young women would go out on the streets of Corinth and approach the thousands of sailors who regularly passed through the city. They would sell their bodies to raise money for the temple.

The New Testament writers do not speak of idolatry so often as do the Old Testament writers, but they did know about it and condemned it with great vigor. Paul gave a long list of sins which will cause men to be lost. One of these was worshipping idols (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). Paul commended the Thessalonians for turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9).

Many—if not most—of the early Gentile Christians had been converted from pagan idolatry. When the Gentiles knew God,

...they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

As a result of their turning from the true God to serve idols, they became immoral—sexually and in every other way. Men and women turned to their own sex for fulfillment

(Rom. 1:24-27).

The recipients of Peter's first letter—like most of the early Christians—had come from the Gentile nations. The vast majority of the Gentiles were idol worshippers. Peter affirmed that his readers "...have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3). The word "abominable" literally means unlawful. All idolatry from God's viewpoint is unlawful. Besides, of all the behavior of humankind, there is none more foolish, more inexcusable and destructive than idolatry. How can any intelligent man make a god of wood or stone or metal and say, "This is my god?"

Have you ever been to a country where men and women engaged in idolatry? In the early 1980's I made a missionary trip to Singapore and to Malaysia. Never before had I seen idol temples, but there are many—including the snake temple—in Malaysia. In every store in Singapore and in Malaysia one could buy his favorite god. New Testament Christians in those Southeast Asian cities are embarrassed at the crass idolatry which exists in their countries. India may have as many as a million gods. Is that one reason India is one of the most backward countries in the world?

But one does not have to have an idol sitting in the corner of a room in his home to be guilty of idolatry. Most Americans would be disturbed at the idolatry in many foreign countries, but they may be as guilty of idolatry as are our pagan neighbors. When we lay so much stress on pleasure—even legitimate pleasure—that it interferes with our service to God, have not our worldly pursuits become our god? When we strive to be rich at all costs, has not money become our god? Paul commanded the Colossians to mortify their members which were upon the earth. One of those members he had in mind was covetousness which Paul called idolatry (Col. 3:5). Whatever becomes dominant in our lives is our god—whether or not that is power, or money, or pleasure, or worldly wisdom. We must not serve idols.

Chapter 112

Are Christians Strange?

What do your friends, family members and neighbors think of your Christianity? If they are Christians or profess to be, they may regard you very highly. But if they are worldly people, they may think you are strange or more properly "weird." In a recent Gallup poll Americans were asked what kind of people they would prefer to have as neighbors.

Near the bottom of popularity, well behind Catholics, Jews, Blacks, Koreans, Hispanics, Vietnamese, Russian and unmarried couples, came the Protestant religious fundamentalists. Only members of outright religious cults were found to be more despised (David Chagall, *Surviving the Media Jungle*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996, p. 107).

Why the American people have that view of religious conservatives should not be too hard to discover. One reason has been the negative language used by the media in speaking of conservatives or evangelicals.

Does the Bible every indicate that worldly people might think of God's people as being strange or weird? The apostle Peter writes of activities in which the people of the world engage. Then he said, "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:4). Why would worldly people think Christians strange when they generally refrain from activities which would hurt them and do good works within their communities? Worldly people and devout Christians have entirely different worldview-worldviews which are incompatible.

The expression, "think it strange," comes from a Greek word which means stranger. It is not unusual for worldly people to ask Christians, "You mean you do not drink or gamble or commit adultery? What is your reason for living?"

Try as they may, worldly people do not understand the motivations and behavior of Christians. They never have and likely never will. Paul gives us some insight into Christian living when he writes: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2).

It should be of great comfort to Christians to know of men's attitudes toward their Lord and Savior as He walked among men. His mission on earth was to do good and bring men and women into fellowship with our heavenly Father. But He was maligned, beaten and crucified for His good works. People thought our Lord was strange. He was even accused of casting our demons in the name of the prince of demons. His own countrymen—and sometimes His own disciples—did not understand His purpose and goals. So Christians should not be surprised when the world does not understand us. It did not understand our Master.

If Christians would compromise their convictions and go to the same places, engage in the same activities and use the same kind of language worldly people do, we probably would not be abused and misused. But if they did that, they would cease to be Christians. Peter said that ungodly people think it strange when Christians run not with them to the same excess of riot. In other words, they want us to run with the crowd. God warned the Jews, "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).

The word "riot" comes from the Greek *asotias* and means dissolute, a person who has abandoned righteous conduct. The word is rendered "excess" in the following verse. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess" (Eph. 5:18). Jesus used the same word when He spoke of the prodigal's rebellious behavior. "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:13). Whatever the world thinks of us, our allegiance must be to God and His kingdom.

Chapter 113

Those Who Oppose Christianity Will Be Judged

I have been a Christian for more than fifty-five years. In these fifty-five years I have never seen opposition to Christianity so strong as it is today. Television, newspapers, secular universities and other groups and agencies in this nation seem to be determined to stamp out New Testament Christianity. Peggy Wehmeyer, a confessed evangelical Christian who works for ABC says, "The elite in this country—the courts, education, the media, the arts—tend to view people who take their faith very seriously...with a smug, arrogant attitude." According to David Chagall's new book, **Surviving The Media Jungle** (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), Alan Dershowitz, the famous Harvard Jewish lawyer, told a National Public Radio audience that Harvard Law School would never hire an evangelical Christian, since they would fail the "acceptable ideology" test applied to all applicants (p. 93).

If you think Alan Dershowitz might be an exception to the rule, please do some investigation on your own. The truth is, in most cases when religious people or programs are discussed on television or in the print media, they always—or almost always—are made to look very foolish. Deeply religious individuals are made to look ignorant, or uneducated, or narrow-minded, or harsh and unloving. On the other hand, homosexuals are pictured as being tolerant, compassionate, and broadminded. What message are the media sending the young people of America? Are they not telling our young people to stay away from religion? They are staying away by droves.

What will be the Lord's judgment of such people? Peter affirms that heathen people think of Christians as being strange because they do not conduct themselves as do the people of the world. Christians will not run with

them to the excess of riot. They speak evil of God's people. But those who speak evil "shall give an account to him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead" (1 Pet. 4:4-5). My friends, nobody can speak evil of God or of His people and get away with it. They will have to give an account of their behavior. What a sad day it will be when the enemies of the cross of Christ have to learn how wrong they have been in opposing truth and righteousness. They will have no excuse for their biased and immoral behavior.

Many of the people among whom I was reared were not Christians; nor did they pretend to be. But, generally speaking, they did not fight those who were Christians. In fact, many of the non-Christians had great respect for those who were committed to Christ and to His kingdom. But the media have given millions of people the wrong information about those who call themselves Christians. The media are responsible to a great degree for the persecution Christians are now experiencing.

But the tables will be turned in the day of judgment. God's faithful children will hear Him say, "You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many" (Matt. 25:21).

On the other hand, those who have opposed and persecuted shall be separated from God and from the glory of His power. Paul wrote of the enemies of the cross "...Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:18-19). The persecutors of the church will have to give an account of their behavior to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

My friends, a day of judgment is coming. Where would you like to be in that judgment: Standing with God's people or being among God's enemies? The choice is yours. I urge you to turn away from wickedness and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Take a stand today for God and for His kingdom.

Chapter 114

The Gospel Was Preached To The Dead

What will happen to human beings when this life comes to an end? Will they simply disappear into nothingness, as atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and other unbelievers teach? Will they be recycled a hundred times or a thousand times until they get it right, as reincarnationists believe? Or will they go to the judgment seat of God to be consigned either to heaven or to hell, as the New Testament says? The apostle Peter wrote of the enemies of Christianity who spoke evil of God's people. They will give an account to him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead (1 Pet. 4:4-5).

But will not those who have ignored God or rebelled against His will have a second chance after they have died and learned about God? There are some modernistic theologians who insist that is what Peter meant in the following verse.

For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit (1 Pet. 4:6).

Does this verse really teach a second chance after death?

The expression, "for this cause," refers to God's plan for judging the living and the dead. Because all men—whether living or dead—are going to be judged, then the gospel had to be preached to all men. Was the gospel preached to the dead while they were alive or after they died? The tense of the verb suggests the people heard the gospel while they were alive, but they are now dead. Who are the dead Peter had in mind? Are they the people who are now dead but who were alive when the gospel was preached unto them? The verse cannot mean that men will have another chance after they die to obey the gospel. The Hebrew writer emphatically stated: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). The very next event for all men after death is the

judgment. Paul taught the same truth to a young preacher.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:11-12).

If we have a second chance after this life, then there is no necessity of living soberly, righteously and godly in this present life.

Those who have died—whether in Christ or out—will be judged just like those who are presently living. All men from the beginning of time will be judged.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:10-11).

If there will not be a final judgment, what would be the motivation for denying oneself any pleasure, even if our pleasure hurts someone else?

The unrighteous dead are being reserved unto the day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:9). They will stand before God to give an account of their opposition to God and to His people. The righteous dead are alive and will be given their eternal home in the final day. They now live according to God in the spirit.

My friends, thinking of the final judgment ought to make us all take stock of our plans, purposes and behavior. If you fail to obey the gospel, your life will be in vain—actually worse than in vain. How can you turn your backs on the One who died for you that you might be saved eternally? Will you not today confess your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, repent of those evil deeds which have separated you from your God and render obedience to the gospel of Christ by being baptized for the remission of sins? The Lord's Great Commission says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Chapter 115

The End Of All Things Is Near

There are two events in the New Testament which are often confused—the end of the age and the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew 24 has an extensive discussion on these two events, but some theologians seem not to know these differences. The destruction of Jerusalem is outlined in the first part of the chapter. After discussing the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:34). But then Christ changed His emphasis to the end of the age. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36).

The apostle Peter mentions “the end of all things” which many writers have interpreted to mean the end of the world. Will you please listen to Peter? “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7). Was Peter speaking of the end of the age or did he have some other event in mind? If he were writing about the end of the Christian era and the second coming, he would seem to be off the mark by about 2,000 years. It is true that neither he nor any other of the apostles knew when Christ would return, but would he have said Christ’s coming was near if it were at least two thousand years in the future?

The destruction of Jerusalem probably was not more than ten years from the writing of Peter’s first epistle and it may have been nearer than that. He could say—because it was true—that “the end of all things was at hand.” The destruction of Jerusalem was such a catastrophic event the language Peter used would certainly be appropriate. The Jewish state had been in existence for almost fifteen hundred years. Its destruction could be accurately described as “the end of all things.” Of course, that kind of language could

be used in reference to the end of the world, but it does not seem to fit the context of 1 Peter.

In view of the great calamity which was to come on the Jewish state, Peter urged his readers to be sober and to watch to the end. The word "sober" in our language has come to mean the opposite of being drunk, but it did not mean that—although it included that—in New Testament times. The Greek word (*sophroneo*) literally means of a sound mind. The Bible uses that word of the man from whom Jesus had cast out many demons.

And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid (Mark 5:15).

Paul instructed Titus to exhort young men to be sober minded (Tit. 2:6).

If there has ever been a time in the history of the world when God's people need to be sober minded, it surely is today. We must learn to think, as much as is humanly possible, like Christ thinks. Paul understood the need to think like Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The only way we can do that is to read the Bible and learn how Christ thought. If we want to become like Christ, we must think as He does.

Peter also urged his readers to watch to the end. The word "watch" is not the common word in the Greek for watching. This word also stresses the need for proper thinking. The same Greek word is rendered "sober" in the following passage.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

The two words—sober and watch—should inspire us to use our time and talents wisely while we live on this earth. Even if the Lord does not come during our lifetime, we must be ready when we come to die. There is no second chance in the life to come.

Chapter 116

Fervent Love Among Christians

It would not be easy to find a word which is more misused and abused than the word "love." We often speak of loving football, of loving steak, as well as loving our family members and loving God. Does loving God fall into the same category as loving food or fishing or camping? The Greeks may have had a little less difficult task in speaking of love since the Greeks had at least four words which meant love. In today's brief discussion, I am concerned about one of these Greek words—*agape*—which has almost become an English word. The apostle Peter instructed his readers: "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

The King James is the only version with which I am acquainted which translates the Greek *agape* by the English word "charity." I understand why the translators did it, but it no longer conveys the meaning of the Greek. The English word "charity" refers to one kind of love—helping those who are in need of food, clothing, and shelter. The Greek word *agape* and the English word "love" connote a much broader meaning. Love means active good will, helping others without expecting any response. It is the kind of attitude Jesus had when he sacrificed Himself for us.

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 (2 Cor. 8:9).

As is evident from the reading of our text, love is of supreme importance. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves." The expression, "above all things," should be rendered "before all things." "Being fervent" comes from *ekteino* which means to stretch out, to expend maximum effort. Other translations of the same

word should be helpful. When Herod had imprisoned the apostle Peter, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:15). The phrase, "without ceasing," is the same Greek word we are examining. The apostle Peter had earlier written in this same letter:

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22).

The word "love" in the phrase, "love one another with a pure heart fervently," is the same word we are studying.

The tense of the verb "fervent" can be translated "keep on being fervent in your charity among yourselves." Loving our brothers and sisters is not a one time duty; we are to keep on loving them. This was one of the features of first century Christianity which impressed even the heathen people. They were amazed at how much Christians loved one another and even their enemies. Thousands of Christians went to their martyrdom with love in their hearts and on their lips for those who were persecuting them. Could that be one of the factors which influenced Paul to become a Christian? He was standing nearby when he heard Stephen, the first Christian martyr pray, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:6).

Having fervent charity among Christians, according to Peter, "shall cover a multitude of sins." The word "cover" comes from the Greek *kalupto* which means to hide. The word "reveal" comes from the Greek *apokalupto* which means to uncover, to reveal, to unveil. Genuine love-loving from a pure heart—figuratively speaking, makes up for a great number of weaknesses. Please listen to James.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jas. 5:19-20).

How very vital it is for Christians to love one another.

Chapter 117

Hospitality Without Grudging

Has hospitality in our world—even among those who profess to be Christians—become a relic of the past? When I was a boy growing up in middle Tennessee, we often had people in our home. First and foremost, we had every preacher who came to our community for a meeting in our little country home. It was not unusual for my mother to prepare a Sunday meal for twenty-five people—twelve to fifteen of whom were family members. People in our community would visit with us on Saturday nights. They would bring guitars, banjos, fiddles and mandolins and we would sing until late at night. In the past fifteen or twenty years, I have witnessed very little of that kind of fellowship. Are we too busy to be hospitable? Or have we simply lost interest in entertaining others?

When I first began preaching in the early forties, it seemed that everyone wanted me in their home for fellowship and a meal. I have been in communities where I was invited to members' homes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. That simply does not happen anymore. In recent years, I have held gospel meetings and not been invited into more than one or two homes. I am usually housed in a hotel or motel where I am able to charge my meals to the church. I prefer to stay in motels, but I miss being invited into the member's homes. I am not complaining, but we do live in a different world today.

In Bible times, there was a great need for hospitality. There were no motels or hotels and very few inns where people could rest on a long journey. They either had to stay in private homes or find a place in the woods or in a cave. Ancient Israel was commanded to look after their traveling brothers and even strangers who passed through the land. The Hebrew writer urged his readers: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). Could the writer be speaking of

Abraham who received some strangers and learned they were sent from the Lord?

The word "hospitality" does not appear often in the Bible. It is not used at all in the Old Testament and appears only one time in the New. The idea was quite common in the Old Testament, but the word was not. Will you please listen carefully to these words from the apostle Peter's first letter? "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:9). Incidentally, this was not mere suggestion; this was a command from God Almighty.

The Greek New Testament uses two words which are rendered "hospitality." One of the words means love of strangers and the other means lover of strangers. Paul used the word which means love of strangers in the following verse. "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). When Paul gave the qualifications of elders of the church, he listed "hospitality" in both 1 Timothy and in Titus. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). A bishop must not be given to filthy lucre, "...But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1:7-8).

Can you understand why Christians are to be hospitable, especially elders of the Lord's church? There are many lonely, hurting people in our world. They need someone to show an interest in their welfare. Elders ought to lead the way in providing for these needful people. But other Christians should do the same. Widows were to be cared for by the church if "they had lodged strangers" (1 Tim. 5:10). We are to provide hospitality without grudging. If we show hospitality, we are to do so without complaining about how much we are sacrificing of our time and money. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Pet. 4:9).

Chapter 118

Stewards Of The Manifold Grace Of God

Most of us are familiar with the idea of stewardship. We use it in reference to men and women who have responsibility for their money, or the lives of other people or their duties to their government. We say, for example, of some public servant: "He has exercised wise stewardship over the city's treasury." Parents are good stewards of the children God has given them when they teach them and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Stewardship requires that we seriously guard our duties, gifts, and opportunities.

The Greek from which the word "stewardship" is translated is used seven times in the Bible. Three times the word is rendered "stewardship," three times "administration" and one time "edifying." Our English word "edify" which means to build up is derived from the Greek. The Greek word translated "steward" except two times in the New Testament and is always rendered "steward" except two times when it is translated "chamberlain" and "governors." The Greek word is composed of two more Greek words, one meaning house and the other meaning law. Literally, a steward is a house manager, a slave over another slave.

The apostle Peter uses the word "steward" in the following passage: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). I do not know—because it cannot be determined from the context—the kind of gift Peter had in mind when he said, "As every man has received the gift." I know that the word "gift" is sometimes used of supernatural gifts (1 Cor. 12:4). Sometimes the word is used of ordinary gifts (Rom. 11:29). But whatever gift Peter had in mind was to be used carefully and in harmony with God's will. Whether the gift was natural or supernatural does not really matter. There were many

supernatural gifts of the early church, such as, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, miraculous healings and so on, but there were many ordinary gifts, such as, giving, exhorting, showing mercy and ministering to the needs of the sick (Rom. 12:6-8). Peter was urging the early Christians to be good stewards of whatever they had received—whether supernatural or natural. The gifts were not bestowed on the early Christians for them to hoard or to use for their own pleasure or aggrandizement. Paul raised these questions about the miraculous gifts which the Corinthians had received:

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it (1 Cor. 4:7).

How tragic that anyone would boast of any gift since we are not the ones who gave them!

Every gift—whether supernatural or natural—comes down from the Father of lights with whom is no variableness of turning (Jas. 1:17). They must be used to glorify God and to bring men and women into the kingdom of God. Peter wants all of us to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” The word “manifold” means many colored, many splendored, variegated. Peter affirms that God has blessed His people in so many ways. We are to use those blessings for honoring our God.

My friends, there are no supernatural gifts available to the church in our day, regardless of what charismatic leaders teach. All of the gifts were God-sent, but they have been removed because they achieved the purposes for which the Holy Spirit gave them. That does not mean we are at some great disadvantage. We have all we need to serve God. Whatever He has given us—natural talents, such as, teaching, preaching, helping those in need, we are to guard them carefully and use them for the growth of the Lord’s kingdom. We are wonderfully blessed by the good gifts God has bestowed upon us.

Chapter 119

The Oracles Of God

Have you ever heard someone pray as follows for the preacher of your congregation: "May the preacher speak today as the oracles of God?" Have you ever wondered what an oracle is? The English word means the medium by which a god reveals hidden knowledge or makes known the divine purpose. In ancient times, it was generally used to refer to a person who was supposed to be speaking for the gods of the heathen world. I am fairly sure the Greek ought to be translated differently in modern times. Many versions avoid the word "oracle," although the Revised Standard Version uses the word "oracle" in 1 Peter 4:11. Will you please listen to that verse?

If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.

The Old Testament uses the word "oracle"—always in the singular—and means word or speaking place. The New Testament uses the word four times and is always plural. The Greek word is *logion* and means simply word, narrative, statement. Since the word appears only four times in the New Testament, I shall read all of the passages where it is used. Stephen said to the Jews in Jerusalem: "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us" (Acts 7:38). The Jews asked Paul what advantage the Jews had enjoyed above the Gentiles? He answered, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). The writer of Hebrews severely castigated the early Christians to whom he wrote:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be

the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (Heb. 5:12).

I have already read 1 Peter 4:11 to you.

The prophets in the Old Testament said they were speaking the very words of God. Perhaps no book in the Old Testament makes that truth any plainer than that of Jeremiah. When the Lord called Jeremiah into the prophetic ministry, Jeremiah protested: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." The Lord assured Jeremiah that He would supply Jeremiah's inadequacies. "Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:6, 9). Later in this same book, the prophet wrote:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD (Jer. 7:1-2).

The apostles and other preachers in the New Testament also claimed to speak God's words to everyone who would listen. Paul had received God's Holy Spirit that he might know the things of God. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:12-13). The same apostle told the Thessalonians:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

But can men in modern times speak as the oracles of God? Can we speak the very words of God? My friends, we can if we read and know what God has revealed on any topic. What do I tell men and women to do to become Christians? I must teach only what God had revealed in His Word. When I do that, I am speaking as the oracles of God.

Chapter 120

Living To Glorify God

Have you ever taken time from your busy life to ask about the true meaning of life? Do human beings exist on this earth to get rich, to become famous, to gain a vast amount of knowledge, to experience all the worldly pleasures this life provides? Apparently millions of people worldwide have never examined what life is all about or they have reached the wrong conclusions. They are acting as if this world ends it all—that there is nothing beyond this vale of tears. But Bible believers have a different view of our purpose on this earth. Solomon wrote almost three thousand years ago:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this
is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring
every work into judgment, with every secret
thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil
(Eccl. 12:13-14).

The New Testament expresses the same truth somewhat differently. "Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). The apostle Peter wrote: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever" (1 Pet. 4:11). These three biblical passages make it very plain that we are on this earth to glorify and to praise the name of our heavenly Father. If we succeed in other endeavors but fail in this one, life will have been worse than in vain.

The word "minister" in our text from 1 Peter 4:11 simply means to serve. It is the same word Jesus used when

He said to His disciples, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The word tells us that every Christian is a minister—not just preachers or elders or deacons, although the Greek word rendered "deacon" is the same word we are examining. All Christians are to minister or to serve by the ability or strength which God supplies. We cannot do His work without His providing that strength.

Peter does not give any specific areas of service in the verse I read to you, but everyone who has read the scriptures and who is observant knows at least some areas where we are needed. Jesus does not provide an exhaustive list in the following verses, but He does give some insight into what God expects. "I was hungry and you gave me meat: I was thirsty and you gave me drink: I was a stranger and you took me in: naked and you clothed me: sick and in prison, and you visited me" (Matt. 25:35-36). Where genuine human needs exist, God's people are to work with His aid in meeting these needs. "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Our work of service in the Lord's kingdom is not designed to bring glory to us. We are not to boast of our compassion in giving to others. Instead, we are to give the glory to God. Peter encouraged us to minister as of the ability which God supplies that "God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever." Did you notice Peter's emphasis on glorify God in all things through Jesus Christ? That means we must be members of the body of Christ to be able to glorifying God through Christ. My friends, if you are not in Christ today—not in the church of the living God—will you not confess your faith in Him today and be baptized for the remission of sins?

Chapter 121

Persecution Is Not Strange For Christians

Have you ever wondered why the ungodly persecute the godly? Do they receive some kind of sadistic pleasure from seeing good people suffer for their convictions? The apostle John furnishes some insight into the attitudes and actions of evil people.

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous (1 John 3:11-12).

The history of God's people in every age has been one of bitter persecution. The Jews were despised and opposed by virtually every nation surrounding Israel: the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Amalakites, the Philistines, the Assyrians, and on and on. Even though the Israelites were in many cases not interfering with the rights and property of the heathen nations, they were still persecuted because the Jews claimed to have the God of the universe as their God. This exclusive claim to the favor of God has always brought suffering on the true children of God. It was permissible in ancient times—and is today—to have the best god, but not the only God. The Old Testament taught—and the New Testament reflects that teaching: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3).

According to the apostle Peter, true Christians should expect to be mistreated and abused. It happened to our Lord Jesus Christ, to His apostles and prophets and to many other Christians. Peter wrote: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Peter's use of the word "beloved" shows his great concern for his

brothers and sisters in Christ. He wanted to provide the information and inspiration they needed to remain faithful in the face of persecution.

The expression, "think it not strange," may be rendered, as it is in the Revised Standard Version, "Do not be surprised" or "do not be amazed." Peter used the same verb when he spoke of the ungodly conduct of the Gentiles "wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4:4). When Christians have examined the life of Christ and studied the bitter persecution directed at Him and when they have looked carefully at the many warnings in the scriptures, there should not be any surprises when we are persecuted. We know—or ought to know—that Satan works through his followers to make life difficult for God's people.

The persecutions which Christians experienced in the first century were described as "the fiery trial which is to try you." Unless you have read a book like **Foxe's Book of Martyrs**, you may not fully understand the intensity of the anger and violence aimed at the church of the living God. The Bible tells us of Herod's killing of James (Acts 12:1-2), of Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7), of Paul's being stoned and left for dead outside the city of Lystra (Acts 14:19) and of Paul's rude treatment by the Thessalonians (Acts 17:13). These are just a few examples of the many times the early Christians were abused and misused because of their devotion to New Testament Christianity.

The sufferings God's people had to endure in the early church and have had to experience through the ages are described as "tests" or "trials." Peter used similar language earlier in his epistle. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold which perishes, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7). In view of what Christians will have to suffer, it ought to be encouraging to remember these words from the Lord Himself: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Chapter 122

Partakers Of Christ's Sufferings

If Jesus Christ had come into our world preaching what modern theologians call "positive sermons," would the world have opposed Him so strongly? Would there have been any reason for His enemies to put Him to death? One modern preacher says He never mentions sin because Jesus did not. Admittedly, Jesus did not use the word "sin" so often as Paul or John, but He certainly did speak of sin—both generically and specifically. From the viewpoint of Christ's opponents, Christ brought persecution and death on Himself. He constantly confronted the Pharisees and others for their disobedience to God's law and their disrespect for that which was holy.

Our Lord was accused of casting our demons in the name of the prince of demons (Matt. 12:24). Jesus probably was not too troubled when the Jews called Him a Samaritan, but they meant their name for Him to be the ultimate degradation (John 8:48). I know Jesus was the Son of God and fully understood the hearts of those who made Him suffer, but it still had to be degrading and disappointing for the one who came to give His life a ransom for the whole world (Matt. 20:28). One never grows accustomed to being beaten, to being driven out of town, to being spat upon and cursed and ridiculed. Jesus had to endure all of this and more.

But what about Christ's modern followers? Should we expect to suffer for the name of Christ? When we do not if we do—what should be our attitude and reaction? Will you please listen to what Peter said on this topic? "But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:13). How in the world can one rejoice when his family is being mistreated, when his goods are being confiscated, when he is driven from his home,

incarcerated and threatened with death? Did Peter really mean that we Christians are to rejoice—that we are to be glad with exceeding joy?

Frankly, I do not know anyone who gets any joy or fulfillment from being mistreated. I do not like for my fellowmen to make fun of me because I am a Christian or to threaten me for being faithful to my God. But if I suffer for the name of our Lord, I am to glorify God in that name (1 Pet. 4:16). When we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are to rejoice because we are "partakers of Christ's sufferings." The word "partaker" is one form of the word rendered "fellowship." I am sharing in Christ's sufferings. The word "partaker" means to have something in common. What a great honor and privilege to have something in common with our Savior who died for my sins! This does not mean that our suffering has any atoning value. It simply means we are living close to the Lord and sharing in the heartaches and humiliations which He experienced.

My friends, if this life ends it all—if there is no world to come—suffering for any reason would make absolutely no sense. Why not, as Paul said, eat and drink for tomorrow we die (1 Cor. 15:32)? The apostle Paul asked, "If after the manner of men I have fought with the beasts of Ephesus, what advantage is it to me, if the dead rise not" (1 Cor. 15:32)? Paul was almost certainly not speaking of literally wild beasts, but of enemies of the cross who opposed his preaching and endangered his life. When we remain faithful in the face of bitter opposition, we shall be wonderfully blessed when Christ's glory shall be revealed. If we die because of our faith and faithfulness, we know we have a home with God for eternity. What a day of rejoicing it will be when we arrive in our eternal home and come face to face with the one who purchased our salvation. The sufferings will all be over when we arrive on that beautiful shore.

Chapter 123

Being Reproached For The Name Of Christ

Many of the leaders in America's news media seem to take delight in ridiculing those who have strong religious convictions—whether the people whom they ridicule are fundamentalist Protestants or conservative Roman Catholics or Evangelicals. Since the majority of the leaders in the media have very liberal moral views, they seem to get their kicks from showing how inconsistent conservative religious people are. When a Jim Bakker or a Jimmy Swaggart or an Oral Roberts has done something foolish—at least, from the media's viewpoint—the news people have a heyday for weeks or even months. I am not attempting to defend foolish behavior on anyone's part—not even on mine—but it does bother me when the news sources make fun of anyone. They do not lampoon homosexuals, but they have no reluctance to criticize those who are strongly committed to any religious group.

The apostle Peter encouraged all who would be persecuted by these words:

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified (1 Pet. 4:14).

The word "if" in the Greek is called the condition of the first class. Peter was not presenting a hypothetical case. He was describing what had happened to God's people through the ages and what would happen to them in the future. God's faithful children have always been opposed by the devil's followers. Peter wanted the early Christians and us to know that the same would continue in the Christian era.

The word "reproached" is an interesting one. The literal meaning is to cast into one's teeth. The word is used in its literal sense in this passage. "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same into his teeth" (Matt.

27: 44). The word is almost always used in a figurative sense. James wrote, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him" (Jas. 1:5). The same word is used in Matthew 11 where Christ severely criticized the cities where He had done many of His mighty works. "Then Jesus began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not" (Matt. 11:20).

Peter knew and we should know about the bitter opposition God's people almost always have to face from the world. He tells us that we should be happy—not because Christians enjoy suffering—but because it is an honor to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. The word "happy" is not a good translation of the Greek. It should be rendered "fortunate" or "blessed." This is the same Greek word translated "blessed" in the beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12). The truth is, we might not be happy that men revile and attack us, but we are fortunate or blessed when it occurs.

When we are faithful in the face of persecution, the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. The idea of the spirit's resting on us conveys the thought that we are given rest or we are refreshed. The apostle Peter was consciously quoting from the prophet Isaiah who wrote:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isa. 11:1-2).

The King James Version adds: "On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." This part of the verse does not appear in most modern translations because some of the best manuscripts omit it. I do not know if it should be in the sacred text, but the thought unquestionably appears in Peter's first epistle. The enemies of the cross cause Jesus Christ to be ridiculed, but God's people bring glory and honor to His name.

Chapter 124

Suffering For Wrong Doing

As I prepare this brief study on "Suffering for Doing Wrong," the second O. J. Simpson trial is in progress. As almost everyone in the world knows, O. J. Simpson was declared to be innocent in the killing of his wife Nicole and Ron Goldman. I am not going to express an opinion as to O. J.'s guilt, but if he is guilty and is shown to be guilty in the civil trial, he would have no basis for saying, "I am being persecuted because I am black or famous or rich." When men and women are evil and are punished for it, there is no glory in their being patient and non-complaining in their suffering. They are simply reaping what they have sown.

If we are reproached for the name of Christ, we can consider ourselves very fortunate or blessed. "But," Peter says, "let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Pet. 4:15). The apostle Peter makes no attempt in this verse to list all the sins men may commit. He is giving just a few to illustrate the point he is emphasizing: There is no glory in suffering for wrong doing, regardless of the attitude of the sufferer.

Peter admonished: "Let none of you suffer as a murderer." The literal Greek reads: "Do not get in the habit of suffering for wrong doing." Christians will have to suffer for the name of Christ, but they must avoid suffering for lying or stealing or killing.

The first of the sins Peter mentioned is "murder." Incidentally, from a scriptural viewpoint, not all killing is murder. When the state has a legitimate reason to put a criminal to death, such as, when he has killed another, that is not murder. But I do need to ask you some questions about murder. When a physician like Jack Kavorkian assists another in killing himself, is that murder? When a couple

like Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson kill their newborn son and dump his body in the trash, is that murder? If they had had the baby aborted ten hours before he was born, would that have been murder? These are questions we cannot escape if we wish to be considered a civilized nation.

Peter next mentions a thief. The Greek word is *kleptes* from which we get our English word "kleptomaniac." Most of us know what the word "thief" means, but we do need to do some thinking about its ramifications. When a government burdens its people with taxes so great the average person has difficulty making a living for his family, is the government a thief? When the United States wastes hundreds of billions of our money, is our government a thief? President Grover Cleveland accused governments of being extortioners when they take too much money in taxes. These are his words:

When more of the people's sustenance is exacted through the form of taxation than is necessary to meet the just obligations of Government and expenses of its economical administration, such exaction becomes ruthless extortion and a violation of the fundamental principles of a free government (Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, p. 689).

Peter used the word "evildoer," but he does not specify the evil he had in mind. All kinds of evil as defined by the will of God are forbidden. He next used the word "busybody." In the Greek that is a fascinating word. It comes from two Greek words: one meaning another and one meaning inspector or overseer. That is a graphic way of saying that some people inspect others' behavior when they have no right to do it. I am aware of the difficulty of deciding when we are busybodies and when we become our brothers' keepers. I must be concerned about my brother's welfare, but I must not stick my nose into affairs where it does not belong. If we suffer for these activities, we cannot plead that we are suffering for righteousness' sake.

Chapter 125

Suffering Because We Are Christians

The laws of God and the laws of our land were designed to punish the evildoer. The apostle Peter commanded Christians to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. Civil government was ordained of God "for the punishment of evildoers" (1 Pet. 2:14). Paul affirmed that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise of the same" (Rom. 13:3). When we commit crimes against humanity and are punished for them, we cannot pretend we are suffering for righteousness' sake.

Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Peter 4:15-16).

Throughout the ages, countless thousands of men and women have been persecuted and even killed because they were Christians. They were often not accused of any other crime—just the crime of being a New Testament Christian. Christians in ancient Rome did not generally rebel against the oppressive Roman government, but they would not bow down to the Roman Caesars as if they were gods. The early Christians were accused of being atheists because they would not and could not worship the Roman gods. They were persecuted because they were thought to be cannibals. They spoke of eating the Lord's body and drinking His blood. The Romans did not bother to discover what the early Christians believed. They killed them just because they were Christians.

The history of our country—at least, until the last generation—was entirely different from most other countries of the world. Most Americans honored the name "Christian," though millions were not Christians and did

not pretend to be. But tolerance toward Christians—especially those who are identified as being fundamentalist or evangelical or conservative—has changed to intolerance and even to persecution. Our national media now speak of Christians as if they have some kind of conspiracy to overthrow the government and establish a theocracy. I know there have been some very foolish statements made by some radio and television evangelists, but the average man who calls himself a Christian is not a part of a plot to overthrow the government. Because of leaders like David Koresh and Jim Jones, Christianity has gotten a bum rap from the media.

Movies—whether made for television or for Theaters—often portray evangelists as greedy crooks—as modern Elmer Gantry. Are there such evangelists? Obviously, there are and always have been. The Bible does say that Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Pet. 2:15). But let me turn the question around for our media critics. Are all television anchor people and all reporters always honorable? Have they ever been known to give a particular spin on a story to make themselves appear to be great? Are they always honest with their sources? Sam Donaldson from ABC is probably the most prejudiced person toward conservatives—whether religious, political or economic—I have heard on television. His attacks against Christianity have been without foundation and very biased.

If a man suffers for evil-doing, there is no glory to that. But if he suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed. The Greek of this verse can be rendered either “stop being ashamed” or “do not get in the habit of being ashamed.” It would be very difficult in some quarters not to be ashamed in view of the attack on Christians. But we are to glorify God in that name. The reason we are to glorify God in the name Christian is because it reflects our commitment to Jesus Christ. It shows that we are His followers.

Chapter 126

The Name Christian

Did you know that the word "Christian" appears only three times in the entire New Testament? The idea of becoming a Christian and of being a faithful Christian is very prominent in the New Testament, but the name is used only three times. The book of Acts speaks of the missionary work which was planned for Paul and Barnabas and then adds: "And when we had found him (that is, Saul of Tarsus), he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:25-26). The next appearance of the word was in connection with Paul's sermon to king Agrippa. Paul asked, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe." "Then king Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost you persuade me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28).

Oddly enough, some who claim to be Christians argue that the name was given in derision. But that really is a strange interpretation of the biblical data. The great statesman prophet of the Old Testament predicted:

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name (Isa. 62:1-2).

What new name other than "Christian" is applied to God's people under the new covenant? Isaiah insisted that the new name would be given by the mouth of the Lord. The Greek word translated "were called" in Acts 11:26 is *chrematizo* and means divinely applied. It is so used every

time in the New Testament, unless Acts 11:26 is an exception. "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Who called them Christians? My friends, it was God almighty who chose that name for His people under the new covenant.

If the name "Christian" were given in derision, would the Lord have chosen that name for His people? The name means a follower of Christ. Is that not what Christians are supposed to be? Peter wrote, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in that name." Incidentally, the prepositional phrase—"in his name"—is rendered "on this behalf" in the King James. Although there is no fundamental difference between these translations, the King James Version does not seem to be the best rendering.

My friends, let me ask you a question of considerable importance. If we are to glorify God in the name Christian, why do men feel an obligation to add some other word to that name? Is not the name "Christian" adequate? Do you remember the tragic division which existed at Corinth? Some of the Corinthians were saying, "I belong to Paul; and I belong to Apollos; and I believe to Cephas (or Peter); and I belong to Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul asked three penetrating questions. "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Cor. 1:13)? What is the significance of the question, "Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" It means that we should wear the name of the one in whose name we were baptized? Peter commanded the Jews on Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Those baptized on Pentecost wore the name of Christ—not the name of the ones who baptized them. Is that the pattern we ought to follow in our day? Is there ever any justification for calling ourselves by any other name than that of the one who died for us and in whose name we were baptized? I urge you to think about these matters and to act accordingly.

Chapter 127

Judgment Must Begin At The House Of God

In one's study of the judgment he must be careful not to conclude that every time the word "judgment" appears it means the final judgment. There will be a final judgment, as Paul makes plain in these words:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

But the word "judgment" may also refer to some temporal judgment. I believe that is true of the following passage.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God (1 Pet. 4:17)?

The language of this verse appears to be relatively simple, but what judgment did Peter have in mind? Could the judgment to which Peter refers be the suffering which the early Christians were already experiencing? As we know from reading other passages, suffering has a sifting effect. The wheat is saved, but the chaff is blown away. Paul wrote: "But when we are judged, we are chastened (or disciplined) of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

Judgment, Peter says, "must begin at the house of God." Because God loves His own and wants them to be saved at the end of the age, He begins His judgment with them. There is no Christian so perfect that he does not need the kind of cleansing which comes from the Lord's discipline. The Hebrew writer reminded us:

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, do not despise the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him: for whom the

Lord loves he disciplines, and scourges every one whom he receives (Heb. 12:5-6).

Judgment in this sense is not for punishing, but for strengthening and stabilizing.

The term "house of God" means in the New Testament era the church of the living God or the family of God. Paul wrote to Timothy that he might know how to behave himself in the "house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The scriptures use a number of different figures to give us greater insight into the nature of the Lord's church. For example, the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23); it is the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). All of these metaphors are meaningful and all were designed to further our understanding of the church. The family figure is especially meaningful for all who love their families. The scriptures tell us that God is our Father, Jesus Christ our elder brother and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We should love the family of God and look forward to the inheritance God has prepared for His faithful children.

"If judgment first begin at us, what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel?" The judgment of which Peter speaks had already begun; that eliminates the final judgment. There is great similarity between the language of this verse and that of Matthew 24:1-28. The impending destruction of Jerusalem would fit the message in this verse. Peter's question was: What shall be the destiny of those not obeying the gospel? If God's faithful servants are judged—and they are on a regular basis—what about the disobedient? Are they not judged here and also in the final day?

Christian people would have great difficulty surviving. Others would not escape. These words from Matthew 24:22 seem to harmonize with what I am reading to you from 1 Peter 4:17. "And except those days be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

May God help His children to so live that they can be faithful regardless of the persecution we have to endure so that we may receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10)!

Chapter 128

Are The Righteous Scarcely Saved?

A major event in the history of God's people—both to Jews and Christians—was the destruction of Jerusalem. A careful reading of the gospel records—particularly Matthew 24:1-35—will show how unspeakably horrible the destruction was. Josephus and other historians record much of the same material found in the Bible. The event brought to an end the nation of Israel. It seems Peter had the destruction of Jerusalem in mind when he wrote:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Pet. 4:17-18).

Is the apostle Peter arguing that God's people going to be saved "by the skin of their teeth," to use Job's expression (Job 19:20)? If that is the message of 1 Peter 1:19, what does the apostle mean when he writes:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:10-11)?

Could Peter have in mind some event other than the final salvation of God's faithful children? Are we going to be scarcely saved?

The word rendered "scarcely" literally means "with great difficulty." Another example of the word's use appears in Acts 27:15. Luke writes "And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work [literally, we were able with great difficulty] to get the boat." Paul used the same word in the following passage. "For scarcely

for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die" (Rom. 5:7).

Jesus warned His disciples of the difficulty they would experience in escaping the destruction of Jerusalem. He wrote: "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. 24:22). The Jews did not listen to our Lord's warnings about the impending destruction of Jerusalem. So when the Romans finally marched against the city and obliterated it, the Jews died by the multitudes. But the Christians who listened to Christ were able to flee Jerusalem and save themselves. None of the Christians died in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Christians scarcely escaped with their lives. Peter's question was, "Where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" Those who were ungodly did not listen to Christ paid with their lives when the Roman army wreaked havoc in the holy city. The two nouns—"ungodly" and "sinner" are modified by one article. The expression could read: "Where shall the ungodly man who is a sinner appear?" Peter was not writing of two kinds of unrighteous people.

The word "ungodly" means without reverence or respect, impious. This is the person who has no reverence in the presence of God almighty and who pays no attention—or very little attention—to what God has revealed in His word. The Greek is always translated "ungodly." Jude said that the Lord is coming with ten thousands of His saints, "to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 15).

The word "sinner" refers to one who has missed the mark. In the biblical sense, the sinner is one who has fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). The ungodly sinner would not escape the destruction of Jerusalem because he would not listen to the prophecies which Christ had given.

Chapter 129

Committing Our Souls To God

During the early centuries of the church's existence, ungodly persecutors of the church directed the most gruesome oppression and malevolence against God's people one can imagine. Christians were torn from their families and communities and exiled to deserted islands and deserts. They were thrown into lion's dens to be mutilated and devoured by wild animals. Thousands and thousands were burned at the stake. Some were beheaded because of their faith in Jesus Christ. In the midst of such vicious hatred and bigotry, what were God's people to do? Peter gave this encouragement:

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19).

It ought to be obvious from this reading and from other passages in 1 Peter that not all suffering is according to the will of God.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:14-16).

Suffering according to the will of God means that one is being persecuted and abused because he is a faithful child of the living God. Of course, suffering for wrongdoing is a reproach to the name of our blessed Savior.

How can we endure the kind of suffering the early church members experienced? How can we face tomorrow knowing we might lose our property or our families or our

lives? The apostle Peter provides the answer. "Let them... commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." The word "commit" comes from the Greek *paratithemi*. It is a banking figure and means to deposit. When you take your money to the bank and deposit it, you expect the bank to take care of it and have available for you when you need it. In a similar fashion, we commit our souls to God almighty for safe keeping. We know He will provide for us—both in this life and in the life to come. The tense of the verb Peter used may be rendered: "Keep on committing your souls to God in well doing."

Paul used this same banking figure in his letters to a young preacher. "This charge I commit unto you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that you by them might war a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18). "And the things which you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Tragically, when we commit our money or other property to others, they may let us down. When we ask for our money back, there may not be any. But God has never yet disappointed anyone. Inspired writers often affirm: "God is faithful." You can always depend on Him.

We must not deceive ourselves by believing that however we live God will take care of us and give us life eternal. We must commit our souls to Him in well doing. Will He keep us if we are guilty of evil doing? If He will keep us in spite of our behavior, then the language of our text is meaningless. Jesus said to the church at Smyrna: "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). If we are not faithful unto death, will we receive the crown of life anyway?

My friends, we know God is our faithful Creator, always doing what He says He will do. We must obey the gospel and live for Him each day in order to be saved eternally.

Chapter 130

Elders

Whom has God ordained to be the rulers and protectors of His flock—the church of the living God? Is it scriptural for churches to have presidents or chief executive officers or bishops—as distinguished from elders—pastors, stewards, and on and on? Did you know that the New Testament authorizes elders to lead and shepherd God’s people under the new covenant? Deacons, preachers and other members have vital roles in the kingdom, but they are not to rule the church. They supply supporting roles for the elders.

The term “elder” was used somewhat differently in the Old Testament than it is in the New, although the two are closely related. Elders in the Old Testament were older men who supposedly had the wisdom and experience to provide guidance and support for the Israelite people. Sometimes the word “elder” in the Old Testament refers to the older people in the community and not to anyone of official status. The following passage seems to mean more than just the older men in the nation.

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads (Josh. 7:6).

Ezra mentions the counsel of princes and elders (Ezra 10:8). I suspect Ezra is referring to men of stature and leadership among the Israelites.

The New Testament epistles almost always use the term in an official sense, that is, referring to elders of the church whom the Lord has ordained to shepherd, rule and guide the flock of God. That elders under the new covenant are more than just older men can be seen in Paul’s work in Asia Minor. He traveled throughout that region of the country encouraging and strengthening the body of Christ.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). The apostle Paul left Titus in Crete so that he could set in order the things which were lacking and "ordain elders in every city," as Paul had appointed him to do (Tit. 1:5). If elders were simply older men, they would not need appointing to that position. They would grow into it.

According to Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, elders of the church were to meet certain qualifications, which would not be necessary if they were just older men. I shall now dwell at length on the qualifications of elders, but I do want to read a few verses from Paul's first letter to Timothy.

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Incidentally, the words "elder" and "bishop" are used interchangeably in the New Testament. One example will have to suffice today. Paul called the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. He said to them, "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:17,28). The word "overseers" is *episcopoi*, elsewhere rendered "bishops." Elders are the God-ordained leaders in the Lord's church. What an enormous responsibility these men have.

Chapter 131

The Elders Among You

Virtually every denominational group in the world has departed from the simple New Testament plan for church government. One group has dozens and dozens of different offices and positions—from the international head to local leaders. So far as I have been able to learn that church has no elders, at least, none who bears that name. Other churches have national and international ecclesiastical structures which have no similarity to the simple plan revealed in the New Testament. Even some churches of Christ have attempted to extend their authority beyond the cities or communities where they are located. For example, a church in Boston has had—and still may have—control over churches throughout the United States and even in foreign countries. My friends, therein scriptural warrant for such corruption of the divine plan.

I am aware that elders were appointed in every city (Tit. 1:5), but the book of Acts makes it plain that elders were to rule over one congregation—not two or three or more. “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). The apostle Peter wrote to “the elders which are among you” (1 Pet. 5:1). That verse shows that elders were in one church and were to lead that one church.

If you know much about human behavior and the problems and challenges any local congregation faces, you know that elders cannot lead, supervise and guide people outside their area. Elders living in Boston cannot possibly oversee the work of the church in San Diego or in Chicago. They cannot even know the sheep of the flock they are supposed to be protecting and guiding. I know that some churches have preachers or shepherds under the those in power, but there is no biblical justification for it. In fact, it

is a direct violation of the simple pattern of church government.

Can you not see the danger of having elders in one city ruling over a church in another city or in another country? If the supervising church becomes unfaithful, there is a great possibility that its satellite churches will also become unfaithful. If the church in Boston tells its dependent churches what to do, they will feel under obligation to do it. That is not the way the Lord wants His church to operate. Each church is responsible to God and not to another church or another set of elders.

Every faithful congregation will work at developing elders in the church. That means we must have educational programs designed to equip men for the enormous task of shepherding the flock. I am not saying that a church cannot operate scripturally without elders, but churches do much better if they have qualified elders. Good elders are not always easy to find. That is the reason the church must have a program of teaching young men to live in such a way as to become qualified to be elders.

One of the greatest blessings which can come to any local church is to have dedicated, concerned and skilled elders. During my more than fifty years of preaching, I have worked in congregations which did not have elders because they did not have anyone qualified. But the work of the preacher and of all other members is so much more pleasant and more effective when the church has good elders.

I would like to honor today all the good elders who are listening to this program. You are doing some of the greatest work in the world. Your work for the Lord may not always be understood or appreciated, but it is vital to the mission of the church and even to its survival. May our heavenly Father bless every faithful elder. May He raise up many like you.

Chapter 132

Peter: Apostle, Elder And Eyewitness (No. 1)

Few men in the history of the world have been more remarkable than a man called Peter. At times in his life he was weak, vacillating, compromising and rebellious. After all, he did deny the Son of God. He had the courage on occasion to speak when the other apostles remained quiet. He did speak sometimes when he should have been listening. When Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration and were talking among themselves about the Lord's imminent death, Peter became very excited and said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles: one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The inspired writer added: He did not know what he said (Luke 9:33).

He was the apostle whom the Lord Himself chose to preach the first gospel sermon ever preached (Acts 2). He also preached the second recorded sermon (Acts 3). God selected the apostle Peter to announce the good news about salvation to the Gentile people (Acts 10 & 11). The first half of Acts of the Apostles is devoted to the work of the apostle Peter. I thrill to read many of his inspired statements in the book of Acts. Let me give you some examples. When Peter and John had healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews wanted to know what power or by what name they had done the miracle.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the

stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12).

After the healing of the lame man, the Jews became jealous and angry and put Peter in prison. Before too long, they allowed him to go free and charged him not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus. Of course, they were wasting their breath by forbidding him to preach anyone in the name of Jesus. Within a very short time, the Jewish authorities learned that Peter was back on the streets preaching Jesus Christ. They arrested him again and asked him if they had not told him not to preach anymore. Peter responded somewhat as follows: "You men may decide for me not to preach, but I am operating under a higher authority." His very words were: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). These words have given great courage to many of God's spokesmen through the ages.

But if you think Peter had learned his lessons about obeying the will of God, let me remind you of an incident which occurred in Antioch of Syria. The church had been established among the Gentiles at Antioch and apparently was growing in numbers and in spiritual attainment. Peter visited the Gentiles at Antioch and was eating a common meal with them, as Christian brothers are supposed to do. When some brothers from Jerusalem visited Antioch, Peter was embarrassed to be seen with the Gentiles. He got up from the table and walked away. Paul was very upset that an apostle and Christian would be so prejudiced. Paul accused Peter of being a hypocrite and rebuked him to the face because he was to be blamed. Tragically, Peter's hypocrisy led others including Barnabas to become hypocrites too (Gal. 2:11-14).

But in spite of Peter's weaknesses, he was one of the most influential men who ever lived. I take great courage when I read and study the life of a man whom Jesus called "Cephas"—the Rock.

Chapter 133

Peter: Apostle, Elder And Eyewitness (No. 2)

The apostle Peter identified himself with three terms: apostle, elder and eyewitness. In his first epistle, he told the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed (1 Pet. 5:1).

All of these terms are significant in understanding the work of the apostle. In addition to the three terms I have mentioned, Peter would be a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.

The word "apostle" comes from the Greek *apostolos* which means one who is sent. Peter occupied that exalted office from the time the Lord began His personal ministry until the time of His death. There were times when he did not bring much honor to the office of an apostle, but when he finally realized the nature of his work, he became one of the great preachers of all time. He was prominent in every phase of the Lord's work so long as he lived.

It is interesting that the apostles were just ordinary men like us. They were to superspiritual. They came from an undistinguished background and made grievous blunders in their personal lives. But through the influence of their Lord and ours, they have had an impact on our world which cannot be measured until the judgment. Their work in the kingdom of God continues to live 2,000 years after they went to meet their reward. These great men serve as examples for preachers and other church leaders in every generation.

Peter served as an elder, although that really is all we know about his position. We are not told where he served

or how long. He said he was fellow elder, literally an elder along with other elders. Incidentally, if anyone doubts that Peter was married, this fact ought to strengthen that truth. An elder, according to the divine prescription, has to be a married man (1 Tim. 3:2). Besides, the apostle Peter had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14). It is not easy to have a mother-in-law without having a wife. Very seldom does a person go out and adopt a mother-in-law.

Peter calls himself "a witness of the sufferings of Christ." Peter was present on many occasions when the Jews and others attacked Christ for His preaching and His righteous living. How much did Peter learn as he watched out Lord suffer for righteousness' sake? Frankly, I cannot tell you that, but I know his faith was weak during the last few months of our Lord's earthly pilgrimage. When Peter was accused of being one of Christ's disciples, he vigorously denied it. Apparently, he did not want to go to the cross and die with Jesus, even though he had vowed he would do it. Not only was Peter a witness to our Lord's sufferings, but he also was present when Jesus was transfigured. He writes of that incident in his second epistle.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Pet. 1:16).

It is significant that the word "witness" is *martus* from which we get our English word "martyr."

Because of Peter's faithfulness and commitment, he had the promise of enjoying the blessings God has in store for His children. Peter said that he was a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. The word "partaker" is *koinonos* and means sharer, partner, companion. It is one form of the word translated "fellowship." Peter had been assured of the home which awaited him when his life's journey was over. That same home has been prepared for all who believe in the gospel and obey it from the heart. We, too, shall be partakers of the glory which will be revealed or unveiled. Are you prepared to receive what God has in store for you?

Chapter 134

Feed The Flock Of God

There is no work in the world more crucial to the growth and effectiveness of the Lord's kingdom than that of being an elder in the Lord's church. I am not attempting to minimize the work of preachers, of deacons or of other church members, but their work depends to a great extent on how well the elders do their work. Churches with weak elders are likely to be led into apostasy, as has happened both in the first century and in the centuries which have followed. Apostasy could be stopped early if the elders realized their enormous responsibilities. All elders in the Lord's church need to realize that they will have to give an account for the members in the day of judgment (Heb. 13:17).

Peter identified himself with elders in the Lord's church and exhorted them to fulfill their duties. The word "exhort" means to urge, to admonish, to encourage. Peter's exhortations included feeding the flock of God which is among you (that is, the members of the local congregations). The word "feed" comes from the Greek *poimante* and means to shepherd. In the English language, we seldom use the word "shepherd" as a verb, but that was the way Peter used the word. So did the apostle Paul in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Our Lord used the word "feed" or "shepherd" three times in His discussion with the apostle Peter. After the apostles and Jesus had eaten together, our Lord singled out Peter and asked him, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" Peter answered, "You know that I love you." Jesus instructed him very tersely. "Feed my lambs." Two more times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Each

time Peter answered in the affirmative. Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Incidentally, when Peter exhorted the elders, "Feed the flock of God which is among you," He limited their responsibilities and authority to their own congregations. They could not shepherd a flock ten thousand miles away or even one hundred miles away.

What is involved in tending or shepherding the flock? The truth is, the people of Palestine had such a broad knowledge of sheep and flocks that Jesus and the apostles did not have to explain to them as He would have in modern America. The responsibilities of shepherds can be outlined in a few statements. Shepherds had the task of leading their flocks into green pastures. Is that not what David said about God's shepherding His people?

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psa. 23:2-3).

The good shepherd makes sure his sheep are well fed and watered. Are not elders in the Lord's church to see that all members are fed spiritual food? Are members being fed in most churches in our day?

Elders must make sure that wolves are kept from the flock. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves and to the flock.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Jesus gave the same warning to all Christians—not just to elders. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15).

Elders cannot afford to be careless. They will allow wolves to steal the sheep.

Chapter 135

Elders Are To Oversee The Church

All organizations—whether businesses or schools or governments or churches—must have someone to oversee the work of that group. When the women's movement began in the 1960's, the women decided that their organizations should not have a hierarchical structure because that had been men's way of oppressing women. Apparently, everyone was to have equal say in their meetings. You can guess what happened without my having to tell you. They were not getting to first base. They were simply falling apart. So, they changed their strategy and began to organize like male-dominated groups. I know that was embarrassing to have to admit that maybe men had something going all the time.

Organizations which have no supervisors or overseers or guides cannot last long and cannot do much while they do last. Even the animals have been endowed with much sense. There is usually a dominant male in every herd of deer or antelope. On the lake where we live, it is easy to watch the leaders among the geese. Somebody has to provide leadership or nothing much will be accomplished. That leadership in the Lord's church is to be provided by the elders of the church.

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, 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 is among you, taking the oversight thereof... (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

The expression, "taking the oversight," comes from one form of the word rendered "bishop." The Revised Standard Version translates the first part of 1 Peter 5:2 as follows: "Tend the flock of God which is your charge." What is involved in "exercising oversight" of a congregation? A supervisor or an overseer in a factory or

in some other kind of business has the duty of finding work for all employees and then seeing to it that they do the work. If the overseer is negligent in his work, the workers will not likely get much done. There is a great need among churches in our day for good elders—men who will encourage every member of the body of Christ to do His work.

It has been my observation that very few church members are doing any visiting or any teaching of the lost. Even where there are committed elders, it is not easy to get members involved in the church's work. They can always find excuses for not visiting or teaching. But, generally speaking, if elders set the example of doing the work of the Lord, members are going to follow. Peter encouraged elders to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:4). The Hebrew writer exhorted members of the church:

Remember them which have the rule over you,
who have spoken unto you the word of God:
whose faith follow, considering the end of their
conversation (Heb. 13:7).

It has never been effective for anyone to say to those who follow: "Do as I say—not as I do." Elders must visit those in need, teach the lost and be faithful in other duties if they want the members to live right.

It probably has always been true that some in the church want to take the reins of leadership away from God-appointed elders. The church has always had a few men of the character of Diotrephes. Do you remember what the apostle John wrote about him? "He loves to have the preeminence among men" (3 John 9). When such a man attempts to disrupt the unity of the church and usurp the authority of elders, he must be stopped. Elders cannot afford to dilly-dally around until he has developed a following. They need to stop such arrogance by the time it gets started. There is more to overseeing the flock, but these are some of the duties incumbent on elders of the Lord's church.

Let us pray for the elders of the church and work to develop more elders for the future.

Chapter 136

Desiring The Office Of A Bishop

Careful students of the scriptures know about the importance of appointing elders in every church (Acts 14:23). In our zeal to have elders in every church, we sometime use some unwise practices. We push to have elders even when there is no one qualified for the office. Churches can be scripturally organized without elders, as is evident from reading the New Testament. But they cannot be scripturally organized with unscriptural elders. Sometimes churches have good men—men who otherwise would be qualified—but who have no desire to serve as elders. It is not unusual for churches to pressure those men to accept the responsibility of the eldership. That is a mistake, as we shall see in our brief study today.

One of the qualifications of the eldership is that the men accepting the office must desire to be elders. Tragically, some men desire the work but are not otherwise qualified. Paul wrote: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). Unless the man has a desire for the work, he should not be pressured into taking it. Peter commanded the elders in Asia Minor:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind (1 Pet. 5:2).

Peter lists two sets of expressions which deserve our careful study: "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." The word "constraint" means not forcing it. This word is used only here in the New Testament. But a verb form of the word is used nine times in the New Testament and is rendered "constrained" (Matt. 14:22) and "compelled" (Acts 26:11). The work of an elder is so time-consuming and burdensome that it should never

be forced on anyone. Instead, it should be accepted willingly. "Willingly" is the opposite of "constraint." Scripturally speaking, no work should be forced on anyone—whether elder or not.

The second set of expressions is: "not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind." "Filthy lucre" is an archaic expression meaning base gain. The New American Standard Bible translates the Greek "sordid gain." The Revised Standard Version renders it "shameful gain." Since elders generally are not paid for their service, why would Peter speak of money in this context? In our day—and true to some extent in Peter's day—churches can handle large sums of money. I know churches whose annual budgets run into the millions of dollars. If a man is greedy, he may be tempted to use some of the money for his own benefit. It has happened, as everyone in my audience knows. There have been cases where church leaders—not necessarily elders—have misused large sums of money—sometimes into the millions of dollars.

Elders are not to take the position for money's sake, but of a ready mind. The word in the Greek is not an adjective but an adverb. They should accept the work "readily" or "with eagerness" (NASB). In other words, they should take the work because they are in love with the Lord and want to see His kingdom grow—both numerically and spiritually. Elders of the Lord's church should be good students of the word, diligent in their concern for the members of the church and willing to spend whatever times necessary to do their work effectively. Being an elder often takes time away from one's work and family. It is often a thankless responsibility. But it pays rich dividends. How desperately the church in our generation needs good elders! I hope and pray that the young men in the church will make an effort to qualify themselves for this awesome task.

Chapter 137

Elders Are Not Lords But Examples

Sometimes leaders—whether in the government or in education or in religion—think of themselves as being little gods or even big gods. They act—to use Job’s words—as if they are “the people, and wisdom will die” with them (Job 12:2). Such leaders are obnoxious and do great harm to whatever cause they espouse. 3 John describes such a leader—probably self-appointed leader.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

How arrogant that any man would set himself up as a dictator in the Lord’s church. Diotrephes would not even receive John—an apostle of Jesus Christ.

A number of years ago the elders of a church I know decided to let the preacher go. Whether or not they had good reasons, I do not know. I am not trying to second-guess an eldership. But when the members asked the elders why they had fired the preacher, one of the elders replied: “That is none of your business.” As a result of such answers, that church lost about 25-30% of its members. Granted, elders have the responsibility of hiring and firing preachers, but they must keep the members informed about those decisions which affect the whole church.

Peter urged elders to feed the church of God which was among them, taking the oversight thereof, “not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). The expression, “being lords,” means exercising lordship. The Revised Standard Version renders the term, “not domineering.” The mother

of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with a request that one of her sons sit on the Lord's right hand and one on His left hand when He established His kingdom. Jesus explained that she did not know what she was asking. He called James and John to 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 (Matt. 20:20-29).

How desperate all leaders need to learn the lesson Jesus taught on this occasion!

Elders must not act like potentates. They are to be examples unto the flock. Does that mean they have no authority except example? Such a conclusion has no support in scripture. Of course, elders are to be examples, but they have authority to shepherd, to rule, to oversee and to warn. There is absolutely no question about the elders having authority—even though the word rendered "authority" (*exousias*) is never used of elders. But their authority means very little if the elders are not examples to the members of the body of Christ.

If elders encourage the members to be diligent in their attendance, then elders must set the example. How foolish and hypocritical it would be for elders to urge regular attendance for the members and they themselves were not diligent! If elders desire that members study their Bibles, give as they have been prospered, visit the sick and reach out to the lost, elders ought to be devoted to these activities. The Hebrew writer said, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17). A part of their watching for our souls involves their being examples of what they teach.

Chapter 138

Do Elders Have Any Authority?

Sometimes when preachers think they may be fired, they suddenly decide that elders have no authority to fire them. They even preach sermons and write articles denying that elders have authority. One man sought to justify his position by saying that the Greek word rendered "authority" (*exousias*) is never used of elders in the Lord's church. And what, dear friends, is that supposed to prove? The Greek word translated "authority" is never used of husbands or of parents. Do husbands and parents have no authority? That, as any rebuttable scholar will tell you, is arguing from silence. Do elders have authority other than just being examples to the flock? Incidentally, if elders have no authority to fire a preacher, they had none to him; so he really has no position. Would preachers be willing to abide by that fact?

I am aware that some of the words which are applied to elders do not necessarily imply that elders have authority. The word "elder" need not suggest authority. But what about "bishop," "overseer," "pastor," "shepherd" and "steward?" Our English words "bishop" and "overseer" are both from the Greek *episcopos*. How can a man oversee if he has no authority for such responsibilities? If a man were appointed an overseer of a manufacturing plant but was given no authority, he would be totally ineffective. No plant owner has that little judgment. The words "pastor" and "shepherd" come from the Greek *poimen*. "Shepherd" is a better rendering of the Greek. Does a shepherd have any authority for feeding and protecting the sheep? The word "steward" means a servant over other servants. He is the ruler of the house, but he rules at the pleasure of the owner. Elders are not lords over God's heritage, but they rule in Christ's stead.

The duties of elders as outlined in Acts 20:28-32 and

1 Peter 5:1-3 unquestionably demonstrate that elders have authority—not all authority—but enough authority to carry out their responsibilities. Paul pled with the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (or bishops). The expression, “take heed,” means to hold your mind on. The elders were to hold their minds on themselves so that they might be examples to the flock; but they were also to hold their minds on their fellow church members. The elders were charged to “feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.” The word “feed” means to shepherd. I have already pointed out that a shepherd had to have the authority to feed, to protect and to care for the sheep. Paul warned the elders of grievous wolves which would enter the flock and of men arising from their own ranks to drawn away disciples after them. They had to have some authority for fulfilling these obligations.

The apostle Peter repeats many of the same thoughts I have just read to you from Acts 20. Both Paul and Peter knew that elders could not do their work without some authority—the authority which God Himself had bestowed upon them. Tragically, some elders have acted like dictators which may have led some to deny that elders have any authority. But misuse and abuse of authority does not destroy the authority which God has given. There are husbands and fathers who act as if they are little gods. But that does not take away from the scriptural teaching about husbands and fathers.

Elders of the Lord’s church are to be men of integrity and of compassion. They are to treat the members as they would want to be treated. They should consult with members of the church on any problem which arises and about the future plans of the church. If they do not, they can lose the support of the members. Wise leaders know their followers and respect them and strive to lead them in the right way.

Chapter 139

The Chief Shepherd

One of the major themes—both in the Old Testament and in the New—is shepherding. In fact, one of the best known and most loved passages in the Old Testament begins,

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psa. 23:1-3).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the word “shepherd” twenty-four times—most of which have nothing to do with actual shepherds. They were referring to kings, prophets, priests and military leaders when they spoke of the shepherds of God's people. One verse from Ezekiel should prove to be enlightening.

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks (Ezek. 34:2)?

The word “shepherd” does not appear very often in the New Testament. When it does appear, it often refers to actual shepherds. But Jesus thought that word was appropriate in outlining His work among the sons of men.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep (John 10:11-12).

The apostle Peter consciously quotes from Isaiah 53:6 and applies it to Jesus Christ. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

Elders of the Lord's church are called shepherds (Eph. 4:11). The King James Version renders the Greek "pastors," as do most other versions, but the Greek word is *poimen* which means shepherd. If the word had been translated "shepherd," it might have helped to avoid some of the confusion surrounding the word "pastor." Peter uses the verb form of the word when he tells the elders of the church to "feed the flock of God which is among you" (1 Pet. 5:2). Paul used the same language in Acts 20:28.

Shepherds of the local church have grave responsibilities and the authority necessary to achieve the work God has chosen them to do. But they are not lords over God's heritage. They are stewards who operate under the absolute authority of Jesus Christ, the king over God's kingdom, the church of the living God. Please take careful note how Peter describes Jesus. "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). Since Jesus is the "chief Shepherd," elders of the Lord's church are "under-shepherds," that is, they work under His instructions and will. They are not law-makers, but they do have the duty of helping the sheep, figuratively, walk in the way of the chief Shepherd.

Those elders who follow the Lord's will for them will be blessed abundantly when the Lord appears. Sometimes elders are maligned and criticized, but if they are faithful under all circumstances, they "shall receive the crown of glory which fades not away." If such a promise does not stimulate elders to be the kind of men God wants them to be and the kind of leaders local congregations need, I would not know what it would take. The expression, "crown of glory," means a crown composed of glory. That crown will not fade; it will not wither.

My elder friend, may I encourage you to provide good leadership to the church? It may be a very difficult work, but the Lord has called you into that office. He will bless you if you are faithful in His service.

Chapter 140

Duties Of Members To Elders

Elders of the Lord's church have very grave responsibilities to the members of the church. They are to watch for the souls of the members, "as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief." For that would be unprofitable for the members (Heb. 13:17). Elders have the duty of ruling over the church and being an example to the flock (Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). They must shepherd the flock which includes warning of wolves who would destroy the flock (1 Pet. 5:2). As you can see from these duties, being an elder entails very serious work in the Lord's kingdom. That work, like marriage, must not be entered into lightly.

But what duties do members have toward elders? The truth of the matter: For every duty an elder has, members have reciprocal duties. If elders are to be examples, members are to follow their examples (Heb. 13:7). If elders have the duty of warning the flock of grievous wolves, we have the obligation of listening to their warnings. Peter admonished the members of the church:

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).

As the elders are to be faithful in discharging their duties to the members, so members are to submit to the elders. Both younger and elder are plural nouns. Is he saying that young people should submit to older people or is he saying that members must submit to the elders of the church? I am aware of the differences among scholars over these questions. Dr. A. T. Robertson, the distinguished American Greek scholar, thinks Peter was speaking of older people in general and not to the elders of the church. That certainly is a possibility, but I believe it is not the meaning

of the text. Why would Peter switch from discussing elders in an official sense to older people? Dr. Robertson admits that 1 Peter 5:1-4 specifically refers to elders—not just to older people. But he thinks Peter changed the topic in verse 5. I have serious doubts about this.

Of this we can be sure—whichever interpretation is correct: Members of the body of Christ are to submit to the elders of the church. The Hebrew writer says very plainly: “Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Heb. 13:17). The word “obey” comes from the Greek word which means to persuade. The word may indicate obedience as a result of legitimate persuasion. But is that not true of all obedience? The word “submit” literally means to array under or to arrange under. There really is not a great amount of difference between the words “obey” and “submit.” Both verbs suggest the duties of members to listen to and respect the decisions of elders.

But what if you disagree with the decisions of the elders? You must discuss your differences with them. If the differences are over matters of opinion, such as, how a meeting house is to be constructed, the final judgment of the elders must prevail. On the other hand, if the disagreements are doctrinal, they must be submitted to the word of God. If you believe the elders are teaching and practicing error and you cannot persuade them to accept the truth, you may have to search for another congregation. But that should be done only after you have prayed about it and done all within your power to change their doctrinal stance.

It is a very serious matter to spread or to receive rumors about the elders of the Lord’s church. Paul told Timothy: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). To rebel against scripturally qualified elders will bring the curse of God on our heads. Let us work with our elders and continually pray for them. Good elders need and deserve and want our love and support.

Chapter 141

Does The Bible Teach Mutual Submission?

Have you ever heard the term, "mutual submission," applied to the husband-wife relationship and to all other human relationships? Patricia Gundry's book, **Heirs Together: Mutual Submission in Marriage** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), asserts that "mutual submission was a *principle* given to guide relationships of *all* believers" (p. 95). She argues that Ephesians 5:22 is not a command to wives to submit, but is a "call to self volitional submission of all believers" (p. 95). Gundry thinks that Ephesians 5:21 and 1 Peter 5:5 teach "mutual submission." I shall read both passages. "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Do these passages actually teach "mutual submission?"

The word "submit" in Ephesians 5:21 and the expression "be subject to" in 1 Peter 5:5 are translated from the same Greek word. The Greek *hupotasso* means to rank or to arrange or to array under. With that definition in mind, does it make sense to speak of "mutual submission?" You probably have been told from the pulpit and in Bible classes that every word must be studied in its context. For a very brief time, let us examine the context of Ephesians 5:21 which reads: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

My responsibility, dear friends, is not to support the politically correct position of the Women's Liberation Movement, but to discover what the inspired writer is teaching. Paul's first example of what submitting one to another means is given in verse 22. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." If

Patricia Gundry were correct, why did not Paul say, "And, you, husbands, submit yourselves to your wives?" If Paul were teaching mutual submission, he could have made that idea so plain no one could have missed it. But he never one time—not in Ephesians or in Colossians or in Titus or elsewhere—instructs husbands to be in subjection to their wives. He had ample opportunity to do so, but never does. He commands husbands to love their wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25), but He never tells them to be in subjection to their wives.

In this same context Paul advised children: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3). Do you see one hint in these verses that God intended for the parent-child relationship to be one of mutual submission? Would it make sense if Paul had supported such unreasonableness? Again, parents are to love and respect their children. They are to do the very best for them they possibly can. But following the feminist foolishness about mutual submission would result in confusion and chaos. Tragically, some parents have submitted to their children to everyone's disadvantage and heartaches.

Paul commanded:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing (Eph. 5:22-24).

If Paul is teaching mutual submission in this passage, why does he not instruct Christ to be in subjection to the church?

The meaning of being subject one to another is very simple. There is no one who does not have to submit to someone: members to elders, wives to husbands, children to parents, citizens to government. We must submit as God has ordained—whatever the relationship.

Chapter 142

Be Clothed With Humility

Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the most influential philosophers who ever lived, although the average man may not have read one word from him. He was the philosopher who paved the way for the destructiveness of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in Germany. He believed in what we call "power ethics," that is, might makes right. He was opposed to Christian morality, the God of the Bible and to Christ Himself. In his book, *Ecce Homo* (which means "behold the man"), Nietzsche called Christian morality "the most malignant form of all falsehood." He thought it was "poisonous, decadent, weakening. It produces nincompoops, not men." Nietzsche thought that meekness, gentleness and humility were signs of weakness.

In contrast to Nietzsche's unchristian and anti-Christian morality, the New Testament exalts humility and vigorously condemns haughtiness. Peter encouraged the early Christians: "...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). Before we analyze this text, I want to read some other passages dealing with humility. The prophet Micah asked,

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul (Mic. 6:6-7).

The prophet provides God's answer to all of those penetrating questions. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8).

James adds: "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jas. 4:6, 10).

Peter urged the early Christians to "be clothed with humility." The Greek word rendered "be clothed" is an interesting one. It literally refers to the knot of a girdle. It referred to the white scarf or apron worn by a slave. It is possible Peter was thinking of the apron Jesus wore when He washed His disciple's feet. Whether or not Peter was consciously thinking of our Lord's act of humility and service when He girded Himself with an apron, we have no way of knowing, but what greater act of humility can be found in all of God's Word, except one which I shall mention in just a moment? After our Lord had shown His willingness to serve, He added, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

The single greatest act of humility is explained in these words. "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." And what happens when one humbles himself in the sight of Almighty God? "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" (Phil. 2:5-11).

Humility may not be a virtue which modern Americans honor, but it is absolutely essential if one is going to be exalted. Christians cannot act as if they are super-spiritual and have the blessings of God our heavenly Father.

Chapter 143

God Resists The Proud

The modern emphasis on self-esteem has led to a generation which exhibits pride and haughtiness. Such an attitude is the very antithesis of what Christ taught His disciples and which He Himself demonstrated, as can be seen in the feet washing episode in John 13. If you want to know the Lord's attitude toward pride, please listen to these verses from Isaiah. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2:11). "And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled" (Isa. 5:15). No book of the Bible has so much to say about pride as does the book of Proverbs. One example will have to suffice today. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

The apostle Peter affirms very plainly: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:6). The Greek word translated "resists" (*antitasso*) means to array or arrange against. James uses the same Greek word in the following verse: "But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). When Paul preached to the Jews in the city of Corinth, the Corinthians "opposed themselves and blasphemed" (Acts 18:6). The word "opposed" is the same Greek word rendered "resists."

When men decide they know more than they do or are better than they are, they are in for being brought low. What better example could I give you than that of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon at the time the Jews were carried into exile? Nebuchadnezzar had built a mighty army in Babylon. He had constructed one of the most magnificent gardens in the history of the world—"the hanging gardens of Babylon"—in honor of his wife who had been reared in a rural setting. Apparently he wanted to make her feel at

home. Tragically, Nebuchadnezzar thought he had accomplished all those marvels on his own. The king said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty" (Dan. 4:30)? How can a sinful mortal make that kind of boast? Did he not realize that by himself he was nothing? Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way that one cannot boast his goodness to the high heavens.

While Nebuchadnezzar was boasting of his great works, a voice fell from heaven, saying,

O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will (Dan. 4:31-32).

The king of mighty Babylon was driven into the fields like a cow. "His hair was grown like the eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws" (Dan. 4:34). How tragic that so many of us have to learn our lessons about pride in such an ignoble fashion!

Oddly enough, many of the Corinthian Christians took pride in the spiritual gifts which God had bestowed upon them. The Corinthians had not earned them; they did not deserve them. And yet they acted as if they were worthy of such great blessings. Paul asked them,

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it (1 Cor. 4:7)?

How can those who love God and His word ever be so proud as were the Corinthians? After all, Paul says that love "vaunts not itself, is not puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4). The apostle Paul warned the Galatians: "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal. 6:3).

Chapter 144

God Gives Grace To The Humble

If any human being needs a reason to be humble, he should dwell on the vast differences between his own weaknesses and sins in contrast to the power and holiness of God Almighty. Paul writes, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Paul prayed that the Lord would remove his thorn in the flesh. God did not remove the thorn, but he did assure Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul commented on the Lord's response to his prayers: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:7, 9). When one meditates on the goodness, power and perfection of God, he can understand why Peter would write: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5).

Does God refuse to give grace to the proud? Actually, in one sense God gives grace to every human being. If He did not, the wicked would simply perish from the face of the earth. Theologians use the term, "common grace," to depict the gracious provisions which God had bestowed on all men. Jesus does not use the term, "common grace," in His Sermon on the Mount, but He does speak of God's taking care of all men. God "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). No person could survive for one minute without God's grace.

But Peter has more in mind when he writes of God's giving grace to the humble. He is speaking of the grace which brings salvation—the grace which enables us to endure the trials and temptations which come into our lives. The tense of the verb in this verse is significant. The Lord keeps on giving grace. James discusses the same truths I have read to you from 1 Peter 5:5. "But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace

to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). When one takes the verbs into consideration, that verse could be translated, "God keeps on giving more grace. Wherefore he says, God keeps on resisting the proud and continuously gives grace to the humble."

Peter charged his readers: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6). The verb "humble" is passive voice and should be rendered "be humbled." Since God keeps on giving grace to the humble, we are to keep on being humbled under the mighty hand of God. With the modern emphasis on self-esteem, it may be difficult for human beings to be humble. But we are deceiving ourselves when we treat ourselves as if we were gods. The apostle Paul warned the Romans:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

No kind of behavior seems more disgusting to God Almighty than haughtiness. It is a slap in the face of God.

Paul writes of the humiliation of Christ.

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 (Phil. 2:8-9).

Christians are urged to follow our Lord's example of humility. Jesus Christ urged His followers not to accept titles which exalted them above other men.

Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matt. 23:10-12).

If you want to be exalted in the very presence of God, then you should humble yourself under His mighty hand while you live on this earth.

Chapter 145

Casting All Your Care Upon Him

Do you have a tendency to worry about conditions or situations in your life, such as, your business affairs, the sickness of a family member or of a friend, or the moral and spiritual condition of the world? Have you ever accomplished anything worthwhile by worrying? I am not being hypocritical of those who worry because I have done my share of it, too. But the scriptures speak very explicitly about the uselessness and sinfulness of worrying. Peter commanded his readers: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

The word "casting" is a participle which means to throw upon, like throwing clothes on a colt (Luke 19:35). The literal rendering of the verb is "having thrown upon him." When worries, anxieties and tensions come into our lives, we are to cast them on the Lord and leave them with Him. The word "care" means worry or anxiety. Both Jesus and Paul had much to say about worry. The verb, "take no thought," in the King James means do not worry or do not be anxious. Jesus said,

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:25, 31, 33-34).

The apostle Paul gives us this assurance: "The Lord is at hand." Then he adds:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:5-7).

When we are tempted to worry, we must take our concerns to Christ in prayer. If we do not, we cannot know the peace which passes understanding. Or to quote the words from Peter which I have already read to you: "Casting all your care upon him: for he cares for you." He wants to take care of you if you will give him the opportunity. But if you take all the responsibility on your own shoulders, you are not going to be successful and you will be miserable in the process.

The second word "care" in our text—"casting all your care on him; for he cares for you"—is a different word altogether. The verse would be better rendered in modern English: "Casting all your worries on him; for with him there is a care." God does care what happens to you and will provide for your needs. Let us return briefly to Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things (Matt. 6:28-30, 32).

I want to ask you a question as our lesson comes to a close: Do you know that worry can keep us from being as effective in God's service as we ought to be? In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus spoke of the thorns which choke out the seed to prevent its being productive. He identifies the thorns as the "cares, riches and pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). Let us place our trust in God because He cares for us.

Chapter 146

Be Sober

Every serious Bible student knows how strongly the New Testament writers condemned drunkenness and drunkards. Paul had seen drunkards in various cities where he had preached the gospel. He pleads with the Roman Christians: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in strife and envying" (Rom. 13:13). The same apostle lists drunkenness among the "lusts of the flesh" and then comments: "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). The church at Corinth was commanded to withdraw from idolaters, railers, and drunkards (1 Cor. 5:11).

God's people are not to be drunkards, but are to be sober. The word "sober" means more than refraining from strong drink, although it certainly means that. The apostle Peter demanded of Christians:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

The word "sober" in this context is from the Greek *nepho*. Arndt & Gingrich says the word involves being "free from every form of mental and spiritual 'drunkenness.' It entails freedom from excess, passion, rashness and confusion. It connotes being well-balanced, self-controlled" (p. 538). W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says the Greek signifies "to be free from the influence of intoxicants; but in the New Testament is used metaphorically and implies watchfulness."

A few examples of the use of the verb should help us to understand what Peter had in mind when he commanded Christians, "be sober." In the following verses from 1 Thessalonians the word is translated "be sober." "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). "But let us, who are of the day, be sober,

putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). In both of these passages, the Greek "be sober," is used figuratively. But how can a person be sober metaphorically if he is not sober physically? What a great tragedy that otherwise intelligent and capable men and women destroy their ability to reason, to serve their fellowmen and their God by filling their stomachs with that which takes away their brains, to quote from Shakespeare!

The apostle Peter uses the word *nepho* three times in his first epistle. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). I have already read to you 1 Peter 5:8. These verses encourage all of us to be awake to the dangers and heartaches we face in this life. There is so much to be done, such a short time to do it and so few workers in the Lord's vineyard. We cannot afford to squander our time, our resources and our minds. We have a sacred obligation to be sober and watchful at all times.

Through the ages, there have been hundreds of examples of leaders—both political and religious—who have used poor judgment and have brought sorrow and troubles to their followers. Sometimes they are arrogant and hard-headed and fail to use their minds to discern the will of God. Churches in the first century, such as, Ephesus and Laodicea, failed to be sober and watchful and fell into apostasy. The Lord accused the Ephesians of having lost their first love (Rev. 2:4). The Laodiceans apparently were so self-satisfied that they were not watchful for the dangers they faced.

I plead with all of us—both as individuals and as leaders—to keep our eyes open—to use our senses to discern good and evil and to follow the good.

Chapter 147

Be Watchful

We human beings so often become indifferent to our blessings and opportunities or so blinded that we fail to take seriously the Bible's instructions about watching. If man thinks he is secure and nothing he does will in anyway affect his eternal salvation, there is not much motivation for being alert. If he is so enamoured by the world's glitter, there is little likelihood of his understanding what his duty to God and to his fellowmen is. The inspired writers constantly harped on the need to be watchful. Peter wrote: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The Greek words from which "be sober" and "be vigilant" are translated can both be rendered "watch." But I shall dwell on the second expression, "be vigilant."

The term, "be vigilant," comes from the Greek *gregoreo* and means watch. The King James Version always renders the word "watch," except in 1 Thessalonians 6:10 where it is translated "wake." Some versions render the word "be alert." Other appearances of the word in the New Testament should help us to understand the word better. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders: "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Our Lord cautioned the church at Sardis: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God" (Rev. 3:2).

It should help us all to survey the reasons why so many Bible writers encourage Christians to watch. The New Testament continually emphasizes the need to be alert to the Lord's second coming. It does not give any hints as to the time of His second coming, but it warns us to be ready.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the

goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up (Matt. 24:42-43).

Warnings about the Lord's return are found throughout the New Testament. We dare not ignore the warnings to watch.

Christians must watch for the devil's attempts to lead us into sin. Jesus took Peter and the sons of Zebedee with Him to Gethsemane and asked them to wait there while He went to pray. He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death: tarry here, and watch with me." When He had prayed and come back to where the apostles were, He found them asleep. He asked, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:36-41). Do you not think Christ's charge to the apostles is just as applicable today as it was then: "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation?" Is not our flesh still weak? Lord, help us to keep our guard up against Satan lest he lead us into soul-condemning error.

Christians have an obligation to watch for opportunities to serve our God by meeting the needs of our fellowmen. Paul and James do not use the word "watch" in the following verses, but who can doubt they understood the significance of the word in these contexts? "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27).

Lord, give us eyes that we may see and ears that we may hear. Help us to look for the opportunities which thou has given us and to seek wisdom and guidance in living according to thy will.

Chapter 148

Your Adversary The Devil

Sometimes modernistic preachers ridicule simple New Testament Christians' belief in the devil. They may even ask, "Did Jesus believe in the devil?" The answer to the question is a simply NO. He did not believe in the devil; He knew of the devil's existence and of his demonic designs on the entire human race. In our Lord's Parable of the Sower, He spoke of the seed which fell by the wayside. It was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it (Luke 8:5). He explained the meaning of the seed which fell on the wayside soil and was devoured by the fowls. "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Jesus angered the Jews when He said to them, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Peter warned the early Christians: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The word "devil" comes from the Greek *diabolos* and means accuser or slanderer. The book of Revelation was given directly by the Lord Himself to John the apostle. Jesus used the word "devil" in the book of Revelation five times and the word "Satan" (*Satanas*) eight times. Will you please listen to these words:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the

accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night (Rev. 12:9-10).

Peter calls the devil our adversary. The word "adversary" means an opponent in a lawsuit. This word should give us considerable insight into the nature of the devil and of his intentions for fallen men. Some of his deceptive practices and demonic designs can be understood by a simple reading of the book of Job.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land (Job 1:6-10).

Satan failed to lure Job into his kingdom, but he tried diligently to turn him away from God.

My friends, the devil is just as real today as he was in the days of Job or of Jesus Christ. He has been curtailed in what he can do to God's children, but you can rest assured he is alive and well on planet earth, to quote the title to one of Hal Lindsey's books. He is your enemy if you are committed to walking in the way of the Lord. He is your enemy whatever you do or fail to do, but he pretends to be your friend if you are God's enemy. Contrary to what liberal theologians believe and teach, the devil was not an invention of ancient prophets and preachers. He lives today, but eventually he will be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone where he will remain forever and ever. Then he will not be able to deceive God's people and lead them into hell.

Chapter 149

The Devil Seeks To Devour

Did you know there are thousands of young people in the United States and perhaps thousands throughout the world who claim to be Satan worshippers? There is even a damnable organization called "the Church of Satan." Anton LaVey is its founder and high priest. He is also the author of **The Satanic Bible**. There are other satanic cults in our country and other nations. All of them are extremely dangerous. One of the cults called Santeria killed Mark Kilroy, a medical student in Texas. Mark Kilroy and some of his buddies visited in Mexico where the Santeria religion was operating. Hundreds of other young people are mutilated and killed every year in this country. Incidentally, many of the so-called "Satanists," including Anton LaVey, do not really believe in a literal devil. They just use the devil as an excuse for their perverted lifestyle. Do you suppose Satan is happy with such groups? If you know the character of Satan as revealed in the Bible, you know the answer to that question.

The apostle Peter urged his readers:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

Do you ever get tired of working in the Lord's vineyard and decide the price for serving God is too high? The prophet Jeremiah became discouraged and decided to quit preaching, but God's word was in the prophet's heart and he could not cease doing the work of the Lord (Jer. 20:9). There is one fact you can know for sure: The devil never gets discouraged and never quits his destructive work. Peter says the devil is like a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour.

If the devil walks about like a roaring lion, why are we not able to discern immediately who he is and what his

purposes are? My friends, the devil does not roar as he walks about. The word "roaring" tells us what a lion is—he is a roaring lion. If he walked about roaring, he would run people away. He does not roar until he has us in his clutches. In every case, we can tell who the devil is and what he wants to accomplish, but so often what he wants is what we want. We fall under his spell because we want to—not because he is irresistible. We could kick him out of our lives, but are attracted to his schemes—often fatally attracted.

The devil walks about, Peter says. The verb "walks about" or "goes about" is present active indicative and means he is constantly on the go to seize the unwary. The word "seeking" is a present active participle and involves continual action. The verse could be translated: "The devil continually walks about, constantly seeking whom he may devour." He never takes time for rest or for a holiday. If only God's people were as committed to their duties! We could win an unbelieving world to Jesus Christ. But we often become lazy or tired or indifferent. The devil takes advantage of that fact and millions of souls are lost for eternity.

Please do not believe Christians are at a disadvantage in their fight against the devil. We have the God of the universe on our side—if we believe in His Son and obey His gospel. The apostle John assures us: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The apostle Paul asked:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:35-37).

We cannot lose if we are on the Lord's side.

Chapter 150

Resist The Devil

Do you remember how Flip Wilson used to say very flippantly, "The devil made me do it?" The tendency of human beings to shift the blame for their misdeeds to others seem to be almost universal. When Eve sinned against God by eating of the forbidden fruit, she tried to excuse her behavior by saying to the Lord, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:13). Adam, on the other hand, placed the blame on Eve. "The woman whom thou gavest me to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). The Lord did not accept such excuses then and He does not accept them now. When we sin, we alone are responsible. We cannot blame the devil, even though he uses every means at his disposal to lead us into sin. We cannot blame God. We need to have the courage of king David: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psa. 51:3).

Satan's purpose with respect to human beings is to "devour" them (1 Pet. 5:8). The expression, "may devour," comes from the Greek *katapino* which literally means to drink down, to gulp down, to swallow up. The word gives plain evidence of the devil's schemes and plans. He has so many ways of deceiving people.

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light (2 Cor.11:13-14).

We must study the scriptures to know how the devil operates and then pray to God for guidance in overcoming him (2 Cor. 2:11).

But can we win in our battle with the devil? On our own strength, we cannot. But with God's help we can win the victory. Peter pleads with all Christians in all ages: "Whom (that is, the devil) resist stedfast in the faith,

knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:9). The word "resist" is a military term which means to take a stand against. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). "Stedfast" means to be firm. It is an adjective which connotes a firm foundation. Our stedfastness must be based on the faith revealed in the word of God. The term, "the faith," is equivalent to the gospel.

The early Christians may have been tempted to think they alone were being abused and misused. They may have thought the devil had singled them out for special oppression. Peter says the same afflictions are accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. The word "afflictions" means sufferings. The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek, "the same experience of suffering." There has seldom been a time or a place where the righteous have not suffered for their convictions. Even in the first century, the members of the body of Christ scattered throughout the world were having to suffer for their faith. That fact may not have been much comfort to the ones to whom Peter wrote, but it let them know they were not alone.

I have a question with which I would like to close our brief study today. How do we resist the devil? We have to get prepared for doing battle with him. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11). We have to know those wiles or methods. Paul did not want Satan to take advantage of the Corinthians: "for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). If we do not know how the devil operates, how are we going to resist him? Finally, we need to pray every day that we may not be led astray from the right way. "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). If we are on the Lord's side, we shall overcome.

Chapter 151

May The God Of All Grace Make You Perfect

When a preacher has worked with a local congregation for a number of years, he usually expresses concern for the welfare when he has to move to other works or he has to retire. Often in Paul's writings or in his speeches, he wanted his brothers and sisters in Christ to know of his love for them. Paul told the Ephesian elders:

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27).

Paul closed his 2 Corinthian letter with these words:

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all (2 Cor. 13:11, 14).

Peter concludes his first letter to the Christians in Asia Minor with these comforting words: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet. 5:10). Each of these expressions deserves our close attention. Think of the significance of the term, "the God of all grace." "Grace" means the unmerited or unearned favor of God. Who but God Almighty can supply the grace without which no man could be saved from his sins and have the promise of eternal life? God assured Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." (2 Cor. 12:9).

The expression, "after you have suffered a while," indicates that these early Christians were not going to escape

persecution. Earlier in this same epistle, Peter had warned the early Christians: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). But the good part is that our sufferings are not eternal. When we reach the other side, there will be no more pain or death or sorrow or crying: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Peter prays that God will make his readers "perfect." The word "perfect" does not mean sinlessness. It means mending that which is broken. The word was used of the nets (Matt. 4:21). Paul pled with the Corinthians to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). In Galatians 6:1, the word is used of restoring a brother who has been overtaken by a fault (Gal. 6:1).

The perfection Peter had in mind involved establishing every child of God in the faith. The Greek *sterizo* means "fixed" (Luke 6:26), "strengthen" (Rev. 3:2). The word "strengthen" has a meaning very similar to the word "establish." I do not know how to make a distinction between these two words. Peter probably uses these synonymous words to build a strong case for the members being faithful and steadfast unto the end. The temptations, trials and heartaches were many, but they could with God's help remain faithful.

The word "settle" comes from a Greek word meaning to found. The noun form of the word is usually rendered "foundation." For example, Paul wrote, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Paul used the word in his prayer for the Ephesians:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;
that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May
be able to comprehend with all saints what is the
breadth, and length, and depth, and height (Eph.
3:17-18).

May God help us all to be strong in His service.

Chapter 152

To God Belong Glory And Dominion

One is made to wonder as he observes many religious activities in our country if we are seeking to entertain rather than to worship and to glorify our God. Many modern hymns—if they can be called that—speak of man's desires, activities and longings rather than praising God and exalting His name. Many sermons seem to be designed to excite, to please and to entertain rather than to bring honor to our God and to explain His word. Why can we not take note of how the Bible approaches our God and Father? Paul wrote as follows to the Romans: "O the depth and the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33)! He concludes his great letter: "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever" (Rom. 16:27).

The apostle Peter wrote extensively in his first epistle about the persecution God's faithful people will experience. He gave wonderful words of encouragement to those who suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. He wanted Christians in every age to know of the support God's people can expect in this life and the hope of eternal life. In the very first chapter he wrote,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

As Peter brought his inspired and inspiring book to a close, he sought to exalt the God of this universe. "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 5:11). Peter touches on a topic which ought to be very

meaningful to every child of God. Our purpose on this earth is to praise, to glorify, to honor and exalt our Father in heaven. Paul expressed that truth in his first letter to the Corinthians. "Whether therefore you eat, or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). We do not exist to find ourselves—as so many modern people say—but to know God and to honor Him by obeying His will. King Belshazzar of Babylon had committed the same grievous mistake being made by many people in our day—including some religious leaders.

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified (Dan. 5:22-23).

We could all profit greatly by a careful reading of the Psalms. Please listen to these excerpts from that great book. "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth...My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise....I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations" (Psa. 57:5, 7, 9). "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou are God alone....I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name forever more. For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell" (Psa. 86:9-10, 12-13).

May God help all of us to remember the one to whom glory and dominion (or strength) belong forever. If we are faithful in his service, we shall spend eternity praising and glorifying His name.

Chapter 153

Silas

In some ways prominent religious writers and teachers are like popular entertainers. Entertainers like to make a name for themselves so that they can make a great amount of money. In some cases, they will do whatever it takes—including compromising their religious and moral beliefs—in order to make it high in the charts. Theologians are not trying to make the charts, but they like to be called on for seminars, lectureships and television appearances. They also want to be remembered as someone who made lasting contributions to the world of biblical scholarship. They sometimes advance some of the most outlandish theories you can imagine. One theologian at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia made a temporary splash in the world of biblical scholarship by contending that Jesus was a married man. No scholar I know believes his theory, but he enjoyed the limelight for a brief time.

The reason I mention the temptation of scholars—and not just in theology—to promote some groundless and preposterous theories is that some writers have applied their skills to the book of 1 Peter. The epistle has excellent Greek in it. How does one explain the good Greek in view of the fact that Peter was a fisherman? Some commentators ascribe the beautiful Greek to Silas—one of Peter's companions. Will you please listen to the apostle Peter? "By Silas, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written to you briefly and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein you stand" (1 Pet. 5:12). There is not one hint in this verse or elsewhere that Silas knew anymore about the Greek language than Peter did. He may have, but that is pure supposition. Besides, was not Peter inspired by God's Holy Spirit? Do you suppose the Holy Spirit had a good grasp of the Greek language?

Peter calls Silas "a faithful brother unto you." We have

no way of knowing what Silas has done to cause Peter to make that complimentary remark. But whatever Silas had been called upon to do, he had done it as capably as he was able. It would be hard to find a more complimentary remark to make about anyone. Incidentally, this is the same Silas Paul chose to accompany him on his second missionary tour (Acts 15:40). He was with Paul when the gospel was first preached on European soil (Acts 16:19). Silas apparently had close personal ties to both Paul and Peter.

What does Peter mean when he says, "By Silas...I have written unto you briefly?" Does Peter suggest that Silas was the co-author of the letter? Or could he mean that he had dictated the letter to Silas? Many reputable scholars believe Paul used secretaries to record the letters he wrote—at least, some of the letters. It is altogether possible Peter did the same. We do not know because the Bible does not give us enough information to make a definite determination. Nor, may I add, is it all that vital. We know Peter's letter is inspired and provides us much needed information.

Peter's letter had many purposes. One of those is explained in these words. I have written unto you testifying that this is the true grace of God. The literal rendering of the Greek is as follows: "I have written unto you beseeching and testifying that this is the true grace of God." These early Christians had been wonderfully blessed by being freed from the bondage of sin and made members of the body of Christ. They had received so many "great and precious promises." They could know that they were recipients of the true grace of God. Peter added: "The true grace of God wherein you stand."

My friends, some religious teachers leave the impression that we are saved by grace alone. Is that possible in view of what Peter writes about their standing in the grace of God? Could they receive that grace in vain (2 Cor. 6:1)?

Chapter 154

The Church At Babylon

When the apostle Peter wrote his first epistle, was there a church in the city of Babylon? There could have been since the city of Babylon was still in existence. Or was Peter using the word "Babylon" like the book of Revelation uses it? Six times the word "Babylon" is used in Revelation. Let me give you just one example.

And there followed another angel, saying,
Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because
she made all nations drink of the wine of the
wrath of her fornication (Rev. 14:8).

There is almost universal agreement among interpreters of the book of Revelation that "Babylon" means Rome. Dr. A.T. Robertson says it "is either actual Babylon, or, as most likely, mystical Babylon (Rome) as in the" book of Revelation. The truth of the matter is: We do not know and probably cannot know. Does it really make that much difference?

The word "church" does not appear in the original of the verse we are investigating. The New American Standard Bible translates the verse "she who is Babylon." So does the Revised Standard Version. Dr. Charles Williams renders the verse: "Your sister-church in Babylon." It probably is not possible at this late date to be sure about the meaning of the verse. However, the word "church" does seem to be a reasonable explanation of what Peter intended. Alan Stibbs's commentary on *The First General Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Em. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) says the word "she" could refer to Peter's wife. I am at a loss to understand where he got such an idea. It seems rather far-fetched to me.

The King James Version reads, "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salutes you." The gender of the noun is feminine and could read, "co-elect woman." But that does not mean any person in particular, but could

refer to the church. That seems to be a reasonable interpretation.

It is necessary to say a few words about election, since Calvinism teaches an unreasonable and an unscriptural position on that concept. The Bible, dear friends, unquestionably teaches a doctrine of election. But, did God elect certain individuals to be saved and others to be lost? Was and is the selection wholly of God? Has man no responsibility in the election process? If men are wholly passive in their election, how do you explain these passages? Joshua said to the Jewish people who had come out of Egyptian bondage and were claiming their inheritance in the land of Canaan:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

Did Joshua actually believe the Jews could choose God? Did their choice make any difference in their salvation? If God had already chosen them, how could their choice—if indeed, they could make a choice—make any difference? Jesus said to the multitudes who came to hear him: "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). If God had not chosen them, how could they come to Jesus? If they did come to him when God had not chosen them, could they have been saved anyway?

When our Lord offers an invitation, it is a genuine invitation—not just hypothetical or theoretical. Men can respond to the Lord's invitation or it is a mockery to offer an invitation. The last chapter of the Bible says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come. And let him who is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The one little word, "whosoever," destroys Calvinism.

Chapter 155

A Kiss Of Charity

The churches of Christ have contended for years that God has provided a pattern for the church. For example, the church must have a certain kind of government, must engage in certain kinds of work and have specified acts of worship because that is what the scriptures teach. There are religious teachers—including some renegade teachers among churches of Christ—who insist that no such pattern exists or if it does, we could not know it. One book goes so far as to ask if incest in the church at Corinth was a part of the pattern. The same book raises the question about the racism which existed in the church at Jerusalem. This is an attempt to turn the church of our Lord into a denomination. Such an attempt must not be allowed to succeed. We must remain faithful to the divine pattern revealed in the Bible.

One question often raised by those who deny a biblical pattern for the work and worship of the church relates to holy kissing. Does God require holy kissing as an act of love and respect for our brothers and sisters in Christ? If he does not, how can we discern where the pattern for the church begins and ends? The apostle Peter urged his readers: "Greet one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen" (1 Pet. 5:14). Paul gave similar instructions to the church at Rome. "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). Is holy kissing or a kiss of charity a part of the divine pattern which is to be observed in every generation? Or was it just one way of showing affection and hospitality?

As most of you know if you have observed what many people from the Middle East and from Eastern Europe practice, kissing as a greeting is still a custom among some people. You, do doubt, have seen Arabs and Russians kiss on first meeting or when they were renewing friendships.

I have seen Russian men actually kiss on the mouth—and not because they were homosexuals. They were friends or acquaintances who practiced kissing as a means of greeting one another. Frankly, I would prefer some other kind of greeting. I would not enjoy greeting Gorbachev with a kiss of charity.

The early church did not invent the practice of kissing as a greeting. It was widely practiced in the Middle East. Guy N. Woods' commentary on **Peter, John and Jude** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1979) makes these appropriate comments: Peter's words "were designed to insure that the custom would be observed in keeping with the morality and chastity characteristic of the high calling of Christianity" (pp. 136-137). Dr. A. T. Robertson says that the "abuse of this custom led to its confinement to men with men and women with women and to its final abandonment" (**Word Studies**, volume 6, p. 136). In other words, holy kissing ceased when the kissing ceased to be holy.

Was the Lord binding "holy kissing" or "a kiss of charity" or was He binding friendliness and hospitality? In the West, hand shaking is our general method of greeting our friends and loved ones—although in close family relationships, hugging and kissing are acceptable as a means of greeting others. There is no attempt on the part of Peter or of Paul to bind a custom from the Middle East. But there was a need and there is one today for Christians to be friendly and affectionate.

I do want to insert a brief comment for some of my younger preaching brothers. Be exceedingly careful about your relationships to the opposite sex. Some great men—like King David—have hurt their influence and injured the church by being too friendly with women. Henry Ward Beecher, one of America's most famous preachers, destroyed himself by his sexual attachment to the wife of one of the leaders in the church where he preached. Never engage in any activity which causes people to doubt your sincerity and your commitment to the cause of Christ.