

MINEOLA BIBLE INSTITUTE AND SEMINARY

The Principles of Christian Living

Radical, Biblical, Apostolic Christianity



Bishop D.R. Vestal, PhD

Larry L Yates, ThD, DMin

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The Principles of Christian Living

CHAPTER 1--YOUR FIRST STEPS

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11

When by the Spirit of God, I understood these words, "the just shall live by faith," I felt born again like a new man: I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God!

Martin Luther

You, my friend, have taken a life-changing step. You have decided to begin a new life. God has become your Heavenly Father and you are now His child; a wonderful eternal relationship has begun. It is really a brand-new beginning. In the words of Jesus, you have been "born again," after obeying Acts 2:38.

Possibly you feel very helpless to explain what has taken place. A new sense of freedom is yours. You are something like a happy child let loose in a big park. Practically everything is touched with divine newness and it is delicious. Do not be perplexed by what you have experienced, for this is wonderfully normal and right. The Apostle Paul puts it this way, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

1. You have acknowledged your need as a sinner and have been baptized in Jesus Name, and have received the Gift of the Holy Ghost, speaking in other

tongues.

You have acknowledged that you were wrong and God is right. You have told the Lord of the poverty of your soul. Earnestly you have prayed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Your first step was to acknowledge your need as a sinner.

Dead and lost are the two Bible words used to describe your past life. Dead things cannot grow. You do not grow into grace; you grow once you are in it. Nothing is so completely helpless as that which is dead; and as far as God is concerned, all people through natural birth, are spiritually dead. The Bible describes your spiritual transformation this way: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Your life has been changed from a dead to a living state in Christ. God has touched your life and imparted divine life -- His life -- eternal life. This decision is really a death-breaking, earth-shaking, Heaven-awakening decision.

Lost is a descriptive word. The Bible states, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Without Christ, we are lost like sheep without a shepherd; helpless, hopeless, and defenseless. Lost, like the prodigal son; separated, destitute, and disgraced. By your actions in obeying Acts 2:38 you have been changed from a lost, to a saved condition, changed from an enemy of God to a friend of God, changed from a stranger to a child of God. Your salvation is revolutionary.

Seneca, the philosopher, said, "We have all sinned, some more, some less."

Coleridge, the great thinker, confessed, "I am a fallen creature."

T.S. Elliot's character, Cecilia Coplestone, talks about her "awareness of solitude, and "a sense of sin."

The Chinese speak of “two good men: one dead, the other unborn.”

The Bible plainly says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

2. You have acknowledged Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to meet our basic need. Christ was born to die. “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). This purpose was accomplished when He died on the cross. Repeatedly He told His disciples of His coming death. On the night of His betrayal by Judas, He broke bread with His disciples. Plainly He explained to them the purpose of the cross. For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Paul simply and clearly wrote, “For he [God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Isaiah prophetically penned, “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” (Isaiah 53:5).

Our basic need is the forgiveness of sin. God’s provision for our need is found in the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son, fully and completely bore the sins of the world. He took upon Himself, our sin. The Gospel is the good news of what God has done through Christ to forgive our sins.

Recognizing Christ as God’s answer, that He died in your place, you have come asking for forgiveness of all your sins. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). In a definite act of faith, you have pledged your allegiance to Christ.

The word confess is an interesting word. It simply means, to speak the same

thing. It means to agree or acknowledge. You have first acknowledged your need as a sinner, but you have also acknowledged Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. What have you done? “Thou hast believed” (John 20:29).

3. You are now beginning to acknowledge Jesus Christ before others. You may ask, “Do I have to publicly confess Christ?”

I must answer, “Yes, Jesus Christ requests a public confession.” And I might add, “How can you help it!”

Jesus plainly said, “Whosoever; therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven” (Matthew 10:32). If you have obeyed Acts 2:38, you will have to tell someone about it. This new life will be obvious, for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34).

Some new Christians try to be “secret” believers, but this is unwise and wrong. Just imagine Dr. Jonas Salk keeping his polio vaccine a secret! This would have been criminal. So, too, a knowledge of God’s salvation places us in debt to the whole world.

Both Nicodemus and Joseph of Armathea tried to be secret disciples. It took the death of Christ to bring them to the place of openly begging for the body of Jesus from Pilate. The Scripture record is clear: “And after this Joseph of Armathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury” (John 19:38-40). Do not let your fear of others rob you of the joy of open allegiance.

It is sin to be silent, when to confess, would help another.

To be ashamed of Christ is really a sad experience. It implies carelessness, error, and failure on our part. It dishonors Christ and brings personal defeat. If Jesus Christ were ashamed of you and me, that we could easily understand; but for men and women to be ashamed of Christ is difficult to comprehend. Joseph Griggs asks,

*Jesus, and shall it ever be
A mortal man ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise
Whose glories shine thro' endless days?*

*Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far
Let evening blush to own a star;
He sheds the beams of light divine
O'er this benighted soul of mine.
Ashamed of Jesus! That dear friend
On whom my hopes of Heav'n depend!
No, when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere His Name.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! Yes, I may
When I've no guilt to wash away;
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,
No fears to quell, no soul to save.*

Ashamed of Christ? We must never be. Repeatedly we are encouraged in Scripture to confess Christ openly and not be ashamed. Jesus said, Whosoever therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of My Words in the adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the

glory of His Father with the Holy angels” (Mark 8:38). To be reproached for Christ now is to be rewarded later. At times, we may be called upon to partake in Christ’s sufferings. This really implies that He and we are together. “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed” (1 Peter 4:16), write Peter.

I have found that failure to acknowledge Jesus Christ often results in careless living, but a public commitment puts one on record before God and man. The fact that others know of your conversion will really help guard you against temptation. Yes, your conversion is a blessed one. With Phillip Doddridge you can sing:

*O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God.
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.
Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away.*

Yes, your conversion has begun a real, happy, lasting change. You are ready to build a life for God.

WHAT YOU MUST NOW DO. As a newborn baby is cared for in the physical world, you need to be helped spiritually. Let me list four helpful suggestions that I will enlarge upon in later chapters:

1. Read the Bible systematically.

What food is to the body, the Bible is to your new spiritual life. At a prescribed time, in a quiet place, each day should start with the Bible. This is a must if you are to grow in the things of God. The Gospel of John is a good place for you to begin. Remember, at least a chapter a day! D. L. Moody said, “The Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible.” A chapter a day will certainly help to keep sin away.

2. Learn to pray.

Prayer is the communion of the believer with God; we speak to God, but He also speaks to us. Prayer is not merely asking favors of God, but rather waiting in quietness before Him. Pray for personal cleansing and victory over evil; pray for yourself and pray for others.

3. Use every opportunity to confess Christ before the world.

In a winsome way, immediately tell someone of your spiritual conversion. Activity always strengthens. When believers share with others, they develop an appetite for Bible study. The result of their speaking to others of their new life will provide daily up-to-date subjects for prayer. When a new Christian begins working, everything comes into proper focus. R. A. Torrey said, "If you make but little of Christ, Christ will make but little of you."

4. Become part of a local church.

If a mother permits her children to grow up in idleness, the result will be untaught children. Since the Christian's responsibilities toward other believers is evident, waiting only forms bad habits. The Bible says, "No forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrew 10:25). Your faithful Church attendance will help you in spiritual growth. Find a fellowship that gives full allegiance to Jesus Christ and the Word of God, and become part of it.

You will be sure to meet temptations, but you need not yield or fall, for God has promised, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). If you do fail, seek immediate forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If you fall, do not remain defeated, but get up and go right on. Perhaps right now you are facing the battle with some habit; remember that Christ is ready to help you, and He has all power in Heaven and earth.

Another secret of victorious Christian Living is to keep your eyes on Christ. The best of men will fail you at times, but never forget -- Jesus never fails.

CHAPTER 2--WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

If we take the first three words of John 1:13 and the last two words, we have the phrase “which were born...of God.” That’s a good definition. A Christian is one who is born of God.

In scorn and ridicule the world gave birth to the word Christian. In Antioch of Syria, a city of a million inhabitants, the followers of Jesus were given this nickname. The word Christian appears only three times in the New Testament and never in the Old Testament. First in Acts 11:26, “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” It appears again in Acts 26:28, “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuades me to be a Christian.” And also in 1 Peter 4:16: “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”

To be a Christian in the early centuries was a life-and-death proposition; it involved the faith of heroes. To be a Christian often meant facing a pagan arena and wild beasts; it always meant the narrow gate, the restricted way, the denial of self, shouldering a cross and following Jesus.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

1. To be united with Christ.

The word Christian is really the combination of two words: Christ and man. When a man or woman is united with Christ, they form one word, Christian. A Christian is the combination of Christ and you. The sinner receives the Saviour and the Saviour receives the sinner. A Christian is a Christ man or a Christ woman.

2. To be born again.

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3). According to Jesus, a Christian is one who has been born again. Spiritual birth is the only way to enter God's family; we must be born again.

In our day, the word Christian has been seriously corrupted. It has been pulled and stretched to cover the whole civilized world. Often it has been misused, misapplied, misunderstood, and misappropriated. Thousands call themselves Christians who have no claim to the name at all. Some say, "All civilized people are Christians." Others suppose this word includes all Gentiles and excludes all Hebrews. To the contrary, there are many splendid people who are Jewish and Christian; and, sad to say, there are thousands of Gentiles who are not Christians at all. The concept of Christianity has become so distorted that millions do not know the difference between spiritual regeneration and mere religious profession.

The story is told of some American seamen marooned on a South Sea island. Fearing the natives, the sailors hid until one day they heard some of the inhabitants speaking perfect English. In relief, the marooned men exclaimed, "They are Christians!"

In reality, no one has the right in his unforgiving state to say, "I am a Christian." You ask, "But why?" Because the Bible teaches that "all have sinned."

God's justice and Holiness demand that sin be paid for and dealt with. Jesus, God's Son, voluntarily died to atone for the sins of all mankind. When one obeys Acts 2:38, then, and only then, does that one have the power or the legal right to be a child of God. John the Apostle said, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that Believed on His Name" (John 1:12).

3. To receive Christ as Saviour.

To receive Christ is to have faith in Him, that He is the sinless Son of God, that He died voluntarily for our sins so that we might be free from spiritual death and judgment and have everlasting life. The all-important question is, have you obeyed Acts 2:38?

A WORD OF WARNING.

Religion is quite popular in our day. The world is full of people who say, "I believe in God. I believe in Christ, and I believe in the Bible." Sometimes the lives of such people do not correspond with what they claim to believe. This is not a saving faith, but a false faith.

The Bible says, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20), and again, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). So if there is no difference, no distinction, I fear that some individuals are in the flesh, and "shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Galatians 6:8).

You see, there is not a prisoner in the world who does not believe it is better to be honest. There is not a drunkard who does not believe it is better to be sober. But mere belief does nothing to change the condition. Faith has come to be thought of today as a simple acquiescence to the Word of God. But this kind of faith is paralyzing, deadening, and even damning. The Bible asserts, "The devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). The difference between heart belief and head belief is the difference between salvation and damnation. Any faith that does not result in a changed life is not saving faith; it is a deceiving faith. So the important question to ask is "Have I believed savingly according to Acts 2:38?"

Occasionally there are those who claim they cannot believe what they do not understand. But in reality, we believe much that we do not understand. For example, no one understands all the mysteries of electricity, yet it would be foolish

to say, "I will sit in darkness until I understand electricity."

No doctor completely understands the marvels of the digestive system. Yet, who would say, "I will not eat until I understand the digestive system."

Who understands the miracle of the common watermelon? A seed is dropped into the ground. It sprouts, and soon there is a vigorous plant which bears several watermelons, each of which, is hundreds of times the weight of the original seed. Outside of each, there is a beautiful coat of green, then a rind of white, and an enticing core of red, with dozens of seeds, each capable of producing additional watermelons. The most brilliant man cannot explain this mystery, but the most ignorant man can enjoy it.

So when you submit to the Gospel, you become part of the divine mystery. You are quickened by God and become "a new creature." Jesus said, "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

By way of review:

1. A Christian is one who is united with Christ in water baptism.
2. A Christian is one who has been born again with the evidence of speaking in other tongues.

WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS NOT.

Sometimes we understand the positive better by considering the negative. I remember well the happiness of my own boyhood experience. On Sunday, all four of us children accompanied Mother and Father to Church; our meals were always prefaced with family prayer; we read the Bible systematically. Ours was a Christian home, yet this wonderful inheritance did not automatically make me a Christian. Relationship to the redeemed does not bring redemption. Kinship to Christians

cannot make one a Christian. God's salvation is not by natural generation. God doesn't have any grandchildren. John 1:13, shares three errors that exist today. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

1. Natural birth cannot make one a Christian.

"...were born, not of blood."

John is simply saying that one does not become a Christian through our earthly parents. The blessing of a godly mother and a saintly father is a great heritage, but this does not make one a Christian. Parents can give a push in the right direction, but they cannot make us Christians.

The Jewish people used to say, "We have Abraham as our father," and therefore, they thought they were safe and secure.

The exponents of Nazism boasted of pure "Aryan blood" and talked of a "super race." This, too, is unscriptural. In the Bible, the mystery of blood is in the heritage of sin, derived from Adam by natural birth. It is also in the gift of salvation purchased by the blood of Christ through spiritual birth. John the Apostle is simply saying that one cannot become a Christian through earthly parents. Natural birth cannot make one a Christian.

2. Good works cannot make one a Christian.

"...nor of the will of the flesh."

Probably the greatest error which exists today is the belief that salvation is the result of personal effort. Thousands imagine themselves Christian because they seek to keep the Golden Rule or because they live decent, moral lives. Some rely upon their religious activity or Church membership. In direct contrast, the Apostle John says that salvation does not come through "the will of the flesh."

I once asked a faithful Church attendee if she were a Christian. She quickly

answered, "I have taught in the Sunday School for sixteen years." I commended her and kindly repeated the question, "Are you a Christian?" She then told me of her efforts in the missionary society, but did not answer my simple question. This dear lady was depending on her own efforts to earn salvation. If being active in religious work made one a Christian, she certainly would be one many times over; but the Bible says, "nor of the will of the flesh."

The Bible message is plain on this subject and easy to understand. Paul said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation comes by obeying Acts 2:38, Salvation is given by Jesus Christ to those who have obeyed His Word.

It would be easier to tunnel through the mountains with teaspoons than to get to Heaven by personal effort, character, or morality. Salvation is an offer, not a demand. It is not based on what I do, but on what Jesus Christ has done.

We do not become Christians by climbing the ladder of good works, rung by rung. In fact, the very opposite is true. Jesus Christ came down the ladder via Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross to meet us where we are. Good works cannot make one a Christian.

3. Religious ordinances cannot make one a Christian.

"...nor of the will of man."

Sometime ago, I asked a medical doctor, "Are you a Christian?" he answered, "I was baptized by Dr. So-and-so some years ago." After further discussion, I learned that he was banking everything on the ordinance of baptism rather than upon faith in Christ.

No man, no matter how prominent or how pious, can make you a Christian. The

erroneous idea that some religious leader can make one a Christian by some religious act is untrue and contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. No Church ordinance, however important, can forgive sin.

A tramp, obviously under influence of alcohol, approached evangelist D. L. Moody. "Mr. Moody," he said, "you're the man who saved me."

As the great evangelist observed the bearded face, blood-shot eyes, unkempt hair, and tattered clothes, he replied, "Yes, it looks as if I did save you. If the Lord had, you wouldn't be in this condition."

Ministers are instruments of God to perform His bidding. As Paul said, "We are laborers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Never can any man confer salvation or forgiveness upon another.

WHAT A CHRISTIAN OUGHT TO BE.

For the Apostle Paul, salvation and surrender were simultaneous. Immediately upon believing he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Just as Paul wanted to do God's will only, so every Christian should commit his entire life to Christ. Paul called upon all Christians to "yield yourselves unto God" (Romans 6:13).

Adolph Deissman suggested that the word "Christian" means "slave of Christ," as "Caesarian" means "slave of Caesar."

In the Old Testament, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, with children as numerous as the sand of the sea. But Abraham had no children. Contrary to the life of faith, he fathered a son by Hagar, his wife's

slave. This act was of the flesh, representing man's blundering way rather than God's way. God intervened and performed a miracle. In her old age, Abraham's wife, Sarah, gave birth to Isaac, a child of faith, the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

God calls each Christian to let go of his own solutions to life's problems and accept the way of faith. He is really saying, "Don't hang on to anything -- yield everything."

It is a big mistake to imagine you can carelessly ramble along in the Christian life. As Samuel Rutherford said, "You will not be carried to Heaven lying at ease upon a feather bed." Tertullian said, "He who fears to suffer cannot be His who suffered."

The call of Christ while on earth was uncompromising and unconventional. His words were so piercing that the hearers tried to kill Him. Yet, today we often present the Lord of Glory as meek and mild, rather than high and Holy, soft and sentimental, instead of steadfast and strong. Artists and poets have portrayed Christ with flowing chestnut hair, a feminine face, going about breathing mild benedictions upon everyone. This is false! It is true that He went about doing good; but on the other hand, He was firm and His Words were stringent. At times, He gave offense to His disciples, to His relatives, to the scribes and Pharisees. On one occasion, Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

True, He was loving and kind, but we must not overlook the demands of His call. "Lord," cried one man, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

Jesus answered the enthusiastic offer, with a staggering response: "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Another cried, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father."

The reply struck back as fast and devastating as lightening. “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:57-60).

A third cried, “I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house” (v. 61).

Jesus dealt a crushing blow when He said, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” (v. 62).

The Christian life is beautiful, but it is not a picnic. Jesus never gained disciples under false pretense. In fact, He never hid His scars, but rather declared, “Behold my hands and my feet” (Luke 24:39).

C. T. Studd’s motto was, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

From history’s pages, we learn of a cowardly young soldier in the army of Alexander the Great. Whenever the battle grew fierce, the young soldier would yield. The General’s pride was cut because this timid soldier also bore the name Alexander. One day, Alexander the Great sternly addressed him and said, “Stop being a coward or drop that good name.”

The call to all Christians is the same today. May we faithfully live up to all the name Christian implies. “Lord, what will You have me to do?”

CHAPTER 3--HOW TO GROW IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Building up yourselves on your most Holy faith.

Jude 20

*How does the soul grow? Not all in a minute!
Now it may lose ground, and now it may win it;
Now it resolves, and again the will faileth;
Now it rejoiceth, and now it bewailed;
Now its hopes fructify, then they are blighted;
Now it walks sullenly, now gropes benighted;
Fed by discouragements, taught by disaster;
So it goes forward, now slower, now faster;
Till all the pain is past, and failure made whole,
It is full grown, and the Lord rules the soul.*

Susan Coolidge

Sometime ago I read a book entitled "Grow Up or Blow Up." The thrust of the book, was that civilization must either grow up or else destroy itself. It is also very important that we as individuals "grow up" in the things of God.

Our twenty first century finds the masses of people living and dying for material possessions. It appears that an unparalleled wealth fever afflicts the majority, while spiritual values are practically ignored. The true measure of success in life is not and cannot be counted in dollars and cents and surely not in physical or mental accomplishments. In complete contrast, the true and eternal measure of life is found in growth in a Christ-like character. You will find this road to be a neglected trail, because there are no superhighways to growth.

Robert Browning said, “Man was made to grow, not stop.” The Apostles Peter and Paul believed this truth too. Peter challenges all Christians to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). The preceding verse contains a stern warning: “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.” Immediately following the warning appears God’s cure: “But grow in grace.”

Romans 8:29, encourages every believer “to be conformed to the image of His Son.” Ephesians 4:15, tells us to “grow up into Him in all things.” First Thessalonians 3:12, challenges us “to increase and abound.”

LIFE: THE FIRST STEP OF GROWTH! Dead things cannot grow. Before there can be spiritual growth, there must be spiritual life. When a child is born, his first cry indicates life. If there is life, then a world of possibilities beckons to this new baby. If there is no life, then there is no hope. A fence post placed in the ground will not grow, but a little seed will grow spontaneously. Drop a stone into the richest soil and it will be exactly the same size years later. Place a seed into the ground, and it will spring up and produce a stalk and flowers. The difference is plain: one has life while the other does not.

This divine life may be imitated, but the difference can be easily detected. One is real; the other is false. One is natural; the other is mechanical. The crystal grows from without by addition of new particles, while a living organism grows from within. The crystal may be beautiful, but it is only a crystal and lacks true life for growth. Dead things may accumulate, but they cannot grow. Unless men and women have the life that comes from above, religious practices and environment mean nothing. In fact, they cause a person to rest in a false hope, making condemnation more sure. To you, who have obeyed Acts 2:38, the divine command is “grow in grace.” These to whom Peter is speaking have been “born again,” for remember, dead things cannot grow.

The story is told of a young sixteenth-century artist who worked hard and long on a statue of an angel. The famous Michelangelo was invited to view the finished masterpiece. As Michelangelo gazed upon it, he commented, "It lacks only one thing," and then he left the studio.

The young artist was depressed as he wondered what his masterpiece lacked. A concerned mutual friend went to Michelangelo to discover what was missing. Michelangelo responded, "It lacks only one thing, and that is life. If it had life, it would be as perfect as God could make it."

Yes, life is the first requisite for growth.

WHY YOU MUST GROW.

1. It is God's plan.

Second Peter 3:18 says, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Ye shall therefore be Holy, for I am Holy" (Leviticus 11:44). Jesus also said, "Be ye therefore perfect [mature], even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Paul, speaking to the Philippians, said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect [full grown].....but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14). Paul was moving upward and onward.

Growth is not the dream of a starry-eyed idealist; it is God's intention. We must bend or be broken, for God will not tolerate continued interference. We are not sinless, but we should sin less and less.

2. It is nature's law.

Nature says, "Grow or I will kill you." A cankered tree does not send forth new shoots. When the body stops growing it begins to die. The fingers of nature begin to pick and to pluck until death claims us. The first law of life is expansion. It is grow or decay! Advance or regress! Live or die!

Jesus said, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit! (John 15:2).

"Grow in grace." The word grow denotes continuous action. There is no time to stop growing. If we do not grow in the physical realm, it is a sad sign; it is a mark of sickness. A mother would be justly alarmed if day after day and week after week her baby showed no signs of growth. A farmer would be dismayed if his crops never yielded their harvest.

Genesis 11:31 tells us that Terah started out with Abraham for the land of Canaan. Verse 31 reads, "And they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." Verse 32 says, "And Terah died in Haran." It sometimes seems that many today are stopping at Haran and dying there. There is no time or place to stop growing. Growth, is according to nature's law and God's plan.

HOW TO GROW.

1. Naturally.

Jesus said, "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" (Matthew 6:28-29).

Notice the phrase, "how they grow." Well, how do the lilies grow? What is their secret of growth? The lily, according to God's plan, simply unfolds the life within. We do not tell a lily to grow; it grows naturally, spontaneously. It does not fuss or fret, toil or turn, strain or stretch; it just grows. Growth is natural and inevitable

when there is life, and more so when there is divine life.

Environment is an important factor in the growing process. If I see an acorn lying on the sidewalk, I know that the acorn will never grow; but put the acorn in the ground where it belongs and it will grow. If we tear a plant out of the soil and hide it from the sun, it will not grow. In just the same way, we who have received Christ must abide in Him if we are to grow and bring forth fruit.

The child of God must continue in a right relationship with God. We are to be rooted in the Word of God. We are to be warmed by the Sun of Righteousness. We are to make friends of God's children. We are to cooperate in every way with the divine Gardener. Do not permit any obstacles to come between you and your Lord. Keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Then we will bring forth fruit, "some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matthew 13:8).

Salvation is just the beginning of what God wants to do for you. He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we [could] ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). Before each believer, is the limitless ocean of grace and truth. May we never be content with the empty shells on the beach when we can launch out in the deep.

The Bible compares Christians to trees. Our roots are to penetrate the topsoil of truth and stretch down into the great doctrinal rocks of eternal salvation. Then when the hurricane of God's wrath tears up the hypocrites and hurls them into the sea of destruction, those trees planted by God will stand.

As trees, we need to throw back our heads and look to Jesus for refreshment. We need to spread our branches out and let the shadow of our Holy influence be felt far and near. Our branches should be heavy with fruit. God's promise is, "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall

spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon” (Hosea 14:5-7).

2. By eating.

We also grow by eating. All living things eat, and what we eat affects our growth. The Bible says, “Eat...that which is good” (Isaiah 55:22). There is no book which can make you grow like the Bible.

If we would place the most costly silk under a microscope, it would appear rough and stained. The lily petal under the same lens is flawless. Solomon’s royal robes could not compare with God’s wild lilies. Matthew 6:28 tells us to “consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. “Well, how do they grow? The lily’s thread-like roots dig down to the minerals and practice selection. Some minerals look fine, but in reality they are poisonous. They are refused. Others are necessary and they are received. This is exactly what we must do to grow in grace.

There are appealing things that are deadly to growth. The Apostle Peter points out some things to refuse: “Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking.” Others are to be received: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2). Whatever else it means, it means that the Word of God is a good thing to feed on. Milk is a food that has been digested by another. Often Christians think that the only feeding they need is that which the Pastor has digested and presents on Sunday morning. This is not enough. “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

We are to feed on the meat of the Word. D. L. Moody used to hoe potatoes when a boy, and he said that he hoed them so poorly that he always had to mark where he stopped. I wonder, is that how we read the Bible?

3. By breathing.

What breathing is to the physical man, prayer is to the spiritual man. Our Saviour was a man of prayer. The common atmosphere was stifling to Him, and so He frequently sought communion with God in places apart from the crowd. If Jesus, the sinless Son of God, found prayer important, we sinful creatures dare not live without it.

We need to breathe deeply, the air from Heaven every day. Andrew Murray said, "We are to be shut out from men, and shut in with God." Archbishop Trench said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness."

Yes, we shall grow if there is communion with Jesus Christ. He is the breath of life.

Rubinstein, the great musician, said, "If I omit practice one day, I notice it; if two days, my friends notice it; if three days, the public notices it." This is an old truth, but still vital. We must "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Someone else has said, "Prayer is the preface to the book of Christian Living, the text of the new life sermon, the girding on of the armor for battle, the pilgrim's preparation for his journey; and it must be supplemented by action or it amounts to nothing."

Prayer and work form the unbeatable New Testament combination. True prayers never come creeping home.

*Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend;
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend.* **Fanny J. Crosby**

4. By resting.

This is what Jesus was talking about when He asked, "Which of you by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Matthew 6:27). Anxiety will not add

to your spiritual size; worry will not add to your spiritual size; worry will not add one fraction to your stature.

The Christian life is not a nervous, hanging-on-to-God, but a resting-in-the-hollow-of-His-hand. I will not grow by toiling and turning, stretching and straining, but rather by yielding completely to Christ's control.

If there is life and health in the physical body, growth is natural and inevitable. So it is spiritually. If we have been born again and are healthy Christians, we will unfold naturally, as the lily from the bud. The Bible says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). "He giveth his beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2). "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the House of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Psalm 92:12-14).

5. By exercising.

The Bible places great stress on work. Show me a person who does not work and I will show you a person who is weak. If you faithfully work, you will eat and sleep right. People often complain that they are not spiritually fed, but probably they are not spiritually hungry, and they are not hungry because they are not working. Broken-down tissues call for nourishment. So those broken down in toil in the Lord's harvest field call out for the bread of life. If a believer will sincerely work in the vineyard of God, he will grow in grace. My friend, if you really want to grow, begin to work. Practice the truth you know, and many other things will become clearer. The farmer's arms become stronger by continual labor. The child grows by exercise. We are to grow as babies grow: slowly and steadily, but surely; a little each day, and a lot in a year. At first, the legs may be weak, but soon we will walk without being weary and run without fainting. "He that hath, to him shall be given" (Mark 4:25). Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17).

One good way to exercise is to witness concerning our faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus plainly said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). A witness is one who tells what he knows. After everything else is said and done, our real excuse for living is to witness. Do not permit a day to pass without speaking to someone about Jesus Christ. Witnessing keeps the prayer life alive and up to date. It also challenges one to dig into the Scriptures in search of answers for those to whom you are witnessing.

Friend, since your conversion, have you been growing? Are you nearer the Saviour now than at your hour of decision? Is your delight in the Law of the Lord and are you meditating upon it day and night?

With God's help, Christians can be like trees planted by the rivers of water, spreading forth foliage and bearing fruit. Apart from Christ, we are chaff, without any hope of life. I would encourage you to grow, grow, grow, until that wonderful day, when we shall see Him and be like Him!

*If God can make of an ugly seed,
With a bit of earth and air
And dew and rain, sunshine and shade,
A flower so wondrous fair,
What can He make of a soul like you?
What the Bible and faith and prayer,
And the Holy Spirit, if you do His will
And trust in His love and care.*

Author Unknown

CHAPTER 4--YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:22

When Dwight L. Moody was visiting England, he heard Henry Varley say: "The world has yet to see what God will do with a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to the Holy Spirit." Moody would later comment, "He said, 'a man,' nor a 'rich man,' but simply 'a man.' I am a man, and it lies within the man himself whether he will or will not make that entire and full consecration. I will try my utmost to be that man."

Every Christian must rely upon the Holy Spirit because He is indispensable. He is the chief Architect in building a life. His ministry is either unknown or ignored, and therefore His power unused.

In the preface to his paraphrase of the New Testament Epistles, J. B. Phillips writes,

The great difference between present-day Christianity and that of which we read in these letters, is that to us, it is primarily a performance, to them, it was a real experience. To these, it is quite plainly the invasion of their lives by a new quality of life altogether. They do not hesitate to describe this as Christ "living in" them.

What a rebuke to us. As I read this, I could not help but ask myself, "What kind of Christian am I?

Am I experiencing the all-powerful presence of God through the Holy Spirit?"

Down through the centuries, there have been many examples of Christians who,

although their lives were quite ordinary, were transformed by the Power of the Holy Spirit into vibrant believers - active and energetic witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Take Peter, for example. Before the Holy Spirit took charge of him at Pentecost, he had been a disciple. But he had also denied Jesus. He had been ashamed to stand for Jesus Christ.

But when the Holy Spirit got hold of Peter, he became a different man. A fantastic change came over him and he began to powerfully preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sometime ago, I received a letter from a young man. "For twenty of my thirty-three years," he said, "I have been a professing Christian. But not until recently did I really understand the work of the Holy Spirit or what He could do in my life. The difference He has made in my life has been unbelievable."

Each believer must realize that the Holy Spirit dwells within and that He is willing and waiting to be our Helper and Guide. Conversion to Jesus Christ began in us with the regenerating Power of the Holy Spirit and it continues and will conclude by His resurrection Power.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. During Old Testament times, the Spirit of God was active, but apparently in a limited way, for example, He was present in creation, for Scripture says, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"

(Genesis 1:2). Of Samson we read, "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him" (Judges 14:6). Then, too, certain men were said to possess the Spirit of God. For instance, Joshua: "And the Lord said unto Moses, "Take thee Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him" (Numbers 27:18). The Old Testament contains at least eighty-eight references to the Holy Spirit. These references seem to show that the Holy Spirit would come for a specific task

and then leave when the work was completed. In the New Testament, the relationship to the Spirit is constant and abiding.

The Spirit of God was the Spirit of conviction, while sin worked itself out from Fall to Flood. He was a Spirit of detailed service, while the people of God were being organized into a nationality; He was a Spirit of strength, while the people were fighting for the land, and were casting out those who had deeply sinned; and He became a Spirit of hope, when the peculiar people had passed into a condition of apostasy and wandering. He lit the horizon with the glow of approaching day.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS PROMISED BY JESUS. There is no doubt that the Spirit of God was active in the Old Testament; however, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come in a different way than ever before. In fact, Jesus said, “that it was expedient, or better, for His disciples that He go away, for if He did not go away, the Spirit would not come” (John 16:7).

John the Apostle, verified this when he said, “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). This passage makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was to come and be active in a different way than ever before. The fulfillment of this promise took place at Pentecost.

In the first chapter of the Book of Acts, the disciples were commanded to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The second chapter tells the thrilling story of His arrival (Acts 2:1-4).

From that day to this, the Holy Spirit has never departed. He has been with the Church ever since. Often He is grieved because of unbelief, but He is never absent. Pentecost marked the coming of the Spirit in a new way to live in the earthly bodies of all believers. Joyfully we can sing:

*O spread the tidings 'round
wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts
and human woes abound,
Let every Christian tongue
proclaim the joyful sound:
The Comforter has come!*

Frank Bottome

The Holy Spirit is also our Teacher. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall...Bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit assures us of personal salvation. In Romans 8:16, we read, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God.” The Holy Spirit agrees with our Spirit if we are in tune with God.

Again in John 16, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit convinces men of sin. When the Holy Spirit comes, said Jesus, “He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (verse 8). The Holy Spirit teaches us, strengthens us, witnesses within us.

THE HOLY SPIRIT INDWELLS ALL BELIEVERS. The Bible plainly teaches that each believer is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. What a staggering truth! Think of it - the Holy Spirit indwelling every Christian!

To the carnal Corinthians, Paul wrote, “Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). In spite of their carnality, they were still the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

In past history, God dwelt in the Tabernacle and then later on in the Temple.

You may ask, “Where does He dwell now?” The Bible says, “in you,” Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

The word ‘dwell’ is a beautiful word. It means to settle down and live, as you would at home. The Holy Spirit is a personal, permanent Guest. He is with us and in us all the time.

As a living resident within the believer, the Holy Spirit gives strength for our weaknesses. He helps us to pray. He empowers us to serve. He comforts us in our sorrow. He is the Paraclete, the One sent to assist us in every area of our lives.

“The Temple of God is Holy, which Temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:17). Paul is simply telling us that our lives must be Holy. Always remember, He is the Holy Spirit, and He requires cleanness of life. The Bible says, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE STRUGGLE AHEAD. There is within every Christian, a conflict! The Apostle Paul gives us a picture of this in Romans 7. Although the believer has been completely forgiven, he soon discovers that sin is still active within him. Although we are changed because of conversion, we are not all that we shall be someday. Sin continues to work in us, and the result is a battle between the “new nature” with all its new ideals and aspirations and the “old nature” with its desires and expectations.

The Christian wants to please God, whereas the unconverted man seeks to please himself.

Is there a way out? Are we destined to be victims of our sinful natures, or can we be victors? What a thrill it is to know that victory is absolutely possible! It is available to all.

First, to be victorious you must submit your life to Jesus Christ and obey Acts

2:38. Someone has said, "If you would master temptation, you must first let Christ master you."

Mankind is like a clock whose mainspring is broken. He needs to be totally renewed on the inside, but the repairs must be supplied from without. He cannot save himself. Even so, men and women today need someone to remake them. That someone is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man's soul and nature. He loves you, He died for you, and He wants you to turn to Him in repentance and faith.

Salvation is the first step to victory over temptation.

Second, to the believer - the child of God - is given the privilege of prayer in overcoming temptation. James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally" (James 1:5).

Do you need help in overcoming your weakness? Ask God! Do you need deliverance from the power and temptation of sin? Ask God! He alone, is able to deliver you. Often I have cried out, "Lord help me," and God's deliverance was given.

God's Word proclaims that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

D. L. Moody once said, "When Christians find themselves exposed to temptation, they should pray to God to uphold them and when they are tempted, they should not be discouraged. It is not a sin to be tempted; the sin is to fall into temptation."

Third, apply the Word of God. Jesus put Satan to flight by quoting Scripture. Jesus said, "It is written," and so must we fortify ourselves with the Word of God.

Fourth, submit to the Indwelling Holy Spirit. When a drop of water falls on a hot stove, the water never really touches the stove. It rests on a thin cushion of very hot air. Heat overcomes gravity and holds the water away until it evaporates. To the child of God who is directed by the Holy Spirit, temptation may come, but it will not be able to destroy us. For God has promised, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

In your hour of trial, remember that God is faithful. He knows your capacity. He will give you all the strength you need to overcome temptation, or He will make a way of deliverance for you.

The secret of victory in your Christian life is in the indwelling Holy Spirit. Allow Him to have undisputed control of your whole life.

THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS FOR SERVICE. A. C. Dixon used to say, "When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do."

Power is within reach of all who believe. Our departing Lord said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

I heard a true story not long ago of a man, who for several years, had struggled to keep his rather large lawn mowed. Finally he decided it just wasn't worth all the time and trouble. He determined that he was going to buy one of those nice riding lawn mowers, something that would take all the headache out of his Saturday afternoons.

Well, he did just that. And the day came for the delivery of his new machine. The man who brought it told him just how it should be operated, explaining all the

controls and also pointing out that it was already filled with gas and oil.

Well, the man could hardly wait to try out his new mower. As soon as the delivery man left, he jumped into the seat and turned the key, but nothing happened. No engine started, no noise, nothing!

His first reaction was to check the gas and oil. They were fine. Then he examined the key and turned it back and forth, still nothing! Finally he decided that, despite the fact that the mower was brand new, the battery must be dead. So, he took the battery to the nearest service station and had it charged, came home, turned the key - and again, nothing happened.

As he was just about to reach his wit's end, his neighbor came over and asked him what his trouble was. After explaining all he had been through, the neighbor climbed onto the mower, turned the key, pushed the starter, and immediately the engine began to purr.

The owner was completely flabbergasted! To think, all that trouble, simply because he failed to push the starter button.

"How simple," you say, and you are absolutely right! But, what the starter button was to that lawn mower, the Holy Spirit is in the life of the believer! Just as the machine needed the contact of Power to operate, so we need the Power of the Holy Spirit to serve successfully in the Christian life.

As we depend on the Holy Spirit, we shall be empowered to live above the world, the flesh, and the devil. In our strength, we will surely fall, but "if ye through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Romans 8:13). The Holy Spirit is our source of Power.

A WORD OR WARNING. We must always remember that the Holy Spirit may be grieved because of careless living. Paul warns, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of

God, whereby ye are sealed unto the Day of Redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The word, grieve means to “cause sorrow.” G. Campbell Morgan asks, “How would you like to be compelled to live with somebody who was everlastingly grieving your heart by his conduct?” Do not grieve or quench the indwelling Holy Spirit rather, “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

The Blessed Holy Spirit is our Helper today, tomorrow, and always. Open wide every area of your life and He will fill it with His presence.

CHAPTER 5--YOU AND YOUR BIBLE?

Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.

Matthew 7:24

Luther studied the Bible as one would gather apples: "First I shake the whole tree, that the ripest might fall. Then I climb the tree and shake each limb, and then each branch, and then each twig, and then I look under each leaf."

The Bible is literally God speaking to you. It is God's instrument in salvation (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:25). And God's instrument for growing mature Christians (1 Peter 2:2). It is the blueprint for the Christian.

The very first step in understanding the Bible is conversion. Paul said, "but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual, judgeth all things" (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

The unsaved person can read the Bible and receive considerable inspiration, but the true Christian receives infinitely more. To salvation, must be added submission. The Bible must be read in a spirit of humility. This is the way to begin.

READ THE BIBLE PRAYERFULLY. Prayer is the "open sesame" to the Bible. Always begin your Bible reading with prayer for divine guidance. All of us in reading some current book have wished the author were present to answer and explain some things, but this is rarely possible. Amazing as it seems, this is possible when reading the Bible. James said, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbradeth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). God really wants to give us wisdom and understanding. The psalmist knew this

truth, for long years ago he prayed, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). It is really wonderful to ask the Lord to show us some “wondrous thing” each day out of His law. After God does this for us, think about this truth, apply it, and put it to use.

John Newton said it this way: “By one hour’s intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes His glory to pass before the soul that seeks Him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort than by a day’s or a week’s converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios.”

The Bible is the result of men being moved by the Holy Spirit. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but the Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” And again, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The very same Holy Spirit who led those men to write, longs to lead us today so we can understand. Without the Holy Spirit, the Bible is like an ocean which cannot be sounded, Heavens which cannot be surveyed, mines which cannot be explored, and mysteries beyond unraveling. We must--we must-- yield to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit has come and dwells in every believer. Permit Him to guide you into God’s truth. Without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we read in vain. So read the Bible prayerfully.

READ THE BIBLE CAREFULLY. Of the Christians at Berea, it could be said, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Bereans read the Scriptures carefully! Today, the Bible

is read a lot, but studied, little. To read with care, requires concentration, so our minds must be alert. To read in a perfunctory way, for the sake of conscience, is not worth much.

Jesus said, "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). This requires obedience. "If any man will do His will, He shall know." All the icebergs of difficulty will melt before a ready and willing mind. Dark skies will be pierced, deep places fathomed, and wide rivers forded. Obedience to God's will results in an unshakable confidence in God's Word.

The Bereans also "searched the Scriptures daily." This requires work, for the great truths of God are not discovered by the casual reader. Diamonds are not found on the sidewalk. The best is always under the shell. We must linger upon the Bible's chapters, verses, phrases, and Words, eagerly seeking to understand its message. Yes, we must search like a miner looking for gold. The psalmist said, "I love thy commandments above gold" (Psalm 119:127). We must search like a hungry man does for food. Jeremiah said, "Thy Words were found, and I did eat them" (Jeremiah 15:16). Job said, "I have esteemed the Words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). And again, "How sweet are thy Words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103). The little bee alights on the flower, then dips down to the very heart and sucks up the honey. Careful Bible reading will yield honey to the mouth. Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life" (John 5:39).

The Lord's formula for Joshua's success was: "This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

The word, meditate means "to attend." All attention must be focused on the

subject at hand. David's definition of a happy man in Psalm 1, is one whose "delight is in the Law of the Lord; and in His Law doth He meditate day and night." May God deliver us from a complacent, casual, cursory reading of the Word of God. Let us read the Bible carefully.

READ THE BIBLE SYSTEMATICALLY. First, let me suggest that you set aside a definite time for Bible reading, preferably at the beginning of the day when the mind is alert. At a prescribed time, in a quiet place, systematically read the Word of God.

Do not permit anything to interfere, no matter how important it seems. Many well-meaning Christians, who sincerely love the Lord, are up and down in their Christian experience, because they have no definite time with God. The old hymn states, "Take time to be Holy, Speak oft with thy Lord." To this, we could add, make time. Let us beware of the barrenness of an overactive life.

To read a portion of the Bible before retiring is fine, but not sufficient. Not only should our last conscious thoughts be of the Lord, but also first thoughts. Give God the first part of the day, not the last; the best, not the worst. "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Second, begin at the beginning. In reading any other book, we start with chapter 1. To start a novel or biography in the middle, results in confusion. The same holds true for the Bible. We cannot adequately understand Exodus apart from Genesis, or Hebrews apart from Leviticus. Too often, we become attached to certain favorite portions, that we neglect the remainder of the Bible. Begin where God began, Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1; and steadily go through to Revelation, chapter 22, verse 21.

Third, secure a notebook and jot down some questions such as: Who is

speaking: God, an Apostle, or the devil? To whom was it written: saints or sinners? What was the back-ground of the writer and possibly the receiver? What are the main ideas? What seems to be the key verse? What message is there for me today? As you read, fill in the answers. Learn the facts; then apply them. This method of reading will help you grasp the entire Book, thus avoiding error and misinterpretation. As you read, make sure you understand the words. If not, look them up. Get your bearings geographically and chronologically. Notice the marginal references and compare Scripture with Scripture. Added to your regular reading, you might want to do some topical studying. This yields rich dividends. Take your concordance and look up the word, "Heaven." Look up every passage in the Bible on this subject and record your findings. You will be thrilled at what you have learned.

Commentaries are splendid; however, beware of being chained to them. Someone has humorously said, "The Bible throws a lot of light on the commentaries." Any book that takes priority over the Bible becomes a crutch which leads to weakness. To read the words of men and neglect the Word of God, is to say the books of men are of greater worth. Read the Bible systematically.

READ THE BIBLE TRUTHFULLY. Why? Because "without faith" -- **WITHOUT FAITH** -- "it is impossible to please [God]" (Hebrews 11:6). Salvation, as well as Christian growth, depends upon believing and obeying God. Faith is necessary in understanding the Bible. This is exactly where Israel failed. "The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Hebrews 4:2). We must -- we must -- believe God! We must read the Bible truthfully.

The Bible is living, not dead. If the Lord came personally to you, would you ignore Him? Well, God has spoken to you in the Bible! May we never neglect it. Just think of it! Not man's word, but God's Word. May we sincerely say with Samuel, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth" (1 Samuel 3:9).

Just imagine Mr. Jones at the close of a busy day. He is weary in body and fatigued in mind. Just before going to bed, he hurriedly reads one of the shorter Psalms. Briefly, he prays and falls into bed. Doubtless, Mr. Jones will remember little of his reading. Every condition militates against it.

In the contrast, picture Mr. Jones at the beginning of the day. He is rested in body and ready in mind. In a definite place, at a definite time, he starts the day with God. After prayer for the Spirit's guidance, he reads with care, answering obvious questions and making brief notations of his findings. Occasionally, a verse must be looked up or a passage of Scripture compared with another. After systematic study, he is ready for all the events of the day. The Word of God will garrison him against evil. His new spiritual discoveries may be applied and put to use. We can be reasonably sure he will "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

To grow in the things of God, we should read the Bible prayerfully, carefully, systematically, and most of all, truthfully.

CHAPTER 6--HOW TO PRAY

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

Matthew 7:7

Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all, pray.

R. A. Torrey

Prayer is the key that unlocks the door to God's treasures.

The disciples came to Jesus one day and ask, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They had noticed that no one ever prayed like Jesus, and as they watched and listened to the prayer of Jesus, they realized their own desperate need. They did not ask, "Lord, teach us to preach," but "Teach us to pray."

At first, prayer may be awkward. The words may come slowly, but keep on praying, for through prayer, we can enter into the very presence of God. We can make our needs known to Him; but, greater still, we can commune with God.

WHAT IS PRAYER? The dictionary describes prayer as a reverent or devout petition to God, an entreaty. Certainly prayer is that. The simplest definition of prayer is the word "cry." In Romans 8:15, Paul says, "For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we 'cry,' Abba, Father."

Prayer is a "cry." When we pray, we are crying out to God. "Lord, help me." "Lord, give me wisdom." "Lord, help me to be silent." Prayer is a cry. Just as a

little child cries to his parent, we cry to God.

But prayer is also a “call.” In Jeremiah 33:3, God’s Words are: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

Prayer is “asking.” Again, our Lord said in Luke 11:9, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

But prayer is also “communion.” How rare it is, “ said Fenelon, “to find a soul quiet enough to hear God speak.” Prayer is talking to God and having Him talk to us. It is spending time in communion with our Heavenly Father.

One day, the five-year old son of D. L. Moody, went into the study where his father sat writing. Wanting no interruptions, Mr. Moody gruffly asked, “Well, what do you want?”

“Nothing, Daddy,” the boy replied. “I just wanted to be where you are.” Sitting on the floor, he began to amuse himself quietly. He desired only companionship.

G. Campbell Morgan, the great English preacher, relates that it was “this little incident, told by Mr. Moody, that helped me greatly to understand the true meaning of prayer. To pray is to be where Jesus is. When we are in His presence, we need nothing more to pray prevailingly.”

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY? The answer to why we should pray is very simple: The Bible teaches us to pray. In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Prayer is God’s cure for caving in. In Matthew 9:38, we are admonished to pray that the Lord of the Harvest will send forth laborers into His Harvest.

Why pray? The answer is, Because Jesus prayed. His entire life on earth was

an example of prayer.

Since Jesus Christ, the sinful creatures find prayer indispensable! Jesus prayed at the beginning of His public ministry when He was baptized: “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the Heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21).

Before choosing the twelve Apostles, He spent all night in prayer: “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him, His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named Apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

He prayed before feeding the 5,000: “And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would” (John 6:11). Jesus prayed before rescuing the disciples at sea. The Bible says, “He went up into a mountain apart to pray” (Matthew 14:23).

At the grave of Lazarus, He prayed: “Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard Me” (John 11:41).

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed: “And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take eat: this is My body” (Mark 14:22).

In Gethsemane, Jesus agonized in prayer (Matthew 26:36-44). Our Lord prayed often, and so must each Christian learn to pray.

Why pray? Because even now, Jesus Christ is praying for us, right now. The Bible says, “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

Why pray? Because prayer was the example given to us by the early Church. Of the Apostolic Church we read, “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Before the Day of Pentecost, they gathered together to pray: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren (Acts 1:14).

After Pentecost, they “continued steadfastly” in prayer.

When Peter was jailed, they prayed unto God who delivered Him: “And when He had considered the thing, He came to the House of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark: where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).

The Apostolic Church saturated their efforts with prayer.

The Apostle James, told the Christians of his time that their spiritual poverty was due to neglect of prayer. “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:2).

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. We should pray humble.

The Apostle James, tells us that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (4:6). Have you ever had anyone resist you? At every opportunity, he fought you; he was totally disagreeable. This is a very difficult situation to be in. But there is nothing - absolutely nothing - so hopeless as having God resist you.

God’s prescription for Spiritual blessing is outlined in 2 Chronicles 7:14: “If My people, which are called by My Name, shall humble themselves, and pray.”

The first key to fruitful praying is a Spirit of humility.

2. We should pray specifically.

Robert Cook tells of a missionary who was evacuated during World War II from a South Pacific island. He was put on a freighter that zigzagged through enemy waters in its journey to safety. One day, right before the ship, there appeared the periscope of an enemy submarine.

“That’s when I learned to pray specifically,” said the missionary. “While the enemy was looking our ship over (probably trying to decide whether or not to sink us), we prayed over every inch of that sub. ‘Lord, stop his motors!’ ‘Jam his torpedo tubes!’ ‘Break his rudder!’”

That missionary prayed specifically. Why? Because he had a specific need - his life was in danger.

Our prayers don’t need to be long. Many of our Lord’s prayers were only a few words. The important thing is that they be specific.

3. We should pray believingly.

General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, advised people to “work as if everything depended upon your work, and pray as if everything depended upon your prayer.”

Pray - expecting God to answer!

In Hebrews 11:6, we are told that “without faith, it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

James says, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth, is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

It was said of Praying Hyde, missionary to India, “he prayed as if God were at his elbow,” Standing ready to answer. He had faith!

Without faith - we cannot be saved.

Without faith - we cannot grow.

Without faith - we cannot please God.

Without faith - we will have no answer to our prayers

Pray believingly!

4. We should pray intelligently.

When we pray, we should determine, “What do I really want from God?” When I consult my doctor or lawyer, I carefully prepare my questions so that all my needs will be met. When we talk to God, we should intelligently bring our requests and petitions before Him. Again, James says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss” (James 4:3). Which brings me to another important point. We need to ask ourselves, “Can God grant my request?” For example, you should not pray, “Lord make my husband become a Christian.” God doesn’t work that way. You ought rather to pray, “Lord, help me to lovingly relate the Gospel to my husband, so he might obey Acts 2:38.”

We also need to ask, “Have I done my part? Am I setting the proper example? Am I demonstrating Christ’s love in my life?”

If a man prays for God to give him a job, he must be willing to read the want ads. The Lord always expects us to do our part in prayer.

5. We should pray obediently.

There is no way we can be successful in our prayer life if we are living with unconfessed sin. The psalmist declared, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18). Sin - unconfessed sin - is disobedience. Sin

blocks our communication with God. It knocks down the power lines.

Jesus said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

We need to pray to God from an obedient heart.

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY? It would be difficult to pray in the wrong place or at the wrong time. Jonah prayed powerfully in the belly of the fish. Paul and Silas prayed at midnight in the dungeon.

We can pray anytime, anywhere. However, it is best to have a definite time and place for daily prayer. David said, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice” (Psalm 55:17).

Of Daniel, we read, “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows, being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Daniel 6:10).

Jesus has told us to enter into the private place to pray. “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6).

Whenever God’s people gather, whether to eat, to study the Bible, or to socialize, it is right to pray, asking God’s blessing.

Do not forget the need for family prayer, a practice which draws the family together with a common cord.

FOR WHAT SHALL WE PRAY? We are to pray for all things needful for our physical and spiritual welfare. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily bread. This infers the needs of life: food, clothing, and shelter. Nothing is too large or too small for God. We are invited to take everything to God in prayer.

OBSTACLES TO PRAYER. Prayer is not easy; it is difficult. Unbelief, worldliness, and indifference, render prayer useless.

Consider the following Bible verses: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2). “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18). “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 Peter 3:12).

Sin caused mankind to be lost, and sin in the believer’s life makes prayer worthless. Thus, it forms a vicious cycle. Ask God to keep you from sin.

Prayer is a gracious privilege. It is a glorious calling. Cultivate prayer.

CHAPTER 7--WORLDLINESS AND YOU

“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.

1 John 2:15

A favorite feature in “The Reader’s Digest,” almost since its beginning, has been its articles recalling “My Most Unforgettable Character.”

Sometimes well-known persons have been highlighted, but far more frequently, these features have pointed to little known men and women. They have been persons whose lives mattered in some special way because of their characters, their personalities, or of what they meant to others.

The true Christian, is an unforgettable character who, day after day, is becoming more and more like the most unforgettable Person the world has ever known. I speak, of course, of Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is not a matter of following a certain list of “dos” or observing a longer list of “don’ts.” It is becoming so occupied with Him that the values and standards of the world around have little influence.

You are a new creature. You have a brand-new nature. You belong to a new and different kind of family.

As a result, you have an entirely new outlook. A new destination is now yours. Your whole attitude is different.

During the Middle Ages, the Separatist believed it was impossible to live a holy life unless they were isolated from the world about them. Their answer was to build communities walled off from the society they had tried to leave behind. As the years would pass; however, the evils of civilization would move in upon them and a

new start would seem necessary.

Escape from the world is really impossible. Nor should we want to escape. God wants us in the world for a Holy purpose - to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

That is our only real excuse for living in this world. And we cannot be what God intended unless we let Him keep us different.

WHAT IS SEPARATION? The Bible speaks of separation. For example, the Apostle Paul, plainly instructed Christians at Corinth, against involvement with the world around them. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," he wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Like our society today, Corinth was wicked. The very name "Corinthian" became synonymous with lustful conduct. Even religious worship included immoral exhibitions.

With fatherly concern, the Apostle wrote, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6:17). We are in the world, but surely not of the world.

When the Apostle tells us not to be yoked with unbelievers, he is referring to passages like Deuteronomy 22:9-11. Here we find the command "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed, which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together."

The principles here is simply this: What God has joined, we must not separate; and what He has separated, we must not join.

Why does the Bible forbid unequal yoking? Because it is unfitting and unfair. The ox and the ass were different in size, temperament, and strength. The ox was considered clean; the ass was an unclean animal. Both would have suffered discomfort and pain from unequal yoking. Harnessing them together would have formed a poor working combination.

The great Greek Scholar, A. T. Robertson, translated the passage about unequal yoking this way: “Stop becoming yoked together with the unconverted.” J. Henry Jowett said, “Worldliness is a spirit, a temperament, and attitude of the soul. It is a life without high callings, life devoid of lofty ideals. It is a gaze always horizontal and never vertical.”

Paul, the Apostle, gets to the heart of the matter in Romans 6:11. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is the answer for Christian victory. Count yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Until you do this, the Christian life will be most difficult and confusing.

DEFINITE COMMANDS FOR SEPARATION. But what is a Christian to do and what is he not to do? The Word of God includes many definite commands. Certain things are always wrong.

It is always right to be motivated by love for God and a needy world, but it is always wrong to lie, to deceive, or to be governed by evil motives.

Between the definite commands concerning good and evil, there is a definite no-man’s land, that at times presents a problem.

The Bible does not say “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not” concerning certain

questions. In this realm, we need the Holy Spirit to apply the principles of the Bible.

His presence assures you of a living Guide. He will help you evaluate your life according to God's will. However, always remember that our natures, at best, are very deceitful. In the face of doubt, it is necessary to call for help.

Often I have prayed, "Dear Lord, I am but a little child. Help me to think right. Reveal Thy will. Deliver me from evil and even the appearance of evil. Teach me to live in such a way that my conduct will glorify Thee." We need the Holy Spirit's help and we need to pray. But let me also give you some specific guidelines.

BIBLE GUIDELINES FOR SEPARATION.

1. Keep in mind the principle of ownership.

We who believe in Jesus Christ have become God's children. We are twice His, in fact. He is our Maker and also our Redeemer. He has created us and then He has purchased us, Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "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?"

He then goes on to explain, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your Spirit, which are God's." We do not belong to ourselves: God created us and redeemed us. Always remember the guideline of ownership.

2. Our conduct as Christians, should be governed by our awareness of responsibility for others.

We should ask ourselves, "How will my conduct affect those around me? Am I a stepping-stone or am I a stumbling block?" Never forget that the world knows that the Christian is different. It was because of this principle, that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:13, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh

while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” The great Apostle was determined to be a good and helpful example to others.

The meat offered to the idols, was probably the finest meat that money could buy. After it had been offered, it could be purchased cheaply in the open marketplace. But if eating this meat would offend others, Paul would refuse it. We must ask, “How will my conduct affect others?”

3. Keep in mind the affect of your choices on yourself.

This standard centers about your ability to count for God. We should ask, “Will my involvement make me more useful to God, or will it make me less useful? Can I ask His blessing upon my conduct.”

Paul’s application of this principle can be seen in 1 Corinthians 9:27, where he says, “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.” Never forget the guideline of self. What will my involvement do to my personal effectiveness for God?

4. Whatever we do should always be to the Glory of God.

This is the all-important test. Always ask, “Can I do this for the Glory of God?” Or, “What would Jesus Christ have me do?”

The great Apostle sums up this principle in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.” The Glory of God should be our supreme desire.

The Bible offers much help in discerning God’s will in doubtful areas. 1 Thessalonians 5:22, sets forth a basic guideline, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

Another is found in Romans 12:2” “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.” We are to be transformers and not conformers.

God’s will is also mentioned in Galatians 1:4, which speaks of Christ “who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the Will of God and our Father.”

Ephesians 6:12, describes our opposition: “For we wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

James warns us in his Epistle: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” And then he adds, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

The Apostle John, in his gentle way, gives a parallel warning in 1 John 2:15: “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.”

The person who is fully yielded to Jesus Christ, will have no serious problems with worldliness. May God help you to determine to live victoriously in this world for Christ.

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” In the final analysis, this moment-by-moment experience of letting Christ live in and through us, is the answer to living a clearcut Christian life.

CHAPTER 8--YOU AND THE CHURCH

Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:5

The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.

John Wesley

Men may not read the Gospel in seal-skin, or the Gospel in Morocco, or the Gospel in cloth covers, but they can't get away from the Gospel in shoe leather.

Donald Grey Barnhouse

Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.

Dwight L. Moody

YOU NEED THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCH NEEDS YOU. The Bible says, we are living stones, joined to one another in God's building. For real success in the Christian life, every convert, and for that matter, every Christian, needs the fellowship of the Church, a divine, permanent institution of which Jesus said, "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18).

Someone has said, "Though the Church has many critics, it has no rivals.

And despite the turmoil and tribulation it may go through, despite the neglect it may receive, the Church will remain. It will survive every onslaught and every attack, because it is God's institution.

WHY IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT? The Church is important because it is

the organization of God, built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. And, my friend, it will never pass away. It cannot be destroyed.

Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church. In Ephesians 1:22-23, we are told that God has exalted Christ Jesus “and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.”

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Church at Corinth, emphasized the importance of this fact: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

(1 Corinthians 3:11). He instructed the believers at Ephesus, that the proper love relationship between husband and wife should compare to the relationship of Christ to His Church (see Ephesians 5:22-25).

One of the problems of the Church is that it is made up of people like you and me. The Church is a divine institution founded by Jesus, but it is also a human institution. It is not a hot-house operating under ideal conditions in a controlled atmosphere. It is an organized group of imperfect saints, all of whom have faults and weaknesses.

We admit our faults, and we want to correct our weaknesses. But, there is nothing God has given us, in earth or Heaven, no organization that is more meaningful, than the Church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? I am sure that when many people hear the word, “Church” they immediately think of a red-brick structure with a tall, impressive steeple, but the Bible never speaks of the Church in this regard.

Actually, the Greek word “ekklesia,” which is translated “Church” in the New Testament, refers to either, a local assembly of Christian believers or else to the

universal Body of Christ, made up of all people everywhere, who have obeyed Acts 2:38. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 we read, “all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” This refers to the mystical Body of Christ, often called the Bride of Christ, or the Church universal. However, this same verse begins, “Unto the Church of God, which is at Corinth.” This plainly refers to the local congregation of believers at Corinth.

The word, “ekklesia” is made up of two separate words, the preposition “ek” meaning, “out of,” and the verb “kaleo,” meaning “to call.” The Church is a called-out group of people, a people separated by God unto Himself.

The English word, “Church” probably came from the Scottish word “kirk” or the German “kirche.” These, in turn, originated from the Greek word “kuriakon.” This word was used by the Greek Christians to designate a place of worship. It comes from the Greek word “Lord” and means, that which is the Lord’s place or the Lord’s House.

When the word “ekklesia” or “Church” is found in the New Testament, it generally refers to a body of believers, banded together in a definite place; in other words, a particular group of people, organized in a local community, accepting the Scriptures, as the basis of faith and conduct.

P. T. Forsythe spoke of the local Church as the “outcrop of the Church universal.” The local Church is vital and is God’s means of accomplishing His work here on earth.

A friend once told me, “I don’t belong to a specific local Church because I don’t see that commanded in the Bible.” But if that friend had studied his Bible at all, he would have realized that the local assembly is strongly emphasized throughout the New Testament. The Book of Acts infers that, on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 new believers were added to the Church in Jerusalem. Later on in the Book of Acts, we

read that the local Church in Anitoch commissioned Paul and Barnabas and sent them out as missionaries.

The Apostle John, received seven messages from the Lord Himself, directed to seven local Churches. Paul and his companions spent many years in the work of establishing and encouraging local assemblies. Nine of the thirteen Epistles, which he wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, were addressed to local Churches.

In our day, it is the local Church that sets apart missionaries and supports them. It is the local Church that operates Sunday Schools, helps the poor, conducts services for worship, edification, and evangelism. It is the local Church which serves as the human instrument to perform God's work here on earth. And it is because God's work, must and will go on, that there is a future for the Church of Jesus Christ.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH. Chapter 2 of the Book of Acts vividly relates the story of that first Church in Jerusalem. How the Holy Spirit was poured out! In Acts 2:41 we read, "then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Those early believers gladly received the Word of God. They agreed with the Bible's indictment of guilt and sin; they had an experience with the living Christ, and as a result of this salvation experience, they became a part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Christians down through the centuries have found that it is necessary to have fellowship together. The writer of Hebrews speaks of this when he states, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25). Martin Luther put it this way: "To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father is as necessary to the Christian life, as prayer."

Sometime ago, I suggested to a Christian man of many years, that he ought to find a local Church where he and his family could become active. “Oh,” he said, “you don’t have to be a member of a Church to be a Christian.”

Technically he was right. Church membership has little to do with salvation. But in a practical aspect, he was wrong. I suggested to him that a man could also cross the ocean without the use of a plane or boat, but I would not recommend it. I reminded him of the sharks he might encounter. The Church is surely God’s vehicle for carrying us through the rough seas of our journey on this earth. My friend, it is a colossal mistake to ignore the Church!

You, my Christian friend, need the Church and the Church needs you!

WHY BE A CHURCH MEMBER? From time to time, I am confronted with excuses from people who will not become involved in the local Church. “Church members have so many faults,” some say. “There are so many hypocrites in the Church.” I am sure that this is true! There never was a perfect Church, or a perfect Christian, for that matter. Even the first-century Churches had their problems. People with problems need the Church, just like sick people need a hospital.

Once a person has been born again of the water and Spirit, they need to be built up in the faith. They need to receive spiritual instruction and share with other believers---- to have the opportunity for Christian fellowship. The Church, through its ministries, is an instrument of training and provides an atmosphere for spiritual growth.

Every Christian needs the Church and its people in the dark hours of life. The fellowship of believers forms a vital unity in which there is strength and comfort. How many of God’s people, over-whelmed with sorrow, have been under-girded by fellow Christians? Only those who have passed hard places can say:

*Blest be the tie that binds,
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds,
Is like to that above.*

John Fawcett

Paul expressed his appreciation for the fellowship of other Christians: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you....for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3-5). Yes, you need the Church and the Church needs you.

It is not enough to attend and contribute. You are needed---your Godly example, your presence, your prayers, your influence, and all that you are---these are needed. The ungodly do not hide their darkness, and we must not hide our light. The Church certainly needs you.

WHAT IS THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH? The Church is to assist its members to grow in every way possible. The Church is a nursery to the newborn and a place of worship, education, and training for the mature believer.

It is interesting to observe the characteristics of the first Church as presented in Acts 2:41-47. In seventy years, those Christians went over mountain peaks and tossing seas to rock the imperial city of Rome with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts 2, shows that this Church possessed:

1. A saved membership (v. 41)
2. A steadfast membership (v. 42)
3. A sacrificial membership (vs. 44-45)
4. A serving membership (v. 46)
5. A spirit-filled membership (v. 47)

The post Apostolic Church was equally evangelistic. In the face of bitter persecution, the Church marched forward to evangelize. Since we today enjoy Apostolic succession, may we also experience Apostolic success.

The Bible clearly teaches that the program of the Church is world evangelization. Christ established the Church in order to reach a lost world. The mission and ministry of the Church are summed up in Christ's command: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Billions of people are included in this commission. The mission of the Church is missions. The last Words of Jesus, outlined the plan of action for the Church: "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They were to begin at home. Peter and John witnessed the death and resurrection of Christ and therefore, they answered, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Today, the need is greater than ever before. We, too, must share the Gospel, for the charge of Christ is still our commission today. Let us proclaim the Gospel in season and out of season, in the highways and the hedges, in public and private, from January to December, every day of every week, every week of every month, every month of every year, till the job is done. The unbreakable promise is "Lo, I am with you always, and even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

CHAPTER 9--YOU AND YOUR MONEY

All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee...O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine Holy Name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.

I Chronicles 29:14-16

Money reveals where our interests lie; it can direct our attitude; it ever exposes us to the danger of worshipping it; and it represents value. Money not only takes; “ it screams.”

Leslie B. Flynn

Is it true, that “money talks?” Yes, even in Christian circles!

Many Christians shy away from the subject of money, but Jesus did not. In seventeen of His thirty-seven parables, Jesus dealt with property and man’s responsibility; for using it wisely.

Let no one think; however, that giving, for the Christian, is a mere obligation, a responsibility. On the contrary, it is a joyous privilege. Giving cannot be separated from the Gospel. The Gospel, in fact, is giving. It is in the center of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.”

God gave, and we should want to give. This is the core of what the Apostle Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians. To challenge, and possibly to shame the Corinthian believers, he tells how believers in Macedonia, in spite of “great trial of affliction” and “deep poverty” (2 Corinthians 8:12) had begged for a share in helping needy Christians at Jerusalem.

Years before, on the Asiatic side of the Aegean Sea, Paul had experienced his

Macedonian vision. The call had been, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9).

Now there had been a second call. Not, “Come over and help us,” but, “Come over and take our help to others.”

For the Macedonian Christians, giving was not a chore, but a challenge, not a burden, but a blessing. Giving was not something to be avoided, but a privilege to be desired.

The danger for these Macedonians was not that they would give too little, but that they would give too much.

Suffering, often produces selfishness, for too often, we take special care of ourselves and forget others. Not so with these Christians. They experienced great trials and deep poverty, but this double yoke could not cramp their large-heartedness.

The way they gave is also notable. “And this they did,” says 2 Corinthians 8:5, “not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Notice the sequence. The first step in Christian giving is not your money, but you! Then sharing what you have will follow. The Dead Sea is a dead sea because it continually receives and never gives.

THE TITHE. But some may ask, “What about the tithe?” The tithe, according to the Bible, is one-tenth of a man’s possessions. People often dismiss tithing with the casual remark, “We are not under law, but grace.”

This statement is true, but remember, the Gospel of grace always goes beyond

the Law. The Law declares, “Thou shalt not kill,” but the Gospel says, “Thou shalt not hate,” and even more, “Thou shalt love.”

The Law of Moses demanded one-seventh of the individual’s time and one-tenth of his income for God. That was the minimum. The tithe is the starting place, not the goal. Likewise today, the tithe is a starting place, not the goal. The Gospel of grace goes beyond the tithe.

Every new convert will want to do, under grace, at least what was required under the Law. Dr. Herschel Hobbs has said, “The nine-tenths prove man’s love, but the one-tenth tests man’s legal obedience.” Make your money immortal: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven” (Matthew 6:20).

Giving should also be systematic. First Corinthians 16:2 says, “Upon the first day of the week, let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” At the very beginning of your Christian life, acquire the habit of regular giving.

In addition to giving systematically, we should give cheerfully. To have part in God’s program is a happy privilege. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

When we come to the end of our life, the question will be, “How much have you given?” Not, “How much have you gotten?”

It will be, “How much have you sacrificed?” Not, “How much have you saved?” We are to be producers rather than parasites, givers rather than getters.

CHRIST’S EXAMPLE. The motive for all Christian giving is summed up beautifully in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye, through His

poverty, might be rich.”

Jesus Christ gave everything. He “emptied Himself” (Philippians 2:7, ASV). Four truths are plain. He was rich; we were poor. He became poor; we became rich. Let’s think about these great facts for a moment.

1. He was rich. In the beginning when all was dark, God spoke and spun all creation into being. God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), and the sun was set afire in the skies.

He spangled the night with the beaming moon and shimmering stars. Then, between day and night, He placed the world and started it on its journey around the sun.

Then God scooped out the valleys and bulged up the mountains. God cooled the hot earth with water, dividing the land from the seas. Then the flowers blossomed. Fruit trees produced. Herbs sprouted.

After this, God placed living creatures on the earth -- beasts of every kind. “And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:25).

Finally, God made man. He breathed into him His breath, and man became a living soul. All creation declares the Creator’s might and wisdom.

God is rich in power. All the silver and gold belong to Him. The diamonds in the black caverns of earth are His. The cattle on a thousand hills belong to Him.

He is rich in wisdom. He is omniscient. The past, present, and future are one eternal “now” to Him. He is rich in life. When He came to earth and took the form of man, death had no claim on Him. He is God from everlasting to everlasting.

2. We are poor. How poor are we? So poor, that we have nothing with which to plead in Heaven's courts. We are so poor, that we could not afford a lawyer to plead our case, so poor, that we have no robes to cover our guilt and nakedness.

Romans 3, spells out the sorry story: "As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one...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. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues, they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known" (vv. 10-17).

We were poor. How poor? So poor, that we had no medicine that would cleanse our sin. So poor, that we could find no bread or water for our thirsty souls. We are poor.

3. He became poor. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of giving: "For your sakes, he became poor, that ye through his poverty, might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

How poor did He become? He was so poor, that there was no place for Him to be born. He was born in a stable with the cattle as His witnesses.

Think how He could have come. He could have been born in a palace, rocked in a golden cradle, fed with a golden spoon. He could have had angels as His attendants.

But NO. As Philippians 2 tells us, He "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" (vv. 7-8).

How poor was He? So poor, that even though He had made the world, He had no place to dwell. The ground was His couch, the rock, His pillow, the brook, His wash basin, the breeze, His towel, and the wind, His comb.

One day He spoke to a multitude, and we read that after He had finished “every man went unto his own house” (John 7:53). But the same Gospel narrative goes on to say that “Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives” (John 8:1).

When He died, it was as a poor man, crucified between two criminals. He was so poor, that He had to commit His mother to another’s care. When it was time for the burial, He was not buried in His own tomb, but the tomb of another.

Why did He become poor? “For your sakes”-- for the sake of those who were lost --for those who were poor. For me, For you.

4. We beome rich. How rich do we become? As rich as Jesus Christ Himself. We were dead -- without hope -- but now, we are alive, children of God. We are not only children, but heirs. We are priests and kings, and we shall reign with Him.

How rich do we become? All the wealth that is His, becomes ours. We are joint heirs with God.

Triumphantly we ought to sing:

*My Father is rich in houses and lands,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands.
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full, He has riches untold.*

Harriet E. Buell

Yes, and these riches are ours, for if we have trusted Christ we can also sing:

*I'm a child of the King, a child of the King
With Jesus, my Saviour, I'm a child of the King.*

Harriet E. Buell

He has made us rich. What shall we give in return? What shall I do with this little life of mine -- my money, my time? Shall I withhold it? Dare I withhold it? What will you do? As for me and my house we will serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD.



As a Christian we need to take on the whole armor of God that we may
be able to fight against the powers of Satan.
(Ephesians 6:10-18)

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