

ISSUES WORTH THINKING ABOUT

BY GLENN PEASE

CONTENTS

- 1. GOD LOVES TO SING Based on Zeph. 3:14-20**
- 2. LAND OF LIBERTY Based on Jer. 34:8-22**
- 3. THE MEANING OF MEANINGLESSNESS Eccles. 1:12-18, 2:1-11**
- 4. TAKING LAUGHTER SERIOUSLY Based on Eccles. 2:1-11**
- 5. A TIME FOR EVERYTHING Based on Eccles. 3:1-8**
- 6. EVERYTHING AT THE RIGHT TIME Based on Eccles. 3:1-8**
- 7. GOD AND BEAUTY Based on Eccles. 3:1-11**
- 8. WHAT IS BEAUTY Based on Song of Songs 1:15-16**
- 9. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE Based on Eccles. 4:9-12**
- 10. THE KEY TO FREEDOM Based on Judges 6:1-16**
- 11. MARCHING FOR A MIRACLE Based on Josh. 6:1-21**
- 12. INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE based on Numbers 12:1-15**
- 13. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE Based on Deut. 24:1-4**
- 14. A JEWISH SERMON Based on Ezek. 47:1-12**

- 1. GOD LOVES TO SING Based on Zeph. 3:14-20**

Knowing the Bible is the best education life has to offer, for not only is it the light by which we come to see our Savior and enter into His salvation, it is by its light that we get insights into all areas of life that other books cannot give us. If you do research on the origin of music, you will be taken back to the ancient world and told of instruments on Egyptian hieroglyphics and in caves. Gen. 4:21 will be quoted about Jubal, the father of all who play the harp and flute. All of the books will assume that music had its source in man.

Even so scholarly a book as The Guinness Book of Music will tell you that the earliest surviving hymn text goes back to the 8th century B.C. to a poet in

Corinth. All authorities stop far short of the Biblical record that tells us that music is eternal because it is a part of the nature of God. It did not have its origin in man, but in the God who made man, and made him to love music and singing, for God has enjoyed it for all eternity.

Music and song are as timeless as the nature of God. If you consider God's singing as sacred music, then sacred music has no beginning, for it is just as eternal as God is. It was a surprise to me when I first discovered this text in Zeph. 3:17 which tells us clearly that God delights and rejoices over His people with singing. I guess I never thought about it before. Man made in God's image could hardly live without music. It is so basic to His joy and happiness. But I never considered whether or not God has delight in singing. When I found this text and gave it some thought, it seemed a very logical thing to assume that God would love music. He is the source of all music, for He created man with the gift of creating it, enjoying it, and using it to praise Him. If He did not enjoy music, it would be a strange thing to want it used in the worship of His people.

We should know that God loves music, and that He has been singing for all eternity, even if this text was not in the Bible. But I am delighted it is here, for it opens up some exciting windows into the nature of our Lord, whom we praise in song. This text about God singing led me to search the Bible to see if there is any other evidence that God enjoys the same things that we do. What I discovered is that all three persons of the Godhead are very happy persons, and they delight in singing, and in all that is joyful.

We have a terrible misconception about Jesus because of the great suffering He had to endure to atone for our sin. He was called the man of sorrows and one acquainted with grief. This label stuck to Jesus, and most of the artists of the ages pictured Jesus in His agony, and this has been the image people have had of Him. The larger portrait of the Bible has been ignored, which is the portrait of Jesus as the happiest man whoever lived. The Lord of laughter; the life of the party, and the lover of singing. Joy was the dominant emotion of His life, and it was the joy of eternity that kept Him going to the cross. Jesus was spirit-filled, and joy is a fruit of the Spirit, which He displayed constantly.

We are blinded to the bright side of His joyful life by a focus on His tears and blood, which is truly a vital focus. We can never forget the blood He

sweat in Gethsemane, and that which He shed on Calvary. Our salvation depends on that shed blood. But let's not lose the life He died to give us-the life of joy and abundant living-the life He lived Himself. The book of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus was history's happiest man. Heb. 1:9 says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness, therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." Jesus was anointed with the oil of joy, and was set above all others by this unique anointing. In plain language, Jesus was the most joy filled person to ever walk this planet.

Spurgeon said, "I suppose there never lived a happier man than the Lord Jesus. He was rightly called the man of sorrows, but He might with unimpeachable truth, have been called the man of joys." It would seem to follow, that if singing is one of the key ways by which joy is expressed, that Jesus would, like His heavenly Father, be a singer. And sure enough, the book of Hebrews reveals Jesus to be just that; like Father, like Son. Just as God rejoiced over His temple in the Old Testament, and sang songs of joy, so Jesus in the New Testament sings the praises of His heavenly Father to His bride the church. We see this revealed in Heb. 2:11-12. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." Just before Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane He sang a song with His disciples, but this text tells us He sang the praises of God on a regular basis.

James makes an interesting distinction between praying and praising. Praying tends to be for the negatives of life, and praising for the positives of life. Listen to James 5:13-14. "Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." Singing songs of praise is a sign of a happy heart, and thus, we know God the Father and God the Son are happy, for they both sing songs of praise. But what about the Holy Spirit? There is no question about the joy of the Holy Spirit, for He is the spirit of joy, and the one who produces the fruit of joy in our lives. He is the one who inspired all the joyful songs of praise in the Bible, and to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with joy.

Paul wrote in I Thess. 1:6, "You welcome the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." In Rom. 14:17 he wrote, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Joy is actually another name for the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13:52 we

read, "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." All the songs of praise and joy through history are songs inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was a man of joy because He was filled with the Spirit. In Isa. 61 we see the passage Jesus quoted and fulfilled in His life when the Spirit of God came upon Him to preach good news to the poor; to bind up the broken hearted, and to set the captives free. Then it says in verse 3 what He came to do for those who grieve: "To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair." The work of the Holy Spirit was to, through Jesus, eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive, that God's people might be clothed in a garment of praise. The Trinity is a trio of praise singers. All three persons of the Godhead are happy, delighted, and joyous singers.

This explains why the Bible is so full of praise. Praise is God's signature. No wonder the Psalms have the entire creation singing praises. Everything God made was made to praise. When anything or anyone ceases to praise God, it is no longer what God made it to be. It is broken and not functioning for the purpose for which it was created. When man ceases to praise God, He is broken and doesn't work. Being saved is to repair that brokenness and renew the ability to praise.

There is no praise in hell, for hell is the junk yard where all go whose praise compacity is broken beyond repair, because they did not call upon the only one who could repair it-the Lord Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit the praise compacity is restored so that men can again be praisers of God. Men are never more like God wants them to be then when they are praising Him. The goal of this life is to get into God's choir which will sing praises forever. The only way to qualify is to let the Holy Spirit into your life by opening the door to Jesus Christ. He will give you a song that will never end.

Joy is the emotion that leads to singing, and this is an emotion that we see in Jesus who was filled with the spirit of joy. When the 72 came back to Jesus all excited about their power in His name to cast out demons, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven," but He urged them not to rejoice that the demons submitted to their power, but that their names were written in heaven. Then Luke 10:21 follows immediately: "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and

earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'"

We get a picture here of the disciples here like little children finding a room full of new toys. They are so excited and full of joy at the victory of good over evil, and Jesus is feeling like you and I feel when we see our children tickled with delight when they receive the gift of new games. Jesus knows the joy of the parent and grandparent, and He praised God for that joy. Jesus is a joyful praiser of God. When you have the joy of Jesus you have the ultimate joy. All other joy is partial, but His is complete. Jesus said in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." There can be no joy higher than that of Jesus, for He was the joyest man whoever lived.

The Shepherd who finds the lost sheep calls his friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep." Jesus said there is rejoicing in heaven over every sinner who repents, but He was doing plenty of rejoicing on earth as well. It is the same story with the woman who finds her lost coin and is rejoicing. The Prodigal's father threw a great party with a feast, music, and dancing because he was so full of joy that his son was restored. Jesus is joyful beyond words over every person who is saved and restored to fellowship with God, and this happens hundreds of times everyday. This means Jesus is in almost perpetual praise inspite of a fallen world. But we must get back to the first person of the Trinity-the Father. Our text tells us He is also full of joy, and in that joy He sings over His people.

This is the basis for the great love song called the Song of Songs. The heart of God is full of love songs for His bride. There is no escaping the reality that all of life, as we know it, is one great romance. God is the hero and man is the damsel in distress. Satan is the villian that seeks to spoil the relationship of God and man. It is a long hard struggle, but the story ends with the wedding feast of the Lamb. God wins His bride, and the feasting, celebration, and the songs go on forever. Every story has three parts: a setting; the setting is upset; and the setting is reset, either successfully, and then there is a happy ending, or unsuccessfully and there is a sad ending. God's story has a happy ending with love and singing that lasts forever.

There is so much unfaithfulness on the part of the bride, and thus, so much judgment that we tend to miss all the joyful scenes of God's delight in His

people. God is a happy God. He is a God in love, and He sings as a lover, and He rejoices in His bride. I studied all the words for happy and joyful emotions in the Old Testament, and I discovered that all of them apply to God. God has a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment as He interacts with people and His creation. It can be a lot of fun being God. Listen to some of the evidence. God is always promising Israel He will make them prosper if they obey Him, and in Duet. 30:9 He says, "The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous just as He delighted in your fathers." The Hebrew word for delight is the same word for rejoicing, being glad, making mirth, and being joyful. It is used again in Isa. 62:5, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." God has the same emotion as the groom who feels he has the girl of his dreams for his own. The word is used again in Isa. 65:19, "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people."

There are others, but we want to look at just one more that gives us an insight into the emotions of our Maker. In Psa, 104:31 we read, "The Lord shall rejoice in His works." God said, after He made the universe, "It is very good." He was happy with His works just like an artist who gazes on His finished painting and says, "That is good. It is the best I can do." God was happy, and no wonder all the angels sang at creation. God was no doubt leading them, for God sings when He is delighted, and He was delighted in His works. He will also be delighted in the final heaven when the story of salvation is complete. So the point is, we will hear God's singing forever, and we will sing with Him forever. Song will be a part of our eternal life. Music is forever, for it is a part of God's very being.

Music beautifies sound, and singing beautifies language, and the purpose of music and singing is to do just that: add beauty to life. It enables us to say on a higher plain what we cannot communicate in words alone. Poetry is a step above pros, and poetry to music is a step above that. There is no higher step of communicating love, joy, and all the emotions, for when we reach the level of song we are on the highest level, where even God is not revealed to go any higher. The Song of Songs is saying by its very title, you cannot go higher than a song to communicate love.

It is also Godlike to rejoice over our works. For all we know God whistled while He worked, or hummed a tune as He said, "Let there be light." He enjoyed what He was doing, and when you enjoy your work you have the

potential of singing over your work. The work itself can be a song we offer to God as a sacrifice of praise. Galen, the famous second century physician, said of his professional life that he regarded it "As a religious hymn in honor of the Creator." Life is on the highest level when we can do all we do for the glory of God. When we do, all of life is a song of praise to God, and this is what leads God to sing over us.

Maclaren, the great English preacher, wrote in his Expositions of Holy Scripture, "Zion is called to rejoice in God because God rejoices in her. She is to shout for joy and sing because God's joy too has a voice, and breaks out into singing. For every throb of joy in man's heart, there is a wave of gladness in God's." God loves to sing, and we give Him reason to do so when we sing and make our life a cause for praise. The Living Bible makes this text come alive. "Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the Lord Himself exalting over you in happy song." The questions this raises are many, and we will have to wait till heaven to have our answers.

- 1. Does God write His own songs?**
- 2. Does He sing solo, or always as a trio of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?**
- 3. Does He have the angels sing backup?**
- 4. Is it recorded so we will be able to listen to God's love songs for His bride?**

It is so hard to imagine God singing that most never try for they never see this text in Zeph. and never explore the joy of God in His people. Spurgeon, however, usually discovers the gems of the Bible that others pass by. Listen to his excited comments on this text. "Think of the great Jehovah sings! Can you imagine it? Is it possible to conceive of the Deity breaking into song: Father, Son and Holy Spirit together singing over the redeemed? God is so happy in the love which He bears to His people that He breaks the eternal silence, and the sun and moon and stars with astonishment hear God chanting a hymn of joy."

It is interesting that Spurgeon would say the sun, moon and stars hear God's song. The Bible and hymnology are full of this idea that the whole universe listens to God's song, as if all of its orderly and beauty of movement is its dance to God's tune. Psa. 148 says the whole universe praises God, and other Psalms have the trees clapping and the mountains skipping to God's tune. Jesus even said on Palm Sunday, if the people had not praised Him, the very rocks would have cried out. That would have really been Christian rock music had the literal rocks broken into songs of praise for their Creator. We

sing at Christmas, "Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains, and the mountains in reply echo back their joyous strains." Do the mountains really sing back in reply to this heavenly song? D.L. Moody, the great evangelist, took it literally, and he preached a sermon on praise in which he said, "Did you ever stop to think that the heart of man is the only thing that does not praise the Lord? The heavens declared His glory, the sun praises Him, the moon and stars praise Him; as rain falls from heaven it praises God; all nature praises God-the ver dumb creature gives Him praise, and it is only the heart of man that won't praise Him."

Now I know what it means when God says He looks not on the externals but on the heart. God is looking inside man to see if there is a song of praise there. That is what matters to God, for if there is praise in a man's heart, he is alive to God and has great potential. When Samuel went to chose a son of Jesse as the new king of Israel, he thought for sure the oldest son would be God's choice. He was big and handsome and seemed a great follow-up to Saul, who was head and shoulders above most all men. God however rejected all of the older sons and chose the youngest, which was David. He was just a mere shepherd boy, but God saw in David what no one else could see. Everyone saw a mere lad, but God saw a king; a king who would be the greatest leader of God's people in praise. He wrote most of the songs God's people sang all through the Old Testament, and all threw the history of the church up to the last couple of centuries. Many of the popular songs today are going back to the Psalms, and many Christians have never ceased to sing the songs of David.

The words of David have gone up in praise to God from all over the world. God saw the heart of praise in David. He was a man after God's own heart, for there was a song in his heart. That is what God looks for in all His children. That is why Paul, who could sing a song even while in stocks in a dungeon, wrote to the Ephesians and said in Eph. 5:19, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord."

God has a musical heart, and He loves to see a song in the heart of all His children. He intends to sing with His family of the redeemed forever, and so one of the best ways to prepare for the heavenly culture is to fill your heart with songs of praise. That is what God saw in David. Others saw a shepherd boy, but God saw a king. Don Mcminh, in his book *Entering His Presence*

writes, "God sings! What a delightful thought! When God thinks about His love for us, it impels Him to sing. When God wants to rejoice, when He wants to praise, He chooses music to express Himself. Music is a part of the eternal existence of God; how wonderful that He has given us the joy of music as a tool to express godliness in our lives." One of the major questions we need to ask of ourselves is, Does God see a song in my heart? God loves to see a song there because He is ever looking for partners to sing, for God loves to sing.

2. LAND OF LIBERTY Based on Jer. 34:8-22

Liberty is America's second name. We have such national symbols as the Statue Of Liberty, the Liberty Bell, and the songs of liberty like My Country Tis Of Thee-sweet land of liberty, of thee of I sing. The Preamble to our Constitution says, "We the people...in order to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution. Our Constitution exists to secure for us the blessing of liberty. Our Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag ends with, "With liberty and justice for all." The Declaration of Independence says that we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Why is liberty so important? It is because bondage of some kind is always a battle. If we are not in bondage to some master or government, we are in bondage to sin, and if not to sin, then to our past, or someone else's legalism. We may be in bondage to family tradition, or social tradition. We are in bondage to our culture and to our peer group. We are in bondage to fears, anxieties, and guilt. We are always fighting to be free from some kind of bondage. The biggest battle of the believer is in staying free as the Son has set us free.

The battle never ceases, for the oppressor is always somewhere seeking to bring you into bondage. The Judaisers sought to do this to the early Christians. They tried to bring them again under the bondage to the law of Moses. Paul had to shout in their ear, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke

of slavery." Liberty is the name of the game. Liberty is life. It is the abundant life Jesus came to give. Liberty is the goal of almost all we do, or do not do. To be free from sin is a goal of God for us. To be free from tyranny is the goal of our government. To be free of all that robs us of God's best is what it is all about, and so liberty is life.

In Isa. 58:6 God says, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen-to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke." As Christians and as Americans we are, by our very nature and heritage, a people committed to liberty. But why do we have it when all men have always loved liberty, and yet have not achieved it? It is because we have a piece of paper that prevents human nature from doing what robs us of our liberty, and that is our constitution.

In our text of Jer. 34 we see human nature for what it is, and how that man is the worst enemy of liberty. Here we see Jews who will not let their fellow Jews be set free from bondage. It is to their benefit to keep them in bondage, and so they enslave those who worship the same God. It is in direct violation of the revealed will of God and leads to judgment. What we see in this passage is an example of why it is a perpetual battle to secure human rights and liberty. Christian history does not differ from Jewish history, but reveals the same danger of power being used to rob people of liberty.

The Christians who came to America to enjoy liberty did not come here to escape the bondage of atheists or humanists, but of other Christians. In our Western history it has been Christians who have been the greatest opponents of religious liberty. The people who fled to America were not coming from non-Christian lands, but from England and Europe where Christians were in control of the church and state. These state-church Christians came to America as well, and so the battle continued in this land for liberty of Christians from other Christians.

The Puritans were some of the most godly people to ever inhabit this planet, but they were convinced that the church and state should be one, and that the laws of the land should be laws that support the church. What they failed to realize was that other Christians did not believe this was right. They assumed that all Christians would benefit from the laws, but the fact is, the laws hindered other Christians to be free to worship God as they were convinced they should.

The Puritans had all kinds of law that put Baptists in bondage. The laws of the early colonies demanded that all babies be baptized, and that all citizens be taxed to support the state church. As the nation became more diverse, and people with different convictions came, there were more and more laws passed to restrain their freedom. Laws were passed that said there could be no preaching at night, and that none could preach without consent of the authorities. No servant could be baptized without the consent of his or her master, and that no one could vote unless they were a member of the established church. America was fast on its way to becoming a nation where one group of Christians enslaved all others.

Then God sent to these shores a man who changed the course of history and helped America become the greatest land of liberty in the history of mankind. His name was Roger Williams, and he was the Apostle of religious liberty. The Puritans did everything they could to get rid of this fanatic for freedom. They vanished him from the country, but he fled and started his own colony. In 1638 he founded the colony of Rhode Island. It was the only place on earth at that time where all Christians were free to worship God and practice their religious convictions without persecution from other Christians. The following year in 1639 he founded the First Baptist Church in America. He laid the foundation for the Baptist being the denomination most famous for its fight for religious liberty.

It was a long hard battle, for the state church was already deeply embedded in America, and the other colonies were governed by Christians who were convinced that their church alone represented the kingdom of God. The Baptists demanded the right to worship and obey God in accordance with their interpretation of the Scriptures. They did not want the ideas of others imposed on them. Isaac Backus stood before the Massachusetts legislature shortly after the famous Boston Tea Party, which was a protest against taxation without representation. He applied this demand for liberty to the religious realm, and he said:

"That which has made the greatest noise, is a tax of 3 pence a pound upon tea; but your law of last June laid a tax of the same sum every year upon the Baptists in each parish, as they would expect to defend themselves against a greater one. And only because the Baptists in Middleburo have refused to pay that little tax, we hear that the first parish in said town had this

fall voted to lay a greater tax upon us. All Americans are alarmed at the tea tax; though, if they please, they can avoid it by not buying the tea; but we have no such liberty. We must either pay the little tax, or else you people appear even in this time of extremity, determined to lay the great one upon us.

But these lines are to let you know, that we are determined not to pay either of them; not only upon your principles of not being taxed where we are not represented, but also because we dare not render homage to any earthly power, which I and many of my brethren are fully convinced belongs only to God. Her, therefore, we claim charter rights, liberty of conscience."

What we need to see is that the battle for religious liberty is not just a fight for freedom of religion, but for freedom from religion. We need to be free from the religious convictions of other people being imposed upon us. This has been the battle of the Baptists. Nobody is more likely to rob you of your liberty than other religious people. John 5:16 says, "Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him because He had done these things on the Sabbath day." Jesus had a different conviction about how the Sabbath was to be used, and so they sought to eliminate Him. This is the way human nature responds to new ideas, and that is why progress in the religious realm is often so painful and costly for the pioneers who blaze new trails.

Who killed the prophets of God? It was not the Gentile kings, but it was God's own people. Who killed Christ? Again, it was God's own people. There is no freedom of religion until you have some means by which you have freedom from the religious convictions of others. That is what makes America so unique in the history of nations. We have freedom from religion guaranteed by our constitution.

Sometimes we might think it would be great if Christians had the power to eliminate all other beliefs. Historians are in agreement, however, that this is the surest way to corrupt Christianity and make it ineffective. Everything Protestants despise about the history of Catholicism began when Constantine linked the Roman Empire and the church. Almost every bad thing you can say about the history of the church has its origin in that marriage of the church and state. The Church gained control of civil power, and it began to

write the worst chapters in its history of evil and corruption. Power does not just corrupt the ungodly. The godly are also its victims, and history makes it clear that Christians need protection from themselves. Our Constitution limits Christian political power, and we need to be grateful that it does.

Christians who have had the power to persecute have done so, for they all follow the same line of thinking that seems to be so reasonable. Lord Macaulay put it into these words: "The doctrine which, from the very first origin of the religious dissensions has been held by all bigots of all sects, when condensed into a few words, and stripped of rhetorical disguise, is simply this: I am in the right, and you are in the wrong. When you are the stronger, you ought to tolerate me; for it is your duty to tolerate truth. But when I am the stronger, I shall persecute you; for it is my duty to persecute error." That is the way Christians tend to think when they get power.

In Virginia, for example, there was a fine of 2000 pounds of tobacco for any parent who refused to have their child baptized by the state church. The Baptists went through horrible persecution when resisting such laws, and they were whipped and jailed by other Christians who did not want them to have the freedom to do it the way they were convinced the Scripture taught. But men of liberty who had the desire for freedom began to see the Baptists position. A young lawyer by the name of Patrick Henry got three preachers set free who were on trial for preaching the Gospel without the consent of the state church.

As the Baptists were dragged to court for their violations of the church-state laws their views were being heard by lovers of liberty. James Madison, the father of the Constitution, came over to their side. Thomas Jefferson became sympathetic, and George Washington became open to their plea for liberty. In 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed, but because of the Baptist fight, three years later in 1779 Virginia gave the Baptists their independence from the state church. No longer did they have to pay the tax to support the state church, and by 1786 the law established complete separation of church and state. The Baptists had won a great victory for religious liberty.

The Baptists were fearful, however, that the central government would gain power over religious liberty and enslave them again, and deprive them of the victory they had won from the states. So in 1788 a General Committee of

Baptists met in Virginia to discuss the new Constitution of the U. S. They sent a delegation to George Washington, the new President. They persuaded him to urge the congress to listen to the Baptist concern. The result was the First Amendment of the Constitution, which says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

America was at last a land of full religious liberty like no other land ever before. The First Amendment eliminated all of the dangers of a state church. No body of religious people can now impose their conviction on any other body of people. All are free to worship and obey God according to their own convictions. This has been the major contribution Baptists have made to our nation. The American historian Mr. Bancroft said, "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists." John Locke said, "The Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty."

We need to appreciate just how much this liberty makes America the unique nation that it is. The great leaders of the Protestant Reformation did not believe in religious liberty for all people any more than did the Catholic church. The majority of Christians in history have felt that liberty should be limited to their convictions which they hoped could be imposed on others. In England when a Catholic gained the throne there was persecution of the Protestants, and when a Protestant gained the throne there was persecution of the Catholics. The only escape from this abuse of power is in separation of church and state, and it was only in America that this goal became a reality. In our land the largest groups of Christians cannot impose any of their convictions on the smallest group of other Christians. We are indeed a land of liberty.

History and the Bible make it clear that the most godly people cannot have power over other people and not abuse that power. That is why the only way to secure religious liberty is by a Constitution like ours that makes it illegal to impose your convictions on others by force. Our liberty does not depend upon the goodness and kindness of those in power. They can hate us, but they cannot deny our liberty, for it is written that they cannot do it. We have our liberty, not as a gift from those in power, but as a right guaranteed by our Constitution.

God demanded that the Jews give their fellow Jews liberty. It is not just a good idea or suggestion, but it is an absolute obligation. Failure to honor God's will in this regard led to great judgment of destruction. God takes man's freedom very seriously. That is why it is essential to preserve the separation of church and state. This does not mean they cannot cooperate, for they are both a vital part of society. They just cannot have power over each other to coerce each other into conformity. They are to be mutually beneficial friends working together for the good of the people. The wall of separation is to protect them from each other. It is like the wall between the men's room and the women's room. But this is not to be interpreted to mean that the two sexes cannot work together for the good of all. The wall is just protection so that the temptation to abuse power is kept under control.

In the Cross of Christ I glory as a Christian, but in the Constitution I glory as an American. In these we have the best of both worlds-a Lord of liberty in a Land of liberty. Let us praise God for His providence that led this nation to be the greatest land of liberty that has ever been.

3. THE MEANING OF MEANINGLESSNESS Eccles. 1:12-18, 2:1-11

Pastor W. Robert McClelland had to endure the painful experience of hearing his grown son curse God and cry out in angry rebellion at Him. His son had worked hard for congressman Jerry Litton in his senatorial campaign. When the polls closed that Tuesday night and Litton come through with an upset victory, it was an experience of great joy. But as is so often the case with life, it suddenly switched tracks and the entire Litton family was killed in a plane crash on the way to the victory celebration.

You can put yourselves in the shoes of a young man who has just poured himself out for a cause, and then seeing it all come to an end just as it was beginning. The absurdity of it; the futility of it, and the total nonsense and utter waste of it is hard to swallow. He was a Christian, but he felt like Solomon in his very sub-Christian mind in this book of Ecclesiastes. His preacher father did not like to hear his deep negative expressions, but he knew in his heart he had felt the same way on another occasion. He was a

professor at a mid-western college, and the wife of one of his colleagues became very ill. He and other Christian friends battered the gates of heaven for her with prayer, and they spent hours at her bedside. The doctor said she would not live, but she did recover and was home for Christmas celebration. It was a great victory but she had a relapse, and on New Year's Day she died. He was so angry at God that he refused to make excuses for God at the memorial service. He said, "This is your doing God, you get yourself off the hook. If this is your idea of wisdom, then you explain it."

He, like his son, experienced the deep dark feeling of meaninglessness. It is that feeling that nothing makes any sense at all, and that life is a joke, but a joke that isn't even funny. You feel like everything you do is as worthless as rearranging deck chair on the Titanic. What's the difference when the ship of life is sinking? This is not a pleasant experience, but it is a universal experience, and at one time or another almost every Christian will get a taste of this bitter stuff. Solomon had to eat it as a regular diet for sometime. Few Christians will have to endure what he did, but the point is, his experience of the meaninglessness of life is in the Bible because it is, was, and will be, as long as history lasts, a very relevant issue.

Dr. Viktor Frankl, a leading psychotherapist in Europe for generations, developed Logotherapy to deal with this very issue. He survived the Nazi concentration camp experience, and he learned through it that those who survived while others in as good health died, did so because they had meaning to their lives. Logotherapy is healing through meaning. If you could get people to see some rhyme or reason in the meaninglessness of life, they can live happy lives, or at least survive. Meaninglessness is the number one enemy of human happiness. Studies show that in both Communist and Capitalist countries modern meaninglessness has multiplied. You might assume that this is due to the masses of the poor who cannot get in on the joys of affluence, but this is not the case.

This malady afflicts those who would feel right at home at Solomon's table. A study of 100 alumni of Harvard who were successful doctors, lawyers, and business men, 20 years after their graduation, made this clear. The majority of them had the feeling of futility, and they wondered what the meaning of their achievements was all about. The Bible deals with the real, and this matter of meaninglessness is very real, and has been one of the major struggles of mankind. Dr. Frankl calls it the existential vacuum. It results

from the frustration of not being able to find meaning even in those things which are suppose to be the goals of life, such as wealth, fame, power, and all the other things Solomon succeeded in gaining in great quantity.

The paradox is that the more man succeeds in getting all that life offers under the sun, the more he questions the meaning of life. It is because when he does not have them he can hope and dream that they would fill his need for meaning, but when he has them he knows they do not, and he can no longer delude himself. Success and progress, therefore, do not take away the struggle for meaning, but they add to it. That is why the very successful often battle with despair, for they have everything and yet they are empty of the one thing they most need, and that is meaning.

Wood Allen says that his only regret in life is that he is not somebody else expresses, with tongue and cheek, the dilemma of modern man. He writes, "More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other to total distinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly." Many feel that these are the only choices. Solomon in this book is also a pessimist, and he experienced the despair that comes with the search for meaning, but as we follow him we find that though the road is rough it does reach a desirable destination and a meaningful choice. We want to look at his journey in three stages.

I. HIS QUESTIONING OF THE MEANING OF LIFE.

This is the theme of chapter one where he asks, what is the sense of it all? It is the striving after the wind and all is vanity. Dr. Frankl, who works with those who suffer from meaninglessness, says it is a good thing for man to question the meaning of life. Animals never do this, but it is a very human experience. He says it is being honest and sincere to question life's meaning, for to just take it for granted is to live on the level of the animal. As long as there is food and comfort the animal does not care, for that is enough. It is not enough for man, for he wants more because he is more than an animal.

Questioning the meaning of life is the first step in the quest to find that meaning. Those who never take the first step never make the journey, and so they add nothing to life's meaning. It is a fact of life that those who often give us the most are those who question the most. God is saying to us by allowing the book of Ecclesiastes to be a part of His Word to man. It is okay to

question. It is not out of God's will to doubt, struggle, and be skeptical about life. In fact, it makes you more authentic and realistic if you can honestly face up to the dark side of reality and not pretend it does not exist.

The Christian who goes through life always saying that God is in heaven and all is right with the world may enjoy his isolation from the real world, but he will not be enjoyed by the world. In other words, he will never be the salt of the world making life taste better, for he will never get out of the salt shaker into the meat and add to life's meaning. He will not be compassionate and caring for a world that is hurting, because he refuses to acknowledge that it is. He insulates himself from the world by denying that tragedy and despair is real. It has to be of value to struggle with the meaning of life, or this book has no business being in the Bible, and is itself meaningless.

We need to learn from this book to avoid extremes. There is the extreme of never questioning life and its meaning, and this makes us superficial and unrealistic optimists. Then there is the extreme of always questioning life and being skeptical of all ultimate values, and this makes us hardened pessimists. Positive pessimism questions life and its meaning, but always with the assurance that in God there is an answer. Solomon questions everything, and yet he never questions the reality of God. This is what keeps him from being a pure pessimist.

Novelist Romain Gary in book The Ski Bum has an older man tell a restless and alienated young person: "Your generation is suffering from what for lack of a better word I shall call over-debunk.....the generation before yours went too far with their debunking job. You went over-board...You were so angry with all the dangerous phony piper's tunes that you ended up by breaking all the pipes and hating all the tunes. You have reduced the world to a spiritual shambles. God is ha-ha-ha. The soul is ho-ho-ho. Booze is reality. Love is sex....But you don't seem to enjoy it. Something is still missing, eh? You got rid of God and, isn't that funny, something is still missing." It is tragically funny when you think about it. You throw out God and then wonder why something is still missing. People do it all the time and do not even realize how foolish it is.

II. HIS QUEST FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE.

This is the theme of chapter 2. This book could well be titled Solomon's

Search. He leaves no stone unturned in his quest to find that which gives life meaning. I made a list of all the things Solomon tried and I can't imagine that there is anything new under the sun that could be tried. He tried all of these things:

- 1. Being a workaholic.**
- 2. A nature lover.**
- 3. A history fanatic.**
- 4. Being an intellectual.**
- 5. Pleasure seeking. He gave himself up to the trio of wine, women and song. If life's meaning could be found in the good times with alcohol, sex, music, laughter and fun, Solomon would have discovered it.**
- 6. He tried creativity of all kinds, and he built marvelous buildings.**
- 7. He tried possessions and had things from all over the world in great quantity.**
- 8. He tried power and being superior to everyone. He was number one.**
- 9. He did not limit himself to what was wise, but gave folly and madness a chance to prove their case, and he acted the fool to see life from all sides.**

The one thing you have to give Solomon credit for was his thoroughness. He covered all bases, and yet when the experiment was over he came up with the same thing he would have had had he chased the wind, and that was nothing. He could not find the meaning of life in any of these experiences, nor in all of them combined. Two out of three ain't bad, but nothing out of everything is really sad. This Solomon search is what characterizes the life of most people.

One of the reasons we live in a world of constant change is due to man's quest for meaning. Nothing can stay the same very long when it is not adequate to satisfy this thirst for meaning. There is constant change because there is constant dissatisfaction. Solomon tried everything, and the human spirit in general is like that of Solomon. The answer must be just around the corner in some new experience, and so life is a quest for meaning by seeking endless new experiences. This means nothing can be stable for it soon gets old and boring because it does not fill the emptiness.

Solomon's experience is being repeated over and over again as people everywhere discover all of their achievements still leaves them unsatisfied. This is what motivates people to do all sorts of foolish things. People throw

away good marriages because they think marrying someone new will bring them happiness. One wife said, "I feel like an unfinished symphony." Another said, "I feel like a column of figures that needs totaling. There should be something that will sum things up and bring the various strands of life together." This quest for meaning affects marriages, and it affects jobs. Many men are constantly dreaming and scheming because their job does not fill life with meaning as it ought. Change is the name of the game because it is man's perpetual hope that change will lead to meaning. Solomon says forget it, for going from one meaningless event to another does not add meaning to life.

III. HIS QUINTESSENCE OF THE MEANING OF LIFE.

This is not a word we often use, but it fits what Solomon does for us as no other word does. Quintessence means the essential principle of anything in its most concentrated form. Quint, as we know, means 5, and so quintessence means the 5th essence of something. This only makes sense when we go back to the history of philosophy, and to the time when men said the 4 elements of all reality are earth, air, fire, and water. These were the 4 essences-the 4 essentials. These represent everything under the sun.

But for those who recognize a higher reality, such as the celestial or heavenly, there was a 5th essence. The quintessence of anything is what it is from the heavenly or ultimate perspective. That is precisely where Solomon finally comes to in his search for the meaning of life. He could not find it anywhere under the sun, but he did find it when he looked beyond the sun to the God who made the sun and all creation. He gives us the meaning of life in a nutshell in the last two verses of this book. "Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is whole duty of man, for God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

You may not see it at first, but his conclusion is the very essence of both the Old and New Testament. Solomon was one of the wisest men whoever lived after all, for by his wisdom he was able to sum up the meaning of life with these two principles-relationship and responsibility. Relationship to God by fearing Him and obeying Him, and responsibility to man, for you will be judged for everything you do as to its good or evil.

This is indeed the quintessence of the heavenly perspective, for that is what the Ten Commandments are all about. They are about relating to God as the supreme Person in your life, and secondly of being responsible in your relationships to your fellowmen. Jesus sums up the whole law with these two great commandments: To love God with your whole being, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said it simpler and clearer, but the fact is, Solomon's conclusion is the same, for to love God is to fear and obey Him, and to love your neighbor as yourself is to recognize you will be held accountable for the good or evil you do in their lives, and so you must live responsibly.

If one truly keeps the first table of the law and makes God supreme, he will keep the second table and live responsibly toward his neighbor. If a man truly prays the first part of the Lord's Prayer, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," then he will truly mean the second part, "Forgive us as we forgive others, and lead us not into temptation." If one keeps the first commandment to love God, he will follow through on the golden rule and do unto others as he would have them do unto him.

Solomon's quintessence of life's meaning is the same as all the rest of the Bible. It is found in an obedient relationship to God. Life under the sun only has meaning when there is a link to that which is above the sun. Augustine said it in a sentence-"Our souls are restless till they find rest in Thee." A. J. Cronin put it in a paragraph: "There comes a moment when man wearies of the things he has won; when he suspects with bewilderment and dismay that there is another purpose, some profound and eternal purpose, in his being. It is then that he discovers that beyond the kingdom of the world there exists a kingdom of the soul."

Solomon took a terribly twisted road to get there, but he did finally learn that life only has meaning in relationship to God. This means that life without God really is meaningless. The ultimate in meaninglessness is to be without God and hope in the world. Will Durant in his book *On The Meaning Of Life* was biblically accurate when he wrote, "The greatest question of our time is not communism versus individualism, not Europe versus America, not ever East versus West; it is whether man can bear to live without God. The answer of Solomon is, no, men cannot bear it, for everything minus God equals nothing, and men cannot live in a universe

without meaning, for his very nature, which is made by God, demands it. Man has no alternative for he needs God to give meaning to life, and nothing else will satisfy that need.

What this means then is that much of life is meaningless because it is life without God. Solomon is not out of line at all by his pessimistic cry of vanity, vanity, all is meaningless. Life under the sun that has no link to God above the sun is, in fact, a life with no ultimate meaning. The despair of the man without God is not superficial, but it is reality. Meaninglessness is a major malady of our time because modern man is trying the same experiments that Solomon did. They are trying to find life's meaning in everything but God, and they are learning the hard way, just as Solomon did, that all is an empty world without God.

Solomon is not all wet, but he is telling it like it is, all of the philosophers who seek for meaning without God tend to come to the same conclusion that life is futile search in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there. The paradox of meaninglessness is that it explains so many things about life. If everything has meaning, and every event and tragedy, and all brutal evil and mindless folly are a part of some plan, then the mystery is indeed mind boggling. If a man's dashing into a McDonald's and killing innocent people by the dozens is meaningful, then we really have a problem. But if the meaningless is real, then the problem is solved, for it is meaningless. You don't need to find a meaning for the meaningless, for by definition it doesn't have any.

This explains why the world is so full of things that do not make sense. What else can you expect in a world where people reject the only way to meaning? They reject God and Christ, who is the only way to God, and the only alternative is the way of meaninglessness. They rob and kill helpless old ladies; they rape and kill helpless young children, or do they a million and one other less violent things, but equally meaningless. It is not part of a plan. It is pure folly and rebellion against the plan of God. It is not part of a puzzle, but is meaningless.

The more you grasp the reality of what Solomon is saying, the more you realize that Ecclesiastes is a powerful introduction to the Gospel. It is the darkness that makes the light of hope so glorious. Until men see the reality of the meaningless they will never seek God and ultimate meaning, for they will

always be convinced they can find meaning without submission to God. Solomon says it can't be done, but they do not know it yet, and refuse to learn from him, but keep trying the same failed experiments that he did.

Jesus confirms the pessimistic truth of Solomon. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gained the whole world but lose his own soul?" That is Eccles. 1 and 2 in a nutshell. Jesus says that if a man gains everything life can offer under the sun, but has not been saved by coming into a loving relationship to God, that man's life is of no profit; it is empty; it is meaningless. His life might just as well have been spent throwing pebbles into the ocean, for the end result will be the same-nothing.

So often Christians resent the truth of Solomon, or they just flatly reject it. Many who say they believe the Bible from cover to cover are not honest, for they do not believe in meaninglessness. They do not see the powerful positive purpose of pessimism. They say of all tragedy that some day we will understand, as if it is really a meaningful part of some master plan. Solomon says, and Jesus confirms it, you don't have to wait to understand many of the mysteries of life. You can know all there is to know about them right now, and that is that they are meaningless. They don't fit now, and they never will, for they are not a part of God's plan. They are the consequences of the rejection of His plan.

When God says thou shalt not murder, and a man does it anyway, that is not a part of God's plan, but a rejection of it, and the result is a meaningless loss of life. Can anyone believe that the millions of babies conceived by immoral sex and then killed by abortion is meaningful? Neither the beginning nor the end are a part of God's plan, and so the whole of it is meaningless. The world is filled with illustrations of what is not a part of God's plan.

If you are expecting that in heaven we will be able to take the mindless massacre of millions of Jews by Hitler and fit it into a logical and sensible picture, as if it was all planned by God, you are ignoring the clear revelation of God. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand said Jesus. God is not on both sides of good and evil. Evil will be eliminated precisely because it is meaningless, and it can never fit into the ultimate plan of God.

Just as it is foolish to try to make the impossible possible, so it is foolish to try and make the meaningless meaningful. So what do we do if we are wise and accept the wisdom of Solomon? We accept the reality of the meaningless. When we do we can experience the paradox of the meaning of the meaningless. That's right! Even the meaningless has meaning to those who have found the ultimate meaning in relationship to God.

Going into the ditch is meaningless usually, but not always, for sometimes it is a necessity to save your life. As a way of life and pattern of driving, however, I think we can all agree it would be meaningless to drive down into the ditch. But because it is meaningless we are motivated to avoid doing it. The meaningless helps us better define the meaningful. Being burned is not as meaningful as not being burned, and so we avoid being burned. Being sick is not as meaningful as being well, and so we seek health and avoid sickness. If it was just as meaningful to drive in the ditch as on the road, there would be no good reason to choose one over the other. The negative makes the positive all the more positive, and the meaningless makes the meaningful all the more so.

So if all of life is meaningful, and all life styles and philosophies are meaningful, then there is no good reason to choose one over the other. All roads, including the ditches, lead to the same place, and so if you choose Naturalism, Humanism, Communism, or Hedonism, or any of the ways Solomon chose to find meaning, you are always on the right road, for all is good. If there is no distinction between the meaningful and meaningless, you have no right to judge any road as of less value than another.

But if Solomon is right, and meaningless is real, and all roads that leave out a relationship to God are dead ends, then man is left with only one major choice: The way of meaning with God, or the ways of meaninglessness without Him. Sometimes we as Christians want to have our cake and eat it too. We want Christ to be the only way to God, and the only way to life with meaning, but we also want everything else in life to have meaning. It can when it is incorporated into our relationship to Christ, but so much of life is not. We must stop being superficial and accept the truth of Ecclesiastes, that much of life is meaningless. In fact, all of it is meaningless that is the result of the choices of men that are contrary to the will of God. Even good and innocent things are meaningless when they are cut off from God, for they have no ultimate value.

Is this suppose to be good news? Yes it is, for it makes life very simple so that one does not need to be a philosopher to understand it. You do not need to be wealthy and powerful like Solomon to get in on the meaning of life, for the way to meaning is available to all, for it has nothing to do with power, possession, or pleasure. It is in a relationship to a Person-the Person of God, revealed to us fully in Jesus Christ. When that relationship is the center of your life, and all else revolves around it, your life and all of its events have a basis for meaning. But even the Christian can get out of fellowship and do what is not God's will, and that will lead to what is meaningless.

Jesus said that without him we can do nothing. We can do much without Him, but the point is it will be meaningless, for it will have no ultimate relevance to the purpose of God. When the Christian decides to disobey the known will of God and do what is evil, it will be meaningless and of no value for the kingdom of God, or for them as individuals. It is a going into the ditch, and so we need to repent and that means getting back onto the road that leads to meaning in all that we do.

The Bible rejects the idea that all is meaningful. It stresses the reality of the meaningless, for the more we know of this reality, the more we will strive to avoid it and stay on the road of meaningfulness. It is important to be aware of the reality of the meaningless so that we can specialize in that which is meaningful. Life makes a lot more sense when you do not have to figure out how to make sense of that which makes no sense. We do not have to defend God against the critics who blame Him for so much evil and tragedy. These are the results of evil and are not a part of His plan at all. They are part of the world of the meaningless. Do not waste your time trying to prove that driving in the ditch is meaningful, or that many other such nonsense things have meaning. Accept the reality of the meaningless and do what Solomon and Jesus agree on- Make God the first priority in your life, and develop a relationship to Him, which is best done by receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and then you can find meaning in all of life, and even the meaninglessness of life will make some sense and be helpful to your development of meaning.

4. TAKING LAUGHTER SERIOUSLY Based on Eccles. 2:1-11

Tom Mullen begins his book, *Laughing Out Loud and Other Religious Experiences* with this story. An engineer, a psychologist, and a theologian were hunting in the wilds of Northern Canada. They came across a isolated cabin, and decided to check it out. When no one answered their knocks, they tried the door and found it open. It was a simple two room cabin with a minimum of furniture. Nothing was surprising about the cabin except the stove. It was a typical pot bellied cast ironed stove, but it was suspended in mid air by wires attached to the ceiling beams.

The psychologist was the first to speculate on this strange location for a stove. He said, "It is obvious that this lonely trapper, isolated from humanity, has elevated his stove so he can curl up under it and vicariously experience a return to the womb." "Nonsense!" Replied the engineer. "The man is clearly practicing laws of thermodynamics. By elevating his stove he has discovered a way to distribute the heat more evenly throughout the cabin." "With all due respect," interrupted the theologian, "I'm sure that hanging his stove from the ceiling has religious meaning. Fire lifted up has been a religious symbol for centuries."

As the three debated their theories, the trapper returned, and they asked him immediately why he hung his stove by wires from the ceiling. He said, "Because I had plenty of wire, but not much stove pipe." The answer to many mysteries is much simpler than we think.

Reading commentaries on the book of Ecclesiastes is often like listening to those three hunters speculate about the stove. They come up with complex and confusing theories to explain this book, and the theories are more difficult to grasp than the book itself. The simple and obvious, and commonsense approach is the best. All we have to do is recognize that Solomon is simply telling us how he really felt. He is not saying he should feel this way, or that it is good to feel this way, but that it is how he really felt. He had himself a ball, and laughed his head off, and then he examined the experience afterward, and he concluded that laughter, like the rest of the pleasures of life, is of no use.

You do not need any complex theory to explain this. It is simple. He is depressed because laughter and pleasure are merely passing experiences, and they are not permanent, and so they do not fill the human need for the eternal. The merry monarch found his mirth of little worth, and it left him

melancholy. This is no surprise, for we have all had that kind of experience where after a good time we become to some degree depressed simply because the laughter doesn't last, and the pleasure of it does not persist.

This is an universal experience, and that is why it is in the Bible. It good for all of us to know that even the man with everything goes through the same experience we do. This releases us from the burden of envy where we think we could escape this type of feeling if only we were somebody else, especially somebody with everything life can offer. It also releases us from the burden of loneliness when we feel we have emotions that the rest of the human race does not have. Paul said in I Cor. 10:13, "No temptation has seized except what is common to man."

What the Bible teaches is that the common man is the only kind of man there is. Solomon was so great, wise, and unique in many ways, but he was still a common man. That was the kind of man Jesus became as well, for there is no other kind, and he entered into the same temptations and the same feelings that we all experience. "He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus understood what Solomon was saying in this book. He had plenty of good times and laughter, but he also knew its limitations, and he endured the experience of depression, and was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Solomon was right, for laughter is not enough to give life ultimate meaning. But it is, nevertheless, a vital part of the meaningful life. Solomon is himself one of the key authorities in the Bible for supporting the value of laughter. Why then, if he sees the worth of mirth, does he stress the worthlessness of it here? It is because, like all other values of life, if they are sought as goal of life, and one becomes as obsessed with them that they push God into a secondary position, they become sources of sickness rather than health, when this happens, as it did with him, then it is true as he says in 7:3, "Sorrow is better than laughter." Jesus confirmed this when He said, "Blessed are those who mourn." In James 4:9-10 we see Christians who have gone off the deep end in their search for pleasure, and they urged to, "Change your laughter to mourning, and you joy to gloom. Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up."

The Bible makes it clear that there is a time to stop horsing around and having a good time, and get down to the serious business of living for a

purpose in God's will. Those who never do, never discover the full value of joy and laughter. So what we see in Solomon is both sides of the coin. We see the futility of laughter, and the fruitfulness of laughter. In 3:4 he says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. Both are good and valid. Since we have been looking at some heavy subjects in our study of this book, I thought we should look at the lighter and brighter side, and reap some value from-

I. THE FRUITFULNESS OF LAUGHTER.

In Pro. 17:22 we read the most famous biblical precept on the value of laughter. Solomon there says, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Laughter is the lubrication of life that keeps us from drying up and grinding to a halt. Drain your life of humor, and it is like draining your car of oil. You will not get far before you lose power and lock up the engine. Laughter keeps the engine of life running smooth. It allows us to keep making progress down the road to God's goals.

What a blessing is the sense of humor for releasing of tension in times of stress. I visited Vern Miller before his by-pass surgery. His room mate Virgil was facing the same surgery. There was tension as they faced the unpleasant prospect of being cut open, but they were easing the friction by using the oil of laughter. Together we were experiencing healing by anointing the whole situation with the oil of gladness. It was good medicine. The doctors have to take out the whole vein in the leg for the by-pass. Vern was having five by-passes, and the other man only three. So he commented that he could use the extra he would have left over for bait. I could see the potential for his practical mind, and I encouraged him to write a book on tips for what to do with your spare parts.

Vern then told of another man who was going into surgery at the same time as he was. He said I am assuming he has a different surgeon, or maybe mine is ambidextrous, and will be doing one with each hand, and he stretched out his arms to illustrate. We had a good laugh. Sure, it was nonsense, and just a way to escape from the tension, but that is what medicine is for, and that is what laughter does. I do not take aspirin because I like the taste, but to escape the pain of a headache. Laughter can help us escape also, and it even tastes good. The point is, laughter is appropriate even in the most serious times because it is a medicine, and it lifts and lightens the load. It is God's most natural drug. Thank God for laughter.

Sometimes when life is on a disaster trail, and everything seems to be going wrong, you can be suddenly touched with a sense of humor, and it is like a shot in the arm to revive your spirit. Bonhoeffer, the theologian, who died in Hitler's concentration camp could write, "Absolute seriousness is not without a dose of humor." Abraham Lincoln was able to survive his responsibility through the Civil War because of the aid of his sense of humor. Sometimes his cabinet felt his humor was out of place, but he replied, "Gentlemen, why don't you laugh? If I didn't laugh with the strain that in on me day and night, I should go mad. And you need the medicine as much as I do." Laughter is a life saver to many in times of unusual stress. My father lived in pain for many years and said that his sense of humor was the only thing that kept him from taking his own life to escape the pain. Laughter can be life saving medicine.

Jesus said that we should face life's worst without letting fear dominate us. He said do not fear those who can kill the body, and that is all they can do. He made it sound like martyrdom was a minor matter. After they kill you, he is saying, the matter is out of their hands, and so don't worry. This can only be experienced by those who have a sense of humor, and who can laugh even at death. You have to be able to see beyond death, and see the joke involved in men thinking they can win by killing you, when all they do is send you into the presence of Him who has the keys of death, and who has a mansion waiting for you to enter and enjoy forever. They think they are robbing you of life, and what they are doing is sending you to the ultimate life of joy.

Faith in Christ and a sense of humor go hand in hand. Eugene O'Neill portrayed this in his play Lazarus Laughed. He had Lazarus say, "I heard the heart of Jesus laughing in my heart, and I laughed in the laughter of God." the crowd joined Lazarus in his happy mood and laughed with him, for the fear of death had been conquered. The play comes to a climax with Caesar threatening Lazarus with death. It was a joke to him, and he responded like a grandpa responds when his 4 year old grandchild threatens to pound him into dust. He laughs, and he dies laughing. It is the laughter of God when we laugh at the absurdities of life.

In Ps. 2 we see the folly of man as he plots to overthrow the plan of God and take over the universe. Verse 4 says, "The one enthroned in heaven laughs." God has a sense of humor, and it tickles him to laughter to see puny men develop such delusions of grandeur. It is like a gnat organizing his fellow gnat to take over a tank. You get the same funny sensation when a small child

in rebellion decides to defy the very powers that gave him life and sustain his life. The most Godlike response you can have to those deluded by their pride is to laugh. In Ps. 37:12-13 we read, "The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming."

Oswald J. Smith, the great preacher and hymn writer, puts the scene in poetry.

**Methinks I hear God laugh, so let them rage.
He'll hold them in derision till the day
He rises in His wrath, and in His hot
Displeasure, vexes those who vainly seek
To tear Him from His throne for judgment set.
What folly if a sparrow hurl itself
Against a locomotive in its pride,
Expecting thus to check it in its speed!
As little hope have they who mock at God.**

Is life a joke? Yes it is when man takes himself so seriously that he thinks he can make it meaningful without God, and so sets out to dethrone God. It is good for us to step back once in awhile, and see the dark side of man from God's perspective, and join Him in a good laugh. Some people think the tower of Babel was where Solomon kept all his wives, but what it is, is a monument to man's silliness. He thought he could build a tower to the heavens and become a power that was supreme. It was the Lucifer approach to life that says, I will exalt myself to the throne of the universe. The funny thing about life is not the psychotic who thinks he is Napoleon, but the normal people who think they are God. History makes all of man's pride a laugh. One of the ways you can divide up the human race in two camps is this: Those who laugh at God, and those who laugh with God.

Jesus was a man of sorrows, but Jesus was also the Son of God, and the express image of the Father. In Jesus we see the same sense of humor that we see in the Father. Jesus saw the comical, the absurd, and the ridiculous side of life. We are so brainwashed into thinking that Jesus was always serious, and even sad, that we miss all of His humor. We refuse to give Him the balance life in our thinking, and by so doing we rob the only truly ideal man of what is vital to that ideal, and that is a sense of humor. Most students of

the life of Jesus see it, but it is seldom stressed, and the result is that most Christians do not recognize the sense of humor in their Savior.

G. Campbell Morgan, that prince of expositors, sees it in the most serious of setting even. After the resurrection when Jesus is walking with the two on the road to Emmaus we see Jesus in this very serious setting playing the game of hide and seek with His disciples. Morgan comments, "There is a tender and beautiful playfulness in the way He dealt with these men. Humor is as divine as Pathos, and I cannot study the life of Jesus without finding humor there."

Tennyson said humor is generally most fruitful in the most solemn spirits, and, "You will even find it in the Gospel of Christ." Elton Trueblood in his book The Humor Of Christ gives numerous illustrations. We will look at just a few. Jesus had a lot of fun with the humorless Pharisees, and often described them in ways that would make the people chuckle. In Matt. 15:14 He calls them blind guides. The very concept is ridiculous. Who would ever have confidence in a blind guide? Imagine a sign on the entrance to a cave that says, blind guides available-reasonable rates. Jesus says, when the blind lead the blind they both fall into a pit. Such is the folly of the Pharisees and their followers. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men was the message of Jesus. Follow them, and you will be pit filler.

This form of humor was typical of Jesus. He described them in all kinds of humorous ways. They kept the outside of their cups shining and spotless. They were germ free, but inside they neglected to clean, but let that fill up with cobwebs, dirt, and dead flies. They would choke on a gnat showing that they were super fussy with minute details of the law, but then they would swallow a camel, hump and all, without batting an eye. That means they could by-pass the major purpose of the law if it was in their self-interest.

Jesus pictured the Pharisees seeking sympathy in the pity party method of looking dismal and pathetic because of their supposedly sacrificial fasting. Jesus said that His followers were to have nothing to do with such sad sack piety. They were to anoint their heads, wash their faces, and look presentable rather than laughable. Jesus had a sarcastic wit that has tickled me many times. My favorite, is in John 10:31-32 where we read, "The Jews took up stones again to stone him." This sounds like a serious situation doesn't it? It is no time for wise cracks, but Jesus responds, "I have shown you many good

works from my Father, for which of these do you stone me?" Jesus never did any bad works, and so He knew they had to be stoning Him for some good work that He did, and He was curious as to which of His kindnesses it was that provoked them to such hatred. Jesus, just like His Father, saw the absurdity of man's folly, and the utter ridiculousness of his rebellion.

Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly. He came that we might be reconciled to God and experience life in its fullness, and enjoy all that He has made, and especially the gift He has given uniquely to man-the sense of humor. Animals do not have this gift, for it is part of the image of God given only to man. Helmut Thielike, the greatest German preacher of modern times, said of Christians, "When they lose their sense of humor it is nothing less than a denial of their Lord."

What use is laughter Solomon asks, and the answer of the centuries is, it is our link with our heavenly Father that lifts us above the mere earthly to the heavenly perspective. Those who see the humorous built into life by God enjoy life so much more. I certainly enjoy being a grandfather more due to the constant laughter that comes from children. Many great Christians point to the animal creation to show God's sense of humor. Dean Inge in one of his many books wrote, "I cannot help thinking that the Creator made some animals and some human beings just for fun. The elephant, the hippo, the baboon with blue cheeks and scarlet stern are not ugly. They are figures of comedy. Why should not the deity have a sense of humor?"

I personally feel that children are the greatest proof of God's sense of humor. To me they are God's clowns in the circus of life. And they add more laughter than all the comedians combined. Just the otheriew of God to the world, and a view that is not consistent with God's revelation of Himself.

Take Devorah Wigoder for example. She rebelled against her Christian heritage and married a Jew. In her book *Hope Is My House* she writes, "To me, one of the most disappointing aspects in the life of Jesus was his lack of humor." What a shame that her Christian heritage never exposed her to the truth of Jesus' sense of humor. If she was only an isolated case, we could brush it off as of no consequence, but she is not. As I study the lives of people who have rebelled against the Christian faith, and have become skeptics and cynics, and even atheists, I discover that they see no humor in the Christian faith. A writer for *Christianity Today* for many years confirms this when he

writes, "I have learned that too many Christian people and organizations can't laugh at themselves. They take themselves too seriously, and this makes them stuffy. Some people are not serious enough about humor and this makes them shallow."

The Christian who does not develop his sense of humor will not likely be an attractive person to the world, like Jesus was. He could fit into most every social situation, and bring joy to the guests because He was ever ready with a story or some humor. One of the best things we can have up our sleeve is a funny bone. Charles Aked said humor is a gift of God, and, "A face as long as a fiddle and a voice like that of an alpine crow will not be imputed to us for righteousness." Solomon said there is a time to laugh, and the time to do it is when you want to make clear to a sad and hurting world that in Christ there is really something to laugh about, for in Him life's blessings become all the more enjoyable, and life's folly's become all the more ridiculous. Both good and evil become causes for laughter in Christ. Tragedy and tears are only for time, but in Christ laughter is forever. Martin Luther said, "If you're not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don't want to go there." He knew he was safe, for he knew of the laughter of God, and of the laughter of Jesus. If you do not, then you need to take laughter more seriously and learn to pray-

**Give me the gift of laughter, oh, I pray,
Though tears should hover near;
Give me the gift of laughter for each day,
Laughter to cast out fear.**

5. A TIME FOR EVERYTHING Based on Eccles. 3:1-8

Art Linkletter tells of the young woman who married a wealthy old man. She was apparently quite fond of him in the beginning, but then she started to focus on the demands of maintaining a home. She told her husband that the garden looked shabby. All right he said spend some money to take care of it. So she brought in the gardening crew, and soon the grounds looked wonderful. Then she noticed that the cutting away of the shrubs and hedges left the house looking shabby. So she called in the painters, and soon the house looked just wonderful. But when she walked into the house, from this beautiful exterior, it made the inside of the house look shabby. So her husband told her to get an

interior decorator, and she did. Finally, the entire estate sparkled and looked gorgeous. But in the midst of all this splendor her husband looked shabby, so she got rid of him.

Linkletter did not say if this story was based on fact, but it could very well be. Here was a woman who wanted a place for everything, and everything in its place. What did not fit, she got rid of. All of us may like to follow such a plan, and keep in our lives only those things which are pleasant, and which our design for the ideal life. Solomon is telling us this is fairy tale dreaming, and does not face up to the reality that life is a mixture of negative and positive. You don't get to pick and choose, and select only the good things of life. You must also experience the bad things.

You cannot just be born, and skip the dying part. You cannot just go out and harvest a crop, and skip the work of planting. You cannot just go through life laughing and dancing, and bypass the weeping and mourning that comes with the package called life. As the cliché goes, "We must learn to take the bad with the good." The key to being able to do this, and still be happy and successful, is timing. Timing plays a major role in life. Part of what it means to be wise is in recognizing the importance of timing.

Amusing is the story of the Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev who was pleading passionately about the insignificance and unreality of time, when suddenly he stopped, and looked at his watch with genuine anxiety, for he noticed he was late for taking his medicine.

Solomon was right, there is a time for every matter under heaven. A time for taking medicine, and a time for refraining medicine. This is not one of his 14 couplets, but it is just as true, and we could all come up with other couplets equally valid. These are just key examples of his main point, there is a time for everything. If this is the case, then it naturally follows that whether life goes smooth, or is rough, often will depend upon the timing. We cannot choose when to be born, and often have little choice as to when we die, but there is much of life where we do have choices, and wisdom is determined, not just by the right choice, but by the right timing.

A good thing done at the wrong time can be a bad thing. That is, it can actually do more harm than good. For example, take Lucy, who is playing out the field, and a ball drops right beside her, and she makes no attempt to catch it. Charlie Brown, the manager rushes out to her in anger demanding an answer for why she didn't hold out her glove. Her reply was simply, "I was having my quiet time." Not even God could be pleased with such timing for devotions. Spirituality of any kind can get a bad reputation if it is used as an excuse for neglecting responsibility, or avoiding obligations. The student who fails his history exam with the excuse that he was reading his Bible, will not impress God or the teacher. Life demands balance. There is a time for devotions, and a time to refrain from devotions. Peter wanted to stay on the Mt. of Transfiguration, but Jesus said, in effect, there is a time to be on the mountain, and a time to be in the valley meeting the urgent needs of men. Escape is good only when it is a means to prepare for more effective battle.

It is good to go through an intersection, for if one does not he will never get anywhere. All progress depends on doing it, so it is good and right, but if you do this good and right thing at the wrong time it can be the worst thing you do. There is a time to go, and a time to stop. One epitaph reads, "Here lies the body of William Jay, who died maintaining his right of way. He was right-dead right-as he sped a long, but he's just as dead as if he was wrong." There is a time to claim your rights, but wisdom recognizes there is also a time to give them up.

The importance of timing is the key to understanding much of the teaching of Christ in the sermon on the Mount. There is a time for the Christian to mourn and be meek, and

to back away from his rights and turn the other cheek. Jesus said if you are offering your gift at the altar, and remember that your brother is offended, go first and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Jesus is saying, there is an order in life that makes things fitting, and if they are not in the right order, even though good, they are not acceptable to God. Jesus gave us specific examples of the importance of timing. He said the Pharisees failed by doing good things, and it was because they timed their alms, prayers, and fasting, so as to be seen of men. Jesus said the right time for these things is when you are alone with God.

Jesus agrees with Solomon, timing is a key factor in the successful life that is pleasing to God, and beneficial to men. Failure and mistakes revolve around poor timing. Robert Morris was a wealthy merchant. He was so wealthy that his son Robert Morris Jr., who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was also the key financier of the American Revolution. His money saved our government from bankruptcy. His father was also greatly honored; one might say, overly honored. One day as he left one of his large ships on a small boat, which was taking him to shore, he was honored by the Captain by being saluted with the ship's cannon. In this case they saluted him before he was out of range, and the cannon ball killed him. He was only 39, and died because of poor timing. The same thing done at a different moment would have been a pleasure.

"How did you get that black eye?" one friend asked another. "By kissing the bride after the ceremony," he replied. "But everybody does that," he responded. "Yeah, I know, but this was two years after the ceremony." Poor timing was the cause of his injury. Good and bad; right and wrong; wise and foolish; often revolve around this matter of timing. Growing in wisdom, therefore, involves growing in your awareness of what is the proper moment. Arthur Gordon interviewed the well-known actor, Charles Coburn, before he died. He asked him the stock question, "What does one need to get ahead in life? Brains, energy, education?" He shook his head and said, "Those things help. But there is something I consider even more important: knowing the moment." He then went on to say, "On the stage, as every actor knows, timing is the all important factor. I believe it's the key in life, too. If you could master the art of knowing the moment in your marriage, your work, your relationships with others, you won't have to pursue happiness or run after success. They'll walk right in through your front door!"

Arthur Gordon was deeply impressed by this interview, and he recognized it was an idea that Solomon had stressed. He did some research on the subject, and discovered it was one of the most practical truths that a person can grasp. He quotes a family relations court judge, who deals with quarreling couples constantly. "If only they'd realize that there are times when everyone's threshold of irritability is low. When a person can't stand nagging or criticism, or even good advice! If married partners would just take the trouble to study each other's moods, and know when to air a grievance or when to show affection, the divorce rate in this country would be cut in half." I am convinced also that many marriages are ruined not by the problems and the conflicts, but by the poor timing involved in dealing with them.

There is a time for war says Solomon; a time when hostility and resentment has to be dealt with in all human relations, but only when it is timed right will it be followed by peace rather than pieces. Successful marriages are accomplished by two people who are aware of the importance of timing. Arthur Gordon learned of his own weakness in this area when he asked his wife, which of his failing annoyed her most. She responded, "Your tendency to wait until we are about to walk into a party before telling me that my hair is mussed or my dress doesn't look quite right." Even if it is true, it is better to leave it unsaid than to speak the truth at the wrong time. Some feel that the truth is always right to speak. This is not so; even Jesus kept back the truth until it was appropriate, and the time was right for it to be received.

God's whole plan of redemption is based on this principle of proper timing. It was not until the fullness of time, when all had been providentially prepared, that God sent forth His Son into the world. Those who could read the signs of the time came to worship the Christ child. Those who were prepared received the gift of God which was eternal life. But, as is always the case, even a blessing can be a curse to those who are not ready for it. For those who had no sense of God's timing, Jesus said His coming brought judgment. The kingdom of God was at hand, but they missed it, because they did not grasp God's timing.

The Prodigal Son got his inheritance at the wrong time. It was a blessing he was not prepared to handle wisely. The result was, it became a curse and cost him everything. Had grace and love not entered the story, it would have ended as a tragedy of poor timing. Many have found sudden wealth to be a curse. Take any other value, and the story is the same. Power is good, but let it fall into the hands of one who is not prepared to use it, and it will lead to tyranny and disaster. Fortunately, it works both ways, and we have the story of Esther, of whom Mordecai said, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Because she recognized the importance of timing, she acted and used her power to save the Jewish race. Mordecai knew the importance of timing, and he told Esther that if she made this a time for silence she would perish. Esther agreed, it was time to speak, and this gave her a major role in the plan of God.

History is constantly revealing tragedy or triumph based on timing. The French Revolution set the masses free, but they were not prepared for freedom. It was bad timing, and the result was great bloodshed from which the nation never recovered. This same thing has happened in other nations, and almost happened in America. Booker Washington in, *Up From Slavery*, told of the great day of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. He describes wild scenes of ecstasy as the slaves wept and danced, and used every emotion they had to express their joy in being liberated. But Washington goes on to describe the next day. Now they had to do something with their freedom, and it became a burden, for they didn't know how to use it. Gloom took over, for they had found freedom to be a very serious business. For some it became a tragedy, but thanks to men of good timing, like Booker Washington, and the black colleges, it did not become the catastrophe it might have been.

The point is, you can go through all of history and see that what makes things good or bad is not just what happens, but the timing of what happens, and how aware the people are of the importance of timing, and being prepared to do what the time demands for success. There is no end of examples. Sex is good or evil depending on the timing. Before marriage it is called an evil, but after marriage it is a blessing. Sports almost always depend upon timing. Even a pro will not be a winner if his timing is off. In warfare courage and bravery are of great value, but the key to victory is in timing. Knowing when to attack or retreat is the key factor. If your car engine is not properly timed there will be loss of power and poor mileage. If your body does not get the proper nourishment at the right time you will not be as effective. Timing is a vital part of life.

The implications and applications of this truth are so enormous and numerous that we can only look at one of them right now. The one that impresses me most is this: If there is a time for every matter under heaven, then it is evidently the will and plan of God that the ideal life be one of great variety. Variety is indeed the spice of life. There is a time for chicken, but also a time for shrimp. There is a time for study, but also a time for play. There is a time for culture, and also a time for clowning. A balanced life is a life where one has a taste of diversity. When it comes to life we are made to be general practitioners and not just specialists.

Let the life of Charles Darwin illustrate my point. As a young man he had a great love

for art, music, and literature. But as he pursued his career he lost his sense of balance in life. He became obsessed with his scientific thinking. He rejected the idea that there is a time for every matter under heaven. For him there was only time for his specialty. Variety vanished from his life, and with it the ability to appreciate the many gifts of God that add pleasure to life. In his declining years, when he had time to enjoy the beauty of life's variety, he discovered it was too late. He wrote,

To my unspeakable sorrow I cannot endure to read a line of poetry. I have tired lately to enjoy Shakespeare, but I found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have even lost my taste for pictures and music. I retain some fondness for beautiful scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did. My mind seems to have become a mere machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.

His problem was poor timing. He never used a portion of his time to keep balanced, and filled with a variety of interests and experiences. He missed the boat as it passed its dock, and later when it stopped again, he no longer wanted the ride. Jesus said work for the night is coming when man should work no more. What this means is that if you do not do what you can do when you can do it, you may never get another chance, for either the time will cease when it can be done, or you will change and no longer care to do what can be done. Darwin learned the lesson too late, but his failure is a powerful lesson to us. He said again, "If I had to live my life over again, I would make it a rule to read a little poetry, and hear a little music every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use."

It is always the right time to be preparing to do the will of God. We do not always know what God's will is, and what He may have in store for us, but whatever it is we will be better prepared for it by starting now. Don't be like the boy who was running to the bus just as it pulled away. A man standing there said, "I guess you didn't run fast enough." "O yes I did," said the boy. "I just didn't start soon enough." It is always the right time to trust in Christ, and it is always perfect timing to start now obeying all that you know of God's will.

6. EVERYTHING AT THE RIGHT TIME Based on Eccles. 3:1-8

Arthur Gordon tells this true story of one of the leaders in a Christian school. He came from a very poor background, and was rather homely, yet he was married to one of the most beautiful and popular girls in Boston. He was asked how he managed to get her to say yes to him. He explained his strategy. He knew he had many manly rivals, and so he could not compete on that level. He had to appeal to her tenderness, and so on one snowy night, when he had a date with her, he slipped on the steps and fell down to the bottom of the porch. She came rushing to his side, and he stopped groaning just long enough to ask her to marry him. He figured she would not have the heart to add to his misery by turning him down. He was right, and she said

yes.

Timing plays a major role in most every marriage, for how people meet is often a matter of timing. This is true for friendship, jobs, and even in the matter of becoming a hero. President John F. Kennedy was asked how he became a hero in the II World War, and he said, "It was involuntary. They sank my boat." He was not looking for a way to be a hero. It was forced upon him, and the point is, all of us may do heroic things if our life depended on it. But if the time never occurs for us to be heroic we just never get the opportunity. Time determines so much of life, and in our text we see many examples.

In verse 2 Solomon begins with the two ends of life-the start and the conclusion. The two major events for all people are birth and death. Solomon says, "There is a time to be born." He is not saying that birth always comes at the right time, as if all births are appointed. We know this is not the case. The birth of Jesus was in the fullness of time, and was precisely appointed, but there are many births that are not so appointed, just as there are many deaths which are not appointed by God.

There are some who read this passage as teaching absolute determinism: That every event of life is all planned, and the exact time and duration of it as well, so that all of life is determined, and whatever will be will be. If this is what Solomon is saying here, it is in total contrast to his emphasis on the meaninglessness and vanity of life. If all is planned by God, and every detail is just what He wants, then all has meaning, and all you have to do is just accept everything as it is as the best of all possible worlds.

But Solomon is saying in this book, life is loaded with the meaningless because so much of it is not a part of God's plan, and has no order, rhyme, or reason. In a world where people are free to reject God and His will, you are going to see a lot of births and deaths that are not a part of His plan. In chapter 6 verse 3, Solomon speaks of an untimely birth. This is a reference to being born so premature that one is born dead. There are millions of births that are not rightly timed, and this leads to defects or death. Today doctors can save children that once had no hope, but still these premature births are not good. Poorly timed births are a negative reality. If there is a right time for everything, there is also a bad time for everything.

There are millions of children conceived by acts which are forbidden by God. Adultery, fornication, rape and incest to mention a few. In no way can you say these conceptions are the will of God, for they violate His clear revelation. The result is poorly timed births of children who are uninvited, unloved, and unwanted. Abortion is the solution that millions choose to prevent these births, and this also is not appointed by God. The beginning and the end are out of His will. If you think all of this will make sense in heaven, I think you will be greatly disappointed, for it will make no more sense than Hitler's killing of 6 million Jews. It is all meaningless because it is all based on the rejection of God's will.

All of this is to say, there is a time to be born, a right time; a time when the parents are ready, the child is ready, and there is an environment of love. This is being born as God intended birth. If there is a time to be born, then there is also a time not to be born. Life either starts with good timing or poor timing, and that start can often determine the destiny of a life.

"There is a time to die." We could spend a long time on this one. If there is a time to die, there is also a time not to, which means, there is such a thing as an untimely death. Mass murderers produce mindless and purposeless death. It is not a part of a plan that is rightly timed. It is evil and folly, and not a part of God's will.

This text was read at the funeral of the late President John Kennedy, but his death was a good example of a time not to die. To be a president, and to be assassinated is not part of God's ideal plan, for it is the result of evil. Many leaders through history have died by the hands of assassins. There is no doubt that sometimes it is a blessing, and even Christians plotted to assassinate Hitler, but the fact remains, death by murder is not God's will.

The ideal time to die is when you have lived a life of obedience to God, and can enter His presence assured that you leave behind an influence for His glory. Just as there is a good time to be born, so there is a good time to die, and man has more freedom of choice in this area than he realizes. The choice to live a life of healthy exercise and eating is one that can make a major difference in when a person dies. So also, family planning can determine when a person will be born. There are many ways by which our choices can determine the right time to be born or to die.

"There is a time to plant." This varies a great deal depending on where you are in the world, and what it is you are planting, but everything has an ideal time, and success depends on being wise enough to discover that time. Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, recognized the importance of timing in planting. He made it so farmers had the freedom to do what was necessary to plant at the right time. Listen to this part of his Edict Of Milan back in A.D. 313. "On the venerable day of the sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all work shops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in the work of cultivation may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits, because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain sowing, or for vine planting less by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost." Christian farmers were given the freedom not to keep the law of the Sabbath in order to keep the law of nature, because the matter of timing can determine the destiny of the crop. There is an ideal time, and those who do not seek it will suffer.

"There is a time to pluck up what is planted." This is crucial too, and many a farmer loses much of his crop by not harvesting it in time. Farming is so much a matter of timing, and it takes a lot of wisdom to determine the ideal time, but those who come closest to the ideal are the most successful farmers.

V. 3 "There is a time to kill." The idea of never killing any living creature is impossible to achieve. A scientist once showed a leader from India, who claimed to live with absolutely no taking of life, a microscope with some of his drinking water under it. It was so full of living creatures that the man broke the microscope rather than believe he was killing many living creatures every time he took a drink.

Death is a vital part of life, and life only goes on because of death. There is a time to kill and take life for the sake of life. But Solomon is not limiting this to the need for food. There are numerous areas of life where killing may be timely. For example: In a just war; self-defense; in administering justice; in the duties of a police officer, and a swat team dealing with a dangerous person who is threatening other lives. Like all of the others, this one can be abused, and the timing be so off that the result is only a victory for evil. Christians can kill at the wrong time and suffer judgment. Back in the year 1290, the Pope sent Christian soldiers to help liberate the Holy Land from the control of the Muslims. They landed at the city of Acre on the coast North of

Jerusalem. It was the key Christian city of the Holy Land, and it was a place of wealth and glory. Christians had ruled it for generations. Half of the inhabitants were Muslims who lived in peace with the Christians.

The ignorant Crusaders, not bothering to learn and adjust to the new culture they had entered, decided to fight the Muslims they encountered there. They went on a rampage and started killing all of the Muslims in the city. Many Christians with beards were mistaken for Muslims, and they were murdered as well. Over a 1,000 died before the authorities of Acre could arrest the blood crazed soldiers who came to help save the Holy Land.

When the Sultan Qalawrn heard what had happened, it was the beginning of the end. The Christians apologized and tried to keep peace, but there was no excuse for what had happened. The Muslims formed the largest army they ever put together. There were 40,000 cavalry and 160,000 foot soldiers. They marched on the city and ended 200 years of a Christian kingdom in the Holy Land. The Christians were massacred, and all the other little towns of Christians were forced to surrender, and the people were sold into slavery. All because of some Christian soldiers who did not have the wisdom to know there is a time not to kill even in war.

Had they killed Muslims in battle the Muslims would have held them in esteem for their courage, but to cut down the innocent was an outrage they could not tolerate. The fact that God did not spare His own people, but let them suffer severe judgment reveals that God takes this matter seriously. There is a time to kill, and a time not to. There is a time to heal. In this couplet it would seem that to heal is in contrast with kill, and it almost seems like it is more a military rather than medical idea. It is as if he is saying, there is a time to kill your enemy, and a time to heal him, and show mercy, and to seek to restore him from his wounds.

The paradox of war is seen in the treatment of prisoners. Many an American has been saved by the doctors and surgeons of the enemy, just as many of them have been saved by our doctors. This has been a practice of civilized people, and it is agreed it is right for the enemy to provide care and healing to those he is seeking to kill. The courtesy of the battlefield goes way back. Saladin, the mightiest of the leaders of the Saracens, who fought many battles with Richard the Lion Hearted, had it. When Richard became severely ill, Saladin did not attack to take advantage of it, but instead sent a

messenger with special fruit cooled in the snow of the mountain to bring healing. Only when he got well did they strive again to kill each other. Strange but true, but there is something noble and right about recognizing there is a time to heal even in fierce conflict.

There is a time to tear down. Back in 850 A.D. it was decided that the Great International Exhibition would be held in London's Hyde Park in the building which was unlike any ever made. Paul Auraundt in his book Destiny, describes this structure which came to be known as the Crystal Palace. It covered almost 20 acres with 5,000 tons of iron, and a third of a million panes of glass. It took 24 miles of guttering to carry water away from the roof. It was the pride of London for years until fire destroyed it in 1936, but the great towers survived the fire, and they were preserved as a glittering reminder of the days of glory.

Hitler's bombing persuaded the English to tear them down. It took the British a while to figure out how the Germans could bomb London so accurately, but finally they did. The glass towers would glisten in the moon light even in a black out, and they became a guide for the German bombers. So in 1941 the British demolished these magnificent towers. Precious as they were, it was agreed by everyone that they had to be broken down.

This is not an encouragement for a nervous breakdown, but a call to be aware that as much as we resist change, sometimes the best thing is to scrap what you have built so far, and start over. There are projects going nowhere that need to be dismantled, and dreams that need to be forsaken in order to be free to get going on new projects and dreams that better fit the times, and your own motivation.

We read of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, or of the Third Reich, but all of us have such a history. We go through stages and sometimes the interest of one stage is not the interest of the other. We need to learn to tear down the old and obsolete, and make way for the new.

There is a time to build. Building is to be a major part of the believer's life. Solomon built the greatest and most elaborate Jerusalem that ever existed. It was the time to do it, for it was a rare time of peace, and he had the wisdom and wealth to make it happen.

There is also a time not to build up. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, tried to build up his fortune at what was an opportune time by taking advantage of the Naaman's generosity. Elisha refused payment for his advice that led to his being healed, but Gehazi followed him and lied about a need. Naaman gave him a small fortune in silver and garments, and he rode off a happy con man. Elisha came to him and said, "Was it a time to accept money and garments and other gifts? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and to your descendants forever." He choose the wrong time to build up, and the result was he tore down his whole families heritage.

Paul writes, in Gal. 2:18, "But if I build up again these things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor." He tore down the old house of law, and built a new house of faith, and it would be utter folly to build up that old place again that could never meet his needs in the first place. It is always times to tear down the works of self-righteousness, and build the house of faith. There is a time to weep. It is not likely that anyone gets through life without tears. Jesus didn't. He found appropriate times to weep, and, therefore, to be Christlike is to be ready to shed tears when the time is right. When tears are appropriate varies a great deal with the individual. I have known women who cry so easily and so often that it seems a weakness, but they were just super-sensitive people. They would cry for joy because they were loved, and they would cry because of relief from a burden. They cried for so many good things as well as tough things that it seemed like excessive tears.

For others tears seem like a lack of self-control, and so the time for them to feel comfortable to weep is not very often. Some men even have a hard time weeping when it is clearly fitting. Paul said we are to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. There is something about others entering into the same experience that lifts and encourages. It is a paradox, but weeping with someone in their sorrow can be an encouragement that ends their weeping. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that laughter and tears are both important powers. One is wind power, and the other water power, and they both can turn the same machinery of sensibility. Joyce Kilmer said, "Jesus wept, God forbid that I cannot."

William Blake wrote,

Joy and woe are woven fine,

**A clothing for the soul divine.
Under every grief and pine,
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe,
And when this we rightly know,
Through the world we safely go.**

Safely may not be the right word. Wisely might be more realistic, for those who can take the woe and not let it get them low, and crush them, often add much to the joy of life for others. Corrie Bond is a good example. Her prosperous father went bankrupt when she was ten, and a weeks later he died. She married at 18, and had a son, but before he was 6 she was divorced. She later married a respected doctor, Frank Bond, in 1889, and she enjoyed a true love. It was a haven, at last, from her world of troubles. But 6 years goes fast, and that is all she had, for Frank suddenly died. He always told her to keep playing the piano and writing songs, and so that is what she did. She went on to fame and wealth, and died in 1946 at age 84. We have all been blessed by what she wrote. For example:

**I love you truly, truly dear!
Life with its sorrows, life with its tear,
Fades into dreams when I feel you are near,
For I love you truly, truly dear!**

In contrast, is John Toole. He wrote a book, but could not get it published. He tried over and over, but it was always rejected by the publishers. His mother did not give up when he did. She kept going to other publishers, and finally found one who would publish the book called, Confederacy Of Duncer. It became a best seller, and in 1981 was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. It was John's mother who had to receive the prize, for John had given up and had put a pistol to his head in 1969. He ended his life at age 32. He could not take the woe times, so he missed the joy times too. Only those who take the two together can make success in life.

There is a time to laugh.

It follows, therefore, that there is a time not to laugh. Jesus told the crowd that the little girl was not dead, but sleeping. Their response was, as recorded in Mark 5:40, "But they laughed at Him." It was poor timing for laughter, for Jesus was not joking, but was dead serious, and when the little girl was soon eating her lunch, the joke was on them.

Abraham and Sarah were told they would have a child in their old age, and Sarah laughed. It would be a joke for anybody to have a baby at age 90, but her laughter was a lack of faith, and so it was poorly timed. When her son was born she laughed again, and named her son Issac, which means laughter. It was a right time then to enjoy God's sense of humor.

There is a time to mourn. There are funeral times, and wedding times. There are times for sorrow and times for gaiety. If it is true that there is a best time for the various emotions, it follows then that we have a capacity to do a lot of choosing about how we feel. We are not limited by the circumstances. Joyce Kilmer put it in poetry,

**Though April may bring you a shower or a flower-
A rainbow of every hue.
Though the sun may touch your nose or your toes-
Happiness depends on you.
Love may come with a flair or with care-
Or whistle a tune for your ear,
And whether the sound be a joy or annoy-
Depends upon how you hear.
Life waits for no one, nor hurries away-
It's there for the choosing, you see-
Whether April or May, or whatever the day-
It's that which you make it to be!**

There is a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. Stones were gathered in order to make a fence or boundary of one's property, and this is at times a good and necessary thing for order and the protection of one's property. But the person who is forever building walls to protect himself, and who never breaks them down, will become a hermit, and cut himself off from relationships that give life meaning.

There is a time in embrace and a time to refrain. There is a time for affection, and a time to be cool and save your affection for a more appropriate time. People disturb others when they express affection constantly in public. At the airport or bus stop it is okay if two people start hugging and kissing. In a store or restaurant this seems out of place and bothers people. It is not that anybody is anti-affection, but it seems to be too personal for public display. At a wedding everybody is happy to see the bride and groom hold each other and kiss, but the same thing in the mall makes people feel uncomfortable. Solomon is just saying there are times when it is wise to refrain from expressing affection.

There is a time to search and a time to give up.

There is a time to keep and a time to throw away. We tend to go to extremes, and we either keep everything, like a packrat, and make all of life messy, or we keep our environment neat by throwing everything away. I have been in homes where keeping has become a key virtue of life. Not a newspaper in the last ten years has left the house. You know the minute you walk in something is wrong. The timing mechanism in these people is not working. They do not have balance because they cannot throw things away.

It is a joy to go into a cluttered messy room and see it take on order as you fill the waste basket or the garbage bag with junk. I have had this pleasure many times in life. It is not always easy to know the best time to keep or to throw away. Many times I've had the pleasure of seeing something on the garage shelf that I was glad I did not throw away. On the other hand there are things I have kept for years that should have been thrown away long ago. We just need to work at balance and keep some things, and throw other things away.

There is a time to tear and a time to mend.

There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. The quiet time is a good example when silence is precious. But silence when you should speak up is not good. Silence can be golden, but it can also be just yellow. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had a large and eager audience as the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Because of this he had a great responsibility for knowing when to speak and when to keep silent. He did not recognize this, however, and used his power of speech to destroy many lives. He got so caught up in

spiritualism, and in communicating with the dead, that he traveled everywhere giving lectures on the subject.

His seven lectures in New York City's Carnegie Hall was a record-breaking sell out. He so persuaded people that they could speak to their dead loved ones that mediums did a thriving business, but so did the undertaker. A rash of suicides followed his lectures. People rushed into the next life to meet their loved ones. Suicide notes littered the town, and they all had one thing in common: Gratitude to Arthur. This was not his intention, and he cannot be held accountable for the foolish things people do, but the fact is, he was giving people encouragement to do the foolish things they did. He would have done more good by being silent until he could offer people what they needed to live, rather than to escape.

Tom Dewey, in 1944, was running for president against Franklin Roosevelt. He got some information that United States intelligence had cracked the Japanese secret code. This meant Roosevelt knew of the plan to attack Pearl Harbor before it happened. He struggled to know whether he should bring this damning information into the campaign, or not. The nation was still at war, and it could undermine U. S. intelligence. He chose to keep silent. It was a wise decision, for in 1991, over a decade after Dewey died, a secret document was declassified. It revealed that the Japanese code cracked in 1931 was the diplomatic code, and not the military code. There was no advance knowledge of the attack on Pearl Harbor. In fact, Japan's own Premiere and Minister of War did not know about it. Dewey died not knowing he had made the wise choice, but it was wise to chose silence.

There is a time to love and a time to hate. There are many things to hate in this world, for it is a world full of things that are contrary to the will of God. Alcoholism has a right to be near the top of things to be hated. Millions who have seen their loved ones killed or maimed know what it is to hate alcoholism. Paul Auranadt tells this true story of Miss C. A. Moore. She married a doctor Charles Gloyal during the Civil War. He was a captain in the war, and he began to drink. Miss Moore did not know until after they were married in 1867. When patience came to him he was often drunk. Things went down hill rapidly as she bore a child, and had to live in poverty because of his drinking. Finally his father came to her rescue and took her to his home. A year later her husband died of excessive drinking.

She remarried, and this time to a non-drinker. He was a minister named David. This could have been a happy marriage, but she forgot there was a time for love. She was so bitter that she devoted all her time to hate. She became quit famous as she traveled around the country crusading against demon rum. She was so obsessed that David divorced her on ground of desertion. With the balance of love in her life she could have been a happy wife, but she chose to be known only for her hatred. Her second husband, however, did give her the name that she is famous for. His name was pastor David Nation, the second husband of Carry Nation.

If you do not know the story of Carry Nation and her method of destroying saloons with her hatchet, you do not know one of the great hate stories of history. She had good reason to hate, and she did a lot of good because of her hate, but she gave hate to great a portion of her time. The result of this lack of balance was that her life missed one of God's greatest blessings. It is right and good to hate evil, but it must be balanced with a love for good.

There is a time for war and a time for peace.

7 GOD AND BEAUTY Based on Eccles. 3:1-11

When my daughter was little I use to take her for a ride on a mini bike through the fields. There were a number of wild flowers, and just on impulse I said to Cindy, "Let's see how many flowers we can find out here." Every time we saw a different kind of flower she would pick it, and we would go on with the search. In a matter of minutes we were amazed at the variety, and within half an hour we had the most beautiful bouquet of 23 different kinds of wild flowers. Such an experience made a deep impact on both of us. We were impressed with the fact that God is a lover of beauty, and that there is more beauty in God's creation than most of us ever see. If you keep your eyes open, you never know when or where you will experience new beauties. Douglas Malloch put it in poetry-

**Along the journey here and there
You often find a flower,
Just anytime or anywhere,**

**No special place or hour.
They are not planted in a row;
You never guess, you never know;
Around a bend a fellow goes,
And right ahead he sees a rose.**

If a Christian is not feeding his soul on the beauties of life, he will not be growing in beauty himself, and will be failing to fulfill the purpose of God in his life. Rousseau said, "Take from our hearts the love of the beautiful and you take away the charm of life." Beauty plays an important role in the life of a believer, but it is seldom given serious consideration. Dr. Harry Fosdick once said, "Nothing in human life, least of all in religion, is ever right until it is beautiful." Nothing that is truly Christlike is ever ugly. All of the fruits of the spirit are beautiful.

William Blake went so far as to say, "A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect, the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian." He is saying that every true Christian will add some beauty to life, or he is not being Christian. Marion L. Bliss in her book *The Way Of Wonder* explains why this is so. "Because to be a Christian is to be a follower of perfection, and a man who seeks perfection soon becomes an artist. The true philosopher is a follower of truth; the true musician is a follower of harmony and law; the true architect is a follower of order and design and symmetry; the true painter is a follower of light and beauty; the true poet is a follower of love. These paths are the paths of perfection, truth, harmony, law, order, design, light, beauty and love, and all lead to one goal-God."

The Gospel and beauty have always gone hand in hand in their transforming march across the world scared by sin. Whenever men turn to Christ their lives and their environment become more beautiful. When John Wesley rode up and down through the English countryside during the last half of the 18th century, his soul was touched by the poverty, and ugliness of the village life. He decided to start a contest. He distributed flower seeds to all of the housewives, and he offered prizes to those who could raise the most beautiful gardens. The result is that the English countryside has the reputation of being the most colorful in the world. Wesley not only changed the history of Christianity in the English world, but his love of beauty changed even the physical environment. He would have said amen to the poet who wrote,

**If of thy mortal goods thou are bereft,
And from thy slender store to loaves alone to thee are left,
Sell one, and with the dole
Buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.**

Our purpose in this message is to show that the Bible supports this emphasis on the importance of beauty. It is not a luxury, but a necessity for the good and godly life. Philosophers have always included beauty among the highest values of life. Their trinity of values have always been the good, the true, and the beautiful. We want to consider this subject under three headings: The fact of beauty; the form of beauty, and the force of beauty. Let's look first at-

I. THE FACT OF BEAUTY.

Our text tells that God has made everything beautiful in its time. If there is any man who cannot see that God loves beauty, he is blind indeed. You just as well try and teach a stone to appreciate Bach as to try and teach such a person to appreciate the Master Artist of all beauty. Such persons are rare, however, and Clarence E. Macartney, the great preacher, was convinced that the love of beauty was so deeply implanted in us by God that this is the reason why people long to escape from the city into the country. God planted a garden of unspeakable beauty for man's first environment, and Macartney says that man has never been able to throw off the influence of that early environment.

The fact is, God made the first garden and all of its beauty. In the Old Testament there are 23 different Hebrew words for beautiful, beauty, and beautify. In the New Testament the word is seldom used, but the emphasis is still there. Jesus, for example, pointed to the beauty around Him to illustrate His teachings. "Behold the lilies of the field. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these." Jesus saw greater beauty in a flower than in the man made beauty of royal garments. Jesus appreciated beautiful clothes, and He wore a robe of such beautiful handiwork that the soldiers gambled to see who would become the fortunate possessor of it. For Jesus, however, nothing could match the garments God gave to the flowers of the fields.

According to Ruskin in his book The Seven Lamps of Architecture, all man made beauty is an imitation of what God has made in the realm of

natural beauty. This is illustrated by the fact that God's design of the Tabernacle and Temple, and all that had to do with architecture and worship was exceedingly beautiful in color, form, and was to have flowers carved everywhere to ornament the place of worship. Let me share just a few of the many references.

In I Kings 6:18 the temple that Solomon built is described: "The cedar within was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers..." v. 29 says, "He carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers..." Ex. 25 describes the flowers carved in the Tabernacle also. The fact is, God demanded everything connected with the worship of Him to be of the finest beauty.

Psa. 96:6-"Honor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary."

Ezra 7:27-"Blessed be the Lord, the God of fathers, who put such a thing into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem."

Isa. 60:13-"The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious."

These are just a few of the many verses that make clear the fact of God's love of beauty. He wants men to create beauty by imitating His own creativity in nature. Let us next consider-

II. THE FORM OF BEAUTY.

We can only touch on a few of the many issues involved in what beauty really is. Many Christians have had low standards in what they consider beautiful. In their rejection of the world's values the Christians of the past have thrown out some of God's values along with those of the world. This is easy to do because some things are universally beautiful, and they appeal to all people whether they be Christians or unbelievers. What a Christian considers beautiful determines a great deal as to the character and conduct of his life.

Frank Gaebelin, writing in Christianity Today, says that many evangelical Christians have, "The snobbery of the banal." That is, a pride in

the second and third rate which expresses contempt for the first rate. Christians often call certain music, drama, and art, high brow and egghead. They are devoted to third rate TV programs and music that has nothing to do with worship. He writes, "Evangelicals turn away from art as a side issue or frill at the peril of their own impoverishment and at the cost of ineffectiveness in their witness. For art, which is the expression of truth through beauty, cannot be brushed aside as a luxury. We who know God through His Son who is altogether lovely must be concerned that the art we look at, listen to, read, and use in the worship of the living God has integrity."

He calls for Christians to get their youth involved in, not just hikes, picnics, games, and parties, but in activities where they learn to appreciate the beautiful in all realms of life. William Lyon Phelps, the Christian professor at Yale, said, "The way to appreciate beauty is to keep looking at it; to appreciate music is to keep listening to it, and to appreciate poetry is to keep reading it." All of this is but commentary on the words of Paul in Phil. 4:8, which opens up the whole universe of beauty for the Christian. Paul said, "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." The Christian is obligated to be devoted to the beautiful in every realm of life.

The Bible speaks of many forms of beauty. There are a number of women referred to as beautiful. The fair form of the female is a form of art in which most men need no encouragement to gain an interest. The references to men's attraction to female beauty in the Bible make it clear that beauty is the foundation for romantic love. In the Song of Songs 6:4 the man says, "Thou art beautiful O my love," and he goes on to describe her beauty. The majority of texts on physical beauty deal with women, but they do not have the monopoly, for David and his son Absalom were also beautiful of form and handsome. Physical beauty is valuable according to Scripture. Prov. 20:29 says, "The glory of young men is their strength, but the beauty of old men is their gray hair. There is a form of beauty in old age not processed in youth.

A wife said to her husband, "Will you love me when my hair turns gray?" He said, "Why not? I've stuck with you through brown, black, blonde, and red." American women spend several billion dollars a year on beauty aids. They obviously consider beauty to be of great value. The druggist said to the customer, "Did that mud pack I sold you help your wife's appearance?" He

answered, "It did for a couple of days, but then it wore off."

External beauty is good, but the Bible makes it clear also that it is not the finest form of beauty. Mrs. Ted Dienert, the youngest daughter of Billy Graham, gave a lecture to a women's club on beauty. She said, "True beauty, I believe, comes from the heart. It is something that can be cultivated. A beautiful woman is someone who takes a positive attitude. She is an interesting person to be with." She is saying that the best form of beauty is that which comes from the inner life, and she gives this quote, "When a graceful figure is the habitation of a virtuous soul, and when the beauty of the face speaks out the modesty and humility of the mind, it raises our thoughts up to the great Creator."

The Apostle Peter would say amen to this, and as a married man himself, he gives this advice to married women in I Peter 3:3-4. "Let not yours be the outward adorning with the braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of robes, but let it be the hidden person of heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." Real and lasting beauty is spiritual. The church is in the greatest beauty business on earth, for its message, if obeyed, can beautify any person with ultimate beauty.

Jesus died that we might be forgiven and cleansed from sin, and restored to the image of God from whence we fell. This is the greatest beautifying process in the entire universe. Jesus only used the word beautiful once, and it was to show that external beauty is superficial. He said to the Scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23:27, "You are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Depth of beauty in the inner man is what really counts.

The Bible does not oppose external beauty, for it speaks favorably of beautiful clothes, jewels, settings, and places, but it makes clear that lasting and godlike beauty is inner beauty. In Psa. 29:2, and in two other places, we are called upon to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. When this is done Psa. 149:4 says that God will beautify the meek with salvation. In Psa. 90:17 the prayer of Moses is, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." David's longing in Psa. 27:4 is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, and to behold the beauty of the Lord. God is the author of all beauty, and the highest form of beauty is like His, which is the beauty of the

spirit. Let's look finally at-

III. THE FORCE OF BEAUTY.

Beauty has great power to move men, and that is why Paul urged Christians to think on the beautiful. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." A man whose focus is on the beautiful will be an optimist. Beethoven composed his masterpiece the 5th Symphony, called the Victory Symphony, during the first year of the Peninsular War when Napoleon's shadow loomed over all of Europe. Napoleon was planning for an all out attack, and Beethoven might have despaired of creating anything beautiful in such a dark hour. But he knew beauty would remain when the smoke of war cleared, and so with his mind focused on beauty he went ahead and finished his symphony. The ugly war is long forgotten, but the beauty of his music lives on, and it blesses and inspires people all over the world.

Beauty speaks a powerful language to those who will listen. It is the language of hope, victory, and optimism. Frederick Brown Harris, the one time chaplain of the U. S. Senate, said, in hours of greatest sentiment and significance, when language breaks down, and orchid takes over." You have heard the adage, "Say it with flowers," and philosophers and poets really mean it. They say the beauty of flowers can communicate what words never can. J. G. Percival has even written on the Language of Flowers, and in poetry says,

In Eastern lands they talk in flowers,
And tell in a garland their loves and cares;
Each blossom that blooms in their garden bowers,
On its leaves a mystic language bears.

The language of beauty is universal, and so simple that all may understand. If men would listen to the full implications of the message of beauty, it would lead them to the author of beauty. Beauty has the force to move men to God. Hugh Macmillan has recorded the beautiful French story of flower power. A nobleman was imprisoned in a dreary fortress because of his part in a plot against Napoleon. During his lonely captivity a little wild flower grew up between two stones in his prison court. It attracted his attention, and having nothing else to do, he watched it grow. He was amazed that he had never taken time before to watch the beauty of nature develop.

That plant became his companion, and he even gave it a name. One day while he lay ill in his bed the jailer announced that his plant friend had put forth a flower. He leapt to his feet, and forgetting his illness, was lost in admiration for its beauty and fragrance. He felt the healing power of beauty, and his mind turned to God, who alone could be the author of such loveliness. He had heard the Gospel of God's love, and God's gift of salvation in His Son, but he had never accepted the Son as his Savior. In the presence of this beauty, however, he submitted to the Redeemer whose life was symbolized by the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valley. Beauty had opened his eyes to the author of all beauty.

As the flower grew it became too large for its small space, and it was beginning to wither. He asked the jailer's daughter to take a message to the Empress Josephine pleading for a stone to be removed to spare the life of his precious companion. The Empress marveled at his concern for a flower, and she successfully pleaded for his release. He married the jailer's daughter, and long after he died his widow wore a costly brooch in which were the faded remains of a prison flower, whose beauty changed their lives so completely.

If any man will honestly look at the facts of beauty, and consider all the forms of beauty, especially the highest of inner and spiritual beauty, he will feel the force of beauty leading him into fellowship with the author of beauty. The beauty of salvation is a gift received by submitting to the Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star-that is, to Him whose every name proclaims Him the author, lover, and sustainer of all beauty-the Lord Jesus Christ.

May the prayer of each of our lives be, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me." May our lives be filled with the flower power of the Lily of the Valley. May our lives be illuminated by the shining power of the Son of Righteousness, that through us the force of beauty might move others to experience the beauty of salvation in Christ.

8. WHAT IS BEAUTY Based on Song of Songs 1:15-16

Every woman wants to be beautiful, and that is why the beauty business is a seven billion

dollar a year industry, and the largest advertiser in America. American women actually worship beauty. They will do almost anything to attain it, including fasting if it is necessary. They will try anything, and the result is sometimes tragic. In his book, *Love In America*, David Cohn writes, "These martyrs to physical beauty are buried or hustled to hospitals while millions of their sisters, quite undaunted, continue their fanatically persistent search for the perfect figure, grimly making their way through tasteless diets, gymnasiums, dancing classes, and plastics surgeon's offices with a fatalistic tenacity unmatched except by lemmings marching to destruction."

Why do women have this drive to be beautiful? The answer is very simple-men. A woman's deepest desire is to be attractive to men, and her greatest fear is to lack that attraction. This leads to all kinds of vanity. A woman came to a pastor and confessed she had a problem with the sin of pride. She said, "Sometimes I sit before my mirror for hours admiring my beauty." The pastor responded, "That is not the sin of pride. Your problem is an over active imagination."

Many women imagine they are beautiful because they try all the gimmicks, and use all the products that promise beauty. Arlene Dahl has taken a more logical approach. She wrote a book titled, *Always Ask A Man*. She spent years asking men what they felt made a woman beautiful. She says that by listening to men you can learn what qualities every Adam looks for in his Eve. She learned that the ideals of men vary, but she writes, "But without exception-every man put one quality above all others in describing his ideal. That one essential attribute which all men seek and admire in a woman is femininity." She then quotes a host of famous men on the subject, and shows that they all agree. Yul Brynner summed it all up, "Simply femininity is the most important thing about a woman, and it is a quality a great many women are in jeopardy of losing. Women are being emancipated out of their femininity in this modern age."

It is not just modern men who feel this way about feminine beauty. We can go back to Washington, the father of our country, and discover the same feelings. We so often see George Washington in cold stone, or metal statues, that we seldom think of him as a man with warm affections, and a love of beauty. From his youth he struggled with his passions for pretty girls, and he wrote a poem about it.

O ye gods, why should my poor resistless heart
Stand to oppose thy might and power,
At last surrender to Cupid's feathered dart,
And now lays bleeding every hour.

He fell in love several times, but his proposals for marriage were refused. We have other poems he wrote to his sweethearts. When he fell in love with a widow, Martha Custis, he finally found one who would marry him, and they had a great love, and a great life together. So passionate was their love that before she died Martha Washington destroyed all his letters to her, for she felt such love deserved to be kept secret.

The Song of Solomon, however, records for us the universal experience of love, and the universal love of beauty. The Shepherd lover of this great song feels toward his shepherd maiden just like men have always felt about the women they love. Throughout the song he praises her feminine charms, and expresses delight in every aspect of her beauty. He makes it clear that beauty does include the physical, for he describes how he adores her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, and breasts. All of these are described in the first few verses of chapter 4.

Beauty is not only in the eyes of the beholder, but is an objective reality visible to all. Someone said the average man can tell all he knows in 2 hours, and after that, he begins to talk about women. Men do not claim to understand women, but they do understand beauty. A man does not need to know anything about flowers to appreciate and enjoy them. So also, ignorance cannot rob men of the one thing they do know about women, and that is their beauty.

Abraham loved Sarah, and she was beautiful to him, but he knew other men could see her beauty as well, and so when he went to Egypt he said to her in Gen. 12:11, "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, this is his wife, then they will kill me, but they will let you live." He persuaded her to say she was his sister. The text goes on to say the Egyptians thought Sarah was so beautiful, so they told Pharaoh, and he took her into his harem. She was spared, however, and God saw to it she was returned to Abraham undefiled. Beauty, we see here, was objective, and could be the cause of a great deal of trouble in the life of a woman, or in the life of a man who marries her.

Confucius was at least partially right when he said, "She who is born beautiful is born with sorrow for many a man." Uriah got himself murdered because he married the beautiful Bathsheba. I remember an old Abbott and Costello film in which Lou Costello was determined to marry a homely girl. He said, "If I marry a pretty girl she may run away." Abbott thinks that is stupid logic and says, "But a homely girl may run away too." "I know," said Costello, "But if a homely girl runs away, who cares?"

Beauty can be a problem, but it can also be a blessing. In Esther 2:7 we read of her, "The maiden was beautiful and lovely." In her case, many lives were saved because of her beauty. The Jews would have suffered a great slaughter had it not been for the king's love for this beautiful woman. The Jews celebrate to this day a yearly feast in remembrance of their deliverance because of a beautiful woman. The Jews have always had a very positive attitude toward the beauty of women. Ibn Ezra said, "Rather little with beauty than much without it." Ben Sira said, "The beauty of a woman maketh bright the countenance," and, "As the lamp shining on the holy candlestick, so is the beauty of a face on a stately figure."

We could go on stressing the importance the Old Testament gives to beauty in a woman, but to relate it all to our passage in the Song of Songs, we need to see that beauty is not limited to the feminine. Males can also be beautiful. In I Sam. 16:12 we read of David, "Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome." His son Absalom was even more so, for we read in II Sam. 14:25, "Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his

beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him."

Beauty is a two way street and covers both male and female. This is what we see in the 15th and 16th verses of this first chapter. In verse 15 the Shepherd says to the Shulamite girl, "Behold you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful." The repetition is a method of expressing superlative and surpassing beauty. In verse 16, most commentators agree, we have her response, and she returns the compliment, behold, you are beautiful my beloved." Leigh Hunt said, "The beautiful attracts the beautiful." Here are two beautiful people trying to out do each other in expressing their adoration. This is the kind of mutual love and admiration we see between the lovers in this greatest of songs. Beauty is one of the themes that runs all through this song, because beauty and love go together, and that is why beauty, like love, is a great power.

Beauty can motivate both men and women to live lives of loyalty and sacrifice. When Paul wrote to the Philippians he said in 4:8, "Whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Paul probably did not have lovely looking people in mind, but the fact is, the power of positive thinking is aided by the beauty of people. Power can be used for good or evil, and so the devil himself uses the power of beauty, for he can be an angel of light. The world is full of beautiful lights and beautiful places to lure people into the ugliness of sin. Evil cannot succeed on its own. It must make use of something good to get anywhere, and that is why beauty is one of its primary resources.

Nevertheless, it is God who is the author of beauty, and it is a great power for good. Joanna Bailie wrote,

To make the cunning artless, tame the rude,
Subdue the haughty, shake the undaunted soul;
Yea, put a bridal in the lion's mouth,
And lead him forth as a domestic cur,
These are the triumphs of all-powerful Beauty!

Micheal Angelo said of his love, that her beauty led him up from low desires and made him want to strive for heaven's best. He said, "How good, how beautiful must be the God that made so good a thing as thee." History is full of great men of God whose greatness, in part, was due to their love of one they felt was beautiful. Johnathan Edwards, the giant intellect, had some awful burdens to bear. Without his wife Sarah it is doubtful he could have survived his trials. He was so captivated by her beauty that he wrote to her concerning a speedy wedding, "Patience is commonly esteemed a virtue, but in this case I may also regard it as a vice."

The beauty he saw was physical, but love does deepen the beauty of lovers so that it is far more than a mere matter of the skin. That beauty is only skin deep is a skin deep saying. External beauty is for attraction, but it is internal beauty that will bind two people together

even when age or circumstances rob them of the external. Lasting beauty is inner beauty, and that is why Peter urged Christian women not to labor for surface beauty, but to beautify the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit. Sir Hunt wrote,

What is beauty? Not a show
of shapely limbs and features. No.
These are but flowers
That have their dated hours
To breathe their momentary sweets, then go.
Tis the stainless soul within
That outshines the fairest skin.

The French say, "Beauty without virtue is a flower without perfume." Capito said, "Beauty alone may please, not captivate; If lacking grace, tis but a hookless bait." We must recognize that the real power of beauty depends upon its depth. If it does not go into the very heart of the person, then however enchanting the external beauty, it will not have a lasting effect. This is not just a Christian teaching, but has been recognized by all wise men. The ancient Greek poet Euripides said, "More precious in a woman is a virtuous heart than a face of beauty." Not only is the virtuous heart a vital element, but intelligence is also an important part of a truly beautiful person. The surface specialist forgets this aspect of beauty. Margaret Fishbeck wrote, "Women are wacky. Women are vain. They'd rather be pretty than have a good brain."

If the internal aspects of beauty are neglected, and only the externals are emphasized, beauty becomes a negative thing, and a source of vanity. That is why Prov. 31:30 says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." The beauty that has the power to please God is the beauty of mind and soul. It is still true, however, that external beauty is a great value and power. The Shepherd lover says to the Shulamite girl that her eyes are doves. He repeats this again later. He is deeply moved by the beauty of her eyes. In love poetry the eyes are a key focus of attention. Heine wrote,

Two sapphires those dear eyes of thine,
Soft as the skies above thee;
Thrice happy is the man to whom
Those dear eyes say: I love thee.

The reference here to eyes like a dove refers to their gentleness and purity. The dove has meek and gentle eyes. They are very feminine, and not like the fierce eyes of the hawk or vulture. The dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit because of its affectionate nature and fidelity of its mate. The spirit of a woman is reflected in her eyes. Byron wrote,

She walks in beauty like the night
of cloudless climes and starry skies;
and all that's best of dark and bright

meet in her aspect and her eyes.

All Christians should have beautiful eyes. If the spirit of Christ is allowed to fill us, then the dove-like gentleness of the Holy Spirit should fill our eyes with love. As we look at the love language of this song, it is so easy to forget that though it deals with literal lovers, it also has reference to the spiritual love of Christ and His church. This means that beauty is an important aspect of the Christian life. Jesus is the author of all beauty, and He loves beauty, and especially the beauty of people who are being conformed to His image. He became ugly for a while as He went through the agony of the cross that we might become beautiful forever.

Jesus was a beautiful person Himself. Many fail to realize this because of a misunderstanding of one passage in Isa. 53:2 which says, "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him." Some have concluded that Jesus must have been homely, but the context makes it clear that this refers to Jesus only in His hour of rejection when He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Before the cross all the evidence points to Jesus as being one of the most handsome of men ever to live. John Gill, the great Puritan commentator, referring to the virgin birth of Christ, "As it was free from sin, so was no doubt free from all the blemishes and defects of nature.....and in this sense, ...may He be said to be fairer than the children of Adam." No sacrifice could be offered to the Lord if it was not perfect and without blemish. Jesus was the perfect once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world, and He, therefore, had to be a perfect specimen of mankind.

The body of Jesus is the ideal toward which we all move, for we shall ultimately be like Him. When we sing, "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me," it is true, we think of His internal beauty, but the fact is, in glory, when we are like Him, it will be a likeness also to His external beauty. Jesus was the brightness of His Father's glory, and the expressed image of His person. It is not likely Jesus had any defect in His body, or anything that would be inconsistent with the image of God. All people were drawn to Him. Women and children, and great husky fishermen were moved by His charm and personality. He was an ideal man, and nothing in Scripture indicates otherwise. If I see a person known for their beauty who has been in an accident, and I come and tell you they look terrible, you would not conclude that that person was ugly. You would know that the accident had marred them, and made them ugly to behold. So it is with Christ on the cross. His beauty was marred by man's cruelty, but He was a beautiful person before the cross, and a beautiful person after His resurrection.

We do not have a homely lover of our souls on the throne of majesty. One day we will see the King in His beauty and behold His glory. Even now Paul says the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is given us in the face of Jesus Christ. There is great power in the beauty of Christ to move us to acts of love, and to transform us into His likeness. The hymn says,

Jesus! I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.

**Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul;
For, by Thine transforming power Thou hast made me whole.**

Whether it be a romantic or a religious love, there is no escaping the importance of beauty. Men must be attracted by beauty before they can love. If Jesus can look at us like the Shepherd looked at the Shulamite girl, and say we are beautiful, and our eyes are doves, then we are beautiful people. We are people whose life and attitude express the gentle love of the Holy Spirit. If we find the fire of love is going out, and we do not care for those for whom Christ died, then we need to get a spiritual beauty treatment, and pray,

**Come Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Kindle a flame of heavenly love
In these cold hearts of ours.**

We can get by without beauty of body, but there is no substitute of beauty of soul. D. L. Moody in his book, Secret Power said, "A man may be a very successful lawyer and no love for his clients...a man may be a very successful physician and have no love for his patients...a man may be a very successful merchant and have no love for his customers.....but no man can be a co-worker with God without love.....We cannot work for God without love. It is the only tree that can produce fruit on this sin-cursed earth that is acceptable to God."

George Pinwell painted a famous picture he called, The Elixir Of Love. A charlatan is standing in the village square offering for sale a love potion which he guarantees will awaken love, and make you beautiful to your lover. Young lovers are crowded around wondering if it can be true. Older people purchased some in expectation that it will bring back the glow of love's younger days. People of all kinds are portrayed as being hungry for a taste of that which will make them beautiful. With keen spiritual insight the artist represents the charlatan standing at the foot of the village cross. Above him the arms of the cross are stretched out, symbolic of the all encompassing love of Christ who longs to make all men beautiful before God, by forgiving and cleansing from sin. None give heed, however, but go on buying that which will not satisfy.

Beauty is possible for all, but what is beauty? It is Christlikeness, and can only be attained by those who love Christ and adore Him as the Shulamite girl did her Shepherd lover. A loyal love is not only beautiful in itself, it is the key to growth in beauty. Loving people are beautiful people. Just as we have an obligation to be loving, we have an obligation to be beautiful, and being loving and beautiful means to be like Christ.

9. TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE Based on Eccles. 4:9-12

History is filled with stories of how feuding people become peaceful partners because of the power of love in the lives of two people. One of the most famous in American history is that of an 18-year-old Indian girl Pocahontas and the Englishman John Rolfe. The Virginia colony was very close to war with the Indian leader Powhatan. They were in the midst of negotiations when the letter came from John Rolfe asking for permission to marry Pocahontas. It was a pleasant surprise to both sides, for they were heading for a showdown, and now everything was changed. It was the first wedding between a white man and an Indian, and both sides were pleased for it would mean peace between their peoples.

It was a glorious feasting affair, and the first time that the whites and Indians could relax in each other's presence for several years. The Indians brought much food, and so it was the first time in as many years that the whites had been well-fed. Pocahontas had become a Christian, and she took on the Christian name of Rebecca, and she and her new husband went to England where she became the belle of London society. Neither of these two people could have done much for their people alone, but the two together made an impact that brought peace and profit to all. They illustrate the truth of our text that two are better than one.

Two dollars are better than one dollar, and two heads are better than one. Jesus was single, but he chose disciples to be with them. He had no intention of trying to reach the world by himself. Paul was single, but he was always seeking for companions and partners in the ministry. Without Dr. Luke being by his side we would not have the record of his life and journeys. God sent both His Son and His Spirit into the world, and we need both to accomplish God's purpose because two are better than one.

Jesus sent out His disciples two by two for good reason, and we demand a second in parliamentary procedure because at least two people have to be in agreement to make anything worth debating. An idea that cannot get at least two people interested is not worth the time of any group. It is just another way of saying that two are better than one. Show me the man or woman who has ever become great alone, and I will show you a fictional character. History will not support the idea that you can become great alone. Everybody who is anybody needs somebody as a partner. Even Crusoe needed his Friday, and the Lone Ranger needed his Tonto. Where would Abbot be without Costello, and Laurel without Hardy?

In the Christian world we see that all great evangelists had their partners. Moody had his Sankey, and Billy Graham had his George Beverly Shea. But there is no point in endlessly trying to prove the obvious that two are better than one. It is almost as self-evident as the saying that two are more than one. Everything about this text is rather obvious. Two can get more work done than one. Two can handle a problem better than one. Two can keep warm better than one. Two can defend themselves better than one. It is not an absolute, for two masters are not better than one, and Jesus said you can not serve two masters. It is not an absolute truth, but it is true, and the challenge is to see how it should change our lives in relationship to other people, and especially other people we work with daily.

The essence of the text is that everybody needs somebody. We all need support and help, and so we all need a friend and companion. If Christ is going to transform our daily work, or any other part of our life, there are two things that must be happening in our lives at all times. We must be receptive to help from others, and we must be responsive with help that is needed by others. In other words, we need to practice in every situation the truth that two are better than one. This two-fold process is basically love in action. You are to be ever recruiting partners in life because two are better than one for you, and you are to be ever recognizing the need for a partner in others because two are better than one for them.

This two-fold process of receptiveness and responsiveness will make this truth very practical and helpful in all aspects of your life, and in all of your relationships. It is really just another way of looking at how to do good to all men, for by receiving help and giving help you do just that. Let's look at each of these and see how they work.

I. BEING RECEPTIVE OF HELP.

Our text says that two are better than one for profits in work, for provision in meeting needs, and for protection in conflict. The wise person, therefore, is one who rejects the idea of isolation and total independence as the best life style. The one who chooses that approach to life is saying that one is better than two, or any other number. This is the satanic approach to life. It says, "I do not need God or anybody else. I am self-sufficient and independent. All I need is myself alone." Satan refused to be receptive to the idea of partnership with God. He wanted to be God, and so he tempted Adam

and Eve to renounce their partnership and become gods on their own. Why share the power and the glory with anybody when you can become your own god? This is the big lie of Satan.

Nietzsche bought into this idea and became obsessed with keeping himself isolated from others lest they contaminate his power and independence. His goal was to have no need of anybody. He would only have a star-like relation to other people. A star can be seen by another, but yet be far distant. Where did this egoistic isolation lead him? It was to the mad house. God did not make us to be alone. He said it was not good for man to be alone. That was the first negative in God's ideal creation. We are made to be social creatures, and that is why two are better than one. Nobody can be all God wants them to be by being alone. We must all be receptive to help just as every part of the body must be receptive to the help of other parts of the body. That is the only way the body can be all it can be. One hand cannot applaud alone. It must be open to receive the partnership of the other hand, and then the two can get the job done.

Aesop tells the story of the members of the body getting sick and tired of the stomach getting all the food and doing so little work. They decided to go on strike and not cooperate with the stomach. The hands refused to put the food to the mouth, and the mouth refused to take it in, and the teeth would not chew it anyway. They all decided to go independent. In a few days they began to doubt the wisdom of their approach. The hands could hardly move, and the legs could not support the body. The mouth was parched and dry. The strike was called off because they discovered that the body was not made to be independent. Only as each member cooperated with the others could any of them fulfill their potential and experience the best of life.

Because two are better than one we have an obligation to be receptive to anyone who can add their one to ours and make two. It is a part of wise living to be a cooperative person ever open to help. On the job this means that that Christian needs to swallow the pride that makes them feel they do not need the help of others. This is especially the case when it comes to the help of non-believers. Christ can transform your work just by getting you to realize that by being receptive to the help of non-believers you can open the door to their interest in the things of Christ. Paul needed the help of pagans to accomplish the plan of God for his life, and he was not afraid to ask for their help. Because of this receptive spirit Paul was able to open doors into the

Gentile kingdom for the Word of God. Solomon got much pagan help in building the temple to the glory of God.

The church and all Christian relationships are built by cooperation. A theme that runs all through the New Testament is that Christians are members one of another, and so all that they do is to be on an interdependent level of one for another. We are to love one another, have peace with one another, honor one another, not judge one another, edify one another, receive one another, greet one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens, be kind to one another, submit to one another, and comfort one another. There are many others that make it clear that two are better than one. All that is good about the Christian life is found in the relationship we have in the body with one another. It is the support and encouragement we receive from one another that makes the Christian life precious. We cannot be all God wants us to be without one another.

The secret of getting Sunday to carry over into Monday is to recognize that his principle is one that will fit the work place as well. We cannot cooperate with the worldly person in their sin and folly, but we can find common ground where we can appreciate their help and be open to receive that help. We need to recognize that non-believers have skills and social values that are of value to the believer. Christians and non-Christians work together to build much that is made in this world. Some unknown poet put it,

**All have a share in the beauty;
All have a part in the plan;
What does it matter what duty
Falls to the lot of a man?
Someone has blended the plaster;
Someone has carried the stone;
Never the man, nor the master
Ever has builded alone;
Making a roof for the weather,
Building a house for the king;
Only by working together
Have men accomplished a thing.**

If we believe this, it means the Christian has to take the principle of cooperation into the work place and be a part of the answer rather than part

of the problem. If two are better than one, then the Christian had better seek every way they can to be a partner. I never did win my atheist boss to Christ. I worked with him for 4 years, and I did leave him with a clear message that Christians can be good partners with non-Christians in the work place. We did many projects together, and we benefited one another. I was open to receive his help, and he was open to receive mine. That is the kind of relationship we need to strive for in the work place. I know from experience that it makes the work place so much more enjoyable for everyone.

This principle applies in all of life. Seek help from others, for by so doing you create a partnership that is a mutual benefit. All of us have benefited because John Newton, the author of amazing grace, applied this truth in relationship to William Cowper. In 1773 Cowper was suffering another of his many spells of mental derangement where he wanted to kill himself. Newton asked Cowper if he would help him write a hymn book that would make church services more evangelical. This was the beginning of one of the most beautiful of all historic friendships. These two men worked together for 8 years in producing the Olney Hymns. Cowper, instead of being dead, wrote 68 of the hymns in that collection, and they have made him immortal in the church. Some of them we still sing, such as God Moves In A Mysterious Way, and There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood.

Had Newton not been receptive to his help, the Christian world may have lost one of its best hymn writers. Not only that, but Cowper went on after this project to write his first book of poems in 1785, and this made him the most favorably talked about author in England. It was all because he had a friend who recognized that two are better than one. All our work in life can be transformed by being receptive to the help of others. The other side of the coin is-

II. BEING RESPONSIVE WITH HELP.

There are always two perspectives in a party of two. There is the partner who falls, and there is the partner who helps the fallen up. We have looked at the need to be willing to receive help when we have fallen, or are in some need. We have to be willing to be dependent and open to receive the help of others. But this is only half of the role of a partnership. You must also be willing to be the helper, and the one who comes to the rescue to lift and support someone else when they are down. This involves an active role of

seeking to find those who need to go from being one to being two.

This means a more active and aggressive role in applying this truth that two are better than one. It is not just being willing and open to receive help, but it is actively seeking people who need help and responding to that need. It means a striving to relieve the burden of oneness where ever you find it by an active cooperation. Nansen and Johansen were polar explorers and they came to a point where their survival depended upon the shooting and eating of their own dogs. Neither had the heart to shoot his own dog, and so they exchanged their dogs, and each sadly and silently went off and shot the other's dog. It was an awful experience, but they demonstrated how two are better than one for survival. People have different feelings about many things, and they need other people to help them through difficult situations. A great way to help others is to be willing to do things for them that they do not like to do themselves.

Charles Darwin had an impact on the world because he proclaimed a view of life that changed history. He painted a picture of nature that made it red in tooth and claw. It was the survival of the fittest, and the weak would not make it. Life is a struggle, and competition is the name of the game. This kind of thinking justified the use of children in slave labor in the Industrial Revolution. Why not get out of them all you can, and if they die in the process that is a matter of the survival of the fittest. All prejudice and social evils could be justified, for they were but human expressions of the laws of nature where the strong dominate the weak.

Darwin's doctrine was just what the exploiters of the world needed to justify all of their inhumanity to man. His writings became the bible for all who would exploit inferiors. Social Darwinism developed which said that the same laws, which govern nature and evolution govern social life. That meant that the superior must dominate the inferior. Competition is the key to success, and only those who compete well will survive. It is a dog eat dog world in nature, and that is what it has to be in the realm of man as well.

Peter Kropotkins was the first reputable scientist to repudiate Darwin. He wrote a book in 1896 called Mutual Aid. In it he describes the force in nature that called for a close dependency and cooperation. There is an interdependency that runs all through nature that is consistently saying that two are better than one. More and more scientist began to agree that nature

does not just reveal competition, but also the tremendous power and value of cooperation. The African crocodile, after a hearty dinner, rests on the banks of the river with its mouth wide open. Several kinds of birds dash across its tongue and teeth picking out shreds of meat. He gets a free tooth cleaning, and they get a free meal. Everybody is a winner. There are many such examples of cooperation in nature.

Kropotkins showed that nature was loaded with mutual aid, and where the strong did not destroy the weak, but where they worked together for mutual benefit and survival. Many began to see that nature is not all about survival of the fittest only, but about mutual dependency. Nature became an example of the truth that two are better than one, and of the need for others help for survival and for a meaningful life. This movement toward a different perspective of nature had a major impact. Key leaders of radical Darwinism even changed their tune. Thomas Huxley, for example, repudiated his gladiator theory of existence and admitted that nature not only revealed the survival of the fittest, but also the striving by cooperation to fit as many as possible for survival.

Biologists began to focus on this side and discovered that even the single celled amoeba sought out the companionship of other amoeba, and revealing that there is a social appetite in all living things. Other studies revealed that all plants and animals exhibit an automatic mutualism, which is a life of cooperation, making two better than one. The fittest who survive are not those who are rugged individualists who trample others down and care only for themselves, but rather those who care for others as well as themselves. Experiments with gold fish showed that when a toxic silver was given to them in isolation they all quickly died. But if this same fatal dose was given to a group together they secreted a slime that diluted the toxic poison that enabled them to live much longer, and had they been in nature where rain could have diluted it even more they could have all survived.

Nature was shown to teach not only the survival of the fittest but of the friendliest. Those who seek companionship among all creatures are the most likely to survive, and the loner is the most likely to be the first to perish. In 1944 a group of 15 distinguished biologists published a statement in Proceedings Of The Philosophical Society Of Texas, which said, "The probability of survival of individual living things increases with the degree in which they harmoniously adjust themselves to each other and to their

environment."

Ashley Montague in his book On Being Human says the essence of life can be expressed in one word-cooperation, or as Solomon put it-two are better than one. Science is telling us that nature has a definition of sin. It is non-cooperation with others that hurts them and you. This fits Satan's attitude toward God and that of Adam and Eve in the fall. Nature confirms the revelation God has given in His Word. His works confirm His words. Cooperation is the key, not only to life, but to the good life. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." He felt like two all the time. To be Christ-like is to never be alone. Jesus is the One who makes every Christian two. He is our Companion who promises to never leave us nor forsake us.

In Christ we are never alone, and to be aware of this is the key to so much of the Christian life. Being good, or doing good to all men is hard, but it is made possible when we recognize we are not alone. Christ is with us and is pleased by our attempts to be of service in all situations. Ruth Calkins wonders aloud in her poem. She writes-

**You know, Lord, how I serve you
With great emotional fervor
In the limelight.
You know how eagerly I speak for you
At a woman's club.
You know how I effervesce when I promote
A fellowship group.
You know my genuine enthusiasm
At a Bible study.**

**But how would I react, I wonder
If you pointed to a basin of water
And asked me to wash the calloused feet
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman
Day after day,
Month after month,
In a room where nobody saw
And nobody knew.**

There are many things hard for the Christian to do when there is no recognition, but if we could only grasp that we are recognized by Christ, and that we never do anything alone, but are always made two with His presence, then we could do far more. We would be motivated to do the things we get no credit for because they please our Partner and Companion. The key to success in the Christian life is being always aware that with Christ we are two, and two are always better than one.

10. THE KEY TO FREEDOM Based on Judges 6:1-16

The story I am about to tell is fiction, but it is funny and it has a point. After 38 years of marriage I thought I knew everything about Lavonne. But I discovered something new when we got back from our trip to Washington. I was putting things away and I was pushing something under her side of the bed when I discovered a box that was in the way. I asked her what it was and she just told me not to get into it. I kept carrying things in from the car, but my mind was on that box. When she went down for another load I quickly grabbed a peek into that box. I was really surprised and mystified for in that box there were three eggs and 500 dollars.

When Lavonne came back up I told her I was just too curious and could not resist looking into the box. I asked her why there were three eggs in it? She just told me that when I would preach a sermon that was not very good she would put an egg in the box. I thought after 30 years of preaching that only three eggs was not bad at all. But then I asked her what the 500 dollars was doing there? She explained, "Every time I get a dozen eggs I sell them."

The story isn't true, but it is an excellent illustration of the need to laugh at our selves, and to realize that the best preacher and the best leader, and the best Christian are nothing without God. Sarah laughed when the Angel of the Lord said she would bear a child in her old age. What a joke that God would use her feeble body to change history. If you want to see the sense of humor that God has, just look at the heroes of history in and out of the Bible. Paul knew his history when he wrote, "God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." This is what the 4th of July is all about. It is

about celebrating the freedom that the weak have won from the strong.

The 13 colonies were divided and weak, and they were going up against the greatest military power in the world on both land and sea. The men who signed the Declaration of Independence knew they were signing their own death warrant, for death was the penalty for defying the crown of England. They were men of great stature like Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. But the fact is, they were all weak in many ways, and they knew that without the providence of God they did not stand a chance.

The Declaration of Independence was composed by using phrases from the popular sermons of that day. Listen to it and you can hear the clear sense of dependence upon God. "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.... We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States.... And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

What we need to keep in mind is that these noble words were forged in debate. Jefferson, the deist, did not want so much about God in the Declaration, but he was out voted by the others. Many did not want to approve of the Declaration, and there were eloquent voices that spoke against it. John Adams called it the greatest debate of all and he argued vigorously for its acceptance. When congress voted nine of the thirteen colonies voted for it, but that was not enough, for it had to be unanimous. So the debate went on and on until all of the colonies agreed, and thus they became the United States of America.

The more you read of the history of our nation the more you realize the heroes of our history were not gods come down to earth, but they were weak and fallible men who knew they didn't have a prayer without the providence of God. It was their dependence upon God that enabled them to declare their independence from tyranny. Dependence upon God was the key to freedom. It was a joke to think this puny body of people could win a war with England, but that is just the kind of joke God loves to play on the tyrants of history.

Puny David defeated Goliath; puny Daniel defeated the powerful leaders of Babylon, and puny Israel defeated the Egyptians and the mighty Midianites. It is one of God's favorite jokes, and we see it again so clearly in the life of Gideon. We want to focus on his story as an illustration of how God works in history, for it is a great encouragement to all of us who feel so weak and inadequate to do the will of God in this fallen world. That Gideon would ever become a hero was a real joke. He was one of the greatest cowards in the Bible, and he had good reason to be one. His whole nation was a people of weakness.

Israel was oppressed by the power of the Midianites. Every year they would plant their crops, and then just when they were ready for harvest the Midianite hoards would swoop over their land and destroy it, and leave them in poverty. They were helpless, and they had to leave their land and climb into the mountains and live in caves. They were like the scrawny little chicken that all the other chickens pecked until it was nearly dead. Among these weaklings was Joash and his son Gideon. They had some grain that was secretly threshed in a wine press to hide it from the Midianites. Imagine being so weak you had to hide your food lest a bully take it away from you and leave you starving.

Now we see the humor of God, for the Angel of the Lord comes to Gideon as he is making enough grain for his lunch, and looking around to make sure the Midianites do not spot him. He is in fear lest he be caught making his lunch, and the Angel greets him with these words, "The Lord is with you mighty warrior." Mighty warrior was such an exaggeration that Gideon did not even respond. He just questioned the Lord being with him, or with anyone among his people. Not only was Gideon a weakling and a coward, he was a skeptic and a pessimist. They lived in fear for their lives, and even lived in fear while preparing their lunch. They were a weak and helpless people. They had every reason to be discouraged and disillusioned about the good old days when God led His people out of Egypt with great power. Gideon's question was, "Big deal, what has he done for us lately?"

The Angel of the Lord persists in the joke of treating Gideon like a mighty warrior, and he says, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites." But Gideon is equally persistent in trying to set the Lord straight on the facts. "All this talk of strength and power is superficial. Look at the facts: Israel is the weakest nation around, and I

belong to the weakest clan in my tribe, and I am the least in my family." If the Guinness Book of Records was printed in Gideon's day, he would be found under the weakest man in the world. Gideon could not even make a sandwich without fear and trembling that the Midianites might see it and take it away from him.

From a human point of view this would be a handicap for one called to lead an army against a mighty foe. But from God's point of view this is just the kind of man He was looking for. Why? Because the problem of God's people all through history is that they thought it was their power and their goodness that made them God's people. And in their pride they fell. God was continually having to teach them that He did not choose them because they were wonderful. He chose them in their weakness to reveal to the world how great and wonderful He was in loving and saving people even though they were totally unworthy.

If we get God's joke, we will laugh at ourselves, and we will see the foolishness of pride and self-glory. Tal Bonham in his book *Humor God's Gift* points out that ability to laugh at our selves is the key to spiritual health. Christians who take themselves too seriously, as if their gifts and their wisdom and their service is the key ingredient to the success of the kingdom of God, have missed the whole point of God's joke. The success of anything that leads to God's glory is not dependent upon man but upon God. We need to laugh at ourselves when we have the audacity to think that God's plan depends upon us.

Ethel Barrymore said, "You grow up the day you have the first real laugh at yourself." Reinhold Niebuhr, the great theologian, said, "The less we are able to laugh at ourselves, the more it becomes necessary and inevitable that others laugh at us." Many are convinced that people that cannot laugh at themselves cannot see their sinful nature, and so they are really blind to how weak they really are. Bernard Ramm said, "Humor reminds us that we are not gods nor goddess." He said that dictators and fanatics always lack a sense of humor because they have classified themselves among the gods. They refuse to tolerate any reminder of their humanity.

The point is, the truly humble person that God is looking for is one who, like Gideon, knows it is joke to call him a mighty warrior. He is weak and he knows it. But he also knows that if God is really with him, he can be used to

do mighty things. Gideon was a chicken and a skeptic, and he needed all kinds of proof that God was with him. And even when God gave him evidence he did not boldly obey but had to get up in the middle of the night to destroy the altar of Baal. He was afraid of the Midianites and afraid of his own people as well. This great hero was afraid of everybody, and he was afraid of God also. He pleaded with God not to be angry with him for his doubting spirit.

When Gideon did finally raise an army to fight the Midianites God had to teach him again that his might was not in the power of man, but in the power of His providence. He had 32 thousand men ready to fight, but God had him whittle his forces down to 300 men to fight an army that was so vast that it filled a valley with camels. They were so numerous they could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore. Again we see God's sense of humor. What a joke-300 men with trumpets and pitchers going against a mighty army. Why not send the youth group with peashooters against an army of tanks? God does go to extremes sometimes to make His point. His point is made clear in 7:2 where he says to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her."

God used the totally inadequate band of 300 men to route the mighty foe just to make this point that He is the one who won the battle. We need to declare our independence from man in order to be free to depend upon God for victory. We see this in the Bible and in our own history as Americans. We are not a great nation and a free nation because we are such wonderful people. We are so because we had heroes who were dependent upon God. They knew they were weak and inadequate, but they knew they were strong in the Lord. Listen to the famous words of Patrick Henry in 1775:

**"There is no longer hope. If we wish to be free, we must fight!
An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!
They tell me that we are weak, but shall we gather strength by irresolution? We are not weak. Three million people, armed in the holy cause of liberty and in such a country, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. We shall not fight alone. God presides over the destinies of nations, and will raise up friends for us. The battle is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.... Is life so dear, or peace**

**so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?
Forbid it, almighty God! I know not what course others may
take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"**

God gave us liberty because of men like that, and God gave Israel because of men like Gideon. God called him a mighty warrior. He was a nobody and a coward, but God made him a hero, and by so doing made it possible for every believer through history to realize that successful living does not depend upon them and their gifts. Success living depends upon our freedom to be dependent upon God.

All the evidence points to the fact that the church is enslaved to the world, and it is much like Israel under the Midianites. The church is often afraid to be the church, and so it conforms to the world. The church has adopted the idols of our culture, and it gives only token honor to the God of our salvation. The average American Christian cannot stand to give more than an hour or two to the things of God each week, but they spend many more hours pursuing the idols of our culture. They care more about success and what looks good than about the kingdom of God. If it has a Las Vegas glow and a Hollywood show, that is the way to go. Pride goes before a fall, and many of God's people have fallen because they thought they could stand in their own power. This is folly, for no one can stand alone. All of us need a constant dependence upon God to remain free.

We are free as a nation because of men and women who took God's joke seriously, and they believed that the weak can be victorious over the strong if they are dependent upon God. We celebrate the 4th of July because of weak people who found their strength in God. The only way we can experience the full joy of freedom in Christ is to take God's joke seriously. We need to realize that He can use us in all of our weakness to make a difference in this world if we declare our dependence upon Him.

Laugh at yourselves, and laugh at the dreams and schemes of men who think they can make a difference by their own wisdom and power. Psalms 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." The bottom line is this: We need to be a people of prayer and a people of dependence upon God. We need to do more than just say Lord, Lord. We need to live in a way that reveals that Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, or we labor in vain. May God help us as we celebrate the Declaration of

Independence to declare our dependence on Christ, and thereby experience the inner freedom to match the external freedom we have as Americans. Dependence on Christ is the key to freedom.

11. MARCHING FOR A MIRACLE Based on Josh. 6:1-21

We don't sing Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war very much any more, for we seldom see the relevance of being soldiers of the cross fighting the forces of darkness. Marching seems irrelevant also, for even in the military world the real force is now in the air and on the sea. The firepower of missiles and bombs makes marching to war less vital. But the fact is, marching has been the key to effective warfare all through history. George Washington won the war for Independence by much marching.

On one occasion when the British were strung out over 12 miles Washington asked his war council what they should do. General Charles Lee urged them to wait, but younger men urged him to attack. Washington took the counsel of the younger men, and his Continental Army marched out of Valley Forge onto the trail of the British. The pipers lit into Yankee Doodle, and the sergeants called out marching orders. With precision the American forces marched against a superior foe, and they dwell them such a blow that the British never again underestimated their American opponents.

There was much marching yet to do, but Washington motivated his men to never stop marching until they forced the British to surrender and leave this land free and independent. If you study the history of warfare, you will discover that many, if not most, of the great victories that have changed the course of history were decided by the marching men. In our age the march has been the key to victories in the civil rights battles. Martin Luther King Jr. changed the history of our nation by means of marches.

In 1965 black people in Alabama could not register to vote. King led a large group marching to the courthouse to register. He and 2 thousand other

blacks were put in jail. When a black man was shot and killed by a state trooper, King called for a march to the state capital in Montgomery. Governor Wallace forbid such a march, but King defied the order. The state police attacked the marchers and sent 70 to the hospital. King did not back down, but he ordered another march. This time 400 white ministers, priests and rabbis from all over the United States joined the march. One of them died in the march, and the nation was shocked. President Johnson and the courts got involved, and congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Marching won for blacks the right to vote without being hampered, and that victory has changed the whole complexion of government in the U. S. Ever since that victory, marching has been a means by which the masses get their message out to the world. If enough people care enough about an issue to march it is a powerful witness for their perspective.

As we look at the march around Jericho that led to the opening victory in Israel's conquering of the Promise Land, we see that the march was basically just that-a witness. The march did not have any military value, for it did not take the marchers anywhere but around the city. It did not give Israel the advantage of a surprise attack, for it was done in broad daylight with the enemy watching. From a military viewpoint this was the most futile march in the history of warfare. It may have been a great idea for a parade, but it was worthless strategy for taking a walled city. The enemy, no doubt, had a good many hearty laughs at Israel's war games. It was more like entertainment as they watched the march and listened to the trumpets. The daily parade had to be the talk of the town, and everybody in Jericho had to have seen it at least once. You can just imagine the mockery the citizens of Jericho hurled out at the marchers.

It was probably very embarrassing for fighting men to march around the city instead of building battering rams, catapults and ladders, which was the normal preparation for taking a walled city. It was not that it was a hard task to do, for Jericho was only about 9 acres of coverage, and so it took only about 25 to 35 minutes to march around it. These people had been marching for 40 years in the wilderness, and so a half hour a day for one more week was a snap. But the question is, why could God want His people to march like this when it was obvious to all that it had no effect on the situation? The answer to that question is what makes the march for Jesus a relevant activity for Christians in our day. Why does God want His people to march? First of all because-

MARCHING IS A MEANS.

I think we often view God as a superman who goes around doing marvelous things and solving problems as an individualist. If you look closely at how God actually operates in history, you see He is really more like the Lone Ranger with his trusted companion Tonto. God does not enjoy working alone. He likes companionship and cooperation. He desires that men work with Him to accomplish His goals. Only Jesus could die for the sins of the world, but He gave the task of taking this good news to the world to His disciples. He could have fed the 5 thousand with no help, but He used the lad's lunch, and He used His disciples to distribute it. Every chance He got He used some means to achieve His miracles so that the natural and supernatural were linked as partners.

God used the womb of Mary to bring His Son into the world, and it is almost always His method of working to use some natural means as a basis for miracles. Jesus did not make wine out of thin air, but He used the water that was present. He did heal at a distance using no means but His divine power, but usually He used a natural means of conveying His power. He used the laying on of hands, the mud and spittle, the washing in the water, or some other physical means. Why? It is because Jesus is in His very being a combination of the natural and supernatural. He represents the way God is as a being who delights in the combination and cooperation of the two. So God uses means to do His will. He could bypass all means, and sometimes He does, but usually He uses means to achieve His goals. This gives man an opportunity to be partners with God in doing the miraculous. This was the case with the march around Jericho. It is was God giving man a role in His miraculous plan. God wants to make it a joint venture.

We have no idea what marching for Jesus will achieve. We may not see any walls fall at all, but it will bear witness to the world that lovers of Jesus are alive and well, and they are not ashamed to let it be known. It could be a means by which God changes lives, and that is why we do it. We want to be available to God as a means He can use to make a difference in the world.

If you see a beautiful and fruitful garden, you know somebody has put a lot of time and labor into it. Only God can make the seeds grow and bring forth the pleasure-giving flowers and food, but it will not happen if man does

not do his part. Almost all the beauty in civilization is a combination of the labor of God and man. Cooperation is the name of the game in beautifying the city. If you take man out of the picture, and have no watering, fertilizing and weeding, you will soon see how true Augustine was when he said over 1500 years ago, “Without God man cannot. With man God will not.” God is a user of means, and men are His major means, and the marching of men is one of those means. It is one of the ways we cooperate with God to make a difference.

Vincoe Paxton was a missionary nurse in China many years ago. She saw so many people die for lack of modern medicine and surgery. Later she served as an army nurse in Europe near the front, and she saw many American boys brought back from the brink of death by means of advanced medical knowledge and equipment. She realized how the grace of God works through human means. An American boy of 20, who suffered a serious head wound, said to her, “But for the grace of God I wouldn’t be here.” She reflected on that and wrote this paragraph:

“He did not know the long combined efforts of the United States Army Medical Service: The batallion aid man who found him in the mud and snow; the litter men bearing his dead weight on their shoulders; the doctors and medical soldiers at the batallion aid stations who had given him supportive treatment; the ambulance drivers traveling with headlights reduced to the slits of cat eyes in the total blackness over treacherous roads; the hospital where he was operated. He could not go back to the test tube the lecture room, the wheels of American industry and transportation, which had placed these scientifically trained minds, skilled hands and carefully prepared medical supplies at the front. He didn’t know of these things. “By the grace of God,” he called it. And of course he was right.”

God’s grace is not just a matter of luck, but it is directly related to man’s recognition of the importance of means. If man does not devise means by which he can cooperate with God, but just sits and lets God do it on His own, he will rob himself of the power of God. God is a user of means. He used pagan powers to punish Israel, and also to liberate them and get them back into the Promised Land after their exile. God is using means to achieve His will all the time, and most answers to prayer come through human agents as

the means.

God often uses strange and unlikely means to achieve His goals. This march around Jericho is a good example. What good is such a march? It is meaningless in itself, and useless to achieve the goal. It is of no value for the miracle, but it provides the context of obedience in which God is delighted to do the miracle. You might say the march was of no value, but if Israel would have said this is nonsense, and if they refused to march, it is not likely the wall would have come down. What is likely is that they would have been marching in the wilderness for another 40 years until the next generation would have learned to cooperate with God and be willing to become a means by which He could accomplish His purpose.

Marching does not do any miracles, but it provides God with a means by which He can work miracles for His glory and man's good. That is why Christians are marching for Jesus around the world. They are marching as a means. They are making themselves available to God to be a means by which He can give the kingdom of God a victory over the kingdom of darkness. The second thing we want to see is-

MARCHING IS A MEASURE.

It is a measure of faith. There is only one reference to this event in the New Testament, and it is in the great faith chapter. Heb. 11:30 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for 7 days." What if they would have said after 5 days, "This is stupid. It does no good. Let's take the weekend off and stop this ridiculous parade of folly." There were, no doubt, people saying something just like that, for they were experts at complaining and griping about what they did not understand.

God tests the faith of His people and all people by asking that they do things that are not of any obvious value. If they are obvious, it does not take faith. If you can see any logical connection between obedience and the end result it is not a test of faith. You have to believe God will honor your obedience even if it does not make sense. Naaman, the pagan army commander, had leprosy, and by the grace of God a little Jewish girl, who had been taken captive, told him about the prophet Elisha who could cure him. After much negation Naaman finally got a message from the prophet that said he should go and wash 7 times in the Jordan River and He would be

healed. Listen to his response to this prescription, which to him was as meaningless as trying to conquer a city by marching around it.

“But Naaman went away angry and said, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed? So he turned and went off in a rage.” (II Kings 5:11-12).

Fortunately for him he had some servants with more light and less heat, and they persuaded him to do what the prophet said. He did it, and he was healed. He was right, of course, for 7 dips in the Jordan had nothing to do with healing leprosy. If it did, the whole world of lepers would be lined up at the Jordan. The prescription was not what healed him. It was his obedience to the will of God. His servants had the faith to believe that God could use this means to heal their leader, and their faith was honored with a miracle. God used this simple means to achieve a marvelous healing. Had he not used the means, he would not have been healed.

The marching of God’s people around Jericho was the same as that dipping in the Jordan. It was a measure of faith. And so it is with every march for Jesus. All we can do is go by faith that God can use such a powerful witness to break down some walls that keep people out of the kingdom of God. We march by faith because we know God can use every means to do a marvelous work in the lives of others. The essence of faith is action, which pleases God. Heb. 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” With faith it is possible, and that is what this march around Jericho did. It pleased God that His people would obey His command and get involved in cooperation with Him. When God is pleased with His people, they are rewarded by His blessings. All their victory, wealth and joy in the Promised Land came to them because they marched in faith.

An Eastern story tells of the king who proclaimed that when his new highway opened the one who traveled it best on opening day would receive a purse of gold. Everyone asked, “What does it mean to travel it best?”

Each according to his own interpretation made preparation for the contest. Some came on horseback and others in chariots. Some came as runners to travel it on foot. Each was doing their best to travel best. At one point in the road there was a pile of stones, and each contestant complained that this hazard was left on the king's new highway. It was a sorry sight, a disfigurement, and an obstacle they complained as they passed by the heap of rough stones.

Only one runner stopped to clear the road of that pile of stones. Under them he found a purse of gold coins. The king's servants brought this man to the king and he announced that that bag of gold belonged to the finder. The man exclaimed, "There must be some mistake!" "No," said the king. "The prize was for the one who would travel my new highway best. The gold is yours, for he travels best who makes the way easier and safer for those who come after." He pleased the king by doing what the king wanted done, and he was rewarded accordingly. So it was with the march around Jericho. It pleased God, and they were rewarded with the victory. We always win the victory when we are willing to be a means by which God can work His will in the world.

12. INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE based on Numbers 12:1-15

A boy in Harvard College, many years back, got his father in Maine to come to Cambridge and see the football game between Yale and Harvard. As they sat down, the boy slapped his father on the back and said, "Dad, for three dollars you are going to see more fight than you ever saw before." The old man smiled and replied, "I'm not so sure about that Son, that's what I paid for my marriage license." Marriage is like football in several ways. It covers a lot of ground, and there are many obstacles to overcome. Whoever is not prepared to face obstacles had better not plan to play football, or get married.

The football player faces two kinds of obstacles. There are those built into the game, and which must be accepted to give the game meaning. Then there are the illegal, or unjust, obstacles, which we call dirty playing. Sometimes the dirty player is penalized, and sometimes he gets by with it, and the innocent

player suffers unjustly. Those who enter into marriage face obstacles they know to be part of the game. There are natural and normal trials, struggles, and adjustments. Marriage partners also face the obstacles of dirty play also. They face the opposition of the ignorant, the cruel, the prejudiced, the jealous, and those with numerous other evil motives.

Moses had to face this kind of dirty play when he chose to marry across the race line. He chose an Ethiopian, who was a descendant of Ham, to be his wife. His sister and brother were offended by this union, and they made it known publicly. They sought to degrade Moses because of it. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible says concerning the Ethiopian, "It is likely that a black slave girl is meant and that the fault found by Miriam and Aaron was with the indignity of such a union." Most are convinced she was black, or at least dark, but there is a possibility that she was no darker than Moses himself. She could have been a part of the Cushites who were of Arabian stock, and less dark than the Ethiopians. This is really irrelevant since the major fact is that it was an interracial marriage.

The text indicates that Miriam did not approve of the union, but it does not give the slightest hint as to why. It could have that it had nothing to do with her race at all, even though this is assumed by almost everyone. It is possible that she was jealous of the woman. There is an ancient translation that reads, "Because of the beautiful woman he had married, for he had married a beautiful woman." Jealousy could have been the problem, and not racism, for it was thought to be a disgrace at this early stage for a Jew to marry a Gentile.

Many find a typology here. Moses is like Christ marrying a Gentile, who represents the church. Miriam and Aaron are the angry Jews who oppose this union. All of this is historically true, but we have no basis for reading it back into this text as a prophetic type. We cannot read race hatred and prejudice back into the hearts of Miriam and Aaron. All we can say is that we have here an instance of interracial marriage by one who is a great man of God, and that he was upheld by God, and the opposition was judged. Moses was not lowered in his dignity before God, or the people, but is exalted as being a servant of God. His marriage across race lines did not reduce his role in the least. God appears to be highly indifferent to the matter of race or color in marriage. There is not biblical evidence against interracial marriage, but much that would show it to be perfectly normal and honorable.

But why would anyone marry a person from another race? Why do you suppose Moses married an Ethiopian when there were all kinds of Jewish girls he could choose from as the leader of his nation? Solomon, no doubt, had dozens, if not hundreds of dark skinned wives, or concubines. Many were gifts from foreign governments. Moses, however, freely chose to marry one outside of his own race. The reason is likely the same as the one that accounts for interracial marriages all over the Western Hemisphere. He fell in love with her. It is a human fact that where any two races are in frequent contact, there will be intermarriage. People will fall in love with people of any race if they are in contact.

A little known fact is that when Israel was delivered from Egypt a great many people of mixed races also went out with them. In the 400 years of captivity there was a good deal of interracial marriage. Joseph, who brought his people into Egypt, married Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. He could do this, even as a member of a minority race, because he rose to a high level social status. Jews and Egyptians would intermarry, but most such marriages would be between the Jews and other slaves, such as the dark skinned people of Ethiopia to the South. Their would also be a mixture of Jews and Arabs. We read in Ex. 12:37-38, "And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succdoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. A mixed multitude also went up with them..."

It is not surprising that Moses would find one of this mixed multitude attractive, and then choose to take her as his wife. She was among his people, and romantic love knows no race barrier. This is so true that there is no such thing as a pure race. All races have intermarried down through the centuries. For example, if we study the genealogy of Jesus we discover that Jesus was not a pure Jew. There is Gentile blood in blood line. The Jews were forbidden to marry with the wicked Canaanites, but Rahab the Canaanite is in the genealogy of Jesus. He had in his blood line some of the blood of Canaan who was cursed by Noah.

Intermarriage with the Moabites was not allowed either, but Ruth the Moabite is in the genealogy of Jesus. She was, in fact, the grandmother of David, Jesus, as the son of David, had a Gentile for a grandmother. Jesus was not a pure Jew, and there are few who are. The fact that Jesus had interracial marriage in His family tree makes it obvious that there is only a

disgrace in the mind of the racist who makes race an idol, and pure blood a god. You might ask, however, why were these marriages allowed to be a part of the blood line to the Messiah when they were forbidden in general? This is the key to the whole subject. The reason marriage was forbidden between Jews and others was not at all based on race or color, but on belief and unbelief. The only kind of marriage the Bible forbids is a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. If anyone of another race becomes a believer, as did Rahab and Ruth, there is no longer any reason to forbid marriage. Anyone who enters the kingdom of God by faith in Christ becomes a potential mate for anyone else in the kingdom.

The secular scholars battle back and forth on the level of brain capacity, social and cultural equality, and other such issues which are totally irrelevant to the Christian perspective. There is only one factor that makes any ultimate difference to the Christian, and that is the factor of faith in Christ. When that is present, all else is secondary. We will look at the problems the secondary factors do cause, but these are no basis for rejecting a legitimate interracial marriage.

Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and our example. Does He practice interracial marriage? Consider His bride the church. Here is marriage on the highest spiritual level, and we can discover that Jesus chooses all races to make up His bride. His bride is red and yellow, black and white. There are millions of racial differences in the body of Christ. The body, like the Head, is not of any pure race, but is both Jew and Gentile. The Head is more Jewish, and the body is more Gentile, but everywhere it is an interracial body. Christ receives all races, and the Holy Spirit indwells all races. Here is union on the highest level of God and man. It is very near blasphemy to suggest that what the Holy Spirit freely does on the spiritual level is somehow evil on the physical level. If a colored person can be a part of the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit will impregnate them so that they bear spiritual children of God, who can find an objection to a white child of God taking a black child of God for his or her mate?

Let us recognize we are dealing here with a totally Christian perspective that is unique to the body of Christ, and no other philosophy or viewpoint can see this as the Christian does. Only the believer can see race from within the kingdom of God, and through the mind of Christ. We cannot expect that non-Christians will share this view. It is an exclusive Christian view.

Practically it means this: Any marriage between two believers is acceptable in the body of Christ. Race is irrelevant. A mixed marriage is preferable to an unmixed marriage of a believer and non-believer. If a white Christian has a choice of marrying a black Christian or a white non-Christian, he is obligated to Christ and the church to choose the black mate.

It is never right for a child of God to willfully and knowingly marry a non-believer. From a Christian perspective an interracial marriage is always superior to a marriage between faith and non-faith. The deciding factor is faith. The Christian does not stand on anthropology or psychology, or any other ology. He stands in Christ, and sees all people through the eyes of Christ. From there he recognizes that those in Christ from every race are really the only pure race, for they alone are all equally children of God. All believers are as free as Moses to choose their mate from any race, as long as the mate chosen is also a believer.

This does not scratch the surface of the problem out there in the world where the vast majority are not Christians. When this message was written a good many years ago, there were still 19 states that forbid interracial marriages. This was progress, however, for in 1957 there were 30 states that forbid it. I have no figures as to when all were changed, but at that time the United States was the only place in the world where interracial marriage was against the law. This is no longer the case because of the advancement of civil rights.

Interracial marriage is going on continuously, and has been, and that is why there is no such thing as a pure race. Whenever soldiers go to war they choose mates from among the people they are fighting. During World War II American soldiers brought back over 5000 Chinese brides, and even 752 Japanese brides. All the hate propaganda against the enemy could not stop men and women from joining in marriage. This was true back in the days of Israel's conquest also. We read in Deut. 21:10-13.

"When you go forth to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God gives them into your hands, and take them captive, and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you have desire for her and would take her for yourself as wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and pare her nails, and she shall put off her captive's grab, and shall remain in your house and bewail her father and her mother a

full month, after that you may go into her, and be her husband and she shall be your wife."

This has happened all through history, and there is probably never been a war where it did not lead to intermarriage of the enemies. When men see beauty they desire the beautiful one for a mate, and it makes no difference that they are enemies, or that they are of different races. Those who have fought for segregation know this, and that is the main reason for their objection to the races being together. They know they will fall in love with each other and marry each other. The fear of interracial marriage is behind most racism.

Where does this leave the Christian? We have already made it clear that race purity is irrelevant to the church. Sherwood Wirt in his book *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, which Billy Graham has said every evangelical should read, wrote, "It is the mark of original sin that men take their greatest pride in things over which they exercise no control and for which they can take absolutely no credit. Human skin color falls into this category." We cannot join the racist and remain Christian. We do not have to encourage interracial marriage anymore than we have to encourage marriage between classes, but we do have to encourage all who are married of whatever races and classes, for it is a Christian obligation to be encouragers of people in whatever circumstance, when they are not doing anything that displeases God. Miriam and Aaron made this mistake so we can learn not to make the same mistake.

13. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE Based on Deut. 24:1-4

Divorce, like death, is an unpleasant reality that we have to deal with because it won't ignore us. In one way or another it forces its way into our lives. If we are fortunate enough to have no friends, neighbors, or loved ones caught in its grasp, we must still face the issue because it is a biblical issue, and one that is of growing relevance in our world. Divorce is affecting the church as never before in history. The secular acceptance of easy divorce has made inroads into the church, and more and more Christian people are conforming to the trend to end a marriage that isn't working. Christians

divorce almost at the same rate as non-Christians.

The statistics are not all pessimistic, however, for most divorced people do remarry, and so the American people are still sold on marriage. The problem is that more people are marrying the wrong person first, and this indicates a marriage that was entered into without adequate preparation. One of the key areas of controversy among Christians today is the whole issue of remarriage. Should the church permit it, and on what basis. Who has the right according to Scripture to enter a second marriage if they have ended a first one in divorce? This is an issue that is of special importance to pastors, for they are constantly confronted with this decision. For the layman it is often just an academic issue, and for them it makes no real difference. The pastor, however, must deal with real people and their needs, and he must be honest and faithful with the Word of God.

Some denominations have made radical policy changes to relieve the pastor of pressure in this area. But more important is the question, what does the Bible say about divorce and remarriage? The issue is not whether divorce is good or bad, for everyone agrees it is a bad thing to happen. It is never the best, and it always indicates failure on the part of two people. But once the damage is done, what is God's will for the persons living in that state of failure? Is it His will that they stay in a state of failure, or that they press on to a state of success in some new relationship such as a second marriage. We want to study this issue by first looking at the Old Testament message in Deut. 24:1-4. We will look at it verse by verse.

24:1 The first thing to observe about the Old Testament law on divorce is that it was only the husband who had the right of divorce. If he found some indecency in his wife he could put her away. There was no provision for the wife to put him away if she did not find him to her liking. Women should not get upset, however, for as we shall see, the divorce law was for her protection.

First of all a man could not rob a woman of her virginity and then turn around and divorce her. A man forfeited his right of divorce by premarital sex. God holds a man responsible for the rest of his life to care for a woman he forces into a sexual relationship. Deut. 22:28-29 says, "If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay the girl's father 50 shekels of silver. He must marry

the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives." You can just imagine how much this law cut down on pre-marital sex. A man would only want to become intimate with a woman that he loved enough to treasure for the rest of his life.

You notice that he can never put her away, not because he made her pregnant, but because he violated her. The female was protected from becoming an old maid that no man ever wanted by someone taking advantage of her. This law was very sensitive to a woman's security, and made sure that sexual abuse would never destroy her future. The principal we see here is that in God's eyes intercourse with a woman commits you to be responsible to that woman the rest of your life. Sex without a life commitment is not acceptable to God. Men were not free to use women any way they wanted to, and have no responsibility. Deut. 22:13-19 also makes a man never free to divorce a woman that he has accused of not being a virgin, if in fact she is.

Getting back to Deut. 24 we want to see that even here where men have the right to divorce a woman, they have an obligation to give her a bill of divorce. If a man had the right to just kick her out of the house, she would be forced to become a slave or a prostitute in order to survive. With her bill of divorce, however, she was a free woman with the right to remarry.

24:2 This verse pictures her going to become another man's wife immediately. She was free to do so because the divorce ended any obligation she had to her former husband. He is no longer her husband in any sense. In verse 4 he is called her former husband. We see here that remarriage was acceptable, and even expected after a divorce. The only aspect of remarriage that is condemned and forbidden in this passage is the remarriage of the wife to her former husband after she has been married to another man. Even if the other man dies this is forbidden.

The second marriage is not out of God's will, but is perfectly acceptable, but the remarriage to her first husband was an abomination. This reveals that God will not tolerate a light-hearted divorce. If a divorce takes place, it is the death of that marriage for good, and God will not tolerate a renewal of that marriage once another marriage has been consummated. Matthew Henry says, "The divorce had dissolved the bond of marriage as effectively as death could; so that she was as free to marry again as if her first husband had been naturally dead."

You can see how the divorce bill was a protection to the woman, and gave her the chance to find happiness in a new marriage. If she did not have this certificate, any relationship with another man would be adultery, and she would have been stoned to death. Her divorce bill was her life insurance.

The reason for the divorce here is because the husband found some indecency in his wife. This does not mean he found out that she had committed adultery. This would be punished by death, and not by divorce. The indecency was something the husband did not like about her naked body. Hillel, the Jewish scholar of New Testament days, said that it could be a mole on her thigh for example. Others say a sore, or a disease, or even something as trivial as bad breath. Divorce could be based on very minor problems in the Old Testament. Jesus rejected this and said that a man could only justly put his wife away if he found her guilty of adultery.

As easy as divorce was in the Old Testament, let us keep in mind that the laws were merciful to women. She could not be treated as a mere thing. Her sexual honor could not be taken from her freely. Even a foreign wife taken captive in battle had to be treated fairly. In Deut. 21:1-14 we see that she could not be sold as a slave, but had to be set free if her husband was not pleased with her. In this text we see the relationship dissolved with no divorce at all. It was much like today when couples live together, and then decide to go their own way. Even this foreign captive woman had her rights, and she could not be dishonored.

The men, of course, had superior rights. They married as many, and as often, as they desired. There was never any question of his right to remarry after divorce. He could marry anyone except a wife he had already divorced, assuming she had entered into another marriage. If she remained single, there would be no problem in the remarriage. The point we want to establish firmly is that remarriage after divorce was acceptable regardless of the reason for the divorce, and this was valid for both the husband and the wife. It was all so simple that it is amazing that Israel survived. There was no lawyer or court involved. It was all a do-it-yourself divorce. There was no red tape, and no complex paper work. The husband just handed her a bill of divorce, and the marriage was over when she walked out the door.

What a contrast to the words of Jesus in Matt. 19:6, "What God has joined together let not man put asunder." Many women criticize Paul's view of

women in marriage, but just contrast his words, "Husbands love your wife as Christ loved the church," to what we see here in the Old Testament.

Marriage was primarily based on sexual attraction and satisfaction. It ended when the husband was no longer pleased. A wife was primarily a sex object, even though her rights as a person were given protection. What we see in history is the constant tendency of man not to press on to the higher and nobler laws of the New Testament, but to slip back to the sub-Christian laws of the Old Testament.

My concern is to find a principle that runs through both the Old Testament and New Testament that is a perpetual guide on the issue of remarriage. The principle I wish to defend is this: Any person who is truly divorced has the right to remarry. There is no such thing as a legitimate divorce where there is no freedom to remarry. Remarriage is the logical and biblical right of anyone who is truly divorced. A true divorce makes the marriage dead, and leaves both partners free to remarry.

John R. Rice in his famous book *The Home Courtship Marriage And Children* defends this principle strongly. Dr. Rice was not a liberal, but a fighting fundamentalist. Listen to his conviction that has influenced tens of thousands of pastors. "Scriptural divorce gives a right to remarry; one who has a right to divorce has a right to remarry. The modern idea of some Christians that one has a right to a divorce, but should remain single thereafter and never remarry, has no warrant in the Scriptures. In the Bible it is everywhere taken for granted that a right to a divorce means a right to remarry. A divorce, on Bible grounds, means that the former marriage is no longer binding. The former husband is no longer a husband. The former wife is no longer a wife. Those who are divorced on Bible grounds are really divorced, are single, unmarried, unbound."

On the basis of this Deut. 24 passage Rice says it is clear that even if a man divorces his wife for a poor reason, once she has remarried there is no going back to her first husband, for the second marriage which is adultery kills the first marriage, and makes it of no account. He rejects the whole idea of any mate going back to their first mate once they have remarried. Once people are divorced for any reason their marriage is dead when another marriage is consummated. The idea of ending the second marriage to go back to the first is foolishness and totally out of line with God's law. The only way it can be right for divorced mates to get back together is if they have not entered into a

new marriage. Once they do there first marriage is dead for good.

Anytime a marriage is dead due to death, a divorce for adultery, or one of the divorced mates remarries, the partners are free to remarry. If this view is consistent with the New Testament teaching, and I am convinced it is, then it means that most divorced people have a right to remarry. This is contrary to many who feel strongly that the teachings of Jesus make it mandatory that few remarry. We will look at the teachings of Jesus in detail, but for now let me share with you again the views of John R. Rice.

Many say the innocent party can remarry, but the guilty party cannot. Rice says this is nonsense, and it violates the teaching of Jesus. There is no law that says a thief cannot marry, or a blasphemer, or a drunkard, or any other kind of sinner. Why should men say an adulterer cannot marry. If the guilty party in a divorce for adultery has killed the marriage bond, he is just as single and free to remarry after the divorce as the innocent one. Once a marriage is dead there is no biblical basis for expecting anyone to remain bound to it. It is a grave sin to have killed it, nevertheless, when the deed is done who could expect him to remain bound to his former mate any more than he would be if he had killed her? Such a man would be a high risk for anyone to marry, but there is no basis for thinking he has no right to remarry.

We want to look briefly at how Jesus did not in any way forbid the remarriage of a truly divorced person. In Matt. 5:32 Jesus said, "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery." How can divorce of a faithful woman make her and adulterer? It is because Jesus is taking for granted that she will remarry. It is always assumed by Jesus that divorced people will remarry. Nowhere in the Bible is it expected for divorced people to remain single. So Jesus says that when she remarries she will be forced to commit adultery if her first husband puts her away for no good reason. None of the reasons in the Old Testament were legitimate for divorce except her being unfaithful. If he puts her away because he hates the mole on her thigh, he forces her, and the man she marries, into adultery.

Jesus did not forbid her to remarry, nor did He forbid another man to marry her. He is saying that the folly lies in that first husband who divorced

her on inadequate grounds. His wickedness and light view of divorce is the source of the problem, and he forces others into sin. He is the bad guy here, and not the wife or the second husband. They do not live in adultery, for once they have sex relations they destroy the bond she had with her first husband, and now she is free from him for good. So free, in fact, that God forbids that she ever go back to him. The first husband is guilty of forcing his wife to kill their marriage by entering a second marriage. This does kill it by the adultery that it leads to, and so the marriage is over. But it is the first husband who is responsible for the adultery, and not his wife and the man she marries. It is important to lay the guilt where it belongs.

In Matt. 19:9 Jesus deals with the man's own remarriage, and He says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." This would mean that if he does divorce her for unfaithfulness he would not commit adultery by remarriage. These two texts make it clear that any sex with a non mate is adultery, and so until a marriage is dead it is adultery to remarry. What Jesus is saying is that the only thing that can end a marriage is sex with another person other than a mate. All other reasons for divorce do not kill the marriage. When two people divorce, they are still married until one of them has sex with another person and commits adultery. Only then is the marriage really dead.

The key difference between the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus is not on remarriage. That is expected in both, but the grounds for divorce are radically different. In the Old Testament it was the man's pleasure, and he could put away his wife for anything that he did not like about his wife. Jesus narrowed things down from that broad basis to the single issue of unfaithfulness. But there is no disagreement on the principle we are looking at, and that is that any person who is legitimately divorced has a right to remarry.

14. A JEWISH SERMON Based on Ezek. 47:1-12

Orville Wright, co-inventor with his brother Wilbur of the first plane to really fly, was looking at the headlines of a newspaper with David Lefkowitz,

a well-known Jewish preacher back in 1918. The headlines told of a terrible air battle between German and American aces. Orville said, "We thought that our invention of the heavier-than-air flying machine would advance the happiness of man, but it has been the swift messenger of death." After a long pause he went on-"I fear we gave this to mankind before we were ready to control its use for blessing rather than for a curse; our spiritual and religious development have lagged behind the fast pace of science." Lefkowitz said that Orville saw, "The sputtering of the candle of the Lord while the fierce bright light of science shown across the world."

This is one area where Jews and Christians clearly agree, and that is that our world has turned away from the spiritual, and it has turned toward the material. The Jews agree that the world is sick and that man's sin has polluted the stream of history, and that a return to God is the only cure. In a sermon on Ezek. 47:12 Lefkowitz said that many have prepared remedies for the world's sickness, but the only one that will work is the one Ezekiel writes about. Ezekiel is a prophet who speaks in pictures, and in this chapter he paints a picture of a river, which gives life, new strength and vitality. It is a river with the power of regeneration, and what is its secret? Verse 12 reveals the secret in the phrase, "Because the water flows from the sanctuary." Lefkowitz says, "In plain words, the prophet Ezekiel feels certain that the ills of society in his day or any other day can only be cured by spiritual means-out of the sanctuary."

The Jews recognize that modern man in his quest for power, wealth and conquest over the forces of nature has ended up spiritually empty. God's moral law in the universe condemns man to pay a heavy penalty for such folly. The Jews believed strongly in man's responsibility and in his ability to fulfill God's will if he chooses. Lefkowitz says of the world's judgments, "It is not honest thinking to regard these as visitations of God which we are powerless to prevent. They are clearly of our own making..." If men do not turn to the sanctuary and stand in the stream of the water flowing from God, Ezekiel says they will not become fresh and fertile soil, but will become salt. Israel's history reveals this over and over again. Man is responsible for the mess he is in. God has a cure, and the task of the Jew, as they see it, is to help the sick world see its need of God's cure. They feel they are the people that God is calling to minister to the needs of men, and the poetry they use could be used as a missionary call in a Christian church.

**The voice of God is calling its summons onto men,
As once He called at Zion, so now He calls again.
Whom shall I send to succor my people and their need?
Whom shall I send to shatter the bonds of lust and greed?**

**We hear, O Lord, Thy summons and answer here are we,
Send us upon Thine errand, let us Thy servants be.
Take us and make us holy; teach us Thy will and way;
Speak, and behold, we answer, "Command and we obey."**

This response to the call is the ideal. The real is far different, but Judaism has high goals. Abraham Caplan in his testimony called Beyond Humanism says, "The hope of Moses that every Jew become a prophet is essential to the viability of every religion. Jewish life today is in danger of being choked by professionalism. We cannot live indefinitely off our "heritage," no matter how skillfully the capital of the past is managed for us by others." It is clear that Jews feel the same need as Christians. They feel that God is the answer. They feel that they are His people to spread the news, but they feel they are failing because the majority are spectators. Their proclamation of principles and their problems are very similar to those of Christians. The great difference is on the person of Christ.

The value of reading Jewish sermons is that it makes you aware of the rich heritage we have received from them. It makes you realize that the Old Testament revelation is far more broad and inclusive than we may think. There is hardly a subject that a Christian can preach on from the New Testament that cannot be found in the Old Testament. The Jews can match Christians on almost anything you can imagine. The Lordship of Christ is that distinctive note of the church. It is no wonder the Gospel is made so simple.

All people need to do is to confess that Jesus is Lord, and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead, and they will be saved. Many to whom the Gospel was spoken already knew more biblical theology than the average Christian of today. Many were priests and scribes who knew the Old Testament in depth. All that needed to do to complete their relationship to God was to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. For the Gentile without this heritage, coming to Christ was the beginning. But for a Jew it was the climax of his response to God. Studying Judaism makes you realize that Christ alone

makes Christianity distinctive, and as soon as you omit Christ you become Jewish, for all biblical theology without Christ is from the Jews. This means we can learn much from the Jews about God's Word, but they can offer nothing that comes close to salvation and new life in Christ.

The Jews know the value of devotion and meditation. To be still and know that God is God, and to consider His wondrous works is vital to their faith. They live in the same world of tension as we do. Their teachers and preachers push them to take time to be holy, and to give God a part of their daily life. Their poets stress this as do ours. One wrote,

**Once I met an angel by the way,
A brief hour he stayed and then did part;
And now his halo guilds my every hour,
His song sings always in my heart.**

Listening to Lefkowitz comment on this would leave you unable to distinguish his Jewish perspective from a Christian perspective on the need and value of devotion. He wrote, "The angel of that hour might guild our everyday and his song sings always in our heart. It is a silent hour, like the hour of the turning tide. Have you stood on the shore of the sea and seen the waves with hoary manes ride in and break with terrific din? There comes a moment of silence when the self-same waves, drawn by the lunar pole 238,000 miles away, turn about and with the same crash of sound with which they came in now ride out again to sea. That moment of silence is the turning of the tide; so the silent hour in our day, the hour of retrospection, the hour of thinking it all out, is the true turning of our life's tide. In that hour we hear the voice of God, in a world that in Wordsworth phrase is 'Too much with us.'"

Jews believe in devotion, quiet time and a deep involvement with the Word of God. Let us not think that only Christians are Bible lovers. Do not think we speak only of the Old Testament either, for a good many Jews are likewise students of the New Testament. It is also a Jewish book, and part of the literature which they claim as their heritage and gift to the world. Their claims for the Bible are as strong as ours. In another sermon Lefkowitz says, "The writers of the Bible were realists. You will look in vain for a single area of life, which the Bible does not see clearly, and about which it does not speak candidly."

The Jews believed that idolatry is the great curse of man. It is the making of gods in their own image. The gods of money, success and power are the most popular. They see it just as the Christian does, and they see the answer as we do, but they do not possess the whole and adequate answer. Lefkowitz ends the sermon by saying, "The conception of the true God and understanding of His will must reach the hearts of men...before democracy and brotherhood and human decency and kindness can flower forth in fullest splendor upon the earth." When you come right down to it the Jews believe salvation is in knowing God, and their mission is to make the truth of God known. They are so close to Christians, for Jesus said in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent."

The only difference that really matters between Jews and Christians is Jesus Christ. This is a difference that makes all the difference in the world, however, for it is a matter of eternal life and death. The Christian does not disagree with the Jew. He says to them that you are right, but you must go one more step in receiving Jesus as the Son of God. Listen again to Lefkowitz exalt God as the answer to man's need for redemption: "First comes God. The world will not be redeemed by poor laws, not even by disarmament conferences. The accumulated wrongs of the ages will not be cleared out with electric fans. Not even with the fans of a hundred legislative enactments or relief agencies. None but God can redeem this world. God in the human heart, God softening the passions of men, transforming the stuff man is made of, rendering man as sensitive to the call of the spirit as an Aeolian harp is to the wayward breath of the wondering wind."

He is so close, and yet so far. You can see why our heritage is referred to as the Judao-Christian heritage. Jews and Christians are brothers in so many ways. It is our obligation to love them and seek to win them to be brothers in Christ also. We have received all that the Jews have and more, and it is our responsibility to encourage them to receive that more, which is Jesus Christ.