

PARADOXES OF PAUL

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1. PARADOXICAL PARTNERS Based on Rom. 12:9

A truck had run off the road and crashed into a tree forcing the engine back into the cab. The driver was trapped in the twisted wreckage. The doors were crushed and bent out of shape, and he had his feet caught between the clutch and the brake pedal. To make matters worse, a fire started in the cab. Concerned people on the scene began to panic, for it was obvious that the driver would burn to death before the fire engine could arrive.

Then a man by the name of Charles Jones appeared, and he took hold of the doors and began to pull. His muscles so expanded that they literally tore his shirt sleeves. People could not believe it when the door began to give way. Jones reached inside and bare-handedly bent the brake and clutch pedals out of the way, and freed the man's legs. He snuffed out the fire with his hands, and then crawled inside the cab, and with his back against the top lifted the roof so other spectators could pull the driver to safety.

We have all heard stories of how mothers have lifted cars, and done other superhuman things to rescue their children, because they are motivated by love, but this man was a stranger. There was no relationship to the driver. If he was a brother, or son, or even a good friend, we could see how love would motivate one to such a feat of strength. But this was not the case. What then was the motivation that enabled this stranger to do such a powerful act of love? It was hate. Charles Jones was later interviewed, and was asked why and how he was able to accomplish such a Herculean feat. He simply replied, "I hate fire." He had good reason for his deep hatred, for a few months earlier he had to stand by and watch helplessly as his little daughter burned to death. His intense hatred for this enemy gave him enormous strength to fight it. His hate led him to a great act of love.

On the other hand, love can lead to hate. Most of the stories of hatred you read about are directly connected with love. Just recently I read of a man who shot his wife and her two brothers because she was leaving him. The statistics show that most murders in our country happen in families. People are most likely to kill those whom they love, or once loved. Love is the cause of so many acts of hate.

What a paradox, that these two strong and opposite emotions can so often be linked together. Paul in verse 9 puts them side by side, and urges Christians to feel them both in the same breath. He says love must be sincere, and then demands that we hate what is evil. Paul was not the founder of this paradoxical partnership of love and hate. The unity of these two emotions runs all through the Bible. I counted 27 verses in the Bible where love and hate are in the same verse together. We remember the old song, Love and Marriage that says they go together like a horse and carriage, but it is equally Biblical to say, love and hate go together. Listen to a partial reading of how the Bible links these two emotions in partnership.

Psalm 45:7 "You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

Psalm 97:10 "Let those who love the Lord hate evil for he guards the lives of his faithful ones."

Eccles. 3:8 "There is a time to love and a time to hate."

Isa. 61:8 "For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity." The love-hate partnership begins in the very nature of God. God could not be sincere in his love if he did not hate that which destroys love. To be God like and Christlike is to combine in our being, love and hate.

Rev. 2:6 Jesus says, "...You have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

You cannot be a good Christian, and a truly loving Christian, if you do not feel hate for that which is the enemy of love. There are many more texts we could read but the point is established: Hatred is a legitimate emotion in the Christian life. In fact, it is a vital emotion if we are to be balanced. This is, however, one of those dangerous truths that can lead to disaster if it is not understood. These paradoxical partners can still be bitter enemies. There is still the major distinction to be made between the hatred of evil, which is good, and the evil of hatred, which is bad.

Hatred is still a deadly foe, and an emotion that has to be kept in check, or it can lead us to become very unChristlike, and totally out of God's will. I John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." Hate destroys relationships of both God and man. Prov. 8:36 has wisdom say, "All who hate me love death." Hate for what is good is love for what is evil, and when these two emotions are reversed from the way God intended them to function, they are destructive of all that is of value in life.

The traditional, and normal, concept of love and hate being opposites and enemies is valid and true. It is just that it is not the whole truth about love and hate. There is more, and we must understand the more, or we will not be in control, and use these emotions the way God intends. The area where we are weak is in this area of

understanding the paradoxical partnership of love and hate. Emotional health depends on our growth in this area. To be what God expects us to be, we need to understand the reality of what is called ambivalence. This word stands for that psychological experience in which opposing emotions, such as love and hate, joy and sorrow, or desire and fear, exist at the same time within the same person. Paul is urging Christians to be ambivalent by telling them to feel love and hate at the same time. It is a cliché among Christians that we are to love the sinner and hate the sin. It is very hard to separate the two, and so we really are feeling both emotions at the same time toward the same individual. This is ambivalence. This leads to much emotional turmoil in the person who does not see this mixture as legitimate.

In marriage, for example, it is a common cause for the breakdown of relationships. Many mates have no understanding of the paradoxical partnership of love and hate. They are locked into a narrow view of reality that says, I cannot love that which I hate, or vice versa. They discover that they feel hate toward their mate for a variety of things, and thus they conclude, love has flown the coop. I lost my love. Because of this false psychology that says, love and hate cannot dwell together, they let their hate boot their love out. It happens all the time that people who really love each other get divorced just because they hate aspects of each other.

Children run away, and mates shoot each other, and all sorts of tragic behavior takes place because people do not understand it can be valid to have hate for people you love. Almost every child hates their parents at some point in life. Sometimes they verbalize it, and are not as subtle as little Bryan. Little Bryan had just been punished, and he sat in silence at lunch. Finally he looked up and said, "God can do anything He wants to can't He?" "Yes dear," his mother replied, "God can do anything." Bryan looked up again and said, "God doesn't have parents does He?" God doesn't have parents, but He does have children, and that relationship also leads to ambivalence. God knows the mixed emotions of love and hate.

Way back in the fourth century St. Augustine described the divine ambivalence. He wrote, "Wherefore in a wonderful and divine manner, He both hated us and loved us at the same time. He hated us, as being different from what He had made us; but as our iniquity had not entirely destroyed His work in us, He could at the same time in every one of us hate what we had done, and loved what proceeded from Himself." The cross becomes the central focus of the divine ambivalence. The cross is where God's wrath and judgment were poured out, and Jesus bore the hatred of God for man's sin. Yet the cross is where the love of God is brightest, for there He gave His Son, and the Son gave His life to atone for sin, and make it possible for all men to be forgiven, redeemed, and reconciled to Him in love.

Never again, and no where else do we see the paradoxical partnership of love and hate working together on so grand a scale. If God did not hate sin, there would be no cross, and if God did not love the sinner, there would be no cross. The cross is a love-hate symbol of the divine ambivalence. So what does this mean for our emotional system? It means we need to accept our own ambivalence, and not flee from it, or seek to suppress it, as if it made us abnormal. Accept ambivalence as part of what it means to be made in the image of God, with the capacity to both love and hate.

If mates could see it is okay to hate those we love, they would not let their hate destroy their love. Love makes its highest investments in a mate. Love is a commitment of trust. When that trust is violated, or rejected, it is one of life's sharpest pains.

It hurts for someone you love to be unloving, and that hurt, if persistent, leads to hate. It does not mean you cease to love the one you hate, for if you didn't love them it would not hurt, and you wouldn't hate them. The more you love the more you hurt when love is rejected, and so you can hate most those you love most.

Christians, for example, almost never hate atheists. Most Christian hatred is directed toward other Christians in the family of God, because they are hurt by other Christians, and not unbelievers. You do not expect an unbeliever to be loving, and so you can handle their rejection. But when another Christian rejects your love it is a hurt that can lead to hate. This explains why the worse wars are civil wars. They are battles of people who are close, and should be loving. Family conflicts are the most dangerous of all, because they are between people who love each other, and thus, they generate the hottest hostility.

The dangers of the love-hate ambivalence can be controlled by awareness of what is happening, and an understanding of the why. We need to see these two opposites can be partners, and not feel the stress of a civil war when we have them both together. We need to see that love and hate have more in common than we realize. They are both hot emotions, and you can be a flame with love, or a flame with hatred. Both are called passions that make the blood boil. Water can't quench the fire of love sang Solomon, and the burning fire of hatred can quickly turn relationships to ashes.

Both of these are intense emotions that tend to want to dominate the whole personality, and push out all other interests. Love and hate both long to consume the object of their passion. They are so different, so much alike, because they both are based on the same value system. Paul says to hate what is evil, and to cling to what is good. The Greek word for cling is the same root Paul used in Eph. 5:31 where we read, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined unto his wife." To cling to, or cleave to the good is to love the good, and want to be one with it, as we in love long to be one with our mate. Jesus used the same word as Paul uses here in Matt. 19:6. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife." The words cleave, and cling to, and adhere to, runs all through the Bible to refer to the strong desires to love others and God.

If we are to cleave to, and strongly love others and God, and the good, the true, and the beautiful, it follows, as night follows the day, we must hate what destroys these values. You must hate what is false, and what ruins relationships between yourself and others. If the world we live in is a world of good and evil, then a healthy and realistic emotional system must experience both love and hate. If you love anything, you must hate something, and if you hate anything, it is because you love something. You cannot have the one without the other.

Life is a mixture of good and evil, therefore, the balanced life is one of mixed emotions. Ambivalence is not neurotic, but it is normal. It is the mixture of opposites that gives life balance. The reason you can eat a dessert even after you can't eat another bite of the food you have been eating is because it is different. Your body can take on a little more because of the variety, but any more of the same is intolerable. The balanced Christian life is one where there is no fear of any emotion because there is an awareness that variety gives life balance. Some hate is needed in a loving life to give balance. Just as recipes call for opposites to create a dish pleasing to the palate, so the recipe for the mature Christian

life calls for opposites to be pleasing to God. The salt and the sugar go into the dish as partners. The sweet and the sour do also, and so love and hate are the paradoxical partners that make the Christian life a tasty treat to God.

We all know, however, that too much of a good thing can really ruin the whole dish. Proportion is the key. You cannot just drop a package of pepper in a dish that calls for a spoon full. Ingredients have to be measured to be compatible partners in making a good dish. So it is with love and hate, and all other emotions of life. God is love, but also has hate. Love is the dominant character of God's being. Hate is only a part of his personality that enables him to be realistic in relating to a fallen world. John 3:16 could have said, "God so hated the sin of the world that He poured out His wrath on His Son that man might escape it, and be saved." That would be true, but that is not the way the good news is communicated. It says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Love is the dominate motive of God's will. His hate is always secondary, and under the control of His love. When we can combine these paradoxical partners in this same way, we will have the balance necessary for mature Christian living.

Note that Paul in verse 9 surrounds the legitimate hate of the believer with the dominate love. Love keeps hate in bounds. It is okay to hate as long as you cling to what is good. You must refuse to let hate rob you of your key values that you love. If hate makes you lose the values you are to cling to, it becomes an evil, and not a partner of love. It is okay to hate all kinds of things about those whom you love, just as long as you go on loving them for their values. It is all right to hate the fact that your mate was so conditioned by their upbringing that they cannot express affection the way you desire. There are all kinds of defects in all of us that are hateful, because they fall so far short of the ideal. Feeling negative about this is realistic, but it becomes a destructive evil when we do not promote love as the senior partner in this pair of paradoxical partners.

The Bible makes it clear that every human being is worthy of love, no matter how far they fall short. It is a Christian obligation to see that even our enemies have value, and are to be objects of love. It is the task of love to see all that is truly hateful, and yet find a way to make love the dominate motivation. Edwin Markham put it so well in his poem.

He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout,
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in.

You can hate who you will, for what you will, and be in the center of God's will if you have a sincere love that strives always to cling to, and cleave to what is good in that person. You cannot be healthy without hate, but you cannot be happy unless your hate is always an assistant to love. Let hate dominate, and you will be a sick and sad person. It is not enough to love flowers to be a good gardener. You must also hate weeds. But pity the poor gardener who becomes so obsessed with fighting weeds that he no longer has any time to enjoy flowers. This is what happens to those who allow hate to become the senior partner, and dominate their life.

In the healthy personality, the love-hate partnership operates with a proper balance in relationship to oneself. We all hate our own defects, weaknesses, and sins. We get disgusted with ourselves often, but we also

quickly forgive ourselves, and press on, because our self-love dominates over our self-depreciation. When we make an error on the road that causes the other guy to curse and shout, we feel a sense of guilt for our mistake, but it does not last long because we are so understanding of our humanness. We quickly forgive ourselves, and get on with living. We take a great step upward in maturity when we can do this same thing with others. Love is the senior partner in this paradoxical partnership when we can soon get hate calmed down so that love can make the key decision on how we will respond to the folly of others.

The two key steps to developing a healthy emotional life are, (1) Accept ambivalence- it is okay, and even God like to have mixed emotions. (2) Advance love-to the level of senior partner. In other words, love is to be the leader over all other emotions. It is vitally important then that love be real, genuine, and sincere. Love is the leader and it must be authentic. Love is the key to all the other emotions doing what they ought to do. That is why Paul begins this passage with the demand that love must be sincere. We all know that anything of great value tends to be counterfeited, and love is the highest value in the world of emotions, and so man has developed many ways to fake it.

Mark Twain dedicated one of his books to John Smith. It was not because he had any affection for a man by that name, but because he discovered it was the most popular name in the country, and if everyone by that name bought his book, he would have a decent profit. Deception in love is common because people really believe all is fair in love and war. A French restaurant has come up with a gimmick that enables a man to appear very loving and generous. When he and his partner come in, both are given a menu, but his has the real prices. Her menu has highly inflated prices, so that when he orders, she is struck dumb by his elaborate generosity for her. Not knowing it is not genuine generosity she will supposedly be deeply grateful to him for what she feels is sincere love. The world is full of this sort of thing, and the Christian is not beyond playing the same game.

Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, and the highest Christian virtue, but faking it is not legitimate. In fact, if you get good at faking it, you may never develop the real thing. Nothing leads to superficiality in relationships faster than those that are based on flowery language alone. The Christian needs to watch this in relationship to God, and not build up a vocabulary of high sounding praise which does not represent his heart. God knows when love is mere lip service. He has had all of history to experience the insincere. It does not take long for a mate or a friend to also learn that your talk can be cheap. A Chinese proverb says, "Never praise a woman too highly. If you stop, she'll think you don't love her anymore; if you keep it up she'll think she's too good for you."

Sincere love seeks to learn the need of the other person, and meet that need. You don't go by proverbs or other people's advice, or faking it for effect. You find the need and you meet it. If your mate does not like a lot of flattery you cut it out. If they crave more, you give more, because you chose to love and satisfy that need. Sincere love is like the love of Christ. He saw man's deepest need and He met it. Jesus said that the Good Samaritan was an ideal example of loving your neighbor. He saw the need and he met it. It is sincere love that will keep legitimate hate in its place, and prevent illegitimate hate from fulfilling its evil intention.

John and Mary Edwards were driving along the New Jersey Turnpike when they saw a young soldier thumbing a ride. They picked him up, and noticed he

was very sad and sullen. Mary began to talk about her son who had also been in the service, and they invited him to come and have lunch with them. They observed a change of attitude, and he began to relax. He told of his homesickness and frustration with army life. He began to smile. When they reached his destination, John pressed a folded ten dollar bill into his hand, and a slip with their address saying, when you get out of the army, come see me and I'll give you a job. The young man had tears in his eyes as he mumbled his thanks. Two weeks later the Edwards received a letter from him. He told of how bitter and resentful he was that day they met. He was AWOL from the army, and was in a spirit of hatred for everyone. He said he had made up his mind to kill the first person who picked him up. You were the first, but you were so good and kind to me I couldn't do it, so when you were not looking I took the bayonet out of my hand, and slide it under the rear seat. You will find it there, and they did.

Sincere love encountered bitter hate, and they were not partners, but fierce foes. Love drove hate from the field and won the battle because it tried sincerely to meet the needs of that young man. They let him know that it is a world where people do care, and there are values worth living for. Love is stronger than hate, and when they are enemies, love is to be so sincere that it will drive hate from the field defeated. But even when they are partners, love must see to it that even though hate adds to the whole picture, it is always to be the case that the ultimate goal is the goal of love.

When hate arises in your feelings, do not fear it, but call on all the forces of love within you to surround it, and contain it, so that it does not move you toward goals displeasing to God. Make sure it moves you to figure out how love can use the energy of hate for its goals. This is the Godlike and Christlike way to use these paradoxical partners.

WHEN OPPOSITES ARE THE SAME Based on Rom. 14:6

A cartoon pictures the door of an office in the central government building of Moscow. The sign reads, Commissar for the Electrification of all the Russias. Underneath is a bit of paper on which is written, "Please knock-bell out of order." We can see the humor in the great inconsistency of one who plans to bring electricity to everybody else, but whose own bell is out of order. It would be helpful if we could see it in ourselves as easily as see it in others. The church is the only organization on earth that claims to be able to set the bells of joy ringing in every heart. Yet, the claim is often mocked, because our own bell is out of order. While we claim to be able to give light to all in darkness, our own light often flickers, and even goes out. Kenneth Slack said, "The world cannot believe claims which are denied in the very body which makes them."

For example, in the early church there was a movement among high caste Hindus in South India toward the Christian faith. They found Hinduism inadequate to meet the challenge of modern knowledge. On the very threshold of their baptism, however, they discovered that Christianity was divided, and that if they united all over the country with various missionary societies, they would find themselves in separated parts of the church, which did not cooperate with one another. They quickly drew back, for why, they asked, should we who were united in paganism enter a new faith which is supposedly

superior where we will become divided, and less of a unity and brotherhood. The church had said, "come to us, for we ring the bells of reconciliation for all men." But when they came, they saw the small print which told them that the churches own bell was out of order, and they left.

This is the tragedy of a divided church. Is the solution a great giant of a church with all denominations united? This is like trying to make peace among all animals by putting them in a common cage. They might be together, but without bars they would still tear each other to pieces. No external plan can fulfill spiritual ideals. The solution to the problem of Christian unity is for Christians to learn to live according to Biblical principles. It is folly to work for conformity, which is unrealistic. It is wisdom to give heed to Paul's clear teaching that opposites can be the same. Paul teaches that Christians can dwell in unity even though they have opposite convictions. Eating meat, and not eating meat, are opposites. Keeping the Sabbath, and not keeping it, are opposites. Yet, Paul says Christians can be on each of these sides for the same reason; with the same motive, and with the same result-the glory of God.

When two men saw a log one pulls while the other one pushes, and then they reverse. They are always doing the opposite thing from each other, but all the time they are working together for the same end. T. DeWitt Talmage says this idea relates to the church. He writes, "The different denominations were intended, by holy rivalry and honest competition, to keep each other wide awake. While each denomination ought to preach all the doctrines of the Bible, I think it is the mission of each more emphatically to preach some one doctrine. The Calvinistic churches to preach the sovereignty of God, the Arminian man's free agency etc. ..." Each denomination has its unique contribution to make.

If this be so, then it is Billy Graham and not his critics who is on Biblical ground by cooperating with men of opposite convictions. Graham is operating on the Biblical principle that opposites can be the same, that is, that men can have radically different views, but be equally holding those views for the glory of God. The critics object that some of the things believed by certain groups are not Biblical. Paul is fully aware that some Christians may be in error, but he clearly teaches here that a Christian has the right to be sincerely wrong on non-essential issues. In fact, it is better to be sincerely wrong on a non-essential issue than to be indifferently correct, for conviction is what counts in these areas.

Paul knew that the weak Christians were wrong in their attitude on meat and certain days, but he recognized that if they were persuaded in their own minds, they could practice their mistakes for the glory of God. Is Paul saying, Christians can be weak, and have strange, almost superstitious, convictions and practices, and still be pleasing to God? That is precisely what he is saying. I can believe that parents can sincerely believe that having water sprinkled on their child's head will make their salvation more probable. If they believe this, and do not have it done, they are guilty of sin. Therefore, if they act on their conviction, and do it, they are doing so to obey and please God. But if it is not objectively true that such an act helps, is it still pleasing to God? Just as pleasing as not eating meat when God really does not care if you eat it or not.

It is hard for Christians to believe this paradoxical truth that opposites can be the same. That is why so few Christians have a Biblical attitude toward other Christians who hold opposite views. Paul paradoxical principle is just too radical for most Christians. It means a Christian can

be right in being sincerely wrong. You can't be sincerely wrong about Jesus and still be right, but you can on a multitude of other subjects. It is, according to Paul, one of the privileges of Christian liberty to risk making mistakes, either by being overly conservative, or by being overly progressive. As long as one stops within the bonds of doing all he does with a thankful heart, and with a desire to please his master, he is free to make mistakes on minor matters, and take positions opposite of other Christians.

Henry Ward Beecher, one of the greatest preachers America ever produced, said, "There are many who are called Christians in whom the kingdom of God is no bigger than a thimble. There are men who have a few ideas, who are orthodox, and who make no mistakes in theology, but woe be to the man who does not make any mistakes. Count the sands of the sea, if you can, without misreckoning....If you have a huge bucket, and a pint of water in it, you will never make the mistake of spilling the water, but if a man is carrying a huge bucket full of water he will be certain to spill it." In other words, if you stay in the shallow water of addition, you may always be right, but greater is the adventure of launching out into the deep of multiplication where the marvels and mysteries of God's majesty will leave your finite mind open to the risk of mistakes. Liberty is always dangerous.

The mistakes the strong Christians made in the Roman church were mistakes of attitude toward the weak Christians, and Paul later teaches them how to correct these mistakes. The weak Christians, however, immediately object that the strong Christians not only offend them by their opposite views and conduct, but they side with the world against others of God's children. This is why the principle of opposites being the same cannot hold water, for what fellowship hath light with darkness. No one can tell us that Christians can agree with non-Christians against other Christians, and still be doing it for the glory of God.

This sounds like a powerful argument against Paul's paradoxical principle that opposites can be the same. As a matter of fact, however, it does not alter the principle at all. It is only opposites among believers that can be equally for the glory of God. Naturally, if an unbeliever takes a position opposite a believer, he is not doing it for the glory of God. Nevertheless, the unbeliever can hold a position that is held by a believer. Some non-Christians are on the same side as Christians on almost all controversial issues. Non-Christians oppose drinking, immorality, drugs and pornography just as Christians do. Christians and non-Christians stand together on all kinds of issues. There are Christians and atheists in both political party's.

The strong Christians in Rome were doing the same things as the pagans. They bought the same meat, and instead of closing up shop on the Sabbath with the Jewish Christians, they work right along with the pagans. They did so, however, not out of indifference, but out of conviction, and Paul says their conduct, therefore, was pleasing to God, even though it conformed to pagan conduct, and was opposite to that of other Christians.

You mean a Christian can take a position opposite of mine, and one that may be held by unbelievers, and still be as pleasing to God as I am? That is exactly what Paul is saying, and John Wesley, a man whom God used to change the course of history, practiced this principle of Paul. He wrote, "Men may die without any opinions, and yet be carried to Abraham's bosom, but if we be without love, what will knowledge avail? I will not quarrel with you about opinions. Only see that your heart be right toward God, and that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and love your neighbor, and walk as your

Master walked, and I ask no more. I am sick of opinions."

But an objection arises from the legalist. It is no mere matter of opinion where the law of God is concerned. God commanded us to keep the Sabbath, and also to not eat meat offered to idols. I can be tolerant of other opinions, but how can I tolerate open defiance of God's revealed law? If you say Christian liberty allows one to disregard the Sabbath, then why not disregard all of the commandments to the glory of God? Again, a strong objection to Paul's teaching when carried out to a logical conclusion. The problem is the objector fails to distinguish between law and evil. Evil is that which is in and of itself opposed to God's nature. No Christian can ever do evil and be pleasing to God.

Paul's principle can never be used to justify any evil in thinking or in conduct. However, a law, even a law of God, is something that can be arbitrary, and may not deal with something that is evil in itself at all. A law can be changed or eliminated with no offense to God's nature. There is nothing inherently evil in traveling on the 7th day, or in gathering wood, and any other work. Yet, it was a sin punishable by death under the law. It was not evil in itself, however, and so the law could be eliminated and what was forbidden could then be allowed without allowing anything evil. The same was true with many Old Testament laws.

Just is the case with laws of the land. Not all laws are against evil. They are often to regulate behavior for our convenience, but if they are no longer helpful they can be eliminated. Therefore, according to Paul, if you are convinced in your mind that God no longer holds you responsible to obey the law of the Sabbath, and the laws regulating eating, you are free to disregard them, and be as pleasing in his sight as those who still obey them. If this be true concerning those things that are actually mentioned in Scripture, how much more does it apply to areas that are not mentioned. For example, can it be that the Episcopalian with his rigid formality, and the Pentecostal with his near chaotic informality are both pleasing to God? Who can doubt it, if they are both convinced in their own minds that these ways of worship are the best.

If a man can eat meat offered to an idol which would be a sin for the weak Christian to eat, and yet do it for the glory of God, who can deny that Christians can do many things opposite from other Christians, and do them for the glory of God? Newell sees here a principle to be applied in many areas of life and writes, "Let those of legal tendencies mark this: That a man may regard not what we regard, and do so unto the Lord." Christians do and believe many things which are opposite to what others do and believe, but if they do so with the conviction they are pleasing to God, then their opposites are the same.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE CROSS Based on I Cor. 1:18-31

The mayor and other dignitaries were looking into the vast pit dug for the new hospital to be built. The town half-wit came up and gazed into the

pit, and asked the mayor what he was going to do with this big hole. The mayor decided to humor him and said, "We are going to round up all the fools in town and pile them in there." The half-wit thought a moment and then said, "Whose gonna be left to cover um up?"

Even a half-wit knows that in some sense all men are fools, but I have to confess I never really realized to what degree this is true until I studied what the Bible says about fools and foolishness. The subject is so vast, and the evidence is so overwhelming that only a fool would deny that all men are fools. This does not sound very nice, however, and so it is wise for us to see there is a positive side to being a fool. So much so, that Paul in I Cor. 3:18 urges Christians to be fools, and in 4:10 he says, "We are fools for Christ."

To add to the paradox of being a Christian fool, Paul in this passage of I Cor. 1:18-31 glories in Christian folly, and links almost everything of Christian nobility to foolishness. He writes of the foolishness of the cross; the foolishness of wisdom, and the foolishness of preaching, and most shocking of all, for it seems to border on blasphemy, Paul even writes in verse 25 of the foolishness of God. Then he says in verse 27 that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And the foolish things are the Christians.

So what it comes down to is this: All men are in some sense fools, but sense all are not fools in the same way, we have to make a distinction between worldly fools and wise fools. The worldly fools are those who feel so wise they have no need of light from God. These fools say in their hearts that there is no God. Man is the measure of all things, and He determines His own destiny. They say science and human philosophy is all we need to produce a utopia. We do not need the Bible or God to create our own heaven.

The wise fool, in contrast, recognizes that human wisdom is so limited, and so there is a need for wisdom from above. They are seeing as fools from the point of view of the worldly fool. God, however, sees them as wise, and so the two perspectives make them wise fools-that is people who seem to choose foolishness and trust in foolishness, but because it is the foolishness of God they are wise. So what we have here is a study in relativity. The worldly wise who reject God's revelation are, in relation to eternal truth, fools. Those, however, who choose the way of God are seen as fools, in relation to the way of the world, but in fact, they are the truly wise. Type one fools seem wise to men, but are fools to God. Type 2 fools seems fools to men, but are wise to God. So wisdom and folly are relative to whose perspective you are seeing them from.

Paul's whole battle with the Corinthians was to get them to stop being wise before the world and fools before God, and to reverse that to being fools before the world, and wise before God. The goal of the Christian is to become a wise fool. The Corinthians were missing this mark because they came from a long tradition of philosophers who had all the answers. As Greeks they were considered a wise people. The result was, the church was in chaos because of all the pride of worldly wisdom. Some thought Paul was the best. Others that it was Peter, and still others that Apollos was number one. Some said they were all wrong, and we follow Jesus only. The church was divided because, in their pride, they were deciding what was best. They were also picking and choosing the gifts they felt were best. In pride Christians can set themselves up as the judge of what is wise and what is foolish, and in so doing they make their human judgment, rather than God's revelation, the basis for their value system, and this is folly.

If human reason is going to be the standard of judgment, then the whole plan of God is nothing but foolishness, and nothing is more foolish than the foolishness of the cross. Just look at the evidence of its folly.

1. The innocent dying for the guilty.
2. The folly of having a way out and not taking it.
3. The folly of having power to destroy your enemy, but letting them destroy you.
4. The folly of surrender to a foe you could easily conquer.
5. The folly of suffering when comfort and pleasure is at your command.
6. The folly of having the power to do miracles, and yet do nothing.
7. The folly of having an eloquent defense and yet not opening your mouth.
8. The folly of going to hell when you never had to leave heaven.
9. The folly of volunteering for a job that is certain death.
10. The folly of being God and yet letting mere men push you around.
11. The folly of forgiving those most worthy of judgment.

We could go on, but I am sure you get the point. The cross is pure foolishness from a rational point of view. It is nonsense, and a ridiculous way for God to go about saving man from the perspective of the worldly wise. An intelligent lost man is scandalized by the cross. He feels that only fools can be Christians if they buy into the foolishness of the cross. When Paul gave his testimony and told of the death and resurrection of Christ, the procurator Festes interrupted him in Acts 26:24 and said to him, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane." Paul responds in verse 25, "I am not insane...What I am saying is true and reasonable. So what we have here is the worldly fool meeting the wise fool, and each fool feels the other is a fool indeed. And the point is, both are right from their point of view.

The village screwball made a friend coming down the sidewalk, and he said, "Tell me which is the other side of the street." The friend said, "The other side is over there" pointing to the other side. "That's funny," said the screwball, "That's what I thought too, but I just over there and the lady there said it was over here." Such a paradox of both sides being the other side can drive a screwball batty, but this is the paradox of life. Both sides of the argument of what is wise are fools from the perspective of the other side, and Paul's advice then is to be a fool for Christ. Be willing to seem like a fool for the sake of Christ. We are so concerned about being accepted that we do not like to be seen as a fool. But the more concerned we are about being respectable to the world, the less we are concerned about being faithful to the wisdom of God.

We are so easily conformed to the world, and we loss our sense of mission which is to confront the world with the foolishness of God.

In the eyes of the wise
Don't be cool, be a fool.
It may be a loss,
And you'll suffer pain,
But this is the cross
That leads to gain.
Gain that goes beyond the worldly clever,
For it is gain that lasts forever.

We are called, not just to be April fools, but perpetual fools. If we never identify with the foolishness of the cross, and always conform to the wisdom of the world, we will still be fools, but not the kind we are called to be. Christians are not beyond the risk of being

worldly fools. A pastor was leaving town, and he told the church secretary he did not have his sermon titles yet for the bulletin, so she could just put in something like, the pastor speaks. What about the evening service she asked? He said he was speaking from Psa. 14 which begins with the words, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." The pastor told her to just make up a title. So she did, and when the bulletin came out it said-Morning-The Pastor Speaks. Evening-What The Fool Said.

In the light of our study, however, it does not need to be seen as embarrassing, for Paul calls himself a fool for Christ, and his ministry for Christ he calls, the foolishness of preaching.

Someone said, "You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but most of the time they will make fools of themselves." Warren Hammer said, "No woman really makes a fool of a man-she merely gives him the opportunity to develop his natural capacities." A young preacher traveling with a Gospel team preached to a Wisconsin congregation, and after the service a Scandinavian saint grabbed his hand and said, "That was a wonderful message." Trying to be humble he responded, "It was just Jesus." "No" said the saint, "It wasn't that good." It can be foolish to attribute all we do to the Lord, for if it was the Lord it would be a whole lot better.

Pastor Wally Klandrud of Phoenix tells of his first hospital call. He wanted it to be perfect, and so he studied all the do's and don'ts of hospital visitation. Nervously he entered the patients room. There was a woman in her eighty's, and the nurse had told him she was senile. He was just about to share some words of comfort when she leaped up on the bed without a stitch of clothing. He tried to keep his composure, and asked her if he could help. "Gotta go to the bathroom," she responded. The pastor ran into the hall way to look for a nurse, but none was in sight. He was in a panic, and ran back to his impatient patient and said, "Mam, there is nobody out there, but I'll be back next week." As he fled out the door he heard her scream, "Young man I can't wait till next week!"

True stories like this are endless that reveal the fallibility that can happen even when we desire sincerely to be tools of God. Instead of tools, God gets fools. Unfortunately, not every foolish thing Christian do is funny. We have studied Peter and his many mistakes, and one of them was that he felt it was foolish for Jesus to talk about dying. The Christian can see the foolishness of the cross just like the world sees it, and that is what Peter was seeing. God's way are so different than man's, that if we get caught up in the wisdom of the world, even as Christians, the ways of God will seem foolish and impractical.

Pastor Vajda of St. Louis tells of his organist who would always slip down the back stairs to the basement just before the sermon began, and then return just before it ended. During one of his Lenten services as the organ ceased, he stepped to the pulpit and began with a gripping illustration. At the height of a battle in the Civil War a young soldier thought the command was to charge. He leaped out of the trench with the regimental flag and started running across no mans land toward enemy fire. When the captain saw that other soldiers were following the flag bearer, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Come back here you fool!" As he paused, everyone could hear the clatter of footsteps as the organist came flying back up the steps to take her place at the organ. That was not his intention at all, but he notes that she never again left the organ during a sermon.

This is in essence what Paul is saying to the Corinthians-"Get back here you fools. You are following the way of worldly wisdom which to God is foolishness. Come back to the foolishness of God which is true wisdom. It is wiser to let the world think of you as fools, than to let God think of you as fools." Somebody is always going to have you on their fools list, but only a fool would choose to be on God's list. Be a fool for Christ, and be on God's list of those who are truly wise. The truly wise are those who are fools for Christ, and care about people who don't care about anyone but themselves. Paul poured his life out for people who were self-centered and worldly wise, and they only rejected him and sought to kill him. Paul still cared and did all he could to win them to Christ by the foolishness of preaching.

Billy Graham tells of the first time he ever preached. It was in a little Baptist church in Florida. 32 people were there, and he thought he had plenty to say. He had four sermons he thought were 40 to 50 minutes each. But he was so nervous he preached all four sermons in 8 minutes. That was the foolishness of preaching. But one little boy in the congregation received Christ, and he realized God can use even our foolishness to accomplish the wisest things that can happen on earth. He tells of one of his evangelists who spoke at a university in Costa Rica. A student came up after and said she was a Marxist, and she laughed and scorned the message he was preaching. The evangelist said, "Before you leave do you mind if I pray for you?" What folly, to ask if you can pray for one who is mocking you. She was shocked and said, "I guess it couldn't do any harm." So he began to pray, and as he did tears of compassion began to trickle down his cheeks. When he finished, the Marxist was in tears also. She said, "No one ever cared enough for me to shed a tear. I'll listen to what you have to say." She heard the Gospel and received Christ as her Savior.

This is the kind of fool Jesus wants. He wants those who will be fool enough to care about people who don't deserve to be cared about. It is foolishness to waste your life caring about lost people. It is foolishness to leave the 99 and risk injury, and who knows what abuse, to go after that one stupid sheep who has gone astray. Worldly wisdom would say stay with the odds; don't risk yourself for the stray. But those who are fools for Christ, who understand the foolishness of the cross, will go, for it is this kind of foolishness that saved them. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. God had the power to condemn the world, and let His Son go free. Instead He let Him die so the guilty might go free. This is the foolishness of God, and the foolishness of the cross. William Stidger wrote,

I saw God bear His soul one day
Where all the earth might see
The stark and naked heart of Him
On lonely Calvary.

There was a crimson sky of blood
And over head a storm;
When lightening slit the clouds
And light engulfed His form.

Beyond the storm a rainbow lent
A light to every clod,
For on that cross mine eyes beheld
The naked soul of God.

No man would be such a God for they consider it foolishness to suffer for the folly of others. If God was not foolish from man's perspective there

would be no cross, and no way for man to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Thank God for such foolishness. All Christian celebrations are really celebrations of the foolishness of God. He had the freedom to just forget fallen man, but He chose to send His Son that they might be redeemed. To magnify the folly of God's plan, it is all based on grace. He pays a high price, and then instead of reaping a huge profit, he gives away the salvation he purchased for free. Jesus could have been the richest king that ever lived. He could have made a mile high palace with streets of gold and walls filled with jewels. He could have had heaven on earth had he charged as little as a thousand dollars each. Every living soul would slave in order to save that much to get into the kingdom.

There is no such plan, however, for salvation is free, and whosoever will may come and drink freely from the fountain of life. Jesus had the greatest money maker of all time at His fingertips, and He gave it away. From the worldly perspective this was nothing but sheer folly. But without the foolishness of the cross there is no answer to the folly of this fallen world. A Polish Jew who had been converted to Christ was asked how he could see his people killed and still believe in the love of God. He saw the blood of his dearest friends stain the streets of his town, but this was his response, "As I looked at that man upon the cross I knew I must make up my mind once and for all, and either take my stand beside him, and share in his undefeated faith in God, or else fall finally into a bottomless pit of bitterness, hatred, and unutterable despair." He was saying, unless there is a God willing to suffer for this loss world, there is no hope, and life has no meaning. But if there is such a God, as we see in Jesus on the cross, then nothing evil can do, can rob us of hope.

This is why men like Jim Elliot risk their lives and die to get the message of the cross to the pagan world. He said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." May God help us to be fools for Christ and share with this lost world the foolishness of the cross.

CHAPTER 4. THE POWER OF WEAKNESS BASED ON II COR. 12:1-10

One of the most incredible biographies ever written is that of Robert Babcock. As a young boy he made a bomb out of some powder he found in his father's barn. He had a hard time getting it to go off, but when it finally did, it blew up in his face and he was instantly blinded, and remained so for the rest of his life. His parents, realizing there was not hope of his sight being restored, took him to an institute for the blind in Philadelphia. Robert did so well, and had such a strong will to become independent, that even as a youth he traveled home to Michigan by himself on a train.

He went on to college, and every year was near the top of his class. In 1869 at the age of 18 he began to study at Ann Arbor Medical College as the first student to ever begin the study of medicine as a blind person. You would naturally assume that he did not go far, but the fact is, he went all the way. He went to Chicago Medical School, and there had to dissect a body, which students with good eye sight find to be a difficult task. Sightless though he was, he passed the test to the astonishment of the examining board. After further study in New York, he was licensed to begin to practice in Chicago. It took him ten years to build up a strong practice, for obvious reasons. His reputation grew, however, until he was made Professor Of The Chicago College of Physicians and Surgeons. Many other honors were bestowed upon him, and he wrote three important books

that made him a world figure among doctors. His thorn in the flesh was no stumbling block, but was a stepping stone to greater heights of service.

His life is an excellent illustration of the philosophy of life that Paul expounds in our text. The paradox that Paul proclaims here is that a handicap can be a help. A painful problem can be a powerful promoter of what is good. A weakness can be an asset and a strength. No one knows for sure just what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, but there is much evidence to believe those scholars who are convinced that his problem, like that of Dr. Babcock, was with his eyes. Paul was not blind, but there is reason to believe he never could have passed the eye test for a drivers license. On the day of his conversion Paul was struck blind by the glory of Christ, and remained sightless for three days. He regained his sight, but there seems to have been a weakness left, for in Gal. 4:15 he says that the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes to give to him. It is, as if he were saying, they recognized his greatest need was to have some decent eyes. In Gal. 6:11 he wrote, "See in what large letters I am writing to you." This implies that his authentic writings can be known by his large letters, the letters of a man who cannot see smaller letters.

Besides this evidence, it seems so fitting for the purpose for which God allowed the problem Paul had with his great visions. He was in danger of being overwhelmed with pride. It would be very humbling for him to hardly be able to see, and then try to boast of his great visions. People who saw him having to put his nose to a book to read, and to put his hand out to keep from running into the city gate, would laugh him to scorn, if he spoke of his great visions. The skeptics would mock him. An eye problem would definitely keep Paul humble about his visions, and prevent his boasting in himself.

Regardless of what it was, Paul was impressed by the fact that God could use a weakness to make him strong. There is power in weakness Paul learned; a power that cannot be made available in any other way. Paul is the great expert on weakness. Out of 33 references to weakness in the New Testament, Jesus used the word once, Peter used it once, and all the rest are from the pen of Paul. Keep in mind that Paul was a strong opponent of Christ before his conversion. He despised the weak Nazarenes, those followers of that weakling who perished in disgrace upon the cross. He attacked them and demonstrated what strength could do. When the Lord appeared and struck him down in blindness, he had a radical change in his thinking about the relationship of power and weakness. He learned by experience that it was his force that was really weak, and Christ's weakness was really powerful. The result was, the paradox in power and weakness running all through Paul's writings.

I Cor. 1:25, "The weakness of God is stronger than men."

I Cor. 1:27, "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."

I Cor. 15:43, referring to the resurrection of the body Paul writes, "It is sown in weakness,

it is raised in power."

II Cor. 13:4, "For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God."

The cross is the greatest illustration of the power in weakness, for by that experience of going like a helpless lamb to the slaughter, Jesus conquered all the obstacles in the way of man's salvation. Paul not only learned to accept the truth of power in weakness, but he tells us he learned to boast, and even be glad for his weaknesses, for they became potential channels through which the power of God could be manifest. In II Cor. 11:30

he writes, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness." This seems to be contrary to all logic. Everyone preaches that God uses our gifts, but when do we hear that God uses our weaknesses? Yet, if we take Paul seriously, his greatest power was not in abilities, but in his weaknesses. In I Cor. 2:3 he says, "And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling."

We picture Paul as a dynamic ball of fire erupting from a volcano like stature, but the facts are, he was small in weak in appearance, and by his own testimony, full of fear and trembling as he preached. Paul was a handicapped man, and the reason God used this, far from perfect, specimen of manhood to proclaim the perfect Savior, is stated by Paul himself in I Cor. 2:5, "That your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." If a powerful, talented, dynamic man moves people to respond to the Gospel, one never knows how much of the movement is generated by the power of personality. But if a weak and handicapped person is used to motivate people, one can see that the power of motivation must come from the Holy Spirit.

If this be a true understanding of the way God works, the logical conclusion is that the typical American way of witness is not necessarily the best and Biblical way. The American way tends to exalt the strong and ignore the weak. Get the top athlete, the most popular movie star or singer, and the finest politician or author, and let them tell the world what Christ means to them. Only a blind man would deny that this bears fruit, but I wonder if it does not rob us of the greatest resource in the church, which is the masses of adults and youth who are not strong, but weak, handicapped and in large measure ungifted.

Is it possible that the fruit of the spirit growing on weaker branches might be even more impressive, at least to those God wants us to reach in our community? Can our very weaknesses in any way be an asset to the kingdom of God? Let us keep this question in mind as we continue to explore this paradox of power in weakness. As a principle for natural life we can see how it holds true, for weakness is what has made man strong. It is the very fact that man cannot protect himself against other creatures who are stronger, that has forced him to develop weapons of strength. Man is so weak he can only jump a short way off the ground, and that weakness has driven him to develop ways to fly, not only around the world, but beyond the world. Weakness leads to power when the weakness motivates men to find a way to offset that weakness.

This is certainly involved in what Paul is saying. It is only the Christian who is fully conscious of his weakness who will depend upon God, and seek for God's power. The strong and talented Christian can easily become self-sufficient and independent. That very strength can become their weakness. And honest awareness of weakness, therefore, is the starting point in the spiritual quest for God's power. You can only really seek with all your heart after that which you are fully aware that you lack. They only find God's power who fully realize their own weakness. Spurgeon said, "God helps us most when we most need his help." If you are strong and feel no need of God's help, then you are weak. When, however, you are weak and know it, and so depend upon God, then you are strong. Paul's paradox is not strange at all, but a fact of life we all experience. When we can grasp the words of Christ, "Without Me you can do nothing," then we are in the state of weakness where we can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The stronger a Christian is the greater is his danger of depending upon his own abilities. It is possible for believers to rely on their own power to live the Christian life. God has built a paradox into the divine-human relationship. It is only when man surrenders to God that he conquers. It is only when he submits to be dependent upon God that he becomes a channel of divine power. Gideon had to learn this paradoxical truth. Gideon had too strong an army, so God made him send 32,000 of his men home. He deliberately made his army weak in order to demonstrate the divine power in weakness. They could have won the battle with a stronger army, but their very strength would have led them to boast of their own power, and that would have been their weakness.

God said He made them weak in Judges 7:2, "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, mine own hand hath saved me." It is because of the great danger of pride that weakness is the way to power. Weakness leaves us no alternative but to praise God, and give Him all the glory. James Stewart wrote, "It is a thrilling discovery to make that always it is upon human weakness and humiliation, not human strength and confidence, that God chooses to build His kingdom; that He can use us not merely in spite of our ordinariness and helplessness, and disqualifying infirmities, but precisely because of them."

History has demonstrated the truth of this paradox over and over. The Greeks and Romans hated weakness and loved strength, and they conquered the world by brut force. Yet, it was the weak and despised Christians who ministered to the slaves, outcasts, and the masses of nobodies of the world, who eventually conquered both Greece and Rome, and carried their values into the future. In our own country it was the weak and despised Baptists and Methodists who were driven out of the original colonies by the powerful established churches. These two lowly groups, who ministered to the weak and uneducated masses, have gone on to become the two most powerful denominations in the country.

In spite of Scripture, and the facts of history, it is contrary to our nature to believe this paradox. Paul knew the Old Testament and the man illustrations of the power of weakness in it, yet he fought submission to it. He did not accept the thorn in the flesh as a blessing, but prayed earnestly for it to be removed. It is normal and right that our first response to any weakness, handicap, or limitation, should be to be free of it. If, however, God will not remove it, then the only wisdom is to find the power in it, and see the truth of verse 9 demonstrated, which is God's power made perfect in weakness.

God's power is only imperfectly shown in great gifts, for even the ungodly have great gifts and skills, and it is hard to identify what is divine from what is human. When God uses a weak instrument, however, you see clearly that the power is of God. That is why His power is made perfect in weakness. If an elephant stepped on a board and it broke, you would not be surprised. But if a weak man did it to rescue someone from a dangerous trap, you would praise God, for it would be obvious that the power was given to the man from above. If a man of charming personality and a unique gift of gab persuades someone to come to church, you are not amazed, for you would expect him to be effective. But if a person of little ability to communicate brings someone, and they respond to the Gospel, you are impressed, for clearly it was luck, or the power of God. The point is, the power of God is much easier to identify when it is seen working in weak instruments.

The practical application should be clear. All of us are clearly inadequate, and have fewer gifts than we wish we had. None of us are all that we want to be, and so we think we can do very little for the kingdom of God. The real growth of the church depends on the gifted few is the common conviction of Christians. Yet, the facts of Scripture and history tell us that all of us can do great things for God; not because we are able to, but just because we are not able. It is not ability, but availability that God wants. He did not want Moses to take a speech course. He just wanted him to obey, and He would use him. If we could dedicate our weaknesses, and make ourselves available to God, He could demonstrate in us that His power is made perfect in weakness.

Catherine Marshall tells of her experience of writing the book *A Man Called Peter*. She needed to succeed in this effort, for she left her job to give to herself to it. About half way through she asked a trusted friend for his opinion. He said, "The manuscript lacks warmth, emotion. The facts are here-but not the heart." She was shattered, and back in her apartment she threw herself on her bed and cried. Self-pity enveloped her. "I lost my husband in his prime, I have to raise my son alone, and with no abundance of money, and I am expected to write a book with no training. How much can one person take?"

After much struggle she realized she was inadequate, but that God was not. She prayed the prayer of helplessness, and asked God to guide her in writing. She got the heart into the book, and masses have been moved to tears by it. Her achievement, she knows, was entirely of God's doing, and she has no tendency toward egocentricity that success can bring. She writes in her book *Beyond Ourselves*, "Since then God has never allowed me the fulfillment of a soul's sincere desire without first putting me through an acute realization of my inadequacy and my need for help."

There are more women than men on the mission field fulfilling the great commission, and, no doubt, one of the reasons for this is because, as the weaker sex, they tend to be more willing to submit to God and allow Him to use their weakness. Men want only to yield their strength. We are always dedicating our talents, gifts and resources, to Christ, and rightly so, but we rarely or never dedicate our weaknesses. This is a tragic neglect in the light of the fact that God can often use them for greater glory. The beauty of dedicating our weaknesses is that we can all do it, for we all have plenty to give. May God help us all to surrender our weaknesses, for His strength is made perfect in weakness.

5.THE PARADOX OF BURDENS Based on Gal. 6:1-10

In South Dakota a man by the name of August had a clothing store he was going to close up. His was not one of those perpetual year around closing sales. He was actually intending to go out of business by July. So he hung a sign in his window which read, *The First Of July Is The Last Of August*. Those who did not know the owners name would think the sign was expressing a meaningless and hopelessly unexplainable contradiction, but for those who knew his name, the sign conveyed a clear and clever message.

So often an apparent contradiction has a very simple explanation. This is the case with the many Biblical paradoxes. Paul has one here in the last chapter of Galatians that certainly seems on the surface, to be a flat contradiction. In verse 2 he says, "Bear one another's burdens," and then in verse 5 he says, "Each man will have to bear his own burden." Certainly in three verses Paul had not forgotten what he wrote. But if he did it on purpose, which is obvious, how can it be that we are to carry one another's burdens, and at the same time each be stuck with our own load?

One might just as well say, that to be wise we must become fools, or, to be strong we must become weak. As a matter of fact, Paul said both of those paradoxes as well. Was Paul a master at double talk, or was he gifted with the ability to see life from a wider and wiser perspective than most men? The latter is the obvious answer. Paul's apparently conspicuous contradictions, and puzzling paradoxes are the result of his God-given ability to see the whole of life, and not just some of its parts in isolation. This ability was essential for one who represented so authoritatively Him who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. What can be more paradoxical than an A which is also a Z, or beginning which is also an end. This can only be possible if we are referring to one who is eternal and omnipresent, and who, therefore, fills all of reality at the same time. This, of course, is precisely the case with God.

Since God's very nature is paradoxical, because it is so all encompassing it follows that it ought not to be surprising to find that His revelation partakes of His nature. The Bible is filled with paradoxes just because it sees life as a whole, and not just in fragments, as is the case with all merely human philosophy. To conquer we must surrender; to live we must die; to be exalted we must be humble; to get we must give. God hates the sinner, yet loves the sinner enough to give His Son for them. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Yet, those who drink of the water of life shall thirst no more. In the last days there shall come those forbidding to marry. Yet, in the last days they shall marry and be given in marriage.

On and on goes the list of Biblical paradoxes, each of them with a valuable lesson to broaden our minds and enlarge our vision of reality. We want to focus our attention on this one before us, which deals with burdens. The thing to be aware of is the truth conveyed by paradox, which is, opposite things can be true of the same thing. A river can be narrow and wide; crooked and straight. From one perspective you may see it go straight for miles, and then begin to wind for miles.

The word burden has more than one meaning, and depending upon how you are using it, it can refer to a curse or a blessing. There are burdens in life that no one can consider good. They are evil, and are crushing burdens. William G. Clark referred to such when he wrote,

Oh, there are moments for us here, when seeing
Life's any qualities, and woe, and care,
The burdens laid upon our mortal being
Seems heavier than the human heart can bear.

The Bible urges us to get rid of these kinds of burdens, for they are anxieties and cares that are beyond our control. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
The burdens of weary, overworked, and frustrated lives are to be gotten rid

of, and refreshment, and rest are to be found in Christ. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." This is certainly one way to look at the matter of burdens, but God forbid that we think it is the whole truth about burdens.

What of the Bible's clear demands that we take on burdens? Take up the cross and follow me; take my yoke upon you and learn of me. All the commands of Jesus, and especially the great commission are commands to take up a burden. Paul adds to this the burdens we are to bear for one another in fulfilling the law of Christ. Here is a burden that is among the loftiest loads we can lift, for to do so fulfills the highest law of all, which is the law of Christ, which is the law of love.

There is a story concerning a king who once placed a heavy stone in the middle of the road, and then hid to see who would remove it. Men of various classes came by, and worked their way around it. Some of them loudly blaming the king for not keeping the highways clear. They all dodged their duty of getting rid of it. At last, a peasant on his way to town with a load of vegetables to sell saw the obstacle, laid down his own burden, and took on the burden of pushing the bolder off the road. As he did, he saw a purse that had been placed under it. He examined it, and found it full of gold, and with a note saying that it was for the one who removed the stone. Burdens can be a blessing when they are matters of helping others deal with their burdens. The peasant fulfilled the will of the king by bearing a burden, and we fulfill the will of our Lord when we bear one another's burdens. So we see there is more than one way to look at a burden.

There are the solitary burdens that we must bear alone; the social burdens that we share, and the senseless burdens that we are to cast upon the Lord. Paul could have kept things simple and uncomplicated by just referring to one kind of burden, but he doesn't do that. He speaks of both the solitary and the social burden in the same context. He links together our obligation to others, and our personal responsibility. Paul is primarily concerned with believers, and the bearing of one another's burdens within the community of faith. The total context, however, is much broader. In fact, in verse 10 Paul makes it clear that all men are included in our social responsibility. He writes, "As we have opportunity let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

There are no boundaries to Christian burden bearing. Any good done for any person can be a fulfillment of this Biblical command, for it is a comprehensive statement, as broad as the love of God. Within that general attitude of good will to all, is a specific emphasis on fellow believers. This is similar to the statement that Jesus is the Savior of all men, but especially of those who believe. The love and atonement of Christ is universal and comprehensive, but only those who believe in Christ, and receive him as Savior, benefit by being redeemed. There is always both the all, and the few, in Christian relationships. The comprehensive potential, and the limited actual.

As we study this chapter we want to keep in mind the total scope of our obligation as far as burden-bearing goes. We have seen there are some burdens we ought not to bear at all, but in this chapter we see three kinds of burdens we are obligated to bear. They are, personal responsibility; social responsibility within the church, and social responsibility to those outside the church.

6:1 Paul begins by writing, "Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault."

Here is the first person who needs a hand with a burden. It is the brother in Christ who has been overtaken by sin. It is not just a fault as the KJV has it, but a serious trespass. Sin like a leaping lion is overtaking him in the jungle of life, and has pulled him from the path of purity into the vines of vice, or the cave of corruption, there to devour him, and to render him useless as a servant of God. There is more of this that takes place than we realize. It is not a rare isolated incident. Peter warned that Satan like a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour, but here is a brother who did not heed the warning.

Paul was not blind, for he knows a Christian brother or sister can be overtaken by some sin. Like John the beloved Apostle, he knows if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. John made provision for the Christians in sin, and said, if we confess it Jesus is faithful to forgive it. Paul gets into the social aspect of sin. Sometimes sin is not just a private matter you can confess and be done with it. Sometimes it has social implications, and becomes a public matter, and a heavy burden. There is blame and shame, and a need for more than God's forgiveness. There is also a need for the acceptance of the body. The world is full of people who know God loves them, and has forgiven them, but who are cut off from the fellowship of the church, because the body paid no attention to what Paul is saying here. We are social beings, and if we don't get social acceptance and restoration to fellowship, we are like branches cut off from the tree, and we wither and bear no fruit.

I remember a silly story I use to tell as a teen. It is about a farmer who was throwing purple powder on his field, and when he was asked what he was doing by a neighbor he said, "I'm throwing this lion powder on my land. It is suppose to keep lions away." The neighbor protested, "But there ain't any lions within a thousand miles from here." He responded, "I know, and it's a good thing too, cause I bet this stuff don't work." Silly, but no more so than the Christian who knows he can't face Satan alone on his own ground, and yet, who sprinkles his life with the purple powder of self reliance, and walks right into the lion's jaws.

You know, as well as I do that the reason so many are being devoured by the lion of lust in our day is because they park in his den. Even as a child of God you never know what you might do if the circumstances are right. Therefore, do not be a fool, but stay away from the lion's den. Every man has his Achilles heel, and Satan throws a pretty good spear, so stay out of range. But some will not listen, and will go down, and this is the man Paul is concerned about here. He addresses those he expects to act on the matter as, "Ye which are spiritual." That which is to characterize them is a compassion and a concern for a fallen brother. Some would think the spiritual ones should be the ones raking him over the coals of condemnation. There are those who feel they are spiritual who like to show their contempt for the fallen, and they add more mud to the mess that already is. The obligation of the truly spiritual is neither to condemn or condone the sinner, but to act in a practical way to offset the victory of sin, and restore the victim.

Every soldier counts in the army of Christ, and none are to be left lying helpless and wounded on the battlefield. One of the obvious influences of Christianity on the American culture is the high value we place on the individual life. We go all out at home or in battle to rescue and save one lost child, or one wounded soldier. This in contrast to what a Dr. Pearson told us at a Civil Air Patrol meeting. He was in China during World War II. The Chinese army did not have any medics, because it was too expensive, so if

a man was wounded and could not go on, they removed his uniform and left him. They would go on to the next village where the first man they found to fit the uniform was drafted. The life of an individual wasn't worth a penny. Not so in our culture, and not so even more in the Christian battle. No soldier of the cross ever ought to ever be given into the hands of the enemy, but be restored to the company of the faithful.

Those who are quick to condemn, not only give aid and comfort to the enemy, but make it hard for the wounded brother to get back to his own lines. To carry out the analogy, it is like a wounded soldier in no mans land trying to get back to his company, but his own men are raking the area with machine gun fire. Just as some Americans die at the hands of their own men because of error, so the church, if it does not follow Paul's pattern, can drive men out of the church. The number of people who no longer go to church, because of self-righteous condemnation, is legion. Many churches and individuals have failed to be channels of the mercy and forgiveness of Christ, because they refused to bear the burden of a fallen brethren. They left him with the whole load until it broke the back of his faith, and he fell crushed, never to rise again. As terrible as it is for what the Chinese did, it is even worse for Christians to do the same on the spiritual level.

To bear this burden is not easy. To share his guilt and shame for deserting the captain of his faith is hard. No one likes to be identified with a deserter, but this is a burden we can only escape by ourselves being deserters of our Lord's orders. This is not a burden we can cast on the Lord, for it is a part of our obligation to a brother in Christ. If we lift it, we will discover it is one of those burdens that is a blessing. "My yolk is easy and burden is light," said Jesus. This is it, the bearing of one another's burden, and so fulfilling the law of Christ. The saint of India, Sundar Singh once crossed the mountains of Tibet during a heavy snowstorm. He was joined by a stranger, and they were companions in misfortune. The cold was so intense they feared they would not make it. They found a man who had fallen off the path to a ledge below. He was unconscious and Sundar asked his companion to help him rescue the man. He said it would be foolish to try and he went off on his own. At the risk of his life Sundar got to the man, and struggled back to the path carrying him. He later found his former companion frozen, but he was able to stay alive because of his extra exertion of carrying the body. He was able to reach a village and survive because he was willing to carry a burden.

Why should children bear the burden of picking up clothes, making the bed, etc., if mom will bear that burden for them? The most irresponsible people in the world are created when someone else bears all of their burdens. Young women make poor housewives when they are not taught to bear the burdens of running a household. It is a curse to escape such burdens, for it is burden bearing that makes people responsible citizens. There are burdens you want others to help you bear, but there are many that you need to bear alone to become the kind of person God wants you to be.

James Gilkey tells of watching a workman on the street of New York city carrying a long awkward plank. The wind kept blowing it, and as it would swing back and forth, he would lose his stride and weave back and forth. Another man came up behind and saw his problem, and without a word he eased his shoulder under the back end of the plank. The workman was ignorant of what was happening. He steadied his step, and quickened his pace, and quickly arrived at his destination. His undetected helper slipped from under the load, and continued on his way. The workman never even knew he had been

helped with his burden. Our Lord does this for us, and we receive a helping hand we never even see.

We can do this type of lifting as well, and give a silent and secret lift to those with burdens. However we do it, we should all be in the business of burden bearing.

CHAPTER 6. THE PARADOX OF BLESSING BASED ON GAL. 6:1-10

Doing your best could be the worst thing you could do. That sounds like a contradiction, but it can be explained so that it makes sense as a paradox. A paradox is a statement, which at first sight seems absurd, and contrary to common sense, but which can be explained so as to be well grounded and true in fact. It is not hard to figure out the paradox in the statement that the new cars are wider, longer, lower, and higher. That they are lower in relation to the ground, and higher in relation to your bank account is easy to see. Many paradoxes are not so obvious. Some of the beatitudes of Jesus, for example are paradoxes. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn, and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. These need some deeper thinking before the clouds of obscurity will clear away, and let the light of truth shine through.

So it is with the statement, doing your best can be the worst thing you can do. It is contrary to a normal pattern of thinking, but all it takes is one illustration to turn it into a paradoxical statement of truth. A minister of a large church had his assistant preach the sermon on Sunday morning. He wanted to slip away to play golf. He drove the ball with terrific accuracy, and everything he did seem to go perfect, and he finished the 18 holes with a remarkable 68. It was the first time he ever broke 100. He was overjoyed and elated until it struck him, he would never be able to tell anyone about it because of the circumstances. Had he played an average game, there would be nothing to tell, but he had gone and done his very best, and now he couldn't share his excitement. Doing his best under those circumstances proved to be the worst thing he could do. His great pleasure paradoxically became his punishment.

Doing your best at any act of evil is always the worst thing you can do. The thing to notice about the nature of paradox is that it keeps you aware of the complexity of reality. It keeps you aware of the danger of oversimplification. We tend to take a legitimate aspect of reality and make it the whole. Paradox forces us to keep an open mind, and seek to reconcile contradictory aspects of life. The Christian who cannot accept paradox as part of reality will often be distressed, because life refuses to conform to the logic of what he feels ought to be. Everything can make sense, however, to one who is willing to see the paradoxical nature of reality.

A blessed curse sounds like nonsense, but a little thought can make it a precious truth. The Scripture says, "Cursed is every man who is hung upon a tree." Jesus was hung upon a tree, and crucified for our sin. His curse became the means by which all of our sins are forgiven. Who can think of a curse that ever led to greater blessings? It was indeed a blessed curse, and no longer a statement of nonsense. I emphasize the reality of paradox because Paul is so paradoxical in this passage of Gal. 6. The paradox we want to consider concerns a blessing we are to avoid. It sounds unreasonable to even suggest that we should try and avoid one of God's blessings, but that is exactly what God expects us to do, and exactly what we want to do when we understand the meaning of the paradox.

No one will doubt that guilt is one of the heaviest burdens a man can bear, and no one will doubt that forgiveness is one of the most precious of all blessings. Yet, as blessed as it is to be lifted, it is more blessed never to have fallen. The blessing we are to avoid, therefore, is the blessing of being the one who is restored through forgiveness. While helping the fallen experience this blessing, we are to be careful to avoid it ourselves. It is a blessing that can only come through first disobeying God. To be eligible for forgiveness we must first sin, and, therefore, this is a blessing we are to avoid.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class what is the first thing we must do to obtain forgiveness of sin? A little boy spoke up and said, "Sin!" It was not the expected answer, but a correct one, and because the only way to obtain this goal is by the route of evil, it is a way we are not to travel. It is a blessing we are never to choose, but one we are to receive only because of necessity due to the fact that we have fallen.

In this first verse Paul is just as concerned that the non-fallen Christian helper escape the necessity of this blessing, as he is that the fallen brother find it. It is wonderful that the fallen brother can be restored and forgiven. Yet, it would be a tragedy if another in helping him bear his load fell himself, and needed to travel the same path. Forgiveness is the only road to travel when one is in the valley of sin, and it is a great blessing, but it is a curse to fall into that valley in the first place, and so it is a blessing to be avoided. Any blessing that requires you to sin before receiving it, is a blessing to avoid. This is why Paul limits the task of restoring the fallen to the spiritual, that is to those who have developed the maturity necessary to do the job without risking themselves.

Anyone who has tackled a difficult job with inadequate tools knows the problem you can get into, and the mess you can make. The tool one must have to effectively restore a fallen brother is the tool of meekness, or gentleness. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and that is why Paul calls upon those who are spiritual to handle this delicate matter. To be spiritual simply means to be one who exhibits the fruits of the Spirit. If one does not have this fruit, he should not attempt the job of restoration. The result could be something like trying to fix a piece of broken china with a hammer. Christians need to leave delicate jobs to those whose inner tool chest has in it, not the sharp saw of severity, and the hard hammer of harshness, but the smooth sander of sympathy, and the mild mallet of meekness.

The word restore is the Greek word for setting a dislocated bone. Part of the body of Christ is dislocated when a Christian falls into sin. There is bound to be some pain in getting him restored, but the proper treatment can eliminate unnecessary pain. The proper treatment that Paul calls for is gentleness. Calvin wrote, "We are here taught to correct the faults of brethren in a mild manner, and to consider no rebukes as partaking a religious and Christian character which do not breathe the spirit of meekness." Not all can lift a fallen brother by meekness, and so they should keep their hands off.

To try and restore a brother in the attitude of arrogant superiority is to fall into the category of those Paul mentions in verse 3 who think themselves to be something when they are nothing. Here is another paradox: To be something we must recognize we are nothing. John Wesley recognized he was nothing apart from Christ, and he really became something. He lifted gamblers, drunkards, and rough sinners from all walks of life by the power of

gentleness. G. W. Langford wrote-

Speak gently! Tis a little thing
Dropped in the heart's deep well;
The good, the joy that it may bring
Eternity shall tell.

If you don't have the tools, leave the task of restoring to those who can do it in the spirit of meekness. A Christian doing good in the wrong way can do more harm than good. The Christian who has the right tools, however, ought not to be deceived into thinking he is immune to danger. There is always a risk involved in bending over a pit to lift another out. It is possible for the helper to end up in the pit. Paul, therefore, gives a warning even to those who are spiritual. It is a blessing to know they can be restored if they fall, but it is a blessing they are to avoid.

I think it is extremely important that we see Paul's attitude concerning the Christian and sin. Paul feels that no one is ever so mature, and so spiritual, that they can afford to be careless. Paul assumes that the finest Christians can fall if they are not cautious. To think that a wonderful Christian cannot fall into serious sin is to be ignorant concerning spiritual warfare. Some people blame emotionalism for the fact that Christians fall into sin. They feel that many conversions are only a momentary experience of excitement that do not last. Others feel the problem lies with those churches which stress conversion as a process of education. These, they say, are not truly born again, and have only a head knowledge, and that is why they fall to the temptation. Both are right, and there are many illustrations to prove their point, but both are wrong in thinking they can explain, by their view, why Christians sin.

The method by which one comes to Christ is not the determining factor at all. The important thing is what one thinks of himself after he does accept Christ. If he thinks he is now safe from the enemy of his soul, and has arrived, he is in serious trouble. His deception at this point will leave him wide open to enemy attack. If he realizes the battle has just begun, and that now, more than ever, he needs the whole armor of God, and much caution, then he is likely to stand, and be a good soldier of Christ. It is pride that leads the Christian to fall, for the proud Christian no longer fears his own weakness. He feels he does not need to be careful in the way he walks. It is the humble Christian who will stand, for he is fully aware of his weakness, and the danger of falling.

Paul makes it clear that the most mature Christian must be aware that the tendency to sin is still in them, and that a proud and careless attitude can lead them into the very pit they hope to lift others out of. An honest Christian is one who is able to say, I am capable of committing that very sin that ensnared my brother. Therefore, I must avoid certain circumstances. Consider thyself is what Paul says. Keep and attentive eye on yourself is another version. Help another with an attitude of pride, thinking you are superior because you did not fall, and you could very well be the next one there pulling out of the pit.

History is full of spiritual persons who are naive at this point. The Bible does not give useless warnings, and so we need to take them seriously. In I Cor. 10:12 Paul says, "Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." David was a man after God's own heart, but he fell. Peter was the leader of the Apostles, but he fell. You can go through the

list of Bible heroes, and the same can be said for just about all of them. The wise Christian agrees with the ancient saying, "Know thyself." To be ignorant of what you are capable of doing is to be blind, and not having an honest knowledge of yourself, and this will lead you to ignore the warnings that would help you to escape when the battle is more than you can handle.

Tis one of human nature's laws,
To see ourselves without our flaws.

This is one law we are to break, and not submit to being blinded by our nature which loves to be deceived about our defects. If we are not honest with ourselves, we will fail to see ourselves in the mirror of God's Word. We will be like the dog who always went wild when he saw his reflection in the mirror. He thought it was another dog, and he was ready for a fight. If we think all the warnings of Scripture are directed to someone else, we are as foolish as that dog. The heart is deceitful above all things, and we need to see that refers to our heart, and not just the heart of others. Fenelon said, "As light increases we see ourselves to be worse than we thought." The purpose of seeing yourself as you are is not to give you a guilt complex, but to show you just how weak you are without the Lord's help. It is to keep you alert, knowing that a sudden attack can take you by surprise and leave you wounded.

Look to yourself says Paul; know yourself; know your own weakness and tendency to sin, and you will be more useful in gaining back the fallen brother, for your caution and stability will increase his security, and give him an example to follow in the future. This is doing for a brother what Jesus did for us all. Had He not stopped to lift us, and had He not faced all temptations and remained sinless, we would have no hope, and no security, and no basis for forgiveness.

Nietzsche thought this was the way to produce a world of weaklings. The strong ought not to stoop to help the weak, he said. This puts them all on the dead level of mediocrity. The strong are to move on higher, and step on the weak to do it. This is the only road to the super race. Hitler and Stalin both put this philosophy into practice, and history has recorded the tragic results. One of the paradoxes of history is that power and might does not conquer in any lasting way. What is gained, soon crumbles. Eternal victories are gained by love, which is willing to stoop and lift. Gentleness which is willing to put up with the weaknesses of men, and seek to lead them to higher ground, is the way to build what is lasting. If Christians cooperate, they can turn an apparent victory for evil into a final victory for good. Let the fall of a brother in Christ teach you caution, and your caution will teach him how to avoid another fall, and both will be better prepared to not experience the blessing we are to avoid.

CHAPTER 7 .THE PARADOX OF PRIDE Based on Gal. 6:3

Some people, probably most people, and maybe all people have to learn how to be humble the hard way, and that is the humpty dumpty way of having a great fall. This was the case with Max Eastman. A film was being made on the life of Christ, and he happened to meet the well known woman photographer working

on that film, who was Alice Baughton. Shortly after this meeting he received a note asking if he would consent to pose with Walter Hampden, the man playing the role of Christ, in one of the miracle scenes. He was so proud of getting such an offer after just a casual meeting, that he could not help but brag. A thing like that couldn't just happen, he must have something on the ball. He said to his mother who was visiting at the time, "See what it is to be a beauty. I just knock them cold at the first sight." When he returned from the studio, however, his glow had turned to gloom. "What did you pose for?" Was the eager question of the family. Meekly he replied, "The corpse of Lazarus."

Lazarus was certainly not unimportant role to play, even as a corpse, but it hardly justified his boast of superior beauty. Had he not opened his mouth, there could only be merit in getting any part at all, but he did, and proved the saying true, "And ounce of vanity spoils a hundred weight of merit." He thought too highly of himself. He was like the man whose wife said to him as they left the party, "Has anyone ever told you how marvelous you are?" "No, I don't believe they have," he said. "Well then," she continued, "Where in the world did you ever get the idea?"

The idea comes natural, for the one thing most all people have in common is their loyal love of themselves. E. W. Howe said, "When a man tried himself, the verdict is usually in his favor." Subconsciously, if not consciously, all men tend to make themselves the center of the universe. Each of us is, to a lesser or greater degree, an I specialist. I read of a printing company that had to postpone the publication of a Bishop's autobiography because of they ran out of capital I's. Pope wrote in his essay on man-

Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,
Earth for whose use, -Pride answers,-Tis for mine;
For me kind nature wakes her genial power,
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;
Sees role to waft me, suns to light me rise;
My foot stool earth, my canopy the skies.

There is a touch of truth even in this self-centeredness, for man alone was made by God with the capacity to appreciate and enjoy the order and beauty of His creation, and man was given dominion over creation. But man fell, like Satan, because of pride, and is now, as Pascal put it, both the glory and the scum of the universe. He still has some basis for pride, but so much more for humility and shame. Abraham Lincoln's favorite hymn by William Knox put it this way-

Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-flitting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

Man is in a strange predicament, caught between his own dignity and depravity; his own worth, and his wickedness. The result is another great paradox of life. Man's self-love is both an evil and a good. It is both an essential for a happy life in God's will, and the main cause for most evil that is out of God's will. Paul in this great chapter on paradoxes deals with both sides of pride.

In verse 3, he deals with that kind of pride which makes a man think himself to be something when he is nothing. In verse 4, he deals with that

kind of pride which is an honest recognition of one's worth before God. The border line between these two is so close, and so poorly defined, that one can every easily slip over into exhibiting evil pride when he thinks he is being rightfully humble. This makes pride a very dangerous area that Satan takes advantage of. Ruskin said, "In general pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes!" This is true of sin as well.

The Old Testament says so much about the evil and folly of pride we cannot even begin to cover it. The New Testament is sufficient to establish it as one of the worse evils of the human heart. Jesus lists it as one of the major evils that proceed from the heart in Mark 7:22. Paul lists it among the dominating depravities of the pagan world in Rom. 1:30. He also lists it as one of the characteristics of men in the last days. He writes in II Tim. 3:2, "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy." Both Peter and James write that, "God resisteth the proud but gives grace to the humble." Christians are urged to avoid pride, and all her ugly sisters like conceit, arrogance, and haughtiness. Paul says in Rom. 12:16, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited."

Pride among Christian is the greatest cause for lack of harmony, and in our text Paul says, the brother or sister in Christ who is proud, and thinks they are something when they are nothing, deceives themselves. They do not fool anyone else, but they are themselves blind to the fact that they are the problem, and are being dupes of the devil to hinder the work of Christ. Paul says, something can become nothing, or somebody can become nobody. Something becomes nothing when it fails to fulfill the purpose for which it exists. For example, you have all had an experience like this. Suppose my son and I were walking along the road, and he picks up a broken piece of metal, and asks me what it is. I look at it, and see that it is from a machine of some kind, and is no longer able to serve the function for which it was made, like a burned out fuse for example. I therefore, say to him, "It is nothing, throw it away." Now we both know it is something, for it exists, or he wouldn't have asked the question, but by calling it nothing I meant it is worthless in fulfilling its purpose, and so has no value whatever.

Jesus said, "When salt loses it power to be salty it is good for nothing." It is still something, but as far as usefulness goes, it is nothing. Something is nothing when it can no longer function for the purpose of which it exists. You've all heard of the two boys who were bragging, and the one son said, "My father is a doctor, I can be sick for nothing." The other one responded, "Well, my father is a minister, and I can be good for nothing." Paul is saying, that it is literally possible for a Christian to be good for nothing. If a Christian thinks he is too good to help another Christian lift their burden, he has allowed pride to render him useless in fulfilling the law of Christ, and so at that point he is nothing. He is still something, or there would be no point of warning him of his danger, but he salt without flavor, and if he does not lose his sinful pride, he will lose his usefulness as a Christian.

A Christian who cannot inner into the bearing of one another's burdens because of pride is not able to fulfill a basic purpose in the Christian life. He is about as valuable as a burned out fuse. Paul is simply spelling out in a practical way the teaching of I Cor. 13. He wrote there, that if he had the tongues of angels, and the gift of prophecy, and great knowledge and wisdom, and faith to remove mountains, and did not have love, he would be nothing. It is hard to believe that so much somethings can equal absolutely

nothing, but this is what Paul clearly teaches. Without love a Christian can be nothing, in the sense that he would be useless for the cause of Christ. This is why pride is such a great danger to the believer, for it can render him useless. In Psa. 62:9 David says, "...men of high estate are a delusion, in the balances they go up; they are altogether lighter than a breath." Paul goes even further, and says they are not only lighter than air, they are nothing, but either way, the two testaments agree, pride can make a man weightless, and unable to exert even an ounce of weight on the scale for good.

The tragedy is that this is not just a hypothetical possibility, but is an actual reality. This was the case with the lukewarm majority in the church of Laodicea. In Rev. 3:17 Jesus says to these Christians who are neither hot nor cold, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and blind and naked." They thought they were something when they were nothing. They deceived themselves into thinking they needed nothing, but in reality, they needed everything. Paul gives another example of this deception of pride in I Tim. 6:3-4. "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, and knows nothing." Here is a man who thinks he is so wise he can go beyond the words of Christ. He thinks he knows something, but Paul says, what he knows is nothing.

Here is the paradox that runs all through the Bible. He who exalts himself shall be brought low. The Tower of Babel is the great symbol of human pride. When man seeks to climb to the sky, he ends groveling in the dirt. When he seeks to go to heaven by self-exaltation, he lands in hell. When he thinks himself to be something, he is nothing. This passage is extremely relevant to all of us. Obedience is vital to our very existence as useful Christians. Bearing one another's burdens is not just a suggestion, it is a demand-do it or else. Here is a law in the midst of grace. A Christian who is not fulfilling the law of Christ is not fulfilling the purpose for which he exists.

This can be hard, and especially when the burden is the result of sin. These are the worst, for it is easy to get your hands dirty, and even your soul, if you are not careful, as Paul warns. Paul knew some Christians would be hesitant on this matter, and would not want to risk spotting their lily white hands in pulling a fallen brother out of the pit. He made his bed, let him lie in it, would be their attitude. After all says the proud Christian, "I am something. I am a leader in the church. I have a reputation of respectability in the community. I can't get involved in helping some fool brother who has gotten himself in a mess. What will people think of me? They might think I approve of his sin, or that I help because I am guilty of the same. I just can't risk the association and spoil my reputation."

This proud man's case is clear, and his concern for his self-image is natural, but the Christian who wants to be used of God cannot afford to be natural, for the paradox is, his very caution is his greatest folly. In saving his reputation with men, he loses the favor of God. He remain something before men, he becomes nothing before God. Paul wants us to see this folly, and never allow pride to keep us from our duty to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. A Christian who cannot risk his reputation to rescue another Christian from the grasp of the enemy is as good as a partner of the enemy, and so of no value in the cause of Christ. Another paradoxical consequence

of this is that when a Christian becomes nothing because of pride, and is lighter than air, and has no weight at all in the scale for good, he makes a heavy impact on the scale for evil. When the love of Christ is absent in a follower of Christ he becomes a useful tool in the hands of Satan.

Alexander Maclaren said, "Depend upon it, heresy has less power to arrest the progress of the church than the selfish lives of Christian professors." Nothing is so heavy, and such a drag on the church, as lighter than air Christians, whose pride makes them useless for good. These lighter than air Christians are paradoxically the heaviest burden the church has to bear. God forbid that we be among these spiritual naughts by being proud, loveless, and unconcerned about the burdens of others. Let us also be aware of the subtlety of pride. It is a two edged sword which cuts both ways. It hides on both sides of the narrow way, and we can fall into its snare in the very act of backing away.

For example, what is our attitude to those whom Paul calls nothing? What of the proud loveless brother? Does he not immediately become one of the fallen brothers who needs the help of the spirit-lead believer in order to be restored. In other words, this something which has become nothing can also be restored back to something, and become useful again in the cause of Christ. His pride which kept him away from the pit lest he be stained, has plunged him into even a muckier pit yet, up to his neck. He has fallen lower than the brother he refused to help, but now he needs a hand, and if we refuse him because he is unworthy of our help, we are only copying his folly, and we will fall into the pit ourselves.

It is no advance on the Pharisee who said, "I thank God I am not as other men, even this Publican," to say, "I thank God I am not as other men, even this Pharisee." A Sunday School teacher after teaching the lesson of the proud Pharisee said, "Let's bow now and thank God we are not like this Pharisee." Pride is subtle, and it can get you coming or going. It is present everywhere, and at all times. One Puritan lamented that ridding ourselves of pride is like peeling an onion, for every skin taken off there is another beneath. The first step to victory over pride is to be aware that it is a clever foe, and the battle will never cease while we are in the flesh. Second, we must overcome evil with good. We must learn how to harness this inescapable characteristic of human life for good. We need to use this which can make us nothing before God, to make us something of which we can be proud, and which God can use for the purpose for which He made us.

CHAPTER 8. PRAISEWORTHY PRIDE Based on Gal. 6:4

One of the most common paradoxes of history is the paradox of succeeding through failure. Jesus failed to turn Israel from her sins, and they crucified Him, but He thereby succeeded in paying the penalty for their sin, and also for the sins of the world. By descending into the valley of failure, He arrived at the peak of success. The cross became both the low point, and the high point of history. There are numerous illustrations of this paradox. A contemporary example comes from the experience of Dr. Paul Tournier, the well known Christian physician of Switzerland, whose many books are very popular in America.

In his book *The Adventure Of Living*, he tells of a lecture he gave at a

University. He felt from the beginning of the lecture that he was not going to make contact with his audience. He clung to his notes, and laboriously recited with growing nervousness. When he finished, he saw his friends slipping away to spare both he and themselves the embarrassment of meeting. On the way home in the car his wife burst into tears because the humiliation was so great. It was the most miserable lecture he had ever given. The next day a professor of philosophy called him on the phone. He said he had listened to a large numbers of lectures in his life, and had never heard one as bad as Dr. Tournier's. The very dullness of it, however, intrigued him, and he wanted to meet Dr. Tournier. This was the beginning of wonderful friendship that resulted in this professor receiving Christ as his Savior. Dr. Tournier said, this was the source of more lasting joy to him than if he had delivered a brilliant lecture. It was his impressive failure that opened the door to the thrilling success of winning a man for Christ. Praise God that He can use even our failure for His glory.

Let us not, however, strive to fail, and seek to be nothing in the hope that God will use it to make us successful and something. The Christian never deliberately aims for anything but the best. Success is always to be his goal. Set your affections on things above; press on toward the mark for the prize; run to win; fight the good fight for victory; whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord, give of your best to the Master, and no less. The Christian never chooses to run poorly, but strives always for excellence. The result of this, of course, will be that Christians will arrive at the goal of success by the normal route of fulfilling the requirements for success. It is then that they face the danger of failure, and can become an example of the paradox of failing through success. If they let success go over their head, and become proud and boastful, they cease to be useful instruments for the glory of God, and so they fail in their highest goal. This is what Paul was warning against in verse 3. The Christian who does not fall, but has by persistence in good habits, and development of self-control, resisted temptation, can still fail if he allows pride to make him think he is really something, even too good to help the fallen brother.

Many Christians, seeing the danger of pride in success, fall into the opposite danger of a false humility, nothing is more superficial and unspiritual than when one who has done an excellent thing pretends that it is really nothing at all. This is not humility but sheer falsehood, or deception. A Christian who excels in some aspect of life cannot honestly pretend that he is a dud. If a Christian boy holds the world's record for the 100 yard dash he would appear silly if he pretended to think he was not very fast. Karl Olsson writes, "How many excellently cooked dinners have been dismissed by humble housewives as nullities, a mere hogwash-because these estimable ladies thought it sinful to admit that they were the best chicken roasters in 7 counties, which, in effect, they knew themselves to be."

Christians can even come to the point where they are proud of their humility, and get great satisfaction in pretending to be nothing, and incapable of anything praiseworthy. This pretense at failure only succeeds in making them failures while they are succeeding. This kind of humility is only a more subtle form of pride.

I am that voice which is the faint
First, far-off sin within the saint,
When of his humbleness he first
Takes thought, and I become that thirst
Which makes him drunken with his own

Humbleness, and so casts him down
From the last painful stair that waits
His triumphing feet at heaven's gates.

In other words, false humility will cause the Christian to fall just as sure as false pride.

Both extremes are foolish and dangerous, for neither of them is honest, and neither is based on a realistic evaluation of one's self in relation to God.

It was sheer madness for Nietzsche, in great pride, to say, "It is only since I have come that a new hope has dawned on earth." But Madame DuDeffond did not lessen the madness when she wrote, "I hear nothings, I speak nothings, I take interest in nothing, and from nothing to nothing I travel gently down the dull way which leads to becoming nothing." This is not humility, but pure pessimism and despair which is totally unfit as a Christian attitude. The Christian alternative to self-deification is not self-damnation, but self-dedication. God does not want your self deified or damned, He wants it dedicated. Paul says, you are deceived if you think you are something when you are nothing, but you are equally deceived if you think you are nothing when you are something. Paul is not trying to get Christians to think of themselves as nothing, for that is an evil. It is unworthy of a child of God, who has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and given eternal life. So both pride and humility can be dangerous, but both are still needed for the balanced Christian life.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian, stood on a hilltop overlooking the sea one summer evening, and he had this experience. "As I stood there alone and forsaken and the might of the sea and the war of the elements brought my own nothingness to mind, and on the other hand the secure flight of the birds brought to mind the words of Christ, 'Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of your heavenly Father,' I felt all at once how great and how small I was, and the two great powers, pride and humility, joined hands and became friends." This is the Biblical solution of the problem: A reconciliation of pride and humility, so that together as friends they can do what neither can do alone. Pride alone is a great evil, but mixed with humility it becomes a praise worthy pride. This is the kind of pride that keeps one from the sin of false humility.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I desire to so conduct the affairs of this administration that, when I come to lay down the reins of power, if I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, the one down inside me." Lincoln wanted to be right within himself. He preferred the approval of the still small voice within, rather than the cheers of the crowd. Lincoln may not have studied Paul's advice here in Gal. 6:4, but he was following it, and that is why Lincoln was such a great, yet humble man, of whom so many have been proud. The key to a humble, or praiseworthy, pride says Paul is self-examination. The amplified version reads, "But let every person carefully scrutinize and examine and test his own conduct and his own work. He can then have the personal satisfaction and joy of doing something commendable (in itself alone) without (resorting to) boastful comparison with his neighbor."

A legitimate pride is a completely personal matter, and does not depend upon anyone else. It is a matter of personal satisfaction in accomplishing something that is praiseworthy. False pride is dangerous for the paradoxical reason that it is not self-centered enough. False pride does not examine the

self for intrinsic worth and value, but is all the time comparing the self with others. False pride finds the false, defects, and sins in others, and then by comparison exalts the self. All their boasting depends upon the falls of others, rather than any intrinsic value in themselves. If you boast because you did not fall like this brother, your goodness is only comparative, and comparative goodness is not Christian goodness. God will never judge anyone by comparison. Anybody can find someone worse than themselves, and deceive themselves into thinking they are good in comparison. This is foolish pride, and many live on a very low level just because they are proud that it is higher than others on a lower level.

Paul says, do not think you are something when you are nothing, just because, even as nothing you have not fallen as low as another. Stop this business of comparing, and get into the business of self-examination. Washington Allston said, "The only competition worthy of a wise man is with himself." This is Paul's idea here. We are not running well just because we are ahead of the cripples. Our competition is to be with ourselves, and not the slowest runner we can find. Examine your own work says Paul. How does it rate in itself, regardless of what anyone else has or has not done. Paul says in Rom. 14:12, "Each of us shall give account of himself to God." It is not a comparative account. It is not, how did you do compared to so and so, but what did you do compared to what you knew you ought to do? How does your action measure up to your knowledge?

If you examine yourself, and are honest, you will likely have a great deal to be humble about. If you really are running at full speed, and are pressing on toward the mark, your reason for boasting will be legitimate, for it will be based on yourself alone, and not on the slower speed of a neighbor, or brother in Christ. Paul, like Lincoln, was concerned about living with himself, and Paul could boast publicly before the Jewish council in Acts 23:1, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day." In II Cor. 1:12 he writes, "For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity..." We could give many other examples of Paul's boasting in himself, because of this clear conscience, and self-respect. Paul had a praiseworthy pride because of his honest testing of his character and conduct against the standard of Christ, and not that of the world, or other Christians. Be followers of me as I am of Christ, Paul could say.

Paul was proud to be a Christian, and a child of God, and a servant of Christ. He was not ashamed of the cross or the Gospel, but he was proud of it, and gloried in the cross. Yet, he never forgot he was unworthy, and was only allowed to do so because of the grace of God. He called himself the least of all saints, but because of God's grace, he could also call himself one of the greatest Apostles. Paul, like his Master, was both humble and proud. Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim publically His wisdom and knowledge, yet none was so humble as Jesus. Praiseworthy pride, and healthful humility were fast friends in the makeup of their personalities.

They could have the highest self-respect, because themselves were in harmony with God's objective revelation. They did not go by comparison with others, but by their own personal relationship to God. Jesus, even as the Son of God, had a human nature. He had personal responsibility He had to bear. He had a load to bear that none could help Him bear, and Jesus had to examine His own work, and have rejoicing in His fulfillment of His Father's will. He could say at the end,

"It is finished." He did the work He was sent to do. Paul could also say at the end that he had fought a good fight, and ran a good race. This sense of personal satisfaction of a job well done, and a life well lived, is to be the precious blessing of every child of God. Arthur Clough wrote,

He who would climb and soar aloft
Must needs keep ever at his side
The tonic of a wholesome pride.

Yes, even pride, that can be the rag of rottenness, can also, by the grace of God be woven into the robe of righteousness, and become praiseworthy pride.

9.GOOD OUT OF EVIL Based on Phil. 1:12-26

Luther Burbank, the world famous scientist, worked for years to try and develop a black-petaled lily. He had several thousand experimental lily plants in his laboratory. A sudden cloudburst let loose a flood of rain that they were all washed away. William Stidger tells of sympathizing with him over what had happened, and Burbank said to him, "When anything like this happens I always remember a little couplet my mother use to quote:

From the day you are born
Till you ride in a hearse,
There's nothing that happens
Which couldn't be worse.

We have all sought to comfort ourselves at some point in life by recognizing this reality- it could be worse. It is almost always true, but still it is a negative comfort. Your life can be a mess, but others are even worse. If this is the best you got, then it has to be what you hang on to, but there is a better and more positive way to deal with the negatives of life, and that is to wait and see if what you thought was bad turns out to be good, and instead of being the worst, it may in reality be the best thing that could have happened.

That is what Paul is writing about to the Philippians. They are worried about Paul. They heard he was thrown in prison in Rome, and they have naturally concluded that his being arrested was not a good thing. They assumed that his ministry, which they supported, was now on hold, and Paul would be of no value in advancing the Gospel now. Paul says not to worry, for your gifts are not money down a hole. His being arrested turns out to actually help the advance of the Gospel, and give him a better ministry than the one he had planned.

The key to being an optimist is having the patience to wait and see what God will do with your negative experience. We so often jump to the conclusion that bad stuff is just that, and that alone. Sickness, trials, shipwrecks, stoning, and prison do not sound like prizes for which you would sell many lottery tickets. Nobody wants this sort of stuff in their life if they can avoid it. What Paul learned by his experience is that the bad stuff of life can be a way for God to use your life in a way that good things could not be used. Paul's being a prisoner led to his having a ministry to the palace guard of Nero, and some of these soldiers came to Christ, which never would have happened had he not become a prisoner. He never would have crossed

their path had he not been arrested.

The fruit of Paul's ministry in prison was quite extensive, and he writes in 4:22, "All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." Paul had Christian friends in the highest places, even the house of the Emperor. There is no reason to believe this ever could have happened if Paul had not been treated like a criminal. This is one of the answers to the question-why do bad things happen to good people? It is because bad things are often the only way to get us in touch with the right people, and to make us willing to go the way God wants us to go. In other words, bad things are tools God uses to get the job done in our lives. The point is not to rejoice in bad things, but to rejoice in the Lord who can use bad things for good goals we never would have achieved without the bad things.

Colonel Bringle of the Salvation Army became a very popular author. He came out of Harvard with honors, and began his ministry on a street corner in Boston. A drunken hooligan threw a brick at him and hit him in the head. He received a concussion that put him in the hospital for months. During his convalescence he wrote a book called Help To Holiness. He added four volumes, and these devotional aids sold in large numbers around the world. He said, "My brethren, if there had never been a brick, there never would have been a book." His bad experience opened up doors he never would have entered had they not compelled him to do so. Don't be so quick to label bad things as a curse. Wait to see if it might be a blessing. Even pray to that end. Grace Crowell wrote a poem that says it all.

Yet as I live them, strange I did not know
Which hours were destined thus to live and shine,
And which among the countless ones would grow
To be, peculiarly, forever mine.
If I but wait, perhaps, this hour will be
Like silver in the sun, some day, to me!

Paul never dreamed that his days in prison would be days God would use him to let his light shine through all of history because of the epistles he would write there. We should pray, "Lord this is a bad day I am having, what good can you help me make of it for your glory?"

F. W. Borham, the great Australian preacher and author, tells of his pastor friend who was asked in Seminary to preach at a certain church one weekend when the pastor became ill. He had other plans with 2 of his best friends, and he did not want to go. He suggested other names and begged to be excused, but the Professor refused to let him off the hook. It was with deep anger that he submitted, and he went to the church in a negative mood, wanting to curse them rather than bless them. But all of his negative feelings were sheer waste, for he met the love of his life there, and his whole future was changed. Had he just waited to see what the end result would be, he could have saved himself a lot of grief. One of the most common phrases of the Bible is wait on the Lord, and the reason is, we need to learn to wait and see what God in his providence is going to do before we label bad things as a curse.

Bad things often turn out like Paul's being thrown in prison. They are stepping stones to fruitful blessings that could not be foreseen. God loves to work in all things, even bad things, for good. It is God's specialty, and

wise is the Christian who has a wait and see attitude toward bad things. Because Paul had this attitude, he did not have to back off earlier testimony. Had he jumped the gun and written saying this is the worst thing to ever happen to me, and now my ministry is ruined, he would have been embarrassed to have to later say it was a great blessing. He waited to see what God would bring to pass. Jowett wrote, "The cloud, which appeared so ominous, brought a gracious shower; the restriction became the mother of a larger liberty." Prison bars and progress sound incompatible, but Paul just waited and sure enough, he saw his arrest lead to advance. It was a promotion to a higher ministry.

Why is it so important for Christians to grasp this reality that God can use evil for good? Because most of the unbelief in this world is based on this very issue. Most atheists are so because they say a good God cannot exist and permit all the terrible evil and suffering there is in this world. Many people do not believe in God because they feel they are better than God, for they would not permit the evil that exists if they had the power of God. So who needs a God who is less noble and compassionate than they are themselves? This would be a fairly powerful argument if the Bible did not reveal that God permits evil for a higher good. He permitted evil men to kill His Son for the sake of redeeming lost men. He permits men to become lost, because only those who are lost and then found again can be truly righteous and loyal to God forever. Satan was made perfect by God, but he fell because of pride. That will never happen to those redeemed by the Son of God. They will be eternally loyal, for they know they are what they are by the grace of God, and not by their own wisdom, power, or goodness. If God is going to have an eternal kingdom with assurance their will never be another rebellion, he had to permit a world with evil and free choice. This terrible fallen world is essential to the perfect world to come. God will bring good out of all its evil.

What good is evil? It is the opportunity to be a child of God. Paul says do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Use evil to reveal your good. Let your light shine by showing the contrast of the good to the evil.

Where there is hate show love.
Where there is greed show generosity.
Where there is bitterness show forgiveness.
Where there is gloom show joy.
Where there is anxiety show peace.
Where there is violence show gentleness.

The point is, if there was no evil there would be no way to identify the good. The goal of history for the Christian is to bring good out of evil, so that evil does not win the war. Whenever you stop with evil, you let it win. The Christian is to overcome evil with good, and that means to go over, around, or through it, and if you can't avoid it no matter what, then seek to use it for some good and outwit it. The providence of God is God working in history to make bad events and circumstances lead to good consequences. Paul's imprisonment was bad for it was unjust and unfair, and caused by hate. God used their evil scheme to get the Gospel into the very household of Caesar. This was the beginning of Christianity becoming the official faith of the Roman Empire.

We often forget the idea of no pain, no gain philosophy, and we resist making anything bad for our children to endure, even when we should know that helps them to become stronger. Cheryl Forbes, a Christian journalist who worked for Zondervan Publishing House, wrote a book called Backdoor

Blessings. Her first job was terrible. The boss was an older women who made her rewrite almost everything she submitted for publication. For a year she resented this snooty miss know-it-all. But slowly it dawned on her that she had become a good writer, and she owed it all to this boss she did not like. Had the boss been a good buddy, and let her get by with less than her best, she never would have attained the level of expertise she had reached. The one she thought was her enemy was really her secret friend.

In Acts 9:16 God said of Paul, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Paul was chosen for a tough life, but out of all the evil he had to suffer, the world is still, and will forever, reaping the good fruit of his life. His thorn in the flesh was a pain he had to endure lest his pride caused him to lose his favored status with God.

It is a principle of life that if someone you love will be a better person by what they suffer, then love will permit that suffering for the sake of that goal. If your child will be more loving as a person by being discipline, then in love you must inflict pain for the sake of this higher goal. If its a good enough principle for God, it is a good enough principle for us to practice in all loving relationships.

I had to hurt Lavonne over and over again this past week. I rubbed her damaged muscle to fight the inflammation. It was painful, but I did it willingly, for I knew it was the only way to get her back to health. Pain was the necessary path to pleasure. I hurt her on purpose for the sake of a positive goal. That was why Paul was in prison, and that is why a lot of negative things happen in life to all of us. The path of pain can lead to pleasure for those who wait to see where the path will lead.

Dr. Reuben Youngdahl, of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, tells of his experience on a world tour. He was enjoying the white sands of the Indian Ocean at Durham, South Africa. He gave no thought to sunburn until it was too late, and he looked like a lobster. He was so sick in the night he considered going to the hospital. He had to spend the rest of his time there sitting in the shade watching others have fun. The day of his great suffering was the day the blue-battle fish infested the shore waters, and with their stingers sent over 1000 swimmers to the hospital. 150 were poisoned serious enough to be hospitalized. Several almost died. He could have been one, and so he realized that his misfortune was also his good fortune. His pain saved him from worse pain, or even death.

President Theodore Roosevelt lived before bifocals were invented. The result was he had to carry two pairs of glasses with him. One was for near vision, and the other for far vision. In his last campaign he was shot when he was in Milwaukee. The surgeon who examined his wound handed him his steel spectacle case and said that the bullet hit this case, and it was deflected from your heart, and saved your life. The president took the case with its shattered spectacle and said, I've always considered the burden and handicap of having to carry these two pairs of glasses, especially these heavy ones that were in this case, as a very sore one, and here at last they have been the means of saving my life." It was a long wait to see any good from that negative reality, but in the long run it turned out that his burden was a blessing.

Arturo Toscanini, the famous orchestra conductor, hated being handicapped with his near sightedness. At nineteen he was playing the cello in an orchestra, but he could not see the music on the stand, so he had to

work harder than anyone, and memorize the music. One day the orchestra leader became ill, and suddenly Toscanini was the only member of the orchestra who knew the score. So he conducted it without the score, and got great responses from the audience. Had he not been near sighted he never would have been ready for this opportunity that lead him to become one of the great conductors of all time. The bad thing in his life became the best thing in his life for his career.

Charles Spurgeon tells the true story of how lies can be used to the glory of God. An evangelist was to preach in a small Italian town back when there was a great deal of hostility between Catholics and Protestants. The local priest told his people that this man who was coming was a worshipping of the devil. This scared many, and so they stayed away, but one depraved soul was interested in devil worship, so he went to hear the man. Nothing could have gotten him there but this lie. But when he came and heard of Jesus, the devil's conqueror, he became a convert to Jesus rather than the devil he was going to seek. God used a lie to bring this man to Jesus.

The point is not, that liars are good, or handicaps, or other bad things are of value. The whole negative aspect of a fallen world is just that-negative. It is bad, and not good, for it would all be taken into the eternal kingdom if it was good. But the fact is, it is all eliminated. We are calling black white, or evil good, for all bad things are bad. The point is, God is not limited to using good things for His purpose. He can use bad things as well, and it is to be one of the challenges of life to work with God to bring good out of evil.

What happened at Standard Oil is a good illustration in the world of industry. After oil is refined, a greasy black liquid is a waste product. They use to empty it at the river, but laws were passed to stop that. Then they dug a pit to get rid of it, but that failed. They tried to burn it, but that was almost a disaster. Finally, in desperation, they called in chemists from all over the country, and by accident they stumbled on to a way to make this massive nuisance into paraffin. This became one of the most profitable products of the refineries. This story is repeated in the history of dozens of waste products.

The point being, what is true for things is true also for events. Negatives, like the wastes of life and the bad events, can, by the grace of God be transformed into valuable products and good experiences. So don't waste anything in life, for what you feel is bad and worthless can become your most treasured event. Charles Kettering was cranking his car in the good old days, and it kicked on him and broke his arm. He thought, this is terrible. There must be an easier way to start a car. This painful event motivated him to go and invent the self-starter that has saved millions of others from suffering. One man's pain led to the greater pleasure of the masses.

That good can come out of evil does not mean there is nothing difficult to bear in the evil. Paul lost his freedom and had to be confined in chains and pay a heavy price for the good that came of it. It was not free but costly to be used of God this way. It would be just as hard, or even harder, however, if no good ever came of it. The hard part is made easier in knowing good will be the end result. Paul did eventually get executed, but he had all the joy of seeing the good that was coming because of his suffering. This is not always the case. The nuclear crisis at the reactor in Chernobyl is a good example. Many people died in that crisis, but it forced doctors to learn rapidly about the removal, treatment and transplant of bone marrow. They had

to act quickly, and they learned by trial and error, but the end result was they learned what will benefit all mankind. One of the doctors made this comment.

"We were like Star Trek. We were going where mankind had never gone before, but we were being dragged there reluctantly. Now, as a result, we have a whole new way to deal with an even cure cancer." The same chaotic energy that killed so many at Chernobyl may now result in a procedure of donor and autologous bone marrow transplants that will save thousands of lives. This new order was born of loss and chaos.

So often in history terrible things for the few can be tremendous benefits for the many. We are among the millions who are benefiting from Paul's imprisonment. Because of it, we have all the wisdom of this letter he wrote in prison. Paul suffered for your pleasure and mine. God used the bad things Paul had to endure to give good things to us. It is one of the ways of God in history to show that He is in control even though man, by his sin and folly, is perpetually doing evil and harmfully things. God is in the business of reversing the effects of man's folly.

What we need to learn from all of this is not to jump to conclusions, and write off bad experiences as total loss. Ask God to help you use the bad as a stepping stone to some good. If God loves to bring good out of evil, then don't waste evil, and let it be evil only, but seek for ways it can lead to good. A most dramatic and radical illustration of this comes from the diary of Ann Traylor, a servant girl coming to America from England. She was raped on board the ship. It was so devastating she wanted to die, but fortunately for her a Quaker lady named Henrietta Best was there, and she had been raped decades before by French soldiers. Now let's make this clear-this was a totally evil experience-it was pure evil. But the point is, it was not wasted, but used. Henrietta came to Ann and used her evil experience to bring comfort to her. Ann wrote in her diary-

She could say to me, "Hush, it happened to me, too." And those words saved my life and my reason. What resurrected me, were her love and her understanding, which, clearly, were the fruit of her own suffering; she could identify with me without pious pretense. When she consoled me and took me in her arms, I experienced the presence of God.

The evil of the past was still evil, and those who did it will be judged, but good was brought out of the evil by a wise use of it. Had Paul laid around his cell swearing at the guards, his evil experience would not have been used for good. He had to be an impressive witness to his joy in Christ in spite of his suffering, or he would have seen no fruit from his evil experience. Bad things don't lead to good by their nature. They only root like fruit and get worse. They can only lead to good as we learn to use them wisely.

The point here is not to say let's all get arrested and see what good can come of it. We are to avoid all evil, and try to prevent every bad thing in life. But when we cannot, and we have to suffer in this fallen world,

let's not waste it, and jump to the conclusion that it is of no value. Let's work with God, and seek to overcome evil with good, and rob the devil of his pleasure. Robert Schuller in his popular book, *Life's Not Fair But God Is Good*, deals with this issue, and gives many marvelous illustrations. One is of Serena Young, a Los Angeles Orthopedic Surgeon. As a two year girl in Taiwan, this Chinese toddler contracted polio, and lost the use of her legs. She was in and out of the hospital until she was 21, but never regained the use of her legs.

She was a bitter young woman. She was angry at God for allowing this to happen to her. She started to search in high school for some way to make sense of this, which seems so senseless, and this is what she discovered; Rom. 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have called according to His purpose." She wanted her handicap to be used for good, and so she began to pray that God would use her tragedy for something good. She stopped her grieving and accepted her disability. She decided she wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon. She was told that it was crazy, but she felt it was God's calling, and though the training was so hard she wanted to quit at times, she persevered, and now has a very fulfilling career helping people deal with their handicaps. The Los Angeles Times had a picture of her propped up on crutches leaning over an operating table giving help and hope to others, who like her, had been dealt a bad hand. She was not wasting her bad experience, but was using it for good, and for the glory of God, whom she praises for helping her see bad things can be used for His purposes. May God help us all learn this lesson, and strive by God's grace to bring good out of evil.

10.FRUITFUL FRUSTRATION Based on I Thess. 2:13F

Joe Bayly had a chance to stay in the luxurious Hilton Hotel in Chicago. It was going to be a treat of a retreat, but then he was hit again by the x-factor. That is what he calls Murphy's Law-the law that says, if anything can go wrong it will. The hot water in his room would not work. He was frustrated, but not all that surprised, for the x-factor is everywhere. It is like the law of gravity. It starts in childhood with getting the mumps on Thanksgiving. Then when you wear your new shoes, you get a deep scratch in them the first time, which you can't even remember happening to your old worn out pair. Then you move up to breaking an arm just as summer vacation begins. Later on, the night before your first date you get a big pimple on your face. Some people do grow out of the pimples, but nobody ever grows out of the x-factor. Bayly says, when he finally gets a chance to sleep in late, that is when some unusual event will wake him up an hour before his usual time.

Dr. R. F. Gumperson began serious research on the x-factor back in 1938. He made some discoveries that led the x-factor to be called Gumperson's law by many. Some of his discoveries were-

1. That a child exposed to a disease for weeks without catching it will then without exposure come down with it the day before the family vacation.
2. That the dishwasher is most likely to break down on an evening in which you are expecting guests.
3. That good parking places are most often seen on the other side of the street.
4. That a man who can't start a fire with a box of matches and the Sunday paper will start a forest fire when he throws a burnt match out of his car

window.

There is no telling what other discoveries his genius may have yielded had he not been killed in 1947. He was walking along the highway one evening facing the traffic as wise walkers do, when he was struck by a visiting Englishman who was driving on the shoulder.

The x-factor got him. It gets us all at sometime or another, and the reason I am preaching on it is because it has recently gotten us. As we were going through a very frustrating time, it suddenly dawned on me that this is a major cause of suffering in the world, and it would fit right into my series on suffering. I knew the Bible would have something to say about an experience so universal, and so when I began to search, it was not long before I discovered that it is a major factor in Biblical revelation.

Let me share some of our experience to show what motivated me to study the subject of frustration. Lavonne and I always look forward to May because that is our anniversary month, and for many years it has been our month for a special get away. This year it was even more important to us because Lavonne had been ill so much with a strange virus that would come and go. It came more than it went, and left her weak and bedridden. I have had to do things I have seldom or never done in cleaning, cooking, and taking care of her. She was getting better, and the Sunday before our vacation she was in both services and felt good. But then the x-factor got us. Monday she was ill again, and the first two days of our vacation we were going to specialists. On the third day she was admitted to Bethesda Hospital, and that is where we spent Wednesday to Saturday.

It was the most frustrating vacation we have ever experienced. This deep taste of frustration made me realize just how powerful a force frustration can be in people's lives.

I know everybody gets frustrated, but when it is a prolonged experience, it has all kinds of potential for being destructive. I better understand the battle of those who endure long range frustration. And I better understand why it is one of Satan's most powerful tools to damage the Christian life. I realized how important it is for Christians not to be ignorant of Satan's devices, and I became determined to find out what God's Word had to say about this serious subject. We can't begin to cover it in one message, but what we can cover is enough to help us be aware of some basics. The first thing we want to look at is-

I. THE FACT OF FRUSTRATION.

By this I mean, it is a part of our fallen world, and it goes with the territory. There is no escape. To be human is to experience frustration. It is not sinful to be frustrated, for Jesus was sinless, but He did not escape frustration. He may have had more than His share even, for the more ideals and goals you have, the more you will be frustrated. That is why Paul had so many frustrations. In our text, Paul says he wanted to come to see the Thessalonians, and he tried time and time again, but Satan stopped him. The word for stopped in the Greek is the word for frustration. Satan is the great frustrator of the Christians goals. The word means to hinder, to impede, to thwart, and thus, to prevent the achieving of a goal by being an obstacle. The military used the word to refer to the practice of making deep ruts in the roads to hold up a pursuing enemy army. You can imagine the frustration of a chariot driver in a hurry with deep ruts in the road.

Satan is a master at blocking the way to God's best. He prevents blessings just as we are to prevent suffering. All through history this has

been his strategy-to frustrate the believer in trying to reach his objective, and cause him to give up in despair. When Ezra records the attempt of God's people to rebuild the temple of God, he tells us of the strategy of Satan in chapter 4:4-5, "Then the people's around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia." It is one of the facts of life we have to face, even if we hate it, and would rather not be aware of it. If we try to do something that we know is the will of God, we will have to expect frustration.

Be not weary in well doing says Paul, and why? Because he knows from experience that well-doing is not a piece of cake. It is hard work, and often will not lead to the results you hope for. That is why Jesus had to experience so much frustration. He was perpetually going about doing good, but was it all greeted with gratitude? Not so! The Pharisees treated Him like a criminal for loving people so much that He would ignore their laws to heal people. It frustrated Jesus that those who were supposed to represent God cared more about rules than about people. Jesus was frustrated with His own disciples because they were so much like the world, and they quarreled among themselves for status. He was frustrated over Jerusalem, for He loved the people and wanted to protect them from the wrath to come, but they would not listen and open their hearts to Him. Jesus wept over the city in frustration.

We could do a whole study just on the frustration of Jesus, but the point we need to stress is that frustration is just a fact of life. It is not wrong to be frustrated. It is just a reality that needs to be recognized. It makes a world of difference to know this, and that Jesus and Paul, and all God's people, are in this together. Frustration, or the being hindered from reaching goals, is a normal experience for all who are in the will of God. It is not a sign that you are failing God, or that you are on the wrong path. If Satan can get you to feel this way, his strategy will be effective, and frustration can lead to failure. When Christians lose their cool because of frustration, they do all kinds of meaningless or destructive things.

The poet Homer, in his epic The Odyssey, tells of how the Greek General Olysses was leading his army toward Troy, and came unexpectedly upon a flooded river he could not cross. He was so frustrated by this obstacle that he went out into the river up to his knees and began to thrash the water with chains. As might be expected, the river gave no response to his rage. The nervous energy created by frustration needs to be channeled toward constructive ends, and we will look at this in a moment, but we first need to get it in our heads that frustration is a fact of life, and something we all need to cope with, even in the will of God.

Edwin Erickson, our Conference missionary in Ethiopia, wrote of the many frustrations he and his wife faced as they returned to Ethiopia. He writes, "A home that sometimes seems like a dorm. City water that occasionally disappears when it is most needed. A basement that sometimes floods after a heavy rain. A guest house for our Ethiopian brothers and sisters that has plumbing problems. People needing medical attention. We need patience to find our niche, try to be ourselves and at the same time be God's servants. Pray for us that we will not be overwhelmed or frustrated

by human expectations
as we discover what God expects from us."

Frustration is a common battle on the foreign field, but it is the same on the home field. Listen to Gary Odle, who is a home missionary trying to get a new church started. His testimony represents thousands of Christians in their struggle to be used of God. He writes, "We tried everything. We did door-to-door survey work and evangelism. No results. We organized a neighbor barbecue at the community swimming pool, personally inviting over 500 people and handing out flyers. No results. We promoted neighborhood information meetings for those looking for a church home. Many said they were sincerely interested-but no results." He goes on with more efforts that got no response, and he concludes, "By December I was frustrated: All this work and expense with little to show for it. Doubt assailed me. Maybe I am the wrong man for the job. Maybe I am going about this in the wrong way. Maybe I'm not spiritual enough. Maybe I should quit."

Doubts and depression are the common results of frustration, and if they are allowed to become the dominant emotions in one's life, they lead to becoming weary in well doing. Thousands of Christian soldiers go AWOL, and do just that-they quit. But Paul did not quit. He faced the fact of frustration frequently, but he refused to fail because of it. He was thrown in prison, and run out of town. He was unjustly punished, and had to endure all kinds of frustrating delays, and being let down by fellow Christians who, like Demas, forsook him. Then, on top of the Satanic obstacles in his path, and the human hindrances to his goals, there was also the God caused frustrations. God's ways are not our ways, and the result is, Paul had goals and ambitions that God prevented, and thus, frustrated.

In Acts 16:6-7 we see God guides sometimes by closing doors we want to go through. He forces us to go through doors He wants us to go through. In other words, frustration can even be a part of God's providential leading. Dr. Luke writes, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Paul went West instead of East, and Christianity became predominately a Western rather than an Eastern movement, because Christ hindered Paul's plan, and promoted his own.

So frustration can be both demonic and divine, and to round it off, we need to see it can also be self-caused. Paul was frustrated with the Galatian Christians for listening to the Judaizers, who would drag them back under the law. But he blamed external forces on their being obstructive, and he writes in Gal. 5:7, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?" Cut in on is the same Greek word for frustrated. This word is also used by Peter to refer to self-hindrance. In I Pet. 3:7 he writes, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Unanswered prayer is one of the great frustrations of the Christian life, but you can't blame the devil for it all, for Peter says we frustrate our own goals when we refuse to relate to our mate in the way God desires.

Paul recognized the danger of self-frustration also, and that is why he put up with a lot of things that were not the best, because he did not want to frustrate the plan of God. He writes in I Cor. 9:12, "If others have this

right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ." Paul is saying, he would rather endure frustration of his rights than cause the frustration of the Gospel. We have not begun to cover all the reality of frustration, but we have established that it is a fact of life that is inevitable, and has its source in-

1. The Satanic.
2. The Spirit.
3. The self.

There's no escape from the fact of frustration. All we can do is respond wisely or unwisely to this fact, and that leads us to consider our second point which is-

II. THE FRUIT OF FRUSTRATION.

Even bad responses to frustration can lead to getting your own way, but these do not produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is always to be the Christian goal. A child is the prime example of how to cope with frustration in an immature manner. We should expect this of a child, but their bad example is not to be our guide. A child responds to frustration with anger, and then a tantrum, if the frustration is not quickly relieved. It is wonderful that children are the weakest segment of society. If they controlled power, history would be a short story. Block a child from getting his own way, and you often create a monster. Fortunately, their fangs and other weapons are not yet fully formed.

Fruitful frustration calls for acceptance and adjustment. It does not make any difference if the blocked goal is a result of Satan, the Holy Spirit, or the self, for the only way you can be creative in your use of frustration is to accept the reality of it, and adjust your goal. That is what Paul did. He did not stand before closed doors and pound until he was bloody. He walked away and entered other doors. He did not say, if I can't have it my way, I quit. He accepted the fact that his way was not possible, and he would have to go a different direction. He knew how to retreat as well as advance. A strategic retreat has saved many an army, and wise is the general who knows when retreat is the key to victory. A stubborn inflexible determination to have your own way regardless of the consequences is not a Christian virtue. It is like childish rebellion against reality. Paul did not like it that he could not get to the Thessalonians or to Romans, for he was hindered, but he did not devote his life to grieving or to rebellion. Instead, he went elsewhere and did the will of God.

I am sure Paul did not like the experience of being thrown in prison, but he did not, in frustration, bang his head on the bars, or go into a vegetative mood of depression. He got out his pen and wrote letters that changed the course of history. He accepted his limitations, and adjusted to the situation, and did something else other than his plan A, and God used plan B to accomplish even more than Paul ever dreamed of doing with plan A. Even God's frustrating no can be a blessing if we accept it and adjust to doing something other than what we planned to do.

Nobody gets their own way all the time. Look at king David, for he had a deep desire to build a temple for God. It was one of the great dreams of his life. But God said no. God put the block before him, and hindered him from achieving this great goal. God said to David that Solomon his son would do it, and it would be known as the temple of Solomon, and not the temple of David. What a frustrating development, but David did not say, if I can't make the rules of the game, I won't play. He accepted the fact that he could

not do all he wanted to, and he adjusted to this reality and said, I can at least collect all the materials needed for the project, and that is what he did. Someone said, "If you can't do all the that you want, you can want to do all that you can." That is what frustrated people do who do what is wise to do in frustration.

Paul was so frustrated when the Jews would not respond to the Gospel. He loved them and longed for them to be saved, but when they rejected the Gospel, he did not give up and quit, but went to the Gentiles and became the apostle to the Gentiles. Abraham Lincoln wanted people to love and support him for his fight against slavery. Instead, he got letters threatening his life. They came on a consistent basis, and they were a frustration to him, but he finally adjusted, and recognized he could not stop other people's folly. He could only choose to go on with his goals, and that is what he did. He wrote, "I long ago made up my mine that if anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. If I wore a shirt of mail and kept myself surrounded by a bodyguard, it would be all the same. There are a thousand ways to getting a man if it is desired that he should be killed." He did not stop the assassin who finally got him, but he also never let the frustration of that threat keep him from doing the best he could to stop slavery.

Doctors face frequent frustration because of the complexity of medicine and the body. What cures one kills another, and every cure is also a potential cause of other problems. Dr. S. I. McMillen, college physician of Houghton College, a well known Christian institution, tells of the 35 year old Mrs. Cheryl Wilkins who had the dread disease of Lupus. She was put on high dosages of Prednisone. It probably saved her life, but her eyes bulged, her blood pressure was high, and she had headaches and emotion problems. She became a walking medical museum. This is frustrating to doctors when causing suffering is the only way they know how to help people. They have terribly frustrating limitations, and they get plenty of flak because of it, but thank God they don't give up. They have to face up to the reality of their limitations, and press on doing what they can.

Paul could not choose where he would be all the time, so he chose to start a church wherever he happen to be. He could not choose to be well off all the time, for sometimes he was forced to be poor and do without. Since he could not choose, he came to the ultimate adjustment and writes in Phil. 4:11-13, "....I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

I never saw it before, but this famous saying of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," is directly related to frustration. He is not saying he has some kind of plug into omnipotence and can do whatever he pleases. He is saying, when I can't do what I please, and when I can't be where I want, and when I can't have what I wish, and life refuses to go my way, I can, by the power of Christ, be content. I can adjust to the fact of frustration, and I can make it fruitful by accepting it, and choosing to refuse to let it get me down and discouraged.

Satan could not defeat Paul, because Paul learned the secret of victory over frustration. If you way is blocked, go a different way. If you can't, then stop where you are, and do something different. Adjust to changing circumstances, and be content in the state you are in, regardless of what goals are being frustrated, for that is the key to being fruitful. The

popular idea that says, if life gives you a lemon, make lemonade, is not off the mark, for it fits the mind of Paul. Keep in mind, we do not always know if our goals are being frustrated by God, Satan, others, or even ourselves, but the response on our part has to be the same if we are to make them fruitful.

When my granddaughter was brought to the hospital to visit Lavonne, she had some very specific goals in mind. Two of them especially stand out. The goal of ripping the Guidepost Magazine out of the lounge, and the goal of pulling the plug for the TV out of the socket. My goal was to frustrate her two major objectives. The score was a tie, for I only partially prevented it, and she only partially achieved it. The point is, I was being frustrating to her for her own safety, and for the benefit of others. Everyone would have been the loser had she been free to do as she pleased.

Frustration is not all bad, and so we have to accept it with that in mind. It could be, the obstacles in our way preventing us from fulfilling our will are really beneficial. But even if they are not, and are of the devil, or have their source in human folly, there is only one intelligent response to frustration. It is the response of Paul at his conversion, and for the rest of his life. Jesus stopped him cold in his plan to arrest Christians, and Paul knocked from his horse, blind and frustrated, said to Jesus, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" His response of obedience made this one of the most fruitful frustrations of history, and he had many more to come.

One of the most famous works of art in the world is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. When the pope asked Michaelangelo to paint it, he protested. He was a sculpture not a painter, but the pope would not take no for an answer. He started this colossal task in frustration. He had to paint ten thousand square feet of ceiling with pictures that would form a unified design. It took 343 figures, some of them 18 feet high. To make it more impossible, the five artists hired to help him were all sent home, and their work destroyed. He would have to do it as a one man project.

He felt it is was too difficult and beyond him. He did not feel like a genius, but was tormented by frustration at the difficulty of the task he was forced to do against his will. The first scaffolding had to be torn down and rebuilt. The first section he painted developed a mold and he begged the pope to let him quit, but he refused. So, month after month he lay on back 68 feet up in the air doing a job he did not want to do. After about four and a half years of this agonizing labor the work was uncovered in Oct. of 1512, and for over 450 years it stands as one of the wonders of the world of art. The point is, Michaelangelo was frustrated with this task from start to finish, but he did not, because of his frustration, blow it, and do a poor job. He did his best in spite of frustration, and made it one of the most fruitful periods of his life. He couldn't do what he wanted, but he wanted to do what he could, and he did.

Frustration is not eliminated by a wise response to it, but it can be elevated so that the negative energy is used for positive purposes. The most frustrating thing in life has to be living without assurance of one's destination. It is frustrating not to know for sure if you are going into eternity as God's friend or foe. This frustration can be the most fruitful of all, if it moves you to take God's gift, and to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, and, thereby, have assurance of salvation. This would make it life's greatest fruitful frustration.

CHAPTER 11. THE PARADOX OF MONEY Based on I Tim. 6:3-10

Someone said, life is an everlasting struggle to keep money coming in, and teeth, hair, and vital organs from coming out. Few have known this better than General Ulysses S. Grant. He led the armies of the North to victory in the Civil War, and was twice elected president of the United States. He was a fairly wealthy man when he retired from public office, but he proved that the wealthy have problems with money too. They make mistakes on a grander scale. Grant invested his capital in a new Wall Street investment firm operated by a smooth talking young man, whom Grant considered a financial wizard. If the ability to make money disappear was what he meant, then he was a wizard, indeed, for Grant lost everything, and at 62 he was penniless.

Among his many friends was Samuel Clemens who had published many successful books under the name of Mark Twain. Clemens convinced Grant he should write about the Civil War, and he would publish his book. Grant signed the contract and got to work producing two volumes that rank among the world's great military narratives. Grant got 10 thousand in advance, and his widow got 200 thousand in royalties. His heirs also got close to half a million. Clemens made a fortune on the deal, and he decided to try it with two other famous generals. It didn't work, and Clemens had some reverses that led him to go bankrupt at age 59. He too made a come back, and when he died in 1910 he left his heirs over half a million.

These two famous men illustrate the universal battle of life-how to make money; how to keep it, and how to make it count. The Christian does not escape this battle at all. The Christian spends a large portion of life engaged in making, spending, giving, saving, and losing money. What makes this hard is the Christian is not endowed with any special gift that enables him to be any wiser than the non-Christian in his management of money. That is why the New Testament is so full of warnings about money, and the danger of being obsessed by it. There is also, as in our text, a lot of New Testament advice on how to use money wisely.

All of this would be unnecessary if Christians were just naturally financial wizards, but this is not the case. Martin Luther was one of the great theological minds of history, but he had no skill whatever with money management. At age 42 he had not yet saved a penny. When he married Katherine Von Bora she discovered he was a money management drop out, who let money slip through his fingers with no accounting for where it went. She had to tell their banker not to honor a draft unless she first approved it. She had to take over to protect him from himself. This story has been repeated over and over again in the lives of Christian leaders.

C. S. Lewis was one of the most brilliant Christians of the 20th century, but he had no sense of money management. When Joy Davidman married him, she found that he had thousands of pounds he didn't even know he had. He also had a small fortune in his checking account, and this was back in the day when there was no interest on it. She quickly got it into a savings account.

One of the reasons many genius type people are not good money managers is because money is not that important to them. They are preoccupied with other and greater things. Einstein, for example, sometimes used his check as a book mark, and then turned it into the library. Robert Frost wrote,

Never ask of money spent
Where the spender thinks it went.
Nobody was ever meant
To remember or invent
What they did with every cent.

It is admirable to be preoccupied with values greater than money, and not to be obsessed with it. Prov. 3:13-14 says, "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding. For she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold." Luther and Lewis were wise in devoting their minds to greater values than money management. But the higher wisdom yet is to know how to use money wisely without it being the dominant occupation of your mind. The Proverbs also speak highly of the values of money. Prov. 10:15-16 says, "The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor. The wages of the righteous brings them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment." The balance life calls for both the avoidance of addiction to money, and the application of the advantages of money. In other words, money is a paradox. It is both dangerous and delightful; a curse and a blessing.

Paul says the love of money is the root of all evil, and Mark Twain said, the lack of money is the root of all evil. The one does not eliminate the other, for Twain's remark compliments Paul's. It is lack of money that leads people to such an obsessive love of it that they do all kinds of evil to get it. The point is, it is hard to say anything about money, either negative or positive, that cannot be demonstrated to be a valid statement. The poem, The Song Of Silver says,

Doug from the mountain-side, washed in the glen
Servant am I or the master of men.
Steal me, I curse you,
Earn me, I bless you;
Grasp me and hand me, a friend I shall possess you.
Lie for me, die for me, covet me, take me,
Angel or devil, I am what you make me.

This is just what Paul is saying in our text. Paul recognizes fully the paradox of money, and so he covers both sides by sharing warnings as to its dangers, and wisdom as to its delights. If we are going to open our homes to Christ, we will have to be aware that He is aware of how we see and use money. This is a vital part of our life for Him, for money is a major means by which we become a part of His upper class, which is the servant class. It is important that we have a good grasp of both the dangers and delights of money. First lets look at-

I. THE DANGERS OF MONEY.

The primary danger is in its power to deceive us into believing it is a substitute for God. Paul says the eagerness to be rich has led some to wander from the faith. Moneytheism-the almighty dollar replaces monotheism. Christians can be deceived into thinking of it as a substitute for their love. They expect money to convey their love, and solve all problems in relationships. Joyce Landorf in her book, Tough And Tender writes, "We seem to have accepted money as the cure-all for every disease, need, or problem imaginable. A man who has not said one real thing to his wife in years shrugs his shoulders and says, 'I don't know what she wants-she's got everything. She can go out and buy anything. She's got the house, clothes, and tons of things. What else does she need?' He has made the money, bought the myth,

and paid for it. All he has to show for himself is a large brick wall made up of material possessions which stand solidly between him and his wife. He thought his money would buy a bridge; instead it has built a wall,...."

That is why money is so dangerous. It makes so many people sincere in their conviction that it will be the cure-all. There are few human beings alive who have not sincerely thought that a million dollars would solve all of their problems. It could, in fact, do just that, but it could also add a whole new batch that you never dreamed of having. Paul says those who desire to get rich mess their lives up good. Paul must have had some good examples in his day, but we have many more in our day. Kit Konolige has written a book called, *The Richest Woman In The World*. It is a fascinating book, not about common place millionaires, but about those more rare people who have over 150 million. There are only between 400 and 500 such people in the United States, and 58 of them are women.

Before you turn green with envy, you need to know how much it cost to be this rich. First of all, you are usually widowed or divorced. If you are still married to a man who has not worked himself to death, you probably have an unfaithful husband, and a very unhappy relationship. There is an excellent chance that you hate your kids, and the feeling is mutual. Many are the stories like that of John Dodge of the auto fortune, who in 1983 sued his mother for 4 million. She had just gone on a world wide shopping spree and had spent 11 million, so she was short of cash. She gave him 500,000, and that started a fight. The feuds and scandals, and the disgraceful behavior of the rich is all on record. We don't have to go by faith in Paul's warning, for we have all we need by sight.

Palm Beach Florida is the home of the super rich where their motto is, anything worth doing is worth doing to excess, and they lived by that motto. It is a materialistic paradise, but it is an Eden after the fall, with drugs, divorce, immorality, suicide, prejudice, and all of the miseries of the heart that you find in the ghetto. They drowned their sorrows in expensive champagne rather than cheap wine, but it does not lead to anymore happiness. Many of those rich people spend a fortune on psychoanalysis. They have guilt that robs them of their peace of mind, and they can't be bought off. They live so often in fear. They have fear of someone kidnaping their children; fear of being robbed, and all sorts of fears about losing their money.

They are often depressed, for they have nothing to do. They don't have to do anything, and so they do those things that people do who don't have to do anything: They play, go to balls, socialize, and seldom do anything creative. This leads to them missing so much of the joy of life, for they miss creative work. They never know if anyone likes them for themselves, rather than their money, and they usually learn the hard way that they are targets of many fortune hunters and con games. Their temptation to do evil is overwhelming, because they can afford to do anything, and few can escape being corrupted by such power.

The point of all this, and we haven't started to cover it all, is that Paul is right, and it can be documented by history and contemporary life-money is dangerous. If you start falling in love with it, you will end up married to a financial frankenstein. It is a monster that will make you pay a price to be rich that is not worth it. Most people can't afford to be rich, but they do not realize it until it is too late. It is true that all of these problems are experienced by the poor and the middle class as well, but they have the hope that money will solve their problems. The rich have no such hope. Let's look now at-

II. THE DELIGHTS OF MONEY.

In verses 17-19 Paul stresses two positive delights of money by saying it is the key to enjoyment, and to the service of others needs. God has given us everything He says for our enjoyment, and with the excess we can pass it on and help others to enjoy life. Money wisely used is a major factor in happiness, both for time and eternity, for a wise use of it in time will lay up treasure for you in eternity. In this chapter where Paul warns about the danger of the love of money, he also makes it clear that money can be a powerful agent of love. Paul's point in saying the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil was not to get Christians to hate money, but to get them to see that a proper use of money can make it the root of all kinds of good. You cannot serve God and mammon, but you can serve God with mammon.

This paragraph of Paul deals with the other side of the paradox, and makes money the friend of the Christian, and the tool by which he does the will of God. The majority of the things we enjoy in life, and which give us pleasure and grateful hearts, are those things that we have been able to make our own because we have had money. There is joy, not only in having food, shelter, and clothing, and all the security and self-esteem these provide, but there is joy in being able to provide these for those we love. Paul says that those who do not provide for their own are worse than infidels. Our happiness as people, and as Christians, is directly involved with the money we have to provide for our family.

In order to be generous you have to have an excess of money. It is hard for a starving man with a piece of crust to be generous. Only those who have more than they need can do good deeds, and meet the needs of those who do not have the necessities. In other words, one of the delights of money is that it gives you the ability to be a source of enjoyment for those beyond your family. The reason it is more blessed to give than to receive is, because when you are a giver it means you have been blest with excess wealth, and you already enjoy what the receiver does, plus you get the added joy of being the source of their enjoyment. The receiver is blest, but the giver is doubled blest, and this is one of the delights of money being wisely used. It is a powerful force for good in the world.

Obedience to all of Christ's commands to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and in general meet the needs of suffering people, all depend on having money. The Good Samaritan could not have taken the beaten man to an inn and paid for his care had he not had enough money. His loving heart would not have mattered had he been broke, for he needed money to adequately meet this man's needs. Jesus could feed the 5,000 without an investment of funds, but He knows we cannot feed anyone without money, and so He knows that money is the key to caring about needy people. The ministries of the church all over the world depend upon God's people sharing their wealth.

Good money management enables the Christian to have more to give, and it helps the body of Christ do its job more effectively. Pharaoh saw in Joseph a man with a mind for management. He let him take over the management of Egypt's agriculture. Joseph developed a massive savings program, whereby he would save the abundance of the bountiful years to supply the need in the barren years. We do not know how many lives he saved, but on top of the Egyptian's, he saved his own family, and thereby the survival of God's people.

God's plan of salvation does include the idea of saving money, and the wise use of money. Jesus needed to earn money as a carpenter, and He needed a treasurer to take care of the purchases made for His band of disciples. There

is no escape for the need for money, but if we have the right attitude, we can see it is a tool to help us be all that God wants us to be. You cannot be a steward of God if you do not have any money to manage. Well done thou good and faithful servant was spoken to one who had managed his master's money wisely. The wise use of money is a key measure of our maturity as stewards of the master. Every ministry in history has had to deal with money, and when it is not done wisely the kingdom suffers, but when it is done wisely the kingdom prospers.

Evangeline Booth after 30 years of leading the Salvation Army had 70 million dollars in capital and property to leave to her successors. She lived a life of very careful economy, and even though she was offered the chance to live like royalty, and was given the chance to stay in the most luxurious places, she refused lest people think she was using donations for her benefit. Rich people knew she used her money to help the poor, and that is why she received checks for up to a half a million dollars.

R. G. LeTourneau was one of the greatest stewards of God in history. When the book, God Runs My Business, was published in 1941, he had already given 10 million to the cause of Christ. His motto was, "Not how much of my money do I give to God, but how much of God's money do I keep for myself." He recognized that all he had was a gift from God, and his job was to use it wisely for his master, and he did.

When Billy Graham and George Beverly Shea and Cliff Borrows, and others, sat down to plan the strategy of their evangelism, they looked at the issues that had to be corrected that made evangelists unpopular. The number one problem was money. The constant begging and manipulation of people for money gave evangelists a bad name. They wanted to be different, and they wanted to use money wisely, and this made Graham the major evangelist of this century. Back in 1952, a millionaire came to Graham. He said he would underwrite his ministry so that he would not have to worry about finances. Graham refused the offer, for he said he gets thousands of letters a week with a dollar of five dollars in them, and he said, "My work would nose-dive immediately if they knew that a rich man was underwriting me."

All of live on both sides of the paradox of money, but the more we become aware of the presence of Christ in our lives, the more we will move from the dangers of money into the delights of money. One of the most dramatic examples of this is the life of Mary K. Beard. Evelyn Christensen titles her story in her book, What Happens When God Answers. She was abused by her alcoholic father who broke her back, all her ribs, and her nose twice. She ran away from home at 15 and married the first man she could find. He was a gambler and a thief. For 5 years she followed him in a continuous crime spree. She lived with beautiful clothes, jewels, and a costume built car. They lived for money, for it was their God.

They were eventually arrested and sentenced to 21 years in prison. Mary repented in prison and fell on the concrete floor, and gave her life to Christ. On March 16, 1973 this money worshiper became a worshiper of Christ, and what a chance this made in how she saw and used money. She first of all became the first woman in the United States to receive a graduate degree while serving time in prison. She gave her mind to Christ. She then decided to minister to people who did not have the money to enjoy some of the common blessings of life. Many prisoners families do not have money for Christmas presents, for example. She started what is called Angel Tree. Children of prisoners write down on a piece of paper what they would like, and these are hung on Christmas trees in churches, shopping malls, and public places.

People take an angel from the tree and purchase the gift written on it. This nation wide project has provided presents for 31,500 children, as of 1987.

Jesus enjoyed being rich, for it was only by His infinite worth that He could purchase our redemption. If He had no worth, He could not have been our Savior. All giving depends on having. Having can be a delight as well as a danger. It was Christ's delight to give up His riches and become poor that we might be made rich. One of the reasons we can rejoice at communion is because it represents the basis for our inheriting eternal life and all the riches that accompany it. Thanks to Jesus we who love Him will be rich forever. The question for us is, is Jesus pleased with how we use what He has given us? Are others blest because we have learned to use money wisely? If so, then we are on the right side of the paradox of money.

12. PAUL'S PARADOXICAL PERSONALITY Acts 21:17-26

A lion, a fox, and a hyena were moving through the jungle collecting their dinner. When they were done they had gotten a large pile of animals. The lion said to the hyena, "Why don't you go over and divide the pile into three equal parts." The hungry hyena said, "Sure." He quickly separated the dead animals in three equal piles. Immediately the lion sprung to his feet, and pounced on the hyena, and killed him. He then put the three piles back together, and threw the hyena on top. Then he said to the fox, "Why don't you go over and divide the pile into two equal parts." The fox shuffled over and pulled out a crow and made that his pile, and he left all the rest for the lion. The lion smiled and said, "Mr. fox, how did you learn to divide so equally?" The fox answered, "The hyena taught me."

Learning can take place fast with the proper motivation. The Bible says that Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. The wise man learns fast that you don't eat this lion, or you will soon be a part of the menu. But Satan is not the only lion in the Bible. In Rev. 5:5 Jesus is called Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Paul learned fast that here is another lion you don't mess with. Jesus sprung on Paul on the road to Damascus, and He knocked him to the ground, blinded. Paul was persecuting his people, and Jesus took it personal, just like a mother lion if someone is hurting her cubs.

The paradoxical difference in these two lions is that the goal of one is to devour, and the goal of the other is to deliver. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah attacked Saul of Tarsus and delivered him from a life of bondage to law, and made him Paul the Apostle of liberty, with a Gospel of freedom and life for all men. It was not the lion's bite, but the lion's light that penetrated Paul, and made him a reflector of that light. This lion, and his prey, became the awesome twosome who together made Christianity a world wide movement that broke down the walls between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul was no lion tamer, but he had the paradoxical experience of being tamed by this Lion of heaven, who was king, not of the jungle only, but of the universe. Jesus became Paul's Lord and King, and from his conversion on, Paul was a man with one priority-to do his Master's will. But what we want to see is that being lion-tamed, that is under the Lordship of Christ, does not mean one is robbed of their individuality and uniqueness. Paul, as a Christian, was still a very complex man with a great deal of variety about him. He is different from any of the other Apostles. The more we study him, the

more we will see he is the product of two worlds. He has both a strong Jewish background, and a strong Gentile background. He is a hybrid, and brings together in one personality some radical differences.

Paul took seriously the obviously impossible goal of being all things to all men. The result is, he had the potential for pleasing everybody, but also for aggravating everybody, and Paul was quite good at both. As far as I can weigh the evidence, he was the most wanted man in the New Testament—dead or alive. There were more plots to kill Paul than there was against Jesus, and all of the other Apostles put together. Paul made more people angry than any other New Testament personality. He was the most criticized by non-Christians and by Christians alike. He has been the most controversial man of the New Testament throughout history, and still is today. People love him or hate him, and sometimes it is the same people, for Paul can be so loving and yet so demanding.

James S. Stewart, the great preacher, said, "Paul can contradict himself, can land himself at times in hopeless antinomy, can leap without warning from one point of view to another totally different, can say in the same breath, work out your own salvation, and it is God working in you, but through it all and beneath it all there is a living unity and a supreme consistency...." His consistency is that he was following his Lord, for Jesus was also a paradoxical personality. Jesus said such things as, to save our life we must lose it, to live we must die. Paul says, to conquer we must surrender. Jesus says, to be exalted we must be humble. Paul says, to be wise we must become fools. Jesus said, to be first we must be last. Paul said, to be strong we must be weak. Paul said we are to have the mind of Christ in us, and he certainly did. He was Lion-tamed, and trained to think like his Lord.

William Wilkinson writes, "Paul, like his Lord, was found of paradoxes, and like his Lord he presented in himself a miracle of paradoxes reconciled." In our text, and in the context, we see in Paul a man of unbelievable stubbornness and unbeatable flexibility. He could be as hard as nails, and as soft as putty. When it came to his goal there was no compromise, but when it came to means toward a goal Paul was open to compromise. If we could be like Paul, we could stand fast, and yet bend at the right time, so as to be more effective in being a tool for the kingdom of God. Let's examine the two sides of this particular paradox in Paul, and see if we can learn something about being both stubborn and flexible. First let's look at—

I. PAUL'S DEMONSTRATION OF INFLEXIBILITY.

Verse 17 simply states that Paul arrived in Jerusalem. That sounds innocent enough until you go back and see that Paul, in his determination to reach Jerusalem, defied most all of the steps for knowing the will of God. He rejected the counsel, advice, and warnings of just about everybody who cared about him. Paul smashed through more road blocks to get to Jerusalem than he did to get anywhere else in his world wide travels. He was like a man obsessed. He would let no one hinder him in reaching this destination. It was Jerusalem or bust for Paul, and he meant it.

Everybody else saw Paul on a collision course with his deadly opponents among the Jews. It was like watching him play chicken, and as the two vehicles raced toward each other, they warn Paul to pull off and save yourself! But Paul never flinched, but like his Lord before him, he set his face steadfastly for Jerusalem. Look at the obstacles he plowed through to get there. In verse 4 of chapter 21 it says, "Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them 7 days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on

to Jerusalem." But Paul said good-bye and headed on to Jerusalem. Then in verses 10 to 11, it says a prophet named Agabus bound his hands and feet with Paul's belt and said, "This is what the Jews will do to Paul if he goes to Jerusalem." It was a prophecy right from the Spirit of God, and everyone else was persuaded that Paul needed to change his course. Then in verse 12 we read, "When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem."

Paul just said that he was ready to die if need be, but he was not going to turn back. They argued with Paul, but he was so absolutely determined that they just gave up. Everybody gave up on Paul, for nothing could change his mind. He would not listen to anybody. When Dr. Luke says we pleaded with him, he was including himself, and so all of Paul's best friends were all convinced he was making a mistake. Red lights were flashing everywhere, but all Paul could see was green, and he was ready to go. He was marching to a different drummer, and was as stubborn as any saint has ever been. All his friends were like gnats trying to stop a run away locomotive. Their efforts were all in vain, and Paul went on to Jerusalem.

Paul was as mule-headed as anybody in history. There are some who match him, however. Colonel Thomas Butler Jr., the Revolutionary War hero is an example. He fought in many major battles, and Washington used him for special assignments. When Thomas Jefferson became president, he made a new rule that American soldiers could no longer wear pigtailed. For over a century it had been a custom for military men to wear a braid of long hair down their back, usually tied with a ribbon. Now they were to be cut off. It had nothing to do with our feelings about being feminine. Jefferson wanted no badges of aristocracy, and the monarchy of the past.

Men of all ranks complained bitterly as their locks were shorn. It made them feel like convicts, but they had no choice. With one exception, Colonel Butler, they all obeyed. Because of his great service to his country, the touchy issue was avoided for two years by his commanding officer. But then they got into an argument, and the General ordered him to cut it off. He refused and was arrested, and was taken to trial in 1803. After 6 months in prison the General offered to release him if he would obey the order. He said he would not do so, and appealed to Andrew Jackson, and got a petition going which was signed by prominent citizens. The General countered with a court martial. But before the papers reached him, Colonel Butler died of yellow fever. He knew his end was near, and so had his friends prepare his coffin with a hole board through the coffin right under his head, so that at his military funeral his pigtail could hang out for all to see that even while dead he was defying that order.

Now, that was stubborn, but history is filled with stubborn people. Sometimes they are a pain, but sometimes they are also a key to progress, just as Paul was the key to his being a witness for Christ to all the world. Look at key people in the history of any field, and you will see a stubborn determination to reach some goal.

Irving Berlin has been called the father of American music. His, Alexander's Ragtime Band circled the world. Back in 1895 this 7 year old refugee, son of a Jewish Rabbi, was on his first job selling papers on the East side of New York. He made 5 pennies, and when he stopped to watch a merchant ship being loaded, a crane caught him and knocked him into the East River. Some nameless Irish warf rat dove in to save him. They got him to a nearby hospital and pumped a considerable portion of the East River out of him. The intern who did it noted this interesting detail: Even though he was

rescued just as he was going down for the third time, his right hand still clutched all five of those pennies-the first he had ever earned. It was prophetic, for this poor little kid was determined to make it in America, and he did. The day would come when he would give a check for half a million to the Emergency Relief Fund. He held on to his dream, and would not let go, but persevered toward his goal.

Time does not permit, but I assure you that there are numerous true stories of how determined people have changed the world. It is a principle that works for the kingdom of darkness as well as the kingdom of light. You can't even be effective in evil without determination. Al Capone was successful as a criminal. He said there are three rules of success. The first is, you always smile; the second is, you always carry a gun; and the third is, you always stick with the plan. If you have to give one up, give up the smile. If you have to give up two, give up the gun, but you never give up the plan. He was right. He applied it wrong, but it is still true, and that is what we see in Paul-he never gave up the plan. Nothing, or nobody, could dissuade him, for he knew he was fulfilling God's plan.

In chapter 20 verses 22-24 Paul spells it out clearly as to why he was so stubbornly persistent in going to Jerusalem. He says, "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace." Paul kept pressing on because he was bitten and smitten by the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and nothing but death could stop him from doing what he was captured to do. Paul was a man of stubborn determination, and his arrival in Jerusalem was a demonstration of his inflexibility. Now, in this very context we see an example of just the opposite-we see,

II. PAUL'S DEMONSTRATION OF FLEXIBILITY.

When Paul got to Jerusalem, he found a problem waiting for him. False rumor that he was anti-Moses, and thus, anti-Jewish, had preceded him. This was not a healthy reputation to have in Jerusalem. The leaders of the church were concerned, and they had worked out a plan whereby Paul could make clear that the rumors were lies. All Paul had to do was to get directly involved in a strong Jewish custom relating to vows and purification. This would take him to the Temple, and give the Jews a live demonstration that he was pro-Jewish, and not against the customs of Israel.

Paul did not raise one word of objection to this plan, but went along with it in full cooperation to try and bring peace, and prevent a division between the Jewish and Gentile church. Now Paul would never impose this Jewish custom on the Gentiles. It had nothing to do with salvation, and there were other far more simple ways for Gentiles to be forgiven and purified without all of this legalistic ceremonialism. But for the Jewish Christians who still loved their heritage, this was the way they did things. Paul was not interested in trying to change their customs, and make them forsake their cultural heritage. As long as Jewish Christians did not consider their customs essential to their salvation, Paul could go along with them. It is no part of the Gospel to tamper with cultural issues and customs that people practice, that are not immoral.

Compromise and flexibility on non-essentials is the essence of all positive human relationships. If you are not flexible with friends, mates,

and associates in all walks of life, you will lose those relationships. No two people agree on everything. There has to be a point where you give in and compromise, and let them have their way and say. To be stubborn and inflexible, demanding your own way as the only way at all times, spells the doom of any relationship. C. G. Jung said, "You can exert no influence if you are not susceptible to influence." In other words, if you are never open to any values in the lives of others, you cannot expect others to be open to your values. Flexibility is the key to making any relationship work. Paul not only knew this, he was the expert in its application. He knew how to be all things to all men. He could bend and compromise on all sorts of personal and cultural issues that had nothing to do with God's revealed will.

In dealing with some of the controversial issues that divided Christians in his day, such as food offered to idols, vegetarianism, and the observance of special days, Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 14:5, and was so flexible he could be on both sides, and he concludes, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." Paul did not take a stubborn stand on every issue and say, this is the way and there is no other. Paul was stubborn, however, in opposing those who had that sort of spirit. The Judaizers said the Gentile Christians must be circumcised to be truly Christian. There was no compromise for Paul on this issue. He fought this legalistic requirement as a rejection of salvation by grace. Paul said to forget circumcision, for it is no longer an issue. I Cor. 7:19 he wrote, "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts." In Gal. 5:6 he wrote, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Paul was stubborn on this issue, and refused to give an inch.

Paul said that circumcision is nothing, but also that uncircumcision is nothing. There was no superiority in not being circumcised either, and so Paul could be flexible in this very area where he was so stubborn. Paul did not fight Jewish Christians in getting circumcised. That was their business, and he accepted it. In Acts 16 he found the godly young man named Timothy, and he desired to take him along on his journey. Verse 3 says, "So he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew his father was a Greek." Did Paul compromise here? Of course he did, and it was a brilliant strategy, for it prevented unnecessary controversy and friction, and it led to strengthening the churches.

Paul did not circumcise Timothy out of any conviction that it was necessary, but rather, as a flexible bending to the cultural circumstances. It gave Timothy the freedom to minister with full acceptance where he otherwise might be rejected. It was a cultural issue, and not a theological issue, and Paul was flexible on such issues. That is why we see Paul involved in what, to our Gentile mind, seems like much ado about nothing. It is ritualistic and ceremonial, and smacks too much of the Old Testament law to have any appeal to us. But Paul is not trying to teach us, or anybody else, that ceremonial purification is of any value. What he is teaching us, by these actions, is that the most stubborn saint alive, when it comes to determination to do the revealed will of God, must be flexible in areas of life that are merely cultural. The Christian who cares his stubborn theological convictions over into cultural convictions is guilty of the idolatry of his own opinions.

The reason Paul could survive the storms that hit the early church was because he was a paradoxical combination of stability and flexibility. Tornadoes will sweep away that which is not deeply rooted, and also that which is rigid. That is why the tree is the best survivor. It is deeply rooted, yet

also flexible, and able to bend a great deal without breaking. This combination is what made Paul the key tool God needed to establish the Gentile church, and yet, keep peace with the Jewish church. He was both rooted in God's principles, and yet flexible to bend with the cultural winds that sweep over the church. He was both a man of conviction, and a man of compromise.

To think it is a virtue to be stubborn on everything is to be like the man who lay in the ditch paralyzed, who kept saying, "But I had the right of way. I had the right of way." So what! There are situations in life where you forget your rights, and bend to avoid an accident, or, you bend to avoid a war, or some unnecessary suffering that can be prevented by a little self-denial. The stupidity of stubbornness on the wrong issues is illustrated in an old Marx Brothers film. They are searching for a lost work of art. Grocho is convinced the picture is hidden in the house next door. But Chico points out that there is no house next door. Not to be deterred, Grocho responds, "Then we will build one." Determination to support one's own theory in spite of the facts, is no virtue. Such determination is not only dumb, it can be deadly. General Custer was determined to solve a problem even when all the evidence indicated it was a hopeless case. He rode into Little Big Horn with the seventh cavalry so outnumbered they were wiped out in 18 minutes. This was dangerous and detrimental determination.

Paul was willing to die to do the will of God, but he was equally determined to live at peace with all men, so far as it was in his power. He also knew when to run, and we find him sometimes fleeing from his foes in the middle of the night, and not stubbornly confronting his foes. Paul was not stupidly stubborn, but fantastically flexible in his response to life's obstacles.

The point of all this is that Paul's paradoxical personality is the key to his being able to be Christlike, and it is like wise a key for us to be like our Lord. Without the balance of forceful conviction and flexible compromise, no Christian can be the tool God needs in every situation. There is a time to be stubborn, and not let even those who love you most stop you from going the direction God is calling. There are destinations we must be determined to reach whatever the cost. But there is also a time to be flexible, and to eat with the publicans and sinners, or even the self-righteous Pharisees. Being paradoxical can get you into a lot of trouble, just as it did Jesus and Paul, but it also makes you the tool God can use most effectively, for being Christlike means to have a paradoxical personality.

