

# **SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN LIVING**

By Pastor Glenn Pease

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## **1. SAVED FOR SUCCESS Based on Matt. 14:22-33**

Most of us probably have some money in a saving account where it is insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Cooperation, or FDIC for short. This brilliant idea which saved the banks after the depression, and saves all savers a lot of anxiety is a gift God gave to the American people through a Christian banker in Philadelphia. His name was Leon H. Sullivan. When black Monday hit on March 4, 1933, and closed the banks, he went to prayer and labored long over a plan to reopen the banks. He thanked God for the idea which led to the banks being able to open. It was the FDIC idea.

**He came to Christ as a boy of nine, and by twenty five he was the youngest bank cashier in the U.S. Banking was his life. But like all successful Christians he had a struggle with pride. He began to crave more power, prominence, and possessions. He began to have social parties in his large house with champagne. He stopped going to church, for his new goal kept him too busy for the God who had saved him. He got so greedy that he went into partnership with a non-Christian. His wife warned him, but he would not listen, for there was a fortune to be made. The entire real estate deal collapsed, however, and he lost everything. He was one hundred and fifty thousand in debt, and had no reputation and no friends. He was sinking fast, but unlike Peter who cried out immediately, "Lord save me," he held on for twelve days in pride.**

**After twelve days of living on corn flakes he finally cried out to God in brokenness, "Lord save me!" It took years, but he was saved and restored and became a successful investment broker who helped Christian colleges and other Christian causes raise millions. By his fall and failure he learned to be successful as a Christian in the world of business. Successful Christians often have to fail so they can be saved for success as Christians. Their success becomes an idol and leads them away from God, and only by means of failure can they be brought back to God to succeed for him. Christians only need to be saved once for eternity by putting their faith in Christ, but they need to be saved many times in time, as they begin to sink because of their lack of faith.**

**Peter was a saved man as a hand picked disciple of Christ. If he would have drowned in the storm, he would have been welcomed into heaven. He was a saved man, yet, we see him here crying out, "Lord save me." It was not the sinners prayer. He was not crying out to be forgiven and reconciled with God. That was not his problem. He was already saved that way, and you never need to be saved that way**

**again. When Jesus is trusted as Savior you are saved for eternity. But here is Peter still calling out, "Lord save me." A saved man can still use some saving when he is sinking.**

**Balzac, the Sir Walter Scott of France, wrote a famous short story called Jesus Christ in Flanders. A ferry-boat is carrying a mixed crowd of passengers when a furious gale strikes and throws everyone into a panic. A stranger with a glow on his face is calm and serene as if he knew he would not die. As the boat begins to sink the stranger speaks, "Those who have faith shall be saved! Let them follow me." He then stepped out upon the waves and walked on the water. A young mother took her child up in her arms and followed him. A soldier and two cousins also followed and walked upon the sea, and they came safely to the shore. The stranger vanishes, but they recognize he is Christ. Balzac's story is obviously an adaptation of our text. But it is a focus on the fact that even saved people; people who already have faith in Jesus, still need to be saved from storms, and all kinds of threats to life and health.**

**Jesus could say, "How do I save thee, let me count the ways." And they would mount up to a high number. The point is, this prayer of Peter as he began to sink is a prayer that needs praying often because even saved people need perpetual saving in this storm tossed world. Let's look at just some of the ways we need saving as suggested by Peter's experience. First of all we all need to be saved-**

## **I. FROM LITTLE FAITH.**

**Whenever a Christian begins to sink, you can trace the trouble back to little faith. The negative realities of life begin to overwhelm you. You take your eyes off Jesus and look to the wind and waves, and fear takes over and reduces the power of your faith. You can't get far walking on water, or even on land for that matter, when your faith**

**gauge is pointing to empty.**

**Peter had enough faith to get him into the middle of a miracle, but then it began to run out. There are few things more embarrassing than half a miracle. To walk on water for a few feet and then drown is not all that impressive as a whole. Peter needed to be saved from his half a miracle due to his little faith. To sink in the middle of a miracle, and make this his terminal trip was not what Peter had in mind. We all need to be saved from the half way projects we get ourselves into. We make a commitment to go all out for Jesus, and then after awhile we lose our enthusiasm and our faith falters. We find ourselves half way through a commitment beginning to sink.**

**I see it in Christian marriages all the time. People make a commitment to be loving and loyal through sunshine and shadow; for better or for worse, but like Peter, they get out into the sea of matrimony and discover it is more frightening than they realized from the boat. Their resolve begins to weaken, and they begin to sink. They need to cry out, "Lord save me." Christians need to be saved and restored to their marriage vows.**

**Christians say, "I'm going to read my Bible through this year," and they take the leap. But after they get through Genesis and struggle through Exodus they come to Leviticus, and their faith wavers. I wonder how many have sunk in their resolve in Leviticus? They had no idea how hard some parts of the Bible are. They need to be saved from this little faith that lets them sink in the midst of their new adventure for Christ. Christians also resolve to witness, and then they come up against a skeptic who is clever, and they begin to sink back from their commitment. We could go on and on dealing with areas of life where Christians need to be saved because their little faith lets them down before they complete their commitment.**

**The good news is that Jesus will hear the prayer for salvation even when our faith is so weak we are sinking. Peter's prayer, "Lord save me!" is the shortest prayer in the New Testament, but it was just as effective as a 20 minute prayer, for Jesus reached out and saved him from drowning. A 3 word prayer, and all 3 words of only one syllable. Thank God he does not evaluate prayer by its length, but rather by its earnestness. Peter never prayed a more earnest prayer than this. His faith was little in his own ability to stay on top of the water, but his faith in Jesus was still strong, and he cried out for Jesus to save him.**

**There was no time for praise, adoration, or intercession. This was a purely self-centered prayer, yet it was answered instantly, for Jesus chose to save Peter from a watery grave. He saw, even in Peter's failure, the seeds of success. Peter's prayer was a confession of his own inadequacy, and of his awareness of Christ's all sufficiency. Lord you can save me, and so do so, for I cannot save myself.**

**Spurgeon points out that little faith tends to get Christians in trouble because it is always seeking for signs and wonders. He feels that Peter may have leaped out of the boat in the first place because of his little faith that he needed to bolster up by this awesome act of walking on water. Some people need to do the remarkable thing to keep their faith from collapsing. This moves them to attempt great things, but they do it in their own power, and they end up collapsing anyway. But even there failure can be good if it leads them to stop trusting in themselves, and to trust in Jesus only. Peter did it here and was saved from his little faith in himself by his adequate faith in Jesus.**

**John Hodges was the number one Pontiac dealer in the world. He was a member of the First Baptist Church of Indianapolis. But he let his success go to his head and began to throw parties with booze and gambling. He began to cut back on church life, for it was interfering with his business life. Besides, you can't serve 2 masters, and his**

**business became his god. He bought 5 used car lots and poured a lot of money into advertising. He got caught in a squeeze and lost half a million in 2 years. He started to drink and life began to fall apart. He had many Christian friends praying for him, and he was finally persuaded to go to a Graham crusade. There he saw that he was sinking because of his own pride and little faith. He repented and cried out, "Lord save me!"**

**He got his life style back in order and went on, as Peter did, to be a fisher of men. He used his business connections to witness to men about his Savior. He was another Christian who needed to be saved. He needed to be saved from little faith, from worldliness, from pride, from failure, and from self. This is the battle of the Christian life and what the whole New Testament is all about. It is about saving saved people from sinking so they can help save a lost world. Christians need a lot of saving before they can help save the world. A sinking Christian is not a very useful tool. But a sinking Christian saved from sinking, as Peter was, is often the best tool, for he has by that experience learned to forsake his self-confidence, and put his confidence in Christ as an all sufficient Savior.**

**We sometimes have to fail and be saved in order to really know who Jesus is as our Savior. Nancy Spiegelberg wrote,**

**Lord  
I crawled  
across the barrenness  
to you  
with my empty cup  
uncertain  
in asking any small drop of refreshment.  
If only I had known you better  
I'd have come**

**running  
with a bucket.**

**This whole incident was designed by Christ to teach his disciples that if they really knew who Jesus was, they could not only be saved from little faith, but also-**

## **II. FROM ALL FORMS OF DISCOURAGEMENT.**

**The whole context is one of discouragement. They were buffeted by the wind and the waves, and could not get to shore. It was in the middle of the night and they were tired and anxious for their lives. It was a discouraging situation, and they were a down bunch of guys. Then to add to the tension Jesus comes walking on the lake and they are terrified. "It's a ghost," they cried, and they were fearful that this was a sign they would not make it. A demon of death is what their fearful minds saw, even though in reality it was their Savior from death.**

**What a major difference there can be between objective faith and ones own subjective fears. They interpreted the scene as evil omen when in reality it was their only hope. How wrong can Christians be in reading the events of their day and experience? Here is a clue. Christians need to be saved constantly from the spirit of discouragement they bring on themselves by their false fears and misreading of events. Their fears had them in the grip of some evil spirit, and they were terrified. Christians often need to be saved from their subjective fears that put their emotional system into a turmoil. There was a spirit of pessimism reigning over the lives of the Apostles in this setting. They were safe, but they felt like they were sunk.**

**From the point of view of Jesus there was nothing to be discouraged about at all. From his perspective it was as pleasant as a**

**Sunday walk in the park. These men needed to be saved from all their fears and doubts that made them blind to the power and presence of Christ in their midst. They were just like God's people in the Old Testament. God could do wonders and miracles to protect them, deliver them, and provide for them. But the next time they faced a crisis they were full of fear and doubt, and begging to go back to Egypt. No number of miracles could ever get them beyond their little faith and discouraged spirit of pessimism.**

**The disciples had already seen Jesus still the storm, and do wondrous miracles in nature. He had just fed the 5000 hours before this storm, and yet, all that is gone from their head, and they are overwhelmed by their present crisis. What we need to see is that these men were finally saved from this spirit of pessimism, and this is just one of the key lessons on the way to that final victory. They eventually became men who could say with the unknown poet,**

**I will not doubt, though all my ships at sea  
Come drifting home with broken masts and sails;  
I shall believe the hand that never fails  
From seeming evil worketh good for me,  
And though I weep because these sails are tattered,  
Still will I cry, while my best hopes are shattered,  
I trust in Thee.**

**But they were not there yet. They were in a terrible mess, but they were saved, and Jesus turned this catastrophe into a major success. The key word in this story is a big word in the ministry of Jesus. The word in the Greek is tharseo, and it is translated, "Be of good cheer, or take courage." This is a special word in the vocabulary of Jesus. He is the only person in the New Testament to use the word. On one occasion it is used to encourage blind men to come to him. Jesus used this word often to encourage those who were discouraged. They were**



**in what seemed to be hopeless situations when Jesus would come and say, "Be of good cheer."**

**His most universal use of the word is in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, or cheer up, I have overcome the world." The one thing that every person needs to be saved from at some point in life is discouragement. The contrary winds get to all of us at times, and we are ready to sink. Jesus says this is just when you need to hear his favorite word and be encouraged to be of good cheer. He is saying that he is already overcome, and so trust in me. This is where Peter comes through a hero, even though he was sinking. Because of his little faith he was going under, but the fact is, he never cease to trust in Christ for he shouted out, "Lord save me!" And Jesus did save him. The whole scene ends in victory and worship.**

**This was not their final education. They got discouraged again, and their faith failed again, and they needed to be saved again from their human weaknesses. But their salvation here did raise them to a new level, and by it they were able to avoid a lot of falls they might have otherwise had. Every lesson they learned was a necessary step to get to the point of the victorious Christian life. Every victory prevented some future failure.**

**Someone said that high heels were invented by a woman who was kissed on the forehead. She wanted to avoid that mistake in the future, and so invented high heels. True or not, it illustrates the point. Failure can lead to success, for it motivates us to do what avoids the same failure in the future. The disciples were a pathetic lot in this whole scene. It was a comedy of errors. The men Christ picked to change the world are seen here as nervous wrecks. They were of anxiety and fears, and their leader was sinking in the middle of a miracle. It is not likely the angelic choir was inspired to fill heaven with a new song of rejoicing.**

Nevertheless, the end result of all this failure was success, because in the final analysis they looked to Jesus and were saved, and every time they were saved they needed less and less saving. Each step of failure was a step up the stairs of success. Dr. John, president of Stetson University, tells of the farmer who only lost a few hogs during a severe cholera epidemic. The county agent asked him if he had learned anything about the disease. He said, "Wal, I've noticed that them as gets it and lingers a spell have a better chance of livin then them that dies right off." Peter failed a lot, but he never went down for the count. He never gave up and sank. He always lingered awhile and looked to Jesus. The result was that Peter was saved every time. Judas, on the other hand, when he failed, gave up and died right off, and went and hanged himself.

If we are going to have a successful year in spite of our weaknesses and failures, we are going to have to pray Peter's prayer often-"Lord save me from myself, my subjective fears and discouragements, from my little faith. Save me daily from all the things that rob me of my vision of your love and presence. Every year a Christian should aim to be more saved than the year before. That means to be more secure, more sanctified, more willing to believe the Word of God. Peter said in Paul's writings there are some things hard to be understood, but sometimes the problem with Paul is that he is too easy to be understood. He makes the requirement of optimism so plain and clear that we are embarrassed by it.

It may sound crazy, but I am convinced that sometimes we need to be saved from success. Success is a test that many Christians have failed to pass. They get successful and, like Israel of old, they neglect the Lord and conform to the world, and lose their way. Many of the scandals of Christianity are the result of success that Christians could not handle. It is also the reality of life that success leads to a decaying of relationships. Bette Middler put it so honestly when she said, "The

**worse part of having success is to try finding someone who is happy for you."**

**We go through life asking, what is the will of God, and Paul says what is the mystery? We know what God's will is. In I Thess. 5:16-18 Paul writes, "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Whenever you are not joyful, or not praying, or not thankful, you are out of God's will, and need to be saved from that state of disobedience. "Lord save me," is about as relevant a prayer as you find in the Bible, for as saved people we need, just as Peter needed, a whole lot of saving to be a success. We need to examine our lives in the light of this truth, and when we see we are sinking in some area of life, look to Jesus and pray the saved sinners prayer, "Lord save me." We need to be constantly saved from our failures, and saved for success.**

## **2. THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE Based on Matt. 16:13-26**

**Apollo 13 was one of the biggest flops in the history of our space program, and yet it was also one of the most celebrated. Can a catastrophic failure also be a colossal success? Just ask the three astronauts of that ill fated flight. It was 1970, and they were on their way to the moon when an explosion changed their plans radically. For the next 6 days it took all the ingenuity of these three men, and a vast ground crew, just to keep them alive. Everything went wrong, and they could have died a number of different ways. They could have frozen to death, but they learned that in zero gravity air does not move, and so if they stayed very still their body would heat up the air around them, and form a sort of cocoon of warm air. Had they**

**panicked and moved about they would have frozen.**

**They could have died of poisoning, or been lost in space, or blown up. It took 24 hours a day of thinking and improvising just to stay alive. All over the world people were praying, and they were able to get back to earth in the lunar module, which was never even designed for anything but taking them down to the surface of the moon. It was like crossing the ocean on the Queen Mary, and half way over deciding to make the rest of the journey in a canoe. They did not get to the moon, nor did they do any of things they were suppose to do. None of the goals were achieved. All they did was to get through dozens of hopeless situations, and survive to tell about it.**

**Commander James A. Lovell said of this amazing flop of a flight, "We could've been assured a catastrophe. But the dedication and knowledge of the ground and the flight crew were such that we were able to make it a successful failure." President Nixon awarded them the Medal of Freedom for their successful failure. Peter is the great example in the New Testament of successful failure. He made the most blunders of anyone, and yet he survived, and like a cat tossed in the air, he landed on his feet, and became a loved hero.**

**In our text we see the flight plan of Peter blow up in his face. He thinks he is in control of the situation, and has such a grasp of the way life should go that he has the audacity to take Jesus aside to set Him straight. Talk about aggressive leadership. Here is a disciple telling the Master the score. Peter has put his foot in his mouth before, but never up to the knee. He has become a megalomaniac, that is one who has grandiose delusions. He has just confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God, and that he is the Messiah, yet he begins to rebuke the Messiah because he does not like what he is saying. Jesus is telling it like it is, and the truth is not pleasant. He will suffer, be rejected, and killed. That is not an acceptable program to Peter, and so he takes**

**Jesus aside to reprogram the plan of God.**

**There is only one other person in history who had that kind of pride, and that was Lucifer. No wonder Jesus said to Peter, "Out of my sight, Satan!" Peter had become a tool of the devil in trying to reprogram the plan of God. Can a Christian fall so low they can become an agent of Satan? Yes they can, and it is not just by falling low, but also, as we see here, by rising too high. Peter was exalted, not just to the moon, but to the very gates of heaven. Jesus gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and He had the power to bind or loose on earth, and that would lead to binding or loosing in heaven. Peter's promotion went to his head, and he began to think that he now had the authority to even alter the course of the Messiah, and set policy on the plan of salvation.**

**Peter was a mere fisherman, but Jesus chose him to be a spiritual astronaut, and he sent him soaring to the heights of leadership and power in the kingdom of God. And what does he do? He blows the mission to pieces by abuse of power. How many other leaders do you know who were called Satan by the Lord? There were no others. Peter was the greatest failure in his abusive power. And yet we see that he not only survives, but he does so quite successfully. He is able to stay on top as the leader of the 12. He does everything wrong, and still comes out a winner. He is the most successful failure in the New Testament. Consider this record of his failure:**

- 1. He lost faith while on the water, and began to sink.**
- 2. He rebuked his own Messiah, and received the strongest rebuke of anyone.**
- 3. He refused to have his feet washed, and had to be forced to cooperate.**
- 4. He cut off the ear of Malchus in Gethsemane and needed to be rebuked.**

- 5. He went to sleep when Jesus asked him to watch with Him.**
- 6. He denied his Lord 3 times.**
- 7. He refused to believe the eye witness testimony of the women who saw Jesus after the resurrection.**
- 8. He fell back into prejudice against the Gentiles even after Pentecost.**
- 9. He needed to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul for his inconsistency.**

**These are just his major mistakes and blunders. He had a number of minor ones as well. You cannot come up with a list like this even for the scoundrels in the New Testament. Yet, this walking comedy of errors is not made to wear a dunce's hat and sit in the corner. He is made the leader of the group. Tragen was one of the greatest of the Caesars, and the senate raised a towering column to record his victories, but today in Rome you will no longer see the Emperor on top of that column raised to his honor. You will see instead a statue of a man with two large keys in his hands-the man called Peter. Peter fumbled and failed his way to the top, and by so doing, he reveals by his successful failure just how fallible man can be, and still be used of God. Consider, for example, that Peter was-**

## **I. AN EXTREMIST.**

**Keep in mind, Peter was no intellectual scholar like Paul. He was a man moved by feeling rather than reason, and feelings can be changed a lot faster than the mind. It takes time to think through an issue, and weigh the values, and change one's convictions. But it only takes seconds to go from hot to cold in one's emotions. Peter was always going from one extreme to the other.**

- 1. On the stormy sea he shouts "bid me come to you Lord on the water," and a few moments later he is crying out "Lord, save me!"**
- 2. When Jesus came to wash his feet he cries out, "You will never**

wash my feet." For an emotional guy like Peter, never is not very long, for he is soon at the other extreme saying, "Not my feet only, but my hands and my head." Jesus had to slow him down and explain that the feet alone are sufficient. Peter is not one to be straddling the fence. He is totally on one side or the other. He is never middle of the road, but usually in the ditch on one side or the other. Ask Peter where he stands, and he says 100% on this side, and while he is saying it, he may be moving to the other side where he will stand with equal conviction. This sounds like a terrible weakness for a leader, but it is a weakness that can be helpful when going through radical transition. The world of Judaism was being turned upside down, and the pagan world would be next, and Jesus needed a leader who was not locked into legalism, but who was open to change, and who could lead others to accept radical change.

It was a troublesome aspect of his personality that he was such an extremist, and so inconsistent. Yet it was a necessary ingredient for what Peter had to lead the church through. He was even inconsistent in his inconsistency. On one occasion after shifting from being closed to Gentiles to being open to them, he reverted back again to the old way, and needed to be rebuked again. Peter must have felt as frustrated at times as a chameleon crawling across a plaid shirt. He was not sure what color to be, but he still comes out smelling like a rose, because his first loyalty was to the Rose Of Sharon, his Lord and Master.

An impulsive personality like Peter's is bound to get you into trouble, for you take every feeling of the moment too seriously. You are moved by some conviction, and you follow your emotions as if it were the essence of the ages, and in fact, it is only temporary. Peter feels it so strongly that he will never forsake his Lord that he proclaims, "I will never be offended because of Thee. All others may be offended, but you can always count on one, and that is me." Then

**the next thing we know, Peter is denying with oaths and curses, "I never knew the man."**

**Peter is one of these guys who is always so enthused about something. It is the answer the world has been looking for. It is the greatest discovery of our day, the discovery of the decade; the milestone of the millennium; the highlight of history. Then the next time you see him, he has forgotten and forsaken the whole thing. These types are on the mountain top, or down in the valley, and to one extreme or the other. Peter was always the first in everything. He did not stop to think things through. While the others were doing that, he was already first on the water, or first with the sword out, or first with the words of wisdom, or of folly. As an impulsive man of emotion, he was faster on the draw than the thinkers. This led to his shooting himself in the foot frequently, but as J. Oswald Sanders points out, "He was an extremist, attempting the impossible and often achieving it."**

**Peter failed more, but he also succeeded more, because he was always doing something. It may have been wise or stupid, but the more he did, the more likely he was to do what was wise. He illustrates the fact that life is a matter of percentages. If you try a lot you may fail a lot, but you will also have more success. The man who calls on 100 customers may fail to sell 75 of them, but the 25 he sells to is far greater than that of the man who only calls on 50, and only has 10 successes. Babe Ruth struck out more than anybody, but he was also the home run champ of his day. The point is, failure and success are opposites, but they are linked together. There is a direct connection, for the rate of failure is often the key to the rate of success.**

**It can be said of some, he made no mistakes, but then it is likely that he made nothing else either, for mistakes are the stepping stones to achievement. Successful people are those who have made plenty of**



mistakes, but they have learned from them. The biggest mistake of all is to so fear making mistakes that you never try. Prov. 14:4 says, "Where there are no oxen the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest." If you want a nice clean barn, that can be easily done by just not having any animals. But the goal of the farmer is not a clean barn, but a barn full of harvest, and to get that you need to struggle with dirt, manure, and one mess after another. The road to a full barn may mean stepping in a lot of manure, and the road to success in any area, may be a road where you step into one mess after another. If you are not willing to make mistakes and messes, you will never get to the harvest.

The cost of success is the willingness to endure failure. Most of the successful people make a lot of mistakes as they climb, and could be called successful failures. A dairy farm with no cows looks clean and smells nice, but it is a flop compared to the messy, stinky farm of the man who has cows, and who is producing milk everyday. The successful life is not the mistake free life, or the mess free life, but the life where even the messes and mistakes are incorporated into a plan to reach goals. It may seem wonderful to have a factory where there is no waste, but it will be of no value. Better is the messy factory where there is a product being produced.

The elder brother made no foolish mistakes, as did the young Prodigal, but was he a better man for it? He stayed home and did all the right things, and ended up a self-righteous brat. The Prodigal blew it, and was a fool, but he learned from his folly, and came home to live a life of humble gratitude for love and forgiveness. Which brother would you most prefer for a friend, neighbor, or relative? Give me the mistake filled life where there has been victory, rather than the proud life of one who has no messed up past, but who is about as much fun as a boil. The mistake ridden life leads to humility, and a breaking down of that pride that makes one a judgmental legalist.

**Jesus loved the publicans and sinners, because they were more open to grace and forgiveness. The Pharisees were too proud. They did not need grace and forgiveness. The man who makes no mistakes does not need a Savior. You can't help the man who never fails, for he does not need help. It is the fallen who know their need of the helping hand. The Pharisees were failing successes, but far superior was the Publican who knew he messed up, and prayed for God to be merciful to him as a sinner. He was a successful failure, like Peter. And Peter was not only an extremist, but he was also-**

## **II. AN EXAMPLE.**

**Peter, with all his weaknesses, was still an example of a type of leader Jesus is looking for. It is not all the blunders he wants, but He wants a man of action who gets things done. James and John were the other two extremists in the group. They were ready to call fire down from heaven because of the lack of hospitality on the part of the Samaritans. They were rebuked for their lack of a loving spirit, but the fact is, these two hot heads along with Peter, the lead hot head, became the inner circle of Jesus. It could be interpreted that he kept these three closest to Him because they were the three who needed constant watching. There may be some truth to this, but the evidence supports the idea that these three were more aggressive leaders, and Jesus was training them for special tasks. They were hazards, to be sure, but Jesus, by choosing them, makes them examples of what the kingdom of God needs.**

**People who would rather make a mistake than do nothing for Christ is what He is looking for. He wants people who may fail, but who are always ready to act rather than be just passive spectators. We don't want to take it lightly that Peter is an example of just how far a believer can go astray. Peter was a channel of God's truth, but he was also capable of being a channel of Satan's lies. The whole point**

**of the temptation of Jesus was to get Jesus to take a path that avoided the cross. Use your supernatural power so you don't have to live on a mere human level. By miracle you can make stones into bread, and by miracle you leap off the temple, and have the crowds eating out of your hand. Just bow to me, and take a short cut to rule the kingdoms of the world. Why go the hard way, when the easy way is open?**

**When Jesus heard Peter rebuking Him, and rejecting the way of the cross, he was hearing Satan again. G. Campbell Morgan has Jesus responding, "Peter, I know that voice, I know that philosophy. I have heard that suggestion, not once or twice, but through the years.." Peter was a mouth piece for Satan. He was trying to get Jesus to bypass the cross. Peter was being used as a tool of Satan. He was saying, if you eliminate sacrifice from your plan, there will be a better way. Jesus had to rebuke him, and make it clear, there is no easy or better way. The cross is the only way.**

**It is important that we see an example like Peter, for it reveals a Christian can be totally off base, and convinced that a satanic view of reality is the best. A Christian can be a stumbling block and a hindrance to the kingdom of God. This example is a powerful tool of education if we use it. Christians often assume that if one is a great Christian leader they have to be right in all their convictions. A Christian leader could never promote what is contrary to the mind of God, they think. Wrong! No Christian is above doing what Peter did, and the more power a Christian gets, the more likely he will do what Peter did. His example is for our warning. All Christians, and their views, need to be examined along side the mind of Christ. Nobody is Lord but Jesus, and He alone is the supreme authority, and everyone needs to be evaluated in the light of His example.**

**The world is full of damaged disciples who have given their loyalty to a fallible leader rather than to their Lord. Christian leaders fall,**

**and take wrong turns in their teaching and theology, and their followers are hurt, and often end up falling away. This does not happen to Christians who know Peter's example, and know the best can fall and become obstacles. Where loyalty is to Christ alone, there is little danger for any leader to lead you astray. It is not on Peter the solid rock I stand, but on Christ. Peter's example is to protect Christians from standing on the wrong rock. Peter is a rock all right, but he is only as stable as his loyalty to Christ is stable. When he gets off base, he is quick sand, and so you do not build on Peter, but on Christ.**

**Peter is an example of how a Christian can be like the devil himself. It is folly to let Christian failure make you angry at God. Christians do this all the time. They will say that a Christian did them harm, and then do the ultimate folly, which is to let a Christians failure cause you to forsake the solid rock of Christ. Peter is also an example of just how far a Christian can blow it, and still be a loved leader. This was a terrible wall that came between Jesus and Peter. You can't call someone the very devil, and not feel estranged. Nor can you have such a label put on you, and not feel the strain in the relationship.**

**Peter says in his letter that the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And you know Peter felt like he had just lost an arm and a leg through the lion's jaws in this setting. Nobody had ever been called Satan by Jesus, and so Peter has the record for being the worst follower of Jesus. He is an anti-disciple; a satanic cross-prevention advocate; the bottom of the pile. Yet, he is restored to fellowship, and to the leadership of the twelve. He is, beyond a doubt, the most successful failure in the New Testament.**

**The most successful black leader in our time was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. What many people do not know is that he was a**

**successful failure. When he graduated from Boston University School of Theology, he went to the First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn. To candidate, and he failed to impress them. They turned him down. Little did he know, at the time, that it was the most successful failure of his career. He went instead to the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church of Montgomery, Alabama where he was accepted. A few months later Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus, and started the revolution that made Dr. King the leading black man of that day. Because he was in the right place at the right time, due to his failure, it changed the history of our nation.**

**I do not doubt that Dr. King was a failure in other areas of his life, but the fact is Jesus used Dr. King to change history. Peter and Dr. King, and many others like them, were not used because they were perfect, but because they would rather fail in trying to follow Christ, than to succeed in anything else. We can't be reminded too often that it is better to try and fail than to never try at all. There is a good chance that you will fail in trying to do the will of Jesus in taking the Gospel to all people. But if you try to do that which is clearly His will, even your failure will be successful failure.**

### **3. HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL NOBODY Based on John 6:1-13**

**Years ago a very famous organist was giving a recital on a new organ. The wind was pumped by a small boy behind a screen. The boy pumped his heart out at this recital, and he was glad for the intermission half way through the program. Out in the vestry of the church the boy looked up at the great organist and said, "Aren't we wonderful?" Chilled with pride the iceberg responded, "Who's we?"**

**Saddened, the lad returned to his pump for the climax of the recital. The organist pressed the keys for the opening cord, but only silence came from the majestic pipes. The signal must have failed the organist thought, and so he repeated it and then pressed again for the thunder to come. No thunder came. There was only a small voice from behind the screen saying, "Now who's we?"**

**We make a great blunder in life if we fail to recognize the importance of obscure, behind the scenes people. Ida Tarbell, in the biography of many famous persons, was asked on her 80th birthday to name the greatest people she had ever met, and she replied, "Those nobody knows anything about." Some of the greatest and famous people in the history book of God are obscure nobodies in the history books of men. Sometimes it happens that obscurity is a blessing because it leaves a person free to give their life in service rather than in display. The poet put it-**

**I'm nobody! Who are you? Are you nobody, too?  
Then there's a pair of us-don't tell! They'd banish us you know.  
How dreary to be somebody! How public like a frog  
To tell your name the livelong day to an admiring bog.**

**Author unknown**

**This can be a false sense of humility, and an excuse for not doing your best. If we are going to be famous before God, even though obscure and unknown before men, we have to learn some basic truths about what our responsibility is, and what God can do through us. We can learn these truths very simply by looking at the obscure little lad whose 5 loaves and 2 fish were the resource used for one of the greatest of all miracles. We know very little about him, but that little can make a big difference in our lives. All we know is that he had some loaves and fish, but two important truths stand out, which become principles for life. First-**

## **I. WHAT HE HAD WAS MADE AVAILABLE-HE GAVE IT.**

**The question is not, how much do you have, but is what you have available? You don't have to have great wealth and ability to be famous with God, and useful to man. The widow had only a mite, but in giving it she made all she had available for God's use, and this made her great in the eyes of Christ. We know very little about one of the most famous persons in the Bible-the Good Samaritan. We don't even know his name. We don't know what he had in the way of material possessions. All we know is that what he had was available. He had time, compassion, and some degree of wealth, and God used him. Others pass by who may have had more, but having is not the secret of blessedness, but giving is.**

**A lad with 5 loaves and 2 fish is not endowed with great resources. "What are these among so many?" We often feel that our talents and abilities are so few that it is futile to offer them in God's service. The problems and needs are so vast that the magnitude of them overwhelms us. We look at our gifts and say, "What are these among so many?" We forget this basic truth that it is not just our ability that counts, but our availability. God does not ask for what you do not have. He only asks that you give what you have. Jesus did not expect the lad to feed the five thousand. All He needed was for the boy to give what he had. It is up to us to do our best, and up to Christ to do the rest.**

**Be unselfish with whatever you do have, and you will be a famous giver in the eyes of God, and in the eyes of those who benefit from your making what you have available. Marion Simms in Your Life told the story of a girl who wanted to give her older sister a birthday gift, but she had no money in her bank. But that did not stump her, for the really unselfish person always has something to give. When her sister opened her package she found an envelope tied with a**

**ribbon. Inside were three colored slips of paper with a gift printed on each. Good for two dish washings. Good for two bed makings. Good for two kitchen scrubbings. These were among her most welcome birthday surprises. Like the little lad, this little lass didn't have much, but what she had she made available, and she gave it. People are not equal in what they have, but they can be equal in making what they have available, and this is the key to being great in the eyes of God. Next we want to see that-**

## **II. WHAT HE HAD WAS MADE ADEQUATE-CHRIST USED IT.**

**If we make what we have available, Christ will make it adequate. God has built the process of magnifying the small and insignificant into the adequate right into His creation. Give a seed to God's earth that could not even feed a bird, and it will be multiplied and made adequate for feeding a flock of birds. A grain of wheat given to the earth, and its fruit in turn given to the earth, and constantly reinvested could eventually produce bread to feed 5 thousand, and even 5 million. God can take our small investment, and our weak and inadequate gifts and use them to be a blessing to many.**

**Longfellow said, "Give what you have to someone. It may be better than you dare to think." Certainly this lad had no idea what Jesus could do with his little lunch, and we have no idea what He may do with what little we have if we make it available to Him. Whatever you are, and whatever you have, Christ can make it adequate for blessing the world. We need to believe this, and not cling to our gifts and abilities and selfishness. We need to make them available for the glory of God and the good of man, as did this obscure little lad who became famous in God's history book.**

**A pilot of an American airline DC-6 was flying 21,000 feet over the Colorado Rockies when his plane threw a propeller which crashed**



through the fuselage and ripped the engine from the wing. With half the controls gone he brought it into Denver for an emergency landing. A reporter at the scene asked him what He did. He said, "In a situation like that you just move over a little bit and let God take over." None of us have enough to journey through this life and be a success for God. All of us have at least one engine missing if not more. We need to learn this lesson to move over a bit and let God take over. The lad made what he had available, and Jesus made it adequate. We need to do the same if we want to have the only fame that really matters.

Jesus adds His infinite resources to our inadequate resources to make the adequate, but He demands that we yield, and make our little available. He does not ask of anyone what is impossible. He asks only for what you can give if you will. There were a lot of famous people in the world of that day when Jesus fed the multitude. Possibly some of them were even in the crowd. They may have been household names in their community, but it was this obscure and unknown lad who had the resource that Jesus needed. Everyone of us has some resource that Christ needs to accomplish certain goals, and only as we make them available can the task be done.

Others may do a greater work,  
But you have your part to do;  
And no one in all God's heritage  
Can do it so well as you.

I wonder how many of us ever realize that Jesus needs what we have. Billy Graham will not reach those that God wants you to reach. All the books, radio, and TV in the world will not do what God wants to do through you.

Jonah was a poor specimen of a prophet. He was narrow,

prejudice, and rebellious, but God needed him, and he used him, and made him adequate for the task He wanted to get done. God does not use all rebels in spite of themselves, however. He usually demands their cooperation, and demands that they make themselves available. The poet said, "And Gideon was nothing, Was nothing in the fray, But just a suit of working clothes The Spirit wore that day." He was a successful nobody because he made himself available to the God who can make anybody adequate to fulfill His purpose.

All of us feel inadequate, and rightly so, for the fact is, we are inadequate. Jesus said that without Him we could do nothing. Without Christ we are nobodies accomplishing nothing. But with Christ we can all be somebody's who are able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Just as 5 loaves and 2 fish can be enough for 5000 lunches if they are yielded to Christ, so our inadequate lives can be enough to accomplish God's will if they are yielded to Him. The constant challenge of the Christian is to surrender his inadequate little so that Christ can make it an adequate much.

Walter Wilson was converted in 1896 and became a lover of Scripture, and a diligent distributor of tracts. Much effort, however, produced little result. There was no apparent success following his zealous labors. He was troubled by it, but others told him not to look for results, but just sow the seed. No farmer could be persuaded that he is being successful if he just sowed seed and never saw a crop. Wilson remained troubled by his ineffectiveness.

In 1914 he went to hear Dr. James A. Gray, who later became president of Moody Bible Institute. He preached on Rom. 12:1, and he challenged Christians to present their bodies a living sacrifice as a place for the Holy Spirit to dwell on earth. Wilson yielded what he had to God, and this is what he wrote: "There, in the quiet of that late hour, I said to the Holy Spirit, My Lord, I have mistreated you all my

**Christian life. I have treated you like a servant. When I wanted you I called for you; when I was about to engage in some work I beckoned you to come and help me perform my task. I have kept you in the place of a servant. I have sought to use you only as a willing servant to help me in my self-appointed and chosen work. I shall do so no more. Just now I give you this body of mine; from my head to my feet, I give it to you. I give you my hands, my limbs, my eyes and lips, my brain; all that I am within and without I hand over to you for you to live in it the life that you please."**

**Walter Wilson became a great example of one who made himself available. Jesus took His inadequate and ineffective life and began to feed the multitude. One day two young ladies came to his office to sell advertising, and before they left he had led them a commitment to Christ. From then on soul-winning was a common everyday part of his life. He walked into a book store, and as he purchased a book he shared his love for Christ with the dealer. He asked if he would like to know Christ as Savior? The man said he had searched for years to know God, and he was anxious to know how to find Him. Wilson led him to receive Christ. He went on to be used of God as a beloved physician, preacher, and author in Kansas City. He was made adequate because he made himself available to be used by Christ.**

**We are the bread Jesus wants to multiply to feed the hungry world. If we are yielded like a loaf in His hands, He can expand us and make us adequate to meet the needs of those who are starving for the bread of life. The work of the kingdom is being done by many thousands who will never be known outside of a very small circle. Nevertheless, they are successful nobody's because they have made what they have available, and Christ has made it adequate for touching those lives in their circle.**

**The key to being a successful nobody is to recognize that you are**

**really somebody. It is one of life's greatest tragedies when people think they are worthless. It is a false view of man's worth in general that leads even Christians to put themselves down. The disciples of Jesus needed to learn this lesson. They had their value system of who was important, and who was not. The only problem is that it did not fit the value system of Jesus, and so they had to junk it. They said that kids were a pain and a nuisance, and they hindered the more important things of life getting done. Jesus rebuked them, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was saying that they are not only the future of Israel, but they are the future of forever, and they are of eternal and infinite value. They were a bunch of little nobody's, but Jesus said you would be better off never to have been born than to cause one of these little nobody's to stumble and miss the kingdom.**

**Jesus had to teach them that the Samaritans were not worthless scum, and that the Gentiles were not dogs of no value. One of the greatest battles of all time is that of trying to get into the heads of God's people that there are no nobody's. Everybody is somebody to God and because of it C.S. Lewis wrote-It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship." Everyone you think of as a mere nobody can be one of everlasting splendor in Christ.**

**The biblical record is loaded with nobody's who are only known in this world because they made their little available to God. In I Kings 17 we read that Elijah came to a widow who had a hand full of meal and a little oil, and she was about to make her last meal for her and her son, and then die. She shared her little with Elijah, and God blessed her, and the grain and oil never ran out, but kept multiplying**

to meet her needs. She made what she had available, and God made it adequate. The New Testament owner of the colt that Jesus used for Palm Sunday is another example. It was not much of a sacrifice to let someone use your colt for a few hours, but because he did make it available Jesus used his colt for fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. It was a small favor that Jesus used for a major fulfillment of prophecy.

Jesus wants to do major things with our puny powers, tiny tools, and trivial treasures. That way He gets the glory for doing what only God can do, but we get the joy of being partners by doing what we can do. Without God we can't do it, but without us He won't do it. There must be a willing partner who will make his little available before God will make it adequate.

God can even use the negatives in your life for blessings to others. A great example is found in the diary of Anne Taylor. She was a Quaker servant girl who was raped on her way from England to America. She tells of how she ran to Henrietta Best and collapsed in her arms in the fold of the ship. She breathed in horror that she had been raped. "Hush," said Henrietta, "it happened to me too." She shared how decades before she had been raped by soldiers in France. Anne wrote in her diary, "Those words saved my life and my reason. What resurrected me was 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."

Henrietta gave her what she had, and though it was not much, it was adequate to meet the need. It was enough so that Anne could gain the victory over her own suffering, and go on to live for Christ and serve others. Henrietta was a nobody in the world, but she was God's gift to Anne, and who knows but God how many other suffering

**children of God needed her love and comfort? Everybody is somebody when they are a channel of God's love.**

**Most of the trouble of the world is caused by people trying to become important, and most of the blessings of the world are caused by people trying to be useful. Jesus was tempted to become important by jumping off the temple, but He chose to be useful. All of His miracles were done to help people solve a problem or meet a need. Our goal in life is to be like Him and seek to be useful in being a blessing to others. This is the road to success in God's book. We may not have much to work with, just as the little lad did not, but if we make what we have available, Jesus can make it adequate, and we can become successful nobodies. You have no idea what Jesus might do with your resources if you yield them to Him. That little boy would have laughed at you had you told him that God would do great things with his lunch that day. We need to learn that little is much when we make it available to Christ.**

**Mary Millis was a poor housemaid in an English nobleman's home. The son was being allowed to grow up with no knowledge of the Bible, and so Mary taught the boy to read the Bible and to put his trust in Jesus. That boy grew up to become Lord Shaftesbury. He changed the course of England's history by fighting for laws that protected children from working 12 hour days in coal mines. He helped establish schools all over England. He brought about prison reform, and changed the attitude of a nation in many ways. He became somebody in the world because of a nobody who was somebody yielded to God, and who yielded what little she had to her Lord, and it was enough.**

**Another Mary was a tiny Chinese slave girl named Mary Liu. She was just a worthless nobody to her mistress who threw her away on a dung heap to die. Her feet were nearly burned away, and her hands were hopelessly crippled. A missionary heard her pathetic cries and**

**rescued her. She was taken to a hospital where they amputated her feet and fingers. Wooden feet were made, and she was given a lot of love. What could such a person give in return? This poor little nobody with such a damaged body became the editor of two Christian magazines called The Messenger and The Star. She made what she had available and Jesus made it adequate to feed far more than five thousand with the bread of life.**

**If you ever feel like a nobody with very little to offer for the kingdom of God, do not despair. You are just what Jesus is looking for to demonstrate again, as He has all through history, that He loves to make much of little. He did it with the lad and his lunch, and He will do it with any of us who give what we have for Him to use. This is the key to becoming a successful nobody, which means one who is somebody in the eyes of God.**

#### **4. GROWTH IS SUCCESS Based on I Cor. 3:1-9**

**Conrad Hilton, president of the world's leading hotel organization, has all his life prayed for God's guidance to help him grow. Mr. Hilton is a professing Christian who, like many other successful Christians in the world of business, feels that we should never be content with what is small, but keep our sights set on what is big. He started in Cisco, Texas with a small \$40,000 dollar hotel, but even then he had his eye on the Waldorf-Astoria, the most famous hotel in the world at that time, and in 1949 he got it. He did not then give up the desire to grow, however, but began the long complicated process of acquiring the Statler Hotels. In 1954 the largest real-estate transaction ever made up till then in the United States took place when he bought the Statler chain for the \$11,000,000.**

**Conrad Hilton never stopped growing, and that was one of the key factors in his success. This has been true for successful people in all areas of life. Longfellow in his declining years was asked how he could be so energetic and write with such power. He pointed to an old apple tree and replied, "That apple tree is very old, but I never saw prettier blossoms on it than it now bares. The tree grows a little new wood each year, and I suppose it is out of that new wood that those blossoms come. Like the apple tree I try to grow a little new wood each year." A tree that stops growing is a dying tree, and a life that stops growing is a failing life, for the facts of life, and the teaching of God's Word is, that growth is success. All that is living must grow or die. This is as true in the realm of the spirit as it is in the natural realm. Paul makes this point clear-**

## **I. GROWTH IS ESSENTIAL.**

**Paul is not scolding the Corinthian Christians because they are immature babes in Christ. That would be as foolish as scolding a baby for not being a man. It is not only legitimate, it is absolutely essential that churches have immature babes. There is no way to grow the kingdom except by winning new converts who begin as babes. Paul is not angry because they are immature, but because of their lack of growth. No one can complain that a baby is a baby, but it is a problem when an adult is a baby. When a child does not grow it is a serious matter. Lack of growth is the real issue here, and it is their failure to grow that is making them fail in the Christian life.**

**There can be no success without growth. The tragedy of many Christian lives is that they come to a point where they stop growing. Elizabeth O'Connor, in her book *Our Many Selves*, feels that this is the essence of sin. She writes, "The meaning of sin is usually not that we try to make ourselves the center of everything. That may happen, but it is a monstrous perversion. We are usually more subtle. We**



**make our present state of selfhood the meaning of existence and thus refuse the deeper meaning which lies within and beyond this present." In other words, if you stop pressing on toward the goal for which God made you, you are failing. Failure is often success that stops growing. That was the case with the Corinthians. Glen Dresback put it in poetry-**

**But no defeat is quite so imminent  
To common ways as the defeat success  
Turns into when it puts aside the dreams  
That made it be and somehow, grows content  
With what it is, forever giving less  
Until it is not, and no longer seems.**

**If growth is success, then lack of growth is failure. This means the question is, not where are you, but where are you going? The new Christian who is immature but growing is a successful Christian. The mature Christian who is standing still is failing, for growth is success. The analogies that Paul uses in this text are analogies that deal with growth. In verse 9 Paul says you are God's field and God's building. A field that does not grow anything is a flop, and so is a building that never gets off the foundation. There must be growth and advancement, or there is no success.**

**The Biblical perspective is similar to that of Ben Sweetland the contemporary success writer. He stresses that success is not a destination but a journey. You are not just successful when you arrive at your goal, but you are successful the minute you start, and all along the way as you move toward it. Paul makes it clear in this context that even the unsuccessful Christian will make it to heaven, but he will lose rewards because of his poor journey. It is not just getting to heaven but how you live along the way that determines if you are a success or failure in the Christian life. If growth is the key, then it follows that**

**success is a journey, and not just a destination. It is not enough to be going to be with Christ, but we must be growing to be like Christ now.**

**It is not just where we get, but what we become that is important. In secular life many strive only for a goal, and when they arrive and are rich, or famous, they have a temporary pleasure, and then in no time at all they are bored and dissatisfied. They failed to realize that true success is not just in getting but in becoming. The same mistake was being made by the Corinthians. They wanted to get this gift and that gift, and they wanted their particular man to dominate, but in all their getting they were not growing, or becoming mature in Christ. The result was, all of their success was really failure, for they were not growing. The best gifts without growth only add to the tragedy.**

**Spiros Zodhiates, the contemporary Greek commentator, says of the Greek word Paul uses in verse 1 to refer to them as men of the flesh, "The state of being sarkikos is one of resistance to the elements that cause growth." A carnal Christian is one who refuses to grow. The spiritual Christian is one who refuses to stop growing.**

**After president Coolidge issued his famous quote "I do not choose to run" statement, he was besieged by reporters seeking a more detailed account. One of them, more persistent than the rest, followed him to the door of his library and asked, "Exactly why don't you want to be president again?" Coolidge looked him squarely in the eye and answered, "Because, there's no chance for advancement." He may have been joking, but the fact is, there are points in secular life beyond which we cannot advance, but in the spiritual life there is no such point. Growth is always a possibility for every believer at all times.**

**Life must grow or die. All agree that eternal life is both quantitative and qualitative. It lasts forever, but it is also a quality of**

**life that begins now and grows forever. The degree of that growth in this life determines much as to the reward we receive in the life to come. My own conviction is that eternal life means eternal qualitative growth. Heaven will not be a place of stagnant sameness, but a place where the adventure of advancement goes on forever with the finite ever moving closer to the qualities of the infinite. That journey does not begin in eternity, but begins right now.**

**Paul, as a concerned spiritual parent, knows that if he can not motivate these Christians to grow up, they will miss out on God's best for both time and eternity. We might question if it is legitimate to try and motivate people by appealing to rewards or judgment, but the fact is, the Bible does it, and Paul is doing it here. It is also a fact that many, if not most, successful people have had parents who constantly motivated them to grow and keep moving ahead. Lyndon Johnson was a compulsive worker due to the motivation of his father. As a boy he would be awakened in the morning by his father saying, "Get up, Lyndon, get up! Everybody else in town has a head start on you already." John F. Kennedy had a father who did the same for him. His sister Eunice wrote, "Even when we were six and seven years old, daddy always entered us in public swimming races...the thing he kept telling us was that coming in second was just no good. The important thing was to win."**

**It is obvious that you can go to excess in this area of motivation and do great harm. Richard Nixon was also strongly motivated to win and succeed, and he did it, but his drive carried him beyond what was legitimate. This was equally true of many others who never got caught. There is a dangerous extreme in every virtue. Even growth can be excessive. Cancer is excessive growths. The abuse of any idea or truth, however, is not to derail us from its pursuit. Paul is not worried about these Corinthians growing so fast they become clumsy spiritual giants. He is fearful that they will remain stunted babes.**

**In the book Cradles Of Eminence, there are 400 famous men and women studied, and all but two of them were motivated at an early age to develop a love for reading and learning. It is a simple law of life. If you do not feed, you do not grow. If you do feed on great food, you become a greater person. Paul is working on this very principle. He wants to motive these Christians to feed on the solid food of Christian truth. You become what you eat, and if you can get people to study the Word of God in depth, and really get into the meat of it early in life, you will have a great Christian life growing. A growing successful Christian is one who has as much motivation to feed his spirit as he does to feed his body. If we were as eager to find gems of truth in the Word of God as we are to find delightful tastes for our tongues, we would be growing Christians. We need to heed Paul's rebuke, where none of us are without sin in this area. Secondly-**

## **II. GROWTH IS CONDITIONAL.**

**It doesn't just happen, for it had not happened to the Corinthians. The first condition is that one be aware of his need for growth. Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that they were responsible for their lack of growth. And that only they could choose to change and get growing. The problem was not lack of food or resources, but their lack of preparation and development. They obviously were unaware of how little they had grown. They thought they were giants when they were pigmies. They thought they could judge who was the greatest leader, and what were the best gifts. They thought they had surpassed just about everybody, when in reality they had not gotten beyond the nursery. They were like the little boy who at the end of his kindergarten year said, "Good-by teacher. I sure do like you. I wish you knew enough to teach me in the first grade." He thought he was passing up the teacher. The Corinthians felt the same about their teacher Paul. His first task was to awaken them to the fact that they were not advanced students at all. They were still working on the**

**alphabet.**

**All of us need to realize how little we really know if we are going to be motivated to grow. The illusion of maturity is our biggest hindrance to growth. We feel no need to grow if we think we know enough. We need to humbly admit that we are not giants. We may not be as immature as the Corinthians, but we are far short of the goal that Paul lays down in Eph. 4:13, where he says we are headed for, "...Mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." When we admit we have not yet arrived, then we are ready for growth. Archbishop William Temple once said, "The sin of the world exists not because a few people are spectacularly sinful, but because most of us are as good as we are and no better." If the world is going to be a better place, then all of us have got to get better, and that means we must grow.**

**One of the fascinating aspects of the Incarnation is that our Lord entered into the experience of growth. It was prophesied in Isa. 11:1, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Luke 2:52 says, "An Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." The Greek word for increased is prokopto, which means to strike forward. The Christmas message is "Unto you a child is born." Jesus did not come as a full grown Savior. He had to grow and strike forward. He had to develop physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. Jesus has already gone through the process of growth, and He has fulfilled the conditions of growth. Jesus entered into time and used time wisely to grow. It takes time to grow, and Paul was angry at the Corinthians because they had time and did not use it. We must recognize that only we can so use our time that it leads to growth. No one can force us to grow. We must choose to grow. We must cultivate our taste. I takes time to fall in love with all God wants us to love.**

**People often expect good things to be delightful from the start. Christians are often bored with sermons and Bible study, and quite often it is because they are just plain boring. On the other hand, it is also often due to the fact they have not developed and grown in their love for what is good for them. They have not cultivated their taste for spiritual food. This growth does not just happen. It takes time and effort and the will to develop it. Those who never take the time and put forth the effort will remain babes and likely will do little of lasting value in the Kingdom of God. It takes time to grow, but if you take the time you will gain eternal reward. Susan Coolidge wrote,**

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

**Jesus had to go through this process himself. He had to overcome obstacles in his family, in society, and even with his own disciples. Jesus was growing right up to the point of Gethsemane where he prayed, "not my will but thine be done." He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. He was then a perfect specimen of manhood and ready to be offered as the Lamb without spot for the sin of the world. If we want to count and not just be counted, we too must use our time to grow and strike forward. The strike forward idea is important. It is not where you are but your direction that matters. Christians are in all different degrees of maturity, but they are successful wherever they are if they are moving forward. A child with**

**2 years of practice on the piano is not to be compared with one of the famed masters, yet the child is a successful piano player if there is steady improvement. The parents and teacher are pleased with such success. It is not just the destination but the journey that matters.**

**Growth is success and that is why both Peter and Paul are constantly urging Christians to grow. In II Pet. 3:18 we read, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In I Pet. 2:2 we read, "Desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby." Paul writes in I Thess. 4:10, "We beseech you that ye increase more and more." and in Col. 1:10, "Increasing in the knowledge of God." and in I Thess. 3:12, "The Lord make you to increase in love." and in Eph. 4:18, "That ye may grow up into Him in all things." and in Phil. 1:9, "I pray that your love may abound more and more." You see in everywhere in the New Testament that growth is essential and conditional. Everyone can grow but only those who will to grow, will grow.**

**J.C. Ryle in his classic book on Holiness wrote, " Many admire growth in grace in others, and wish that they themselves were like them. But they seem to suppose that those who grow are what they are by some special gift or grant from God, and that as this gift is not bestowed on themselves they must be content to sit still. This is a grievous delusion and one against which I desire to testify with all my might. I wish it to be distinctly understood that growth in grace is bound up with the use of means within the reach of all believers."**

**Let me then be always growing,  
Never, never standing still,  
Listening, learning, better knowing  
Thee, and Thy most blessed will;  
That the Master's I may trace,  
Day by day, my growth in grace.**

## **Unknown**

### **5. THE BATTLE FOR SUCCESS Based on I Cor. 3:1-15**

**In the 35 years following the Civil War 3 success writers towered high above all others, and they became successful by writing about success. All 3 were ordained men. One of them was Russell Conwell who was the pastor of the Baptist Temple of Philadelphia. He delivered his famous lecture over 6000 times, and raised several million dollars with which he built a large university. The title of his lecture was Acres Of Diamonds, and this is the story behind it:**

**One day as he was jogging down the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates on a camel, led by an old Arab guide, he was told this story. There once lived in ancient Persia a wealthy and contented farmer by the name of Ali Hafed. One day an old priest visited him and told him about diamonds that had been discovered. He told of the wealth and power that came with their possession. That night the farmer could not sleep. He was discontent with what he had. The next day he sold his farm and went off in search of diamonds. After wandering through Asia and most of Europe he had become a wretched man in rags and in despair. He threw himself into a great wave and was drown.**

**The man who bought his farm was one day leading his camel through the garden, and the camel desired a drink. As the camel nosed the water the owner noticed a flash of light from the sand in the brook. He picked up a stone and took it home. A few days later the old priest came to visit. He recognized that stone as a diamond. They**



**rushed together to the brook, and thus was discovered the famous diamond mine of Golconda, the most magnificent of all history. Ali Hafed had lived on acres of diamonds, and died a failure because he didn't recognize what he had, and was off looking for it all over the world.**

**Russell Conwell was impressed with this story, for he had seen a similar thing happen many times. Numerous poor people sold their land to go off to improve their lot only to learn that their had been oil or gold on their land. He had been a poor farmer, and had run away at 15 to make a better life for himself. He went to Europe, but returned and fought in the Civil War. It was while lying in a hospital tent dying from his wounds that he received Jesus as his Savior. He entered the ministry and raised millions to build up a church and school to meet the needs of working class people. His conviction, like that of most success writers, is that every person can be successful if they recognize and practice some basic principles. Our purpose is to show that Scripture in general, and Paul in particular, support this idea that all of us can be successful. We want to examine the basic principle that Paul stresses to the Corinthians that applies to all of us. Let's consider-**

## **THE ARENA WHERE THE BATTLE FOR SUCCESS IS WON.**

**Jesus said that the kingdom of God is within you, and Paul made this same point to the Romans when he said that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Corinthian Christians were failing in the Christian life because they were like Ali Hafed. They were looking for success somewhere out there in the world. But success is not found in externals says Paul. All their search for success in following men, and getting excited about gifts with the most external display, is taking them far afield. Their acres of diamonds are not out there in the**

**world, but they are within them.**

**In verse 16 Paul writes, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you?" Their greatest resource was right within them. They were wasting their lives in the futile search for what was already theirs.**

**Paul tells them in vv. 21-23, "For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephus or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's. In 4:8 Paul writes, "Already you are filled! Already you have become rich." Yet, with all of these resources they were failing. Paul is constantly telling them where they are failing. They were successes living as failures when they should have been failures living as successes. If we recognize that the arena where we battle for success is within, we can learn to fail successfully.**

**History has some great examples of failures being the key to success. The famous atheist Robert Ingersall was once traveling by train with a companion by the name of Lew Wallace. As they traveled they saw one church steeple after another. There were several in every town they passed through. Ingersall said, "Lew, you are a learned man and a thinker. Why don't you spend some time in research concerning Christianity's leader Jesus Christ, and then write a book proving once and for all that he was an impostor, and thus relieve these misguided people of their delusions."**

**His friend was captivated by the idea and agreed. He started immediately to travel and consult ancient manuscripts and original sources for the period of history in which Jesus lived. His goal was to write a book proving Jesus was an impostor. He totally failed to achieve that goal, for he discovered that all the evidence supported the fact that Jesus was who He said He was-the Son of God and the Savior of men. At the age of 50 he prayed to God for the first time saying,**

**"O God, show yourself to me, forgive me my many sins, and help me to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ." Lew Wallace failed to write his original book, but he went on to write what has become one of the greatest books of all time-Ben-Hur. He found both success and salvation by failing to reach his goal because he found God's goal for him.**

**History is full of such experiences. God seems to delight in bringing good out of evil, and success out of failure. William Wilburforce was a hunchback who suffered from many cruel jests, but God used him to so fight for other underdogs. He got a bill passed through the British Parliament that set a million slaves free. Alexander Whyte was born out of wedlock. He got the worst start in life, but he ended up as one of the greatest preachers in the history of Scotland. His books are read around the world yet today.**

**The purpose for Paul writing to these immature babes is to help them become mature in Christ, and able to digest the solid food. He wants them to reap the reward of the riches within them. Paul is convinced that failures can become successes. He knew this for he was one of the most successful failures in history. One of the great themes of literature and the Bible is this theme of success out of failure. The ugly duckling becomes the beautiful swan. Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer is mocked for his unusual nose, but in the end he becomes a hero. Cinderella the lowliest becomes the highest and noblest. In the Bible it is Joseph the despised brother who becomes the hero and savior of his people. The stone rejected by the builders becomes the chief cornerstone, and He who is despised and rejected of men becomes the one before whom every knee will bow.**

**This theme is so universal that it ought to teach us clearly not to write off any failure, for the facts of life show that failure is one of the key roads on the way to success. It is almost impossible to succeed**

**without failure. The arena is within, and if you do not let failure defeat you there, you can always press on to success. Paul spent a lot of time with the Corinthians. It was about 18 months, and yet they are babes in Christ with all kinds of problems. Paul did not throw up his hands in despair, and give up on them because he failed. He wrote this letter, and God used the failure of both him and the Corinthians to give the whole world the blessing of this Epistle. Had Paul given up and let externals discourage him, then he would have been a failure.**

**Twixt failure and success the points so fine  
Men sometimes know not when they touch the line.  
Just when the pearl was waiting one more plunge,  
How many a struggler has thrown up the sponge.**

**Author unknown**

**Successful men always take that one more plunge, for they know the only real failure is in giving up. Washington won the Revolutionary War by retreating. He gave up so much territory, and he surrendered so many strategic positions, and lost so many battles, and yet he was not a failure because he never quit. He pressed on through all his failures to a final success. The battle out there in the external world did not defeat him because he never gave up within.**

**Our Lord battled within over the issues of success and failure. He had much opposition from the leadership of Israel. It would have been easier to succeed had he conformed to their will. All would have been easier had he yielded to the temptation to take Satan's shortcut to power. The people also wanted to make him king. He had numerous roads to success, but he resisted them all, and he took the road of apparent failure to cross. He set his face like a flint to go to the cross and do His Father's will. W. J. Dawson wrote,**

**He dwelt within the wilderness**

**Disdaining Mammon's lure;  
He walked among the thorns of pain,  
And yet his step was sure.  
He saw the gilded chariots pass,  
The conqueror's array;  
They held to him a laurel crown,  
And still he turned away.  
Back to the wilderness he went  
Without a thought of loss;  
He hewed out of the wood two beams  
And made Himself a cross.  
If I would save them I must die!  
This was the thing He said.  
Perchance the hearts that hate me now  
Will learn to love me dead.  
He died upon the cross He made,  
Without a lip to bless;  
He rose into a million hearts,  
And this was His success.**

**Jesus won His battle for success within. All of the externals were negative, and it looked like total failure, but Jesus did not give up. He said, "Not my will but thine be done." This decision was to will success in the midst of failure. Paul wanted the Corinthians to do this very thing. Stop struggling for your own will to be fulfilled, and stop being like children always wanting your own way. That kind of struggle for success leads to failure. On the other hand, learning from your failure is a key to success. This applies to all of life. It is true for our success in the world as well as in the Christian life.**

**Babe Ruth was the home run king of baseball before Hank Aaron passed him, but the record shows that he failed to hit a home run far more than he succeeded. He struck out as many times as he hit a**

home run. Great successes are frequently failing, but not letting failure hinder their will to succeed. Edison failed in over 900 experiments before he succeeded in getting a light bulb to work. Charles Kettering, vice president of General Motors, spent 14 years on thousands of experiments trying to get the spark knock out of auto engines. It was 14 years of failure after failure, and then came success with tetraethyl lead. He said, "All in research is 99.9% failure and if you succeed once, you're in." Great men of science have to learn to live with failure as they press on to success.

No musician ever became a success without first living through many failures. Before any piece of music is played perfect, it is played poorly many times. Traveling the road of failure is the only way to success in most areas of life. No child ever learns to walk without falling, and no babe in Christ ever becomes mature in Christ without failing. One of the values of this letter to the Corinthians is that it shows clearly how Christians can fail in so many ways. This is not to discourage us, but to encourage us to see that failure should not hold us back from progress anymore than it does the scientific researcher.

What this means for all of us wherever we are on the road to Christlikeness, which is the ultimate Christian success, is that we must will to win within. We dare not let externals and our own weakness discourage us from pressing on. The first principle for success is to recognize that the arena where we battle for success is within. This is where the power of positive thinking does play a major role in the Christian life. We need to have positive thinking about what God can do through any yielded instrument. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." He thought right, and this gave him the resource for success. He pressed on whatever the external obstacles to be a winner.

**When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high,  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit-  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.  
Life is queer with its twists and turns  
As everyone of us sometime learns,  
And many a fellow turns about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out.  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow.  
You may succeed with another blow.**

**Author unknown**

**The Bible proclaims it, and history proves it. Enrico Caruso was told by his music teacher that he could not sing. He persevered for a dozen years, and finally got an opportunity. His voice cracked during rehearsal, and he fled from the theater in tears. He filled in for a tenor who became ill one night, and the audience hissed him. He continued to study and practice, and finally ended at the top. Walt Disney applied for a job as an artist at the Kansas City Star, and was told that he had no talent. His first series of cartoons, "Oswald the Rabbit" was a flop. He kept trying, and then came Mickey Mouse. Zane Gray couldn't sell a story during the first 5 years as a writer. George Gershwin wrote almost a 100 melodies before he sold his first one for five dollars. On and on the record goes of those who had to plod through failure on the way to success. But we must keep coming back to the principle that enables one to do that, and that is an awareness that the battle must be won within.**

**No doubt these Corinthians Christians wondered about their weaknesses. How can we obey the high standards of Christ? Who can really love their neighbor as themselves? Who can escape lustful**

thoughts, and how can we always turn the other cheek? The ideal Christian life seems to be beyond our reach, and so failure is guaranteed. Most Christians are caught in this conflict at one time or another, and the only answer that can lead them to success is the recognition that the will to win within is the key. Catherine Marshall in her book *Beyond Ourselves* deals with this issue. She writes, "Our emotions are not the real us. The motivating force at the center of our physical being is our will. The will is the governing power in us. Before God we are responsible only for the set of that will..."

The issue is not how do you feel, but what do you will? You cannot control your unruly emotions often. You cannot control lust, but what is your will? Do you will to do the will of God, or do you will to insist on your own self-centered desire? You may feel resentment you cannot control, but do you will to forgive? Is it your will to win and be successful in the Christian life, or do you will to have your own way, even though it is not God's will? This is the arena where you fight and determine if you will be a failure or success. Recognition of this is what enables people to succeed when failure seems to be inevitable. The Corinthian Christians were weak and feeble Christians, and their lives were full of frustrating problems because they failed to take advantage of the rich resources that were within. We cannot look down our noses at these early saints, however, for the facts of life make it clear that even mature Christians often suffer from inner defeat and failure.

Dr. Frank Lauback, born in Benton, PA., and destined to become one of the most famous Christians of the 20th century, is a good illustration. At one point in his career he desperately wanted to become the president of the Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines. He was one of the 7 trustees who had to vote for the man to fill the position. When the time came, 3 voted for him and 3 against him. He did not know this and so he voted for his opponent, and by



**that one vote lost the election. In a very real sense he voted himself out of his own dream.**

**So great was his disappointment that he developed a bitterness that poisoned his life. For 2 years he became a semi-invalid. He hobbled around like a defeated man until he finally realized that he was being foolish. He voted for his own failure, but he could also vote for his own success if he would yield his life to God. He won that inner victory, and began to cash in his acres of diamonds. Out of his pit he rose to heights of Christian success beyond his wildest dream. No one who has ever lived has helped more people learn how to read than Frank Lauback. The Gospel has reached millions because of his labor. Instead of a president of a school, he became a teacher of nations. The arena where the battle had to be won was within. Had he allowed failure to continue to dominate his inner life, he never would have become a success. Success is not out there in the luck, breaks, and good fortune. All that enters the picture only after one has won the battle for success within.**

**The greatest success stories are not those of 4 boys who became millionaires, but of those who are without hope and without God in the world who find the Pearl of great price. Those who are in darkness who find the riches of light in Christ are the greatest successes, and this is a battle also that is won within. If you do not believe anyone can be successful in this way, listen to this true story. In 1924 the judge in a Midwest courtroom said to Starr Daily, "I'm about to sentence you to a major prison term for the third time. I know you are sick. And I know that more punishment is not the remedy. But your record leaves me powerless."**

**At 16 Starr became the leader of a gang of safecrackers. He was the best, but even the best get caught. His father hoped that after 14 years in prison he would be different, but he lived to see him sentenced**

**the 3rd time. Starr plodded and escape the 3rd time. When it was discovered, he was put in the hole for 15 days. It was a dark and damp hole where he was given a piece of bread and a cup of water at 6 in the morning. Twelve hours later he was given another piece of bread and cup of water. After 15 days of this his feet were black with congealed blood. For weeks after he was left on the icy cold stone floor in filth, and he was near death.**

**Only hate kept Starr alive, but then he got so weak that he came to the end of his hate, and it was then that a positive thought entered his mind. He thought, "All of my life I have been a dynamo of energy. What might have happened if I had used that energy for something good?" But now it was too late and he was dying. He slept into a state where he dreamed he was in a garden, and Jesus came toward him. This was the one he had been trying to avoid all his life. Jesus looked into his eyes, and he felt love like he never felt it before. It extracted all of the hate from his heart, and he had this thought: "I am submerged in Reality, I'll never be the same again, now or through eternity."**

**He dreamed that all whom he ever hated or injured past before him, and he poured out his love to them. He was taken to the prison hospital after that. He not only recovered, but was such a changed man that he was released in 1930, which was 5 years ahead of time. This man with a 6th grade education went on to write 6 books, and lectured all over the nation. He pointed numerous prisoners to Christ. He became a success for eternity, and then for time, and it all began when his inner resistance was defeated, and he yielded his inner life to Christ. That is where all lasting success begins. Whether you are a wicked sinner, or a weakly saint, the battle for success must be won in your heart. If you surrender to the Lordship of Christ, you can win the battle for success within.**

## **6. THE MOTIVATION TO SUCCEED Based on I Cor. 3:1-15**

Successful people almost always attribute their success, in large measure, to the influence and inspiration of some other person. Henry Ford tells of how he was in a period of uncertainty about building his gas engine. He was discouraged about it, and was letting the idea go dead in him. It was at this point that he met Thomas Edison at a convention in New York City. Edison got him to explain his idea, and draw his plan on a menu card. When Ford finished, Edison banged his fist on the table and said, "Young man, that's the thing; you have it! Keep at it!" This word of encouragement from the world's greatest inventive genius is just what Ford needed. He wrote, "That bang on the table that night was worth world's to me." He went back from that convention and built his engine. He had it in him to do it, but it may never have gotten done without that encouragement from Edison.

Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke wisdom when he said, "Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can." Paul was striving to be that person to the Corinthian Christians. He was trying to be that external stimulus that motivates people to be all they can be. In part one of our study of success we stressed the basic truth that the arena where the battle for success is fought is within. We must never lose sight of this truth. Dr. Maxwell Maltz, the celebrated plastic surgeon and psychologist, and author of *Psycho-Cybernetics*, wrote, "Your mind is the battleground in which you win or lose....it is a battleground in which you lose the war against negative feelings or in which you win this essential battle and go on to face life with success-type approaches."

**Because this is a vital part of the story of successful living, Paul emphasizes, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." A vital part is not the whole, however. The heart is vital, but it is not the whole of the body. The battle is within, but it is also a fact that a successful battle within depends upon influences from without. It is almost impossible to be successful alone. We need the positive influences of others to bring out the best in us.**

**Victor Goertzel and his wife read over 5,000 volumes of biography to produce their book Cradles Of Eminence. They examine the childhood and home life of 400 of the most famous men and women of the 20th century. They concluded that if you want to be successful you have got to be influenced by the right people. In the majority of cases these successful people were influenced by one or both parents who had a strong drive toward intellectual or creative achievement. The external influence of someone is what motivated them to will to win within.**

**Joseph Brunten Jr., who was born and educated in Pittsburgh, tells of the influence that motivated him to climb to Chief Scout Executive of Boy Scouts of America. He was on a hike with a scout troop as a boy, and they had gone a long way and were tired. When the scout master said to rest they all flopped on the grass. Then the scout master said, "Look about you. What do you see?" All in chorus they shouted, "Grass!" He ordered each patrol to lash 4 sticks together in a crude frame about a foot square, and place it on the ground. This was to be their world for the next hour. The boys were puzzled, but they began to observe. In minutes they realized there was more than just grass. There was a world of great variety with different plants, spiders, mites, earthworm mounds, and even a bit of fluff off a rabbit's tail. There were rock particles, pebbles, and minerals. Joseph never forgot that experience, and he writes, "In one hour I received one of the most important lessons I have ever had in my life.**

**I learned to observe instead of just to see. I learned to look below the surface instead of to judge by appearance." The scout master happened to be his father, and this lesson on seeing was a motivating factor in his success.**

**Success through seeing is common for successful people, for they usually see more than others. William T. Brady, one of America's most successful executives, told of the little girl who was taken for a cruise around Manhattan Island on a clear day. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Daddy, I can look farther than my eyes can see." Brady who knows what success is all about said that is the key- to look farther than our eyes can see. The person who can help us do that is a key factor in our success. The Apostle Paul was being that person to the failing Corinthian Christians. They were failing because they were superficial. They saw only in front of their noses. Paul lifted their sights to the future and to eternity. Look ahead to the day of judgment and reward said Paul. Build what will last, or in the end you will lose. Parents need to help their children see the future, and not let them get locked into the present as all there is. Paul is striving to be that positive parental influence in the lives of these spiritual children that will lead them upward and onward to successful Christian lives. He is scolding them like foolish children that they might wake up, grow up, look ahead, and become more mature in Christ.**

**This analogy from the family is not forced on the text, but is actually found in the context. In chapter 4 verses 14-16 we read, "I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then be imitators of me." This means that the pattern for Christian success follows the same principle as the pattern for success in all realm of life. Parental influence is a key to success in the physical and spiritual life. The battle has to be won**

**within, but in order for this to happen there must be an openness to positive external influence.**

**As third parties looking on we can put ourselves in either the place of the influencer(Paul), or the influencees(Corinthians). In order to grow ourselves we need to let the text speak to us, and in order to be a help to others we need to examine what Paul is doing in the text. Why does he take this approach, and what is its value for us today? Lets examine first the fact that it is-**

## **I. A NEGATIVE APPROACH.**

**Paul is so negative here that we know there must be another paradox involved, for he is a positive thinker. We can only conclude that somehow a negative approach is sometimes the most positive method of influence. He tells it like it is, and what is isn't very good. He tells them that they are not spiritual at all. They are so unspiritual that they can't appreciate all the gourmet spiritual food he has for them. He would like to throw a banquet and have a feast, but all they are fit for is a baby bottle of milk. Paul is expressing his own frustration. In the previous chapter he has written of the marvelous wisdom God has revealed. He has revealed secrets beyond what the eyes of man have ever seen, or the ears of man have ever heard, or the mind of man ever conceived. He has knowledge that is possessed only by the mind of God Himself, and he ends chapter two by saying, "We have the mind of Christ."**

**Paul is already ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb. He is in on the secrets of the ages. He is sinking the teeth of his mind into spiritual steaks as thick as the skulls of these Corinthian Christians. He now comes to chapter three and he has to start with a but. The feast is ready, but you are not. The meat is available, but you cannot digest it. There is always a but that breaks in between the ideal and**

**the real. Success is in getting rid of that but. When the Christian life is murdered it is not mystery. It is not the butler, but the but that did it. The potential is there, but it never becomes actual because of that but.**

**Here is the Apostle Paul with a degree from the school of direct revelation from God, and he is stuck with a class of babes. They not only do not have the capacity to digest anything but milk, but they even fight over the milk. They are so childish in their jealousy and strife that Paul says they are no different than ordinary men. They are so shallow in their spiritual life that the naked eye cannot detect any distinction between them and the non-Christian. That is really sharp rebuke, and not constructive criticism. It is cutting negative criticism. Yet Paul says he is doing it, not to crush them and stomp them into the ground. His motive is to lift them, and be a positive influence in helping them to mature. Is this a wise approach for anyone trying to be a positive influence? Can immature people be made better by this method? Can parents or Christian leaders profit from this approach of Paul?**

**First we need to see that Paul had good precedent for this negative approach to a positive goal. Jesus wanted nothing but the best for Peter, but on one occasion we read in Mark 8:33, "he rebuked Peter, and said get behind me, Satan! For you are not on ;the side of God, but of men." Even to the Apostle of love, John, and his brother James, Jesus had to speak negative words of rebuke. When they wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans we read in Luke 8:55, "But he turned and rebuked them and said, you do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them." The study of the positive value of the negative is a subject greater than we can deal with here, but the fact is both the Old and New Testaments make its value clear. Eccles. 7:5 says, "It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools." A number of Proverbs say the same thing. In other**

**words those who always sing your praises are not necessarily the most positive influence in motivating you to success.**

**A mother in Pittsburgh told of driving 400 miles to New Your City with her husband and two little boys. Ivan in the back seat was a perfect angel. He just sat quietly deep in thought. She was impressed and thought to herself that he deserves some praise. Just as they entered the Lincoln Tunnel she turned and told him what a wonderful boy he was. I'm so proud of you," she said. A minute later the world of tranquility cam to an end. Ivan pulled out the ashtray and spilled the contents all over them. The ashes and butts and smoke kept coming like atomic fall out. They were in a tunnel in heavy traffic and choking like crazy. She said if there had not been so many other cars around she might have murdered him on the spot. They were so shocked and mystified by his behavior they took his to a doctor.**

**This is what the doctor learned. Ivan had been quiet because he was thinking of how to get rid of his younger brother who was snuggled between mom and dad in the front while he was alone in the back. Jealousy filled his whole being, and when the mother praised him he felt guilty. ?To show he didn't deserve it he dumped the ashtray. Undeserved praise can give rise to tension and guilt, and actually hinder maturity. The Corinthian Christians were jealous and envious of one another, and they were struggling for superiority. Paul did not close his eyes to their immature behavior and praise them for their zeal. He rebuked them for their sub-Christian attitudes, for only by seeing themselves for what they really were could they ever get moving toward what they ought to be. Paul was a master builder, and he knew that sometimes you must tear down before you can build up.**

**If a child, or a Christian brother is on the road of failure, the most positive influence you can have is often the negative of rebuke. Paul wrote to Titus on how to handle those with false ideas and in 1:13 said,**



**"Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." There is the paradox as clear as a bell. The positive goal can only be attained at times by a negative approach. Christian positive thinking is not so superficial as to think that one must be always positive. A Christian positive thinker will follow both his Lord and the greatest Apostle, and be negative when necessary, for there can be blessings in bumps. Two year old Kevin O'Connor was being rushed to a Philadelphia Hospital by an ambulance. A chicken bone was caught in his throat, and even the slightest delay could mean the difference between life or death. The driver, therefore, did not take it easy, but sped along as fast as he could. He hit a hole that bounced Kevin and made him cough up the bone. Ordinarily a bump is totally negative and good for nothing, but sometimes it is just the thing that is needed.**

**Just as bumps are not always blessings, however, so also it is not recommended that rebuke be our usual approach to be a positive influence. We must need to be aware that it is a legitimate means to the end of success. To do it well we must examine more clearly the words of Paul who was a master at the use of this approach. We need to see that always at the heart of his negative approach was-**

## **II. A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.**

**When you see a sign that screams at your mind-"WRONG WAY"-you are not angered by it but thankful for the warning. You know the motive behind the sign is your own protection and safety. Many times we search for a sign to tell us if we are on the right road, and the quicker we find one that tells us we are going the wrong way the better we feel. This is what a truly Christian rebuke should do for us, and this is what Paul had the ability to do. The positive attitude of love and concern runs all through this Epistle of rebuke. Those who knew Paul knew his rebuke was motivated by love, and that it was for their own protection and good. The negative approach without the positive**

**attitude is the approach of an enemy and not that of a friend. Paul was a friend, and it comes through clearly. He calls them brothers. They are immature, but they are still brothers and sisters in the family of God.**

**They are just as saved, and just as bought by the blood of Christ as he is. He makes it clear that it is their very dignity as God's children, and his respect for their potential that motivates him to rebuke them. WRONG WAY, Paul is screaming, and not to hinder them, but to help them get going the right way. One of my professors, Dr. Bob Smith, used to say, "I can disagree with you violently on principle, but still love you as a person." Not all Christians are capable of doing this, and, therefor, not all Christians can be effective in using the negative approach as a positive influence. If Dr. Bob rebuked you, you knew it was out of love and respect for you, and that is the way it was with Paul. He ends this Epistle with the positive note of love, "my love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen." If that is not the final impression you leave with people, you have no right to practice the negative approach. It will only lead to failure rather than success.**

**An optimism must characterize us as it did Paul to be effective in rebuke. Paul knew they were living defeated lives, but he also believed they could grow up and succeed. That hope was the basis for his writing in the first place. Paul was not like an angry father shouting, "You are a stupid hunk of hide, and you will never amount to anything." Paul was saying, "You are a stupid hunk of hide, but you are meant by God to be so much more, and I am determined to help you be that so much more." Pat Boone said an optimist is a hope addict, and that is what Paul was. He always had hope and tried to instill it in others. He expected others to see they could be what God expected them to be.**

**You will fail as a motivator is you condemn failure without**

**conveying expectation of growth. Paul expected great things from these dormant seeds. He expected what he planted to grow and produce what is beautiful and useful. The positive attitude of expectation is what makes one a successful motivator.**

**Mickey Mantle became one of the greatest batters in the history of baseball, but not without winning battles over failure first, and not without the motivation of external influence. As a boy he played a lot with his father pitching to him. His father would one day play the major role in his career by means of a negative approach with a positive attitude. When Mickey finally made it to the major leagues, and joined the New York Yankees, he started as a flop. In a double header with Boston he struck out five times in a row. He cried like a baby, and Casey Stengel put him back in the minor leagues. He was on the bottom, and was ready to give up when his father came to visit him, and listen to his sob story of failure. His dad's reply was, "Mickey, things get tough at times and you must learn to take it. If that is all the guts you've got, you don't belong in baseball." Mickey knew that that rebuke meant, "But I think you have what it takes to make it." That negative rebuke from a positive attitude motivated him to go on to win the battle within and become a champion.**

**It is almost impossible to become a champion without the aid of external motivation. The Corinthian Christians would have settled down to a near pagan level without Paul's influence. All of us need the blessings of bumps, and the values that come from being reminded of our weaknesses and failures. Creative anxiety is what this is called by success writers. Most all successful people in any realm have it. It is that uncomfortable feeling that they were meant for more than what they now are. Walt Whitman in his autobiography wrote, "I was simmering, simmering. Emerson brought me to a boil." All of us need that external stimulus that will bring us to a boil where we act and begin to do something to grow and become the more we were meant to**

be.

**Billy B. Sharp in his book Choose Success has a chapter entitled "Are you uncomfortable? That's Good!" In it he shows how successful people all through history have been motivated by dissatisfaction. He writes, "Unless you experience creative anxiety in your environment, you will not grow, for you are not being motivated to move from where you are to where you would like to be."**

**The Holy Spirit creates this uncomfortable feeling in the lives of those He draws into the Kingdom. Only that sinner who longs to be different responds to the Gospel of Christ, and finds life's greatest success in being saved by faith. Only those saints who are dissatisfied respond to rebuke and move on from the milk to acquire the taste for the meat of the Word. The Word has plenty of rebuke, but they know it is because God has a high view of their potential and wants them to grow. They use the Word, in both its negative and positive approach, as the key tool for the motivation to succeed.**

## **7. FRUIT IS SUCCESS Based on II Peter 1:8**

**Two young brothers, Nathaniel and John Chapman, entered the Black Bear Tavern, the largest building in Pittsburgh back in 1788. They were looking for a place to sleep in this little village on the Western Frontier. All of the rooms were filled, so they had to sleep on the floor in the corner of the bar. Little did the bar keeper realize that one day one of these brothers, John, would become one of the most famous characters West of the Allegheny Mountains. John had been to Harvard, and had also been a missionary preaching the doctrines of the Swedish mystic Swedenborg. He came to Pittsburgh**

**because it was the point from which people departed for settlements in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.**

**John and his brother went up the Allegheny River to visit an uncle. When they found his cabin enemy they decided to settle there for awhile. John noted that there was an absence of fruit trees in the area, and he decided to do something about it. He found an neglected orchard and set out hundreds of apple tree shoots. Clarence Macartney in his book of historical studies called Right Here In Pittsburgh says, "This was probably the first nursery in the West." John became so concerned about orchards and the providing of fruit for the people moving West that he made it his life work to plant apple trees.**

**He said, "Fruit is next to religion. I use to be a Bible missionary down in Virginia, but now I believe I'll be an apple missionary. He chose a very fruitful profession, and he was a marvelous success at it. He became known all over the country as Johnny Appleseed. Everywhere he went he carried his bag of apple seed and he planted them. He said, "I am going to sow the West with apple seeds, making the wilderness to blossom with their beauty, and the people happy with their fruit."**

**On horseback, in canoe, and on foot he roamed the wilds of Western Pennsylvania, Southern New York, and Ohio. He kept a cabin near Pittsburgh. He dressed with ragged, ill fitting, faded garments. He went barefoot and had long black hair that fell over his shoulders. He made friends wherever he went as he sowed his seeds and preached from the Bible. When the Indian wars raged through Ohio, he was the only white man who could go on roaming the woods and not be killed, for the Indians also loved him. For 50 years he lived a vagabond life risking every danger to sow his seeds. More than once he was brought down by malaria. Robert Luccock in The Last Gospel**

tells of how on one occasion he was found by a pioneer in an Ohio River settlement dying with an intense fever. He did not know who he was, but he called for a doctor. The doctor came and seeing him clutching a bag of seed with the initials JC burned into the leather said, "It's Jonathan Chapman that good Samaritan of Pittsburgh come to settle among us. Praise God from who all blessing flow."

At the age of 79 Johnny Appleseed died at Fort Wayne, Indiana where he is buried. Monuments have been created in his memory, and many legends have surrounded his career. In the U. S. Senate, General Sam Houston of Texas paid this eulogy to Johnny Appleseed: "This old man was one of the most useful citizens of the world in his humble way. He has made a greater contribution to our civilization than we realize. He has left a place that can never be filled. Farewell, dear old eccentric heart. Your labor has been a labor of love..." We are interested in this life, because his life of love and fruit illustrates the ideal of the New Testament for the Christian. Our goal is not apples, but our goal is fruit. As Peter indicates here, and as the whole Bible makes clear, the purpose of all virtues, including love, is that they might lead us to fruitful living.

Johnny Appleseed dressed like a bum, had his hair like a hippie, had habits as strange as John the Baptist, and was just a very unusual man, but he became a great success because fruit was his aim, and he fulfilled that aim. Without fruit he would have been considered an eccentric old fool and a mad man. Fruit made the difference, and fruit will make the difference for all of us between failure and success.

Fruit is one of the key themes of the Bible. God is a God of fruit, and all that is in harmony with His will is fruitful. Paradise was paradise because of the fruitfulness of nature. To be put out of paradise was to have to labor for food, for the earth was less fruitful outside of paradise. When paradise is regained, Rev. 22:2 describes it

**as possessing fruitfulness beyond anything we, or Johnny Appleseed, could ever imagine. A tree bearing 12 kinds of fruit and yielding its fruit every month.**

**The Godly in the Bible are often likened to a tree, and the effects of their godliness to fruit. In Psa. 1 he who delights in the law of God, "Shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." Success and fruit go together.**

**Paul was a Johnny Gospelseed going everywhere sowing the seeds of life in Christ. He says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. The whole ministry of the church is symbolized in fruit bearing. Jesus sent forth His disciples that they might bear fruit.**

**It was no accident that the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost. This was the great feast of harvest when the fruits were gathered in. What delight God has in harmony and beauty of symbolism. The coming of the Spirit was the beginning of the harvest of the church. Three thousand souls were saved that day, and the church immediately began to bear fruit. The dry bones of Israel were clothed with living flesh. The desert of Israel began to bloom like a rose, and began to produce the fruits necessary to refresh the world and bring new life to all.**

**Jesus cursed the fig tree because it had no fruit. It was a symbol of Israel. Israel was cut off because she was barren and unfruitful, and a new branch was grafted in, which was the Gentiles. God just will not tolerate perpetual unfruitfulness. Jesus tells us clearly why Israel was replaced by the church to represent the kingdom of God on earth. In Matt. 21:43 he said to the Jewish leaders, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it." Even the kingdom of God is of no value if it produces no fruit. Every gift of God and every virtue is of no value if they do not**

**produce fruit.**

**Jesus was very fruit conscience. In the Parable of the Sower He taught that much seed is choked out before it bears fruit, and so is of no value. But some seed goes on to bear fruit, and some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty. Not all seed is equally fruitful, but any fruit is some measure of success. John the Baptist required fruit as evidence of repentance. Jesus said that by their fruits you shall know them. Fruit is the test of all truth. That is why Paul warns Christians not to partake of the unfruitful works of darkness. The Christian should be so fruit conscience that he does not waste his life on what is unprofitable. This is even so in spiritual experiences. We are urged to aim for the best and most fruitful gifts.**

**In I Cor. 14:14 Paul says, "...if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." The good can be the enemy of the best and rob us of fruit. All we do needs to be evaluated according to its fruitfulness. We can get caught up into the 7th heaven in emotion but if we do not turn this spiritual experience into some sort of fruitfulness, it is all in vain. Fruit is what counts, and fruit alone is success. Even the death of Christ is a fruit issue. In John 12:24 He says, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." A seed that does not die and thereby bear fruit is of no value. It is as worthless as a dead rock. Success for a seed is in bearing fruit, and if it cannot bear fruit without dying, then dying is the only way to success. So it is with the seed of David-the Lord Jesus Christ, and so it is for all who follow Him. Whatever the cost we must pay the price to bear fruit, for fruit is success.**

**In the light of all this, which does not begin to cover all the stress of Scripture on fruit, we can see why Peter makes the goal of all these virtues the escaping of an unfruitful life. This is the worst possible fate**



**for a Christian to be a dead an barren branch. The world desperately needs a army of Johnny Gosepseeds planting the trees of life in the wilderness of the world.**

**When Julian the Apostate was Emperor of the Roman Empire, this is what he wrote to a pagan priest: "Let us consider that nothing has contributed so much to the progress of the superstition of the Christians, as their charity to strangers. I think we ought to discharge this obligation ourselves. Establish hospitals in every place, for it would be a shame in us to abandon our poor, while the Jews have none, and the impious Galileans (thus he calls the Christians) provide not only for their own poor, but also for ours." Here is pagan testimony to the fruit bearing power of agape love. The love of Christians even gets their enemies to do good works just to try and keep the church from getting all the credit. God alone knows all the good evil men have done in order to keep others from turning to Christ. Government programs of welfare do much good, but they rob the church of her fruits. People now look to the government when they use to look to Christians motivated by the love of Christ to meet their needs.**

**We seldom stop to realize that even good works divorce from the Gospel are the means by which the powers of darkness can keep people from turning to the light. If Satan can meet all a man's needs on the physical level, why should he turn to the church or to Christ? This means the government programs compete with the church for the allegiance of men, The church must be actively engaged in demonstrating love on every level, and do it in the name of Christ, for only as men see that we are motivated by His love will they turn to Him.**

**Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the gifted Negro poet, felt deep bitterness over the injustice to his people. He was a cynic and his poetry**

**reflected this.**

**A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,  
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,  
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,  
An never a laugh but the moans came double,  
And that is life!**

**Before he died at the age of 33 he experienced the love of Christ in his own life, and he was transformed. Instead of the soar and bitter fruit of despair, he bore the sweet attractive fruit of the Spirit, and he wrote,**

**A crust and a corner that love makes precious,  
With a smile to warm and the tears to refresh us,  
And joy seem sweeter when cares come afar,  
And a moan is the finest foil for laughter,  
And that is life!**

**Paul Dunbar became a success before he died because he bore the fruit of the Spirit, and fruit is success. This is the goal for every Christian. We must produce that fruit which attracts the hungry soul to Christ. If the church is ineffective today, it is because they are like neglected orchards. The fruit is small and unappealing. Hungry minds and hearts are looking elsewhere for satisfaction. We must each strive to produce fruit according to our gifts. God does not expect a grapevine to produce watermelons, nor does he expect an apple tree to produce corn. Each is to produce according to its gifts. You are not to compare yourself with anyone else, but to measure how effective you are in the use of your own gifts. If you have the gift of helping others and no one is thanking you for your help, you are not using your gift, and are not producing fruit. Evaluate your gifts in the light of whether they are producing fruit.**

**Fruit is what we give back to God for the gift of salvation. Salvation is what we accept from God, but fruit is what we achieve for God. Salvation is a gift from God, but fruit is a goal we reach for God. Salvation comes as free grace, but fruit comes by fertile growth. Salvation is God's investment in us, but fruit is the interest we return to God on His investment. May God help us to be successful in our service for Him by striving to bear fruit, for fruit is success.**

## **8. A GOOD START IS NOT ENOUGH Based on Gen. 3:1f**

**A young boy came home from his first day of school and confessed to his father that he told a lie. The father asked why he did it and the boy said, "Well, dad, when they asked me where I was born it seemed so sissy to say The Woman's Hospital, so I said the Yankee Stadium." So often the truth seems sissy in comparison to fiction, and so there is a tendency to ignore facts and interpret life to fit ones wishes. This is a common attitude when it comes to the account of Adam and Eve. It is alright for fun and light hearted conversation, but it would seem too sissy to take it as a serious account of the origin of man and sin, and so people have pushed it aside, and filled up books with speculation which has no foundation, but does seem more dignified.**

**It is true that the story is simple, for it was written for people with simple and unscientific views of life. If the revelation was given in our day God would, no doubt, give us more information, but since He gave it in the day of Moses it is natural that it should be in a form fitting the need of that age. In spite of its simplicity, there is no other source through which we can gain so much information about origins,**

**life, sin, death, and God's purpose in the world. Gen. 3 tells us what no philosopher or scientist could ever tell us concerning why man is the way he is.**

**It is the story of the most fantastic of all failures. Nobody ever had a better start than Adam and Eve. They had a great start, but they didn't continue, and so they fell. One of the basic truths we learned from the account of the fall is that it is not a good start, but a good ending, that is most important. It is not the seed that quickly sprouts and gets a good start in growth, but which then withers in the sun for lack of depth that counts for anything. It is the seed that however poor a start it gets arrives at the point of bearing fruit that really counts. It is he who endures to the end that shall be saved, and not just he who gets off to a good start.**

**A golfer writes, "A long drive, straight down the middle of the fairway, does give a man a tremendous advantage, but it is not decisive. One can have an impressive beginning and end up very badly, and one can have a miserable start and a thrilling finish. As one golfer exultingly reported to me, I was in the rough all the way, and then pared the hole." A good start doesn't count because you don't add the scored until you finish. This is a principle that applies to all of life.**

**Benjamin Robert Haydon was a painter in London in the early part of the 19th century. His first painting was accepted by the Academy, and then followed a succession of large historical painting that gained for him the reputation of being one of the greatest painters for centuries. The art critic raved about him. Wordsworth said of his painting "Christ Entering Jerusalem," that it was worth waiting half of century to complete. The whole of Piccadilly was blocked by the carriages of those who came to see this marvelous painting. Leigh Hunt said of one of his works, "It is a bit of embodied lightening."**

**What a start he had on the road to fame, wealth, and influence. But Halford Luccock says that by the turn of the century his name was not even known in the world of art. His rapid success in the beginning filled his heart with pride and he wanted to be the king of painters. He began to write abusive and bitter letters of satire about his rivals and critics. This caused him to lose his popularity as quickly as he gained it. He was soon friendless and bankrupt. His terrific success was reversed to a tragic struggle just to survive. Finally, in despair he ended his own life. This poor ending destroyed everything gained by the good start. Better to be like those who start was miserable, but who had a glorious ending. Just as it is true-**

**That lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And departing leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.**

**So it is also true-**

**Lives of brilliant failures all remind us  
A good start is not enough.  
We must forget the road behind us,  
And press on however rough.**

**As we examine the account of the most tragic of all brilliant failures I trust that none of us will fail to grasp this truth that when all is going well we must be humble, and we must be constantly looking to Christ knowing that he who stands must beware lest he fall. And when all is going poorly we must be hopeful and press on still looking to Christ, who delights in bringing a tragic beginning to a triumphant finish.**

**No matter how bogged down a runner is in a race of life, if he**

**truly looks to Christ he will be enabled to cross the finish line and wear the victor's crown. Because of this great hope we have in Christ, those who know him can approach Gen. 3, which Leupold calls, "The most tragic chapter in the Bible," with a sense of relief, for we know however great and complex are the problems concerning the origin of sin, we have the remedy for it.**

**If we only knew of man's ruin without God's remedy, it would be an awful account of study, but with the good news bound together with it, we can study it with great profit. All who have a good start are in danger from the same source that brought the fall of Adam and Eve. Our concern should be to examine the sources of danger and be aware of them so as to avoid them or overcome them. The first source of danger is what we want to focus on in this message.**

**External persuasion is what we see in verse 1. One of the primary truths we gain from this account is that sin did not originate within man, but it was external in origin. This fits the whole biblical pattern, for salvation likewise does not originate within man, but is external in origin. Man is not the cause of his fall, or of his salvation. But in both he plays a major role. There is profound truth in the old western preachers explanation of the doctrine of election. He said, "The devil votes against me, and God votes for me, and I cast the deciding vote." The Calvinist would be more at ease if we said, "The devil votes against me, and I vote for me, and God cast the deciding vote." This is probably more correct, but the point we want to see is that external powers plays a decisive role in both the fall and salvation of man.**

**It is man's response to the external that makes him, as Pascal said, "Both the glory and scum of the universe." The serpent is the source of the first temptation to evil, and from the context alone it would appear that the serpent is to be taken as strictly just that-an animal**

like all the others that God created, but superior in gifts. It is only by means of the rest of Scripture that we can see that the serpent is only a means being used by Satan. Satan was the real source of evil and not the serpent. Jesus called Satan a liar from the beginning and the father of lies, and it is obvious he is referring to this event of the fall. In Rom. 16:20 Paul says to the Christians, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." There can be no doubt that he is referring to the promise of Gen. 3:15 that the serpent's head would be crushed by the seed of Eve. In Rev. 12:9 we read, "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the world." The serpent and Satan are one.

The Old Testament pictures God's great enemy in the form of a serpent. In Isa. 27:1 we read, "In that day the Lord will punish with His sword, His fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea." The lesson we are to learn is not just to beware of snakes, but to beware of any external source of clever and cunning evil. Someone has said that one of the best proofs of the reality of Satan is the cleverness of evil. It seems to have so many resources to insure its success. The serpent here in Gen. 3:1 represents any means, which Satan might use to entice us to fall from the path of obedience to God. Joanna Baillie wrote-

Think'st thou there are no serpents in the world  
But those that slide along the grassy sod,  
And sting the luckless foot that passes them?  
These are who in the path of social life  
Do bask their spotted skins in fortune's sun,  
And sting the soul.

An evil and deception person is called a snake in the grass because he is an example of the serpent, who by deception brought sin into the

**world.**

**If external persuasion could deceive man in Eden where all was perfect and where man was pure and off to such a good start, then let us not fall into the greatest deception of all, which is to believe we cannot be deceived. Some poet put it-**

**Satan desires us great and small, As wheat to sift us, and we all are tempted,  
Not one, however rich or great, Is by his station or estate exempted.  
No house so safely guarded is, But he, by some device of his can enter.  
No heart hath armor so complete, But he can pierce with arrows fleet its center.**

**We are ever in danger of being deceived and made to fall. God made provision so that we can withstand the fiery darts of Satan. We have the whole armor of God, and we can with the sword of faith even slay the dragon in one area of life after another. But the battle is never done, and we must persist to the end, and never be content with a good start. We will be targets of temptation as long as we live. Paul wrote in II Cor. 11:3, "Abut I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thought will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Believers are still subject to external forces that can lead astray. Otto Harback said, "Fro we're only poor weak mortals after all; Sons of apple-eating Adam, prone to fall." We are open to the serpent's sting whenever we dream that we are self-sufficient.**

**We are to be ever aware that we must be faithful to the end and not count on a good start. The prize is at the finish line, and we must press on forgetting what lies behind. Walt Mason said, "You may be lustrous as a star, with all the virtues in you canned, but if you fool around with tar you'll blacken up to beat the band." We need to flee**



from external forces of temptation, for they have led many a believer to fall just like Adam and Eve. Why are we still in this danger? It is because God will never take from us the freedom to choose, and so we can choose to disobey him at any time, and be enticed into evil.

Emerson wrote,

"For he that ruleth high and wise, Nor pauseth in His plan,  
Will tear the sun out of the skies Ere freedom out of man."

God made it possible for us to sin and choose the path of disobedience, but he does not will that we ever go that way. Only by having the choice can we truly choose to be obedient and faithful to our commitment to God and His ways. We need to have external sources of evil enticing us in order for us to be loyal to God. If we were protected from this kind of temptation we would not be choosing to be obedient, for we would not have a choice. Do not fear temptation, for it is an opportunity for you to choose the way of God and be pleasing to Him, and this is the goal of life. It is not how we start, but how we finish life that counts, and so all the temptations along the way are opportunities for us to press on to the finish line where we will hear, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

## **9. PREREQUISITES FOR PURPOSEFUL LIVING**

**Based on Prov. 2:1-3**

A woman in a contemporary play is complaining about her hollow living, and she says to another, "Don't you get the feeling that this is a broken world, something like a watch? The parts are all there, and it looks all right, but the main spring is broken and it no longer has

meaning. Life looks right, but it's meaning is missing. It's main spring is gone." Many modern people feel like her that meaning is missing. The result is all kinds of wild and ridiculous ways to recover meaning, or at least to establish some goal.

In another play called *Catch 22* one of the characters named Dunbar makes long life his goal and the only purpose for which he lives. His goal leads him to unbelievable nonsense. He is depressed because time goes so fast, and since his goal is longer life he goes to any length to make life seem longer. He notices that when he does things that he dislikes the time drags, and so he figured if he fills his days with tasks that he dislikes and even despises, life will seem so much longer. Without a doubt, he is right. And unpleasant life would seem longer, but to sacrifice all quality for the sake of mere quantity is certainly eligible for the label of folly.

The Christian, of course, is committed to a life of growing quality. Jesus came that we might have life abundant, and both Old and New Testaments make it clear that the believer is to advance in wisdom and in favor with God and man. Solomon has already made it clear that the fear of the Lord is the beginning, or principle part, of knowledge, but now in chapter 2 he gives us a list of prerequisites, which are necessary to gain this key factor, which makes the believer's life meaningful and purposeful. Notice that in verse 5 he says, "Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." What is that? It is what comes after one has fulfilled the conditions described in the first four verses. If we fulfill these purposeful living is guaranteed. The first prerequisite is that we must be-

## **I. RECEPTIVE.**

This, of course, is the first requirement in gaining the benefits of

**any teaching or philosophy of life. Even God's own children do not benefit by His abundant provisions if they do not receive them. Notice that the father recognizes that he cannot compel his son to receive his words. He can only seek to convince him of the value in doing so, and of the folly of not doing so. Receptivity is totally the responsibility of the individual. You can talk about giving your child an education, but this is not really accurate. All anyone can do is make an education available. Only the child can make it actual by being receptive to that which is made available.**

**Knowledge and wisdom, like Christ, can stand at the door and knock, but they only gain entrance when we open the door and receive them. The Gospel was available to the Auca Indians through the 5 missionaries who flew to them, but they were unreceptive, and the result was death for the missionaries and continued darkness for them. It was only when they became receptive that they were redeemed. We see that from the very beginning of one's encounter with God, to the highest degree of fellowship and sanctification, receptivity is a basic requirement. Solomon says, "Son, if you will receive my words, you can reject them or ignore them, but if you are receptive you will fulfill the first prerequisite for purposeful living." The second is to be-**

## **II. RETENTIVE.**

**If you store up my commands, or as the RSV has it, "..treasure up my commandments." This is just another way of saying the same thing as was said in the first clause, but it carries with it the thought of retaining what is received. Store up is stronger than receive. Solomon goes from the general to the particular, and his second clause strengthens the first and fills up the weakness of the first if it is left alone. The Bible is not wordy and does not just repeat the same idea in another way for no good reason. This added emphasis is necessary,**

**for it has to be recognized that it is possible to be receptive and still let what has been received be lost.**

**It can go in one ear and out the other. A sieve and a sponge are both receptive, but only the sponge is retentive. If what we receive is not retained for application when it is needed, you are no longer off than those who have never been taught. It is possible to pass a test by cramming, but you cannot live a purposeful life on that basis. You must retain what you receive, and day by day build up a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom.**

**It is hard for young people to get the vision of how important it is to learn and retain what they learn. I can recall saying of so many things, "What good is this stuff? I will never use it. It will never do me any good. Why do I have to waste time studying that?" Youth is impatient and wants to see a connection of all they learn with their today. It is a condition of future success, however, that they learn that most truths, ideas, values and principles cannot be immediately utilized. No one would ever buy a set of encyclopedias if they were only interested in today. No one has ever has use for all that information at any one time. It is a storehouse of knowledge for one's needs through all of life. You don't have to know anything about Beethoven today, but next year, or ten years from now, you may, and so you treasure of this information now.**

**So it is in learning godly principles of purposeful living. They don't all apply today, but when you hear any truth of God's Word expounded, treasure it up, for some day you will need it, and if you have received it but not retained it, you have not met one of the basic conditions for arriving at a totally meaningful life. It is today that you build your tomorrow. If you do not retain the bricks of wisdom you receive today, your castle of tomorrow will be diminished. For example, teens ought to be learning now all they can about marriage.**

**Those who do will be prepared to apply what they have learned, and not just learned by trial and error. Those who wait to learn often only learn that it was folly to wait. Don't wait until a drought to fill your reservoir, but receive now and retain for the future. Those who are receptive and retentive of godly teaching are well on their way to a truly purposeful life.**

**Verse 2 elaborates on how to fulfill these conditions. First of all, to receive you must have ears that are attentive to wisdom, and a heart that is active in securing understanding. It takes the cooperation of both the internal and external man. If one does not pay attention he can never fulfill the prerequisite of being receptive. All kinds of wisdom can be in your presence, but you will be none the better if you are not attentive. This is one of the real values of note taking. If I didn't have notes of all the lectures and messages I have heard, I would retain little of conscious value from it all. Many great messages I have heard are only vague memories because I did not take notes. Those I took notes on are very real and practical value, for I have retained key ideas and thoughts that I can refer to and be stimulated all over again. Note taking will help you incline your ear, for one cannot note what he does not hear.**

**Eusebius records of Constantine the Emperor that he would stand for hours to hear the Word, and when requested to sit he replied, "He thought it wicked to give negligent ears when the truth handled was spoken of God." Foxe records of Edward VI, King of England, "That never was he present at any sermon commonly, but would excerpt them or note them with his own hand." He who is not attentive will not be receptive, and he who is not receptive cannot be retentive, and so we see how the very foundation to purposeful living is built on a most simple truth. It amounts to this: Pay attention or you have had it. You can go to Sunday School all your life and still wind up as so many do-totally unaware of what God's will is for you. This can**

**happen by simply not turning your ear to wisdom, and not paying attention.**

**The second clause again strengthens the first. You must apply your heart to understanding. In other words, listening is basic, but mere listening with no active hunger to learn will not be effective. Passive attention gives only momentary value. It can be interesting and enjoyable to hear truth and wisdom, but if one inner man does not make a deliberate effort to make those truths working factors in life and thought, there will be no retention of what is received, and so no treasure from which to draw in the future. Not only must the ear hear wisdom, but the mind and heart must digest it and use it. The heart in the Bible is the seat of reason and intellect. The brain is not used in the Bible. A life of meaning and purpose does not just happen, but it is gained by positive and active commitment and hard work. Next we have-**

### **III. AGGRESSIVE.**

**Verse 3 gives us the third prerequisite for purposeful living, which approaches the same ideas from another and more aggressive angle. The first 2 verses picture one with plenty of wisdom at hand, and his responsibility is to be open to it, and to take full advantage of its availability. Now we move on to greater fields, and into fathomless depths and measureless heights where we know we can only know in part, but where we long to expand that part. We come to a situation here that implies the fulfillment of the first. In other words, many can either listen or not to what is available, but this verse applies only to those who have already opened up to receive what is available, and there appetites are wetted to go out and search of what is not at hand.**

**In the first 2 verses wisdom waits to be received, while in the second 2 verses it is hidden like treasure. The first requires that only**

**we open the door and let it in. The second demands that we open the door and go out searching. Solomon is recognizing that there are limitations to what can be gained by receiving alone. This will never be adequate to fulfill all one's needs if they want to truly make all of life purposeful. Some things just cannot be taught, but must be caught. There are insights, attitudes and understandings which no one can give you, and so you cannot just receive them. You have to go searching for them. Life is complex and each person is unique, and so they need distinctive insights to fit their own unique life.**

**We must go beyond what is general and common wisdom available to all who will receive it, and we must cry out for specific insights for our own lives. We must have a definite hunger and thirst for understanding that drives us across the barren desert of worldly wisdom to the fruitful oasis of the wisdom of God. We must not be content to merrily pay attention when the wisdom of God is presented. We must pursue it. We must go crying after it. If at first you don't succeed, cry, cry again, is what Solomon is saying. Lift up your voice and call out for insight, and cry aloud for understanding. Go and search for it as you would search for hidden treasure. When we cease to cry, we will cease to care, and could end up missing God's best. We must begin by being receptive and retentive, but not until we are also aggressive have fulfilled the 3 basic requirements Solomon lays down for his son as prerequisites for purposeful living.**

## **10. TAKING LAUGHTER SERIOUSLY Based on Eccles. 2:1-11**

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

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

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

**Reading commentaries on the book of Ecclesiastes is often like listening to those three hunters speculate about the stove. They come up with complex and confusing theories to explain this book, and the theories are more difficult to grasp than the book itself. The simple and obvious, and commonsense approach is the best. All we have to do is recognize that Solomon is simply telling us how he really felt. He is not saying he should feel this way, or that it is good to feel this way,**



but that it is how he really felt. He had himself a ball, and laughed his head off, and then he examined the experience afterward, and he concluded that laughter, like the rest of the pleasures of life, is of no use.

You do not need any complex theory to explain this. It is simple. He is depressed because laughter and pleasure are merely passing experiences, and they are not permanent, and so they do not fill the human need for the eternal. The merry monarch found his mirth of little worth, and it left him melancholy. This is no surprise, for we have all had that kind of experience where after a good time we become to some degree depressed simply because the laughter doesn't last, and the pleasure of it does not persist.

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

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

acquainted with grief.

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

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

## **I. THE FRUITFULNESS OF LAUGHTER.**

In Pro. 17:22 we read the most famous biblical precept on the value of laughter. Solomon there says, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." Laughter is the lubrication of life that keeps us from drying up and grinding to a halt. Drain your

life of humor, and it is like draining your car of oil. You will not get far before you lose power and lock up the engine. Laughter keeps the engine of life running smooth. It allows us to keep making progress down the road to God's goals.

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

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

Sometimes when life is on a disaster trail, and everything seems to be going wrong, you can be suddenly touched with a sense of humor, and it is like a shot in the arm to revive your spirit. Bonhoffer, the

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

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

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

**he dies laughing. It is the laughter of God when we laugh at the absurdities of life.**

**In Ps. 2 we see the folly of man as he plots to overthrow the plan of God and take over the universe. Verse 4 says, "The one enthroned in heaven laughs." God has a sense of humor, and it tickles him to laughter to see puny men develop such delusions of grandeur. It is like a gnat organizing his fellow gnat to take over a tank. You get the same funny sensation when a small child in rebellion decides to defy the very powers that gave him life and sustain his life. The most Godlike response you can have to those deluded by their pride is to laugh. In Ps. 37:12-13 we read, "The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming."**

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

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

**Is life a joke? Yes it is when man takes himself so seriously that he thinks he can make it meaningful without God, and so sets out to dethrone God. It is good for us to step back once in awhile, and see the dark side of man from God's perspective, and join Him in a good laugh. Some people think the tower of Babel was where Solomon kept**

**all his wives, but what it is, is a monument to man's silliness. He thought he could build a tower to the heavens and become a power that was supreme. It was the Lucifer approach to life that says, I will exalt myself to the throne of the universe. The funny thing about life is not the psychotic who thinks he is Napoleon, but the normal people who think they are God. History makes all of man's pride a laugh. One of the ways you can divide up the human race in two camps is this: Those who laugh at God, and those who laugh with God.**

**Jesus was a man of sorrows, but Jesus was also the Son of God, and the express image of the Father. In Jesus we see the same sense of humor that we see in the Father. Jesus saw the comical, the absurd, and the ridiculous side of life. We are so brainwashed into thinking that Jesus was always serious, and even sad, that we miss all of His humor. We refuse to give Him the balance life in our thinking, and by so doing we rob the only truly ideal man of what is vital to that ideal, and that is a sense of humor. Most students of the life of Jesus see it, but it is seldom stressed, and the result is that most Christians do not recognize the sense of humor in their Savior.**

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

**Tennyson said humor is generally most fruitful in the most solemn spirits, and, "You will even find it in the Gospel of Christ." Elton Trueblood in his book *The Humor Of Christ* gives numerous illustrations. We will look at just a few. Jesus had a lot of fun with the humorless Pharisees, and often described them in ways that would**

**make the people chuckle. In Matt. 15:14 He calls them blind guides. The very concept is ridiculous. Who would ever have confidence in a blind guide? Imagine a sign on the entrance to a cave that says, blind guides available-reasonable rates. Jesus says, when the blind lead the blind they both fall into a pit. Such is the folly of the Pharisees and their followers. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men was the message of Jesus. Follow them, and you will be pit filler.**

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

**Jesus pictured the Pharisees seeking sympathy in the pity party method of looking dismal and pathetic because of their supposedly sacrificial fasting. Jesus said that His followers were to have nothing to do with such sad sack piety. They were to anoint their heads, wash their faces, and look presentable rather than laughable. Jesus had a sarcastic wit that has tickled me many times. My favorite, is in John 10:31-32 where we read, "The Jews took up stones again to stone him." This sounds like a serious situation doesn't it? It is no time for wise cracks, but Jesus responds, "I have shown you many good works from my Father, for which of these do you stone me?" Jesus never did any bad works, and so He knew they had to be stoning Him for some good work that He did, and He was curious as to which of His kindnesses it was that provoked them to such hatred. Jesus, just like His Father, saw the absurdity of man's folly, and the utter ridiculousness of his rebellion.**

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

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

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

**Take Devorah Wigoder for example. She rebelled against her Christian heritage and married a Jew. In her book Hope Is My House she writes, "To me, one of the most disappointing aspects in the life of Jesus was his lack of humor." What a shame that her Christian heritage never exposed her to the truth of Jesus' sense of humor. If she was only an isolated case, we could brush it off as of no consequence,**



**but she is not. As I study the lives of people who have rebelled against the Christian faith, and have become skeptics and cynics, and even atheists, I discover that they see no humor in the Christian faith. A writer for Christianity Today for many years confirms this when he writes, "I have learned that too many Christian people and organizations can't laugh at themselves. They take themselves too seriously, and this makes them stuffy. Some people are not serious enough about humor and this makes them shallow."**

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

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

## **11. FUN IS FUNDAMENTAL ZECH. 8:1-19**

### **Introduction:**

**Geography students after traveling around the world by books were asked to list what they considered the seven wonders of the world. It was a hard decision but such things as Egypt's Great Pyramids, The Taj Mahal, The Grand Canyon, and The Great Wall of China, were getting a lot of votes.**

**The teacher noticed that one of her students, a quiet girl, had not entered into the discussion. "Are you having trouble," she asked, and the girl said, "I couldn't make up my mind because there are so many." "Well tell us what you have," the teacher urged. She stood to her feet and read from her paper-"I think the seven wonders of the world are to touch and to taste, to see and to hear, and then to run and to laugh and to love."**

**This little girl was tuned into a different channel and she was sharing wonders that are indeed greater marvels than any of the so-called 7 wonders of the world. None of them would be anything without those gifts of God that enable us to wonder at them and enjoy them. She was listing wonders not limited to one place in the geography of the world, but to those wonders that God has given to those made in His image all over the world.**

**Her seven wonders are more wonderful because they are not just in one place, but in every place. I don't know what her teacher's response was to her answer, but our text tells us that God's response is a hearty, heavenly amen!**

**This chapter of Zechariah is God's description of the ideal life for His people. It is a picture of just how good it can be when he blesses His people. We want to focus on just a few of the details.**

**Notice in verse 5, God says His ideal of the perfect city is one where the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. Then in verse 19 He says the fasts will be changed to festivals and become glad and joyful occasions.**

**There is something about this chapter that gives you the sneaking suspicion that God loves fun, and He loves His people to have fun. This may seem a little too light hearted, but I intend to show that fun is fundamental to God's nature, and His plan for man.**

**This subject is so vast in Scripture that my hardest task was to figure out how to limit it. The entire message could be devoted to just quoting Bible verses on gladness, delight, joy, and feasting. I was so overwhelmed with the number of texts dealing with the feelings of having fun that I couldn't get a handle on it until I discovered the word play, which is a synonym for fun. It is the Hebrew word for the children playing in the streets, and it is the ideal word for study because it is used only a few times in the Bible in referring to the feeling of playfulness. Let me share with you the context of these few verses on play.**

**God seems to be in a playful mood as He responds to Job, and asks Him all kinds of questions about His creation. In Job 40:20 God is speaking of one of His largest creatures, either the Hippopotamus or Elephant, and He says, "The hills bring him their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby." A few verses later God is really getting into the fun of making Job see his physical insignificance compared to His great creature called the leviathan, and in 41:5 He asked Job, "Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?" This same Hebrew word for play is used there for "make a pet of him." Jehovah is joking with Job just as we do when we see a creature like Godzilla, or some other monster, and say, " wouldn't he make a great pet?"**

**What we have here is God's acknowledgment that the playfulness we see in the animal kingdom is not an accident, nor is it a part of the fall. The playfulness of creatures that makes us enjoy the zoo, and nature films, and pets, is built into the animal kingdom by God. It is part of His plan that man should enjoy the playfulness of animals and have them as pets, and enter into the fun of play with them. We don't have time to persue this-we are just taking a peak. But this peak tells us why we enjoy our pets. It is because God made them to be playful.**

**In Psalm 104:26 the psalmist is describing God's vast creation, and then He comes to the sea, teaming with creatures, and He says, "There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there." Frolic is the same Hebrew word for play. We went to Sea World in Florida and saw how man can build great buildings and bodies of water for the sea creatures to frolic in and give people enjoyable entertainment. The Bible says the oceans are God's playground for these same creatures. The only reason they can be trained to play games and do tricks for our entertainment is because God made them with this capacity to have fun and to play.**

**The Jewish rabbinical tradition says that God made leviathan as a play thing. God delights in His creatures, and some of them may have no other purpose than to delight the creator. God has fun with His creation, and the reason we are to respect and to conserve it is because it is God's toybox with delights to give pleasure to God and man.**

**Even if we did not have verses to say so, it would be a logical supposition that if God enjoys the playfulness of the animal kingdom, He must also enjoy the playfulness of man. But we do have text that illustrate this reality. In Isa. 11 we get another of God's descriptions of an ideal earthly environment. Note how the child will be able to play with the animal kingdom, and not just our present day domestic**

**pets, but the animals that now are dangerous. Verses 6-9 say, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."**

**In other words, where God is fully known there is play without pain. It is all joy and pleasure, and all that God has made works together in harmony, and evil is absent completely. All of the childhood fantasies of playing with the animal kingdom, and leading them like a Tarzan will be fulfilled. These fantasies that led Walt Disney to produce his movies are not a part of the fall, but are a part of that playful image of God in which man was originally made. God anticipates this future ideal with the same pleasure you anticipate an adventure of fun with your children. You want your children to have fun, and God wants the same for His children.**

**Playfulness is a part of Godliness, but we seldom see the Biblical picture of it. Because we lack this Biblical foundation we sometimes feel guilty when we engage in play. This is not all bad, for we need to keep in mind we are dealing with a paradox. There is another side to play that is dangerous and destructive. Like any other value, when it becomes an idol, it becomes a curse. We need to keep a balance so that we do not lose God's best because we abuse playfulness. But on the other hand some Christians go the other way and quote Paul, "Set your affections on things above and not on the things of the earth", and use this as a basis for rejecting the enjoyment of earthly play. In reality, when we set our affection on things above, we see clearly the nature of God which enables us to wisely choose what is consistent**

**with that nature.**

**When you set your affections on things above,  
You will come to know  
That he who is light and life and love  
Also has affections for things below.**

**God delights in the same things we do-the playfulness of animals, the fun of children, and the festivities of adults. Celebrating is one of the ways that men praise God. In II Sam 6:5 the Hebrew word for play is again used. "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tamborines, sistrums, and cymbals." The ark of God had been returned and they were celebrating. When the prodigal son returned there was also a celebration with song, dance, and feasting. Even the angels of heaven get into the mood and rejoice when the sinner repents.**

**The point is, there is fun in victory. There is the feeling we ought to celebrate and sing, and have pleasure when God blesses, and God delights in our feeling this way. Fun is a part of the total worship experience, and because this is so, we need not fear that heaven will ever be boring, for with eternal worship there will also be eternal fun.**

**Prov. 8:30-31 is the last text on positive play that we want to look at. It is again in the context of God's creating the wonders of the world. Wisdom is present and wisdom says in the Hexapla translation of the O.T. "Then I was at His side as a small child; then I was all delight, daily playing before Him the whole time, playing on His earth, taking my delight in the children of men." The picture is one we too seldom consider. God had fun creating the world. The Son and the angels and wisdom all enjoyed it as well. It was like a great celebration-a day of play as all heaven entered into the delight of**

**watching God set up the largest playground ever. It is the picture of children watching with delight as the circus is set up, and all the preparations are made for a great time of fun.**

**God did not lose his delight in play because of the fall. His goal is to overcome the effects of the fall and get back to a world of fun without sin. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached his great message that won 3,000 to Christ and he quoted David as referring to Christ and His resurrection. He says in verses 26-28, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy with your presence." The word for joy here is used only two times in all the N.T. It is the word from which we get our English word euphoria. It covers all the emotions we refer to by gladness, cheerfulness, happiness, delight and joy.**

**This text tells us that God's plan was for Jesus to experience these emotions forever in His presence. Jesus knew how to enjoy life and to enjoy children playing. He could have pleasure at the parties he attended, and He could add to the delight of others as He did at the wedding of Cana. The only other place that same Greek work is used is in Acts 14. Paul and Barnabas healed a crippled man at Lystra. The people there thought for sure they were gods who had come down, and the priests of the temple of Zeus came to offer sacrifices to them.**

**Paul was shocked, and pleaded with them to see that they were only human too. Then he shared the good news of the living God who loved them and who had been blessing them in so many ways. In verse 17 he says God has not left himself without a witness-"He has shown kindness by giving rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Joy is the same word used for the joy of Jesus. Keep in mind, these are**

**pagan people, and Paul is saying their joy, or euphoria, has been the gift of God.**

**This text makes it clear that God made man the same way He made the creatures of the field and the sea. He made them with the capacity for fun and play so they could enjoy the good things of life. It is a universal feeling-this feeling of well-being called euphoria. It is God's gift to all men, and this needs to be recognized, for Paul used it as a tool of evangelism. We do too, but we do not recognize the Biblical basis of what we are doing. All evangelism efforts use fun as fundamental.**

**I do not know of a camp ministry that would survive a season if it was not for fun. Take away swimming, boating, ball games, ping pong, bikes, and other sports; take away all the fun and see how people will stay away in droves. You couldn't pay kids to come to a camp where fun is not fundamental. Every youth group and organization in the world knows this. If there is no plan for fun you can forget planning anything else.**

**It is not just kids who need it, but adults do as well. The reason we enjoy musical groups is because it is fun. It is fun to be uplifted. It is fun to be aided in praising God. Music is a recognized form of play. The same word we have been studying for play in the Bible is most often used for playing instruments. Music is played and enjoying it is playing. That is why every great evangelist has music. It is fun to hear good music, and so the fun of music is a key element in attracting people to Christ.**

**If Christianity is not fun it is not pleasing to God nor man. We too often think fun and play is a secular side of life. It is good for a break until we get back to the important and serious stuff of life. This concept is too bad for it leads Christians to not take fun seriously.**



**They do not see it as a vital part of their spirituality, and a key value for which they can praise God. We need to see that fun is fundamental in all the relationships of life; with animals, friends, family groups of all kinds, and even God.**

**Why did Jesus say we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven? We usually hear it is because the child is so innocent, and so full of simple faith. This is no doubt part of it, but what about a child's playfulness? That is what childhood is, the time of life when they learn to play. Did Jesus ever play? Francis Thompson asks,**

**Hadst thou ever any toys  
Like us little girls and boys?  
And didst thou play in heaven with all  
The angels that were not too tall,  
With stars for marbles. Did the things  
Play can you see me? Though their wings?**

**We could quote hours of poetry dealing with the childhood of Jesus, but all we know for sure is that He was a growing boy who had fun. It is inconceivable that Jesus did not play and have fun as a child on earth. When He was left behind in the temple, Mary and Joseph assumed He was with some of their relatives, giving us the clear hint that Jesus must have often been off playing with other children. We are told today that how a child learns to play is vital to developing their identity. If they do not learn to enjoy play they will become too serious as adults. Some do skip childhood and never learn to play. This leads to an adult who does not know how to enjoy life.**

**On the other hand if they do nothing but play, and are never taught that life is more than a game, they tend to become irresponsible playboys or playgirls. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, but all play and no work makes him a jerk. Any psychiatrist will tell**

**you that one of their most common clients is the person who has nothing to do but play. They lack the pleasure of work and achieving goals and they eventually become depressed for the lack of meaning in life. Play must always be balanced with a purpose pleasing to God or it becomes a burden rather than a blessing.**

**In the childhood of man when God put Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, there was balance. They had the delight of enjoying all the pleasures of play and eating, but God also gave them the work of keeping the garden. Extremes of being workaholics or playboys are both contrary to God's will. Work and play in balance is the key to a happy life. Dwight D. Eisenhower said to students at Columbia University, where he became president in 1948, "Have fun. I mean it. The day that goes by without your having had some fun-the day you don't enjoy life-is not only unnecessary but unchristian!"**

**In the light of our study, we can say his statement was Biblically accurate for the Bible clearly teaches that we can never be all that God made us to be without fun, for fun is fundamental. But keep in mind that it is fun to be a child of God. It is fun to be saved and to be forgiven. It is fun to be sanctified and growing in the knowledge of God. It is fun to be in Christian service. There is joy in serving Jesus. Fun is a broad concept that takes in many aspects of life that are pleasing to God. God is a fun-loving God and we need to take fun seriously and make it a vital part of our Christian life, and be praising God for it continually, for fun is fundamental.**

## **12. PRACTICING THE PRESENCE Based on Acts 17:22-31**

**An atheist and a Christian were debating the value of prayer, and the atheist said, "I never pray." The Christian said, "But you must have prayed at sometime in your life." "Yes," he admitted. "I did pray once. I was on a hunting trip in the Yukon and got separated from my party. A blizzard came up, and I became snow blind as I wondered about, and then I was also starving and cold. I finally fell on my knees and asked God for help." "Well," said the Christian, "it looks like you got it." "Got it nothing" he responded, "if an Indian guide hadn't come along just then I would have died."**

**Here was a man who was experiencing the absence of God in the very presence of God's grace and loving kindness. Unfortunately, this is an experience not limited to atheist and unbelievers. Even God's own people can have all kinds of misconceptions that blind them to the presence of God. The Jewish leaders had their own ideas about what the Messiah would be like, and so, even in the presence of the Messiah they experienced His absence, and they rejected Him. Christ was objectively there in their presence, but they were not subjectively aware of His presence.**

**How often does Christ come unto His own, and His own receive Him not? Multiplied millions of times, I am sure. Theologically Jesus is always present with us, but practically we experience His absence because we are not aware of that presence. He promised He would never leave us nor forsake us, but we need to become aware of His being ever present. This is what Paul was doing on Mars Hill as he tried to make the Athenians aware of the presence of God. They worshiped an unknown god. A god that seemed far away, and they only had an obscure awareness of this absent god. Paul's message was to help them become aware that God is not far away at all, but very near, and that in fact, they lived and moved and had their being in Him.**

**We are not unlike these Athenians, and part of our problem is that we need to be up a tree and out on a limb like Zaccheaus before we become aware of the presence of Christ. We get conditioned by dramatic stories to think that the only time to seek Christ's presence is in a crisis. We read of Daniel in the lion's den; the three friends in the fiery furnace, and Paul and Silas in the dungeon, all experiencing the presence of Christ in great power, and we think this will come in handy if I ever get stuck in a hopeless situation. But what we really need is an awareness of His presence in the common place every day events of life. The crisis is rare, and if we only want to be aware of Christ in a crisis, we put Him in the same category as an insurance policy. We only need to think of Him when something goes radically wrong. This is a very superficial concept of who Jesus is as Savior and Lord, and it eliminates Him altogether from the role of companion, guide, and friend.**

**Paul is seeking to convince the Athenians that the God who sent His Son into the world is the God of the commonplace. He is the God of the every day, the marketplace, and the home, as well as the God of the Temple. This unknown God does not need to remain unknown, for it is His desire that men know Him and experience His presence. In verses 27 and 28 Paul makes two things clear: There is an objective and subjective presence of God. In other words, there is the actuality Of God's Presence, and the awareness of God's presence. There is the fact of God's presence, but only the feeling of God's presence makes the fact a vital part of every day life.**

**Paul says God wants us to seek for Him. He wants man to reach out and touch someone, and He wants that someone to be Him. He is not far from each one of us, but we can miss Him completely if we do not strive to reach Him. Fact and feeling must become one; the actuality and the awareness must be united. Let's look first at-**

## **I. THE ACTUALITY OF GOD'S PRESENCE.**

**The Bible makes it clear that God is everywhere because of the very nature of His being. Matter cannot be at two places at the same time, but this law does not apply to spirit. Spirit does not have the limitations of matter, and since God is spirit He has no limit of place. Our bodies are stuck to being in one place at a time, but our minds can be in many places at the same time. My mind is just as aware of the clock in the back as it is of the pulpit in the front, and of the windows on the side. My mind is present everywhere in this room even though my body is present only in one spot. My body is in the front, but my mind is everywhere in the room. If I had a mind that transcended the limits of these walls I could be aware of more yet. God has a mind that is universal, and thus, He is aware of all that is a part of His creation, and thus, He is everywhere present in His universe, just I can with my mind be everywhere present in this room.**

**There is no where to go to be out of the presence of God. This is David's point in Ps. 139 where he writes, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where I can flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me." You can't go where God is not, anymore than you can go to another pew and be out of my awareness. As long as you are in the sphere of my awareness you are in my presence. God's awareness takes in all the universe, and therefore, there is no place to go out of His presence.**

**God does not have to work at being present everywhere anymore than we have to work at being aware of how many fingers we have, or of how many people are sitting at the table with us. We can all easily be aware of what is part of our immediate environment. So God, because He is everywhere present, is easily aware of all that is. As**

**President Lundquist of Bethel once said, "God knows the number of hairs on our heads, not because He makes a count each time I comb it, but because He is present at every point. He knows that number as easily as we know the number of people riding in a car with us.**

**The implications of God's omnipresence are enormous. One of them is that He is always available whether we are aware of Him or not. Tennyson wrote,**

**Speak to Him for He hears,  
And Spirit with spirit can meet.  
Closer is He than breathing,  
And nearer than hands and feet.**

**The actuality of God's presence is a theological truth, but to experience this reality we need to move on to the second point which is-**

## **II. THE AWARENESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE.**

**We need to understand that much that is real, true, and actual does not have an impact on our lives until we become aware of it. Candid Camera is a great example. People do things they would never do if they were aware they were on camera. When they become aware they immediately cease to do the foolish things they were doing.**

**We do the same thing everyday in our homes. We do things that hurt and hinder rather than help and heal. They are foolish things we do and say to those we love for any number of reasons, but primarily because we let the circumstances of life control us. We let the frustrations of life outside the home affect how we treat those inside the home. Just imagine how becoming aware that the Candid Camera crew had set up your home to film how you treat your family after a**

**miserable day at work. You would by the power of that awareness suppress all anger and unkind cutting remarks, and you would be corneous and thoughtful and reasonable in all your requests. You would be a model of love.**

**But since you know the chances are several billion to one that your reactions to life behind your own doors is going on tape, you feel free to be sub-Christian without the fear of discovery. Our awareness that our behavior would be exposed to the public would greatly modify our behavior. We can only justify sub-Christian behavior because we are unaware of the presence of Christ. We practice the absence of Christ because it is the only way we can be comfortable on a sub-Christian level.**

**It would be extremely embarrassing to come rushing into your living room screaming at your mate or children, and discover Jesus sitting on the couch visiting with the one you are blasting verbally. You'd give anything to have the chance to go back and come in dealing with the issue in a civil and polite manner. The point is, if we could be aware of the presence of Christ we could control all of the sub-Christian impulses that all of us feel at times.**

**Teilhard de Chardin said something that could change our lives if we would take it seriously. He said, "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." If we were aware of the presence of God and of Jesus in our lives, we would have a taste of heaven, and joy would be a dominant characteristic of our lives. Only in heaven will all tears be wiped away, and so there will always be tears in this life, but an awareness of the presence of Christ will enable us to handle the negatives of life in a more positive way.**

**Angela Morgan may seem too ivory towered in her poem, but the fact is, the more we can reach out to the level of her awareness, the**

more we can experience the glory of the commonplace. She writes,

**I am aware  
As I go commonly sweeping the stair,  
Doing my part of the everyday care,  
Human and simple my lot and share-  
I am aware of a marvelous thing.  
Voices that murmur and ethers that ring  
In the far stellar spaces where cherubim sing.  
I am aware of a passion that pours,  
Down the channels of fire through Infinity's doors,  
Forces terrific with melody shod,  
Music that makes with the pulses of God.  
I am aware of the glory that runs  
Bound to the stars by invisible chains,  
Blaze of eternity now in my veins,  
Seeing the rush of ethereal rains,  
Hear in the midst of every day air,  
I am aware.**

Here the theological and practical are made one. The actuality of God's universal presence is mingled with the awareness of His special presence in her everyday duties-even that of sweeping the stairs. This sounds like Brother Laurence who became famous for his classic little book called, **THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD**. He developed such an awareness of the presence of Christ in his life that it made no difference to him if he was in the prayer room or in the clutter and clatter of the kitchen. The result was his work was the same as worship, for it was done in Christ's presence, and for His glory, with equal joy. Imagine being able to eat or drink, or do whatever you do, to the glory of God. Every activity or chore becomes a project you do to please Christ, as you are aware he observes you. Brother Laurence could wash pots and pans for the



**glory of Christ because he had learned that all of his secular life, as well as his religious life, was lived in the presence of Christ.**

**This does not mean that Christ does not work in our lives if we are not aware of Him. He does. He entered the home of the two on the road to Emmaus, and he talked with them, ate with them, and they enjoyed his fellowship even though they thought he was a stranger. Jesus can be present blessing us in many ways regardless of our awareness, but the awareness increases our openness to His leading, and to a sense of joy and gratitude for His presence. God will not cease to work His will if we remain unaware of Him, but we miss out on the joy of His presence.**

**In Is. 45:5 God says of Cyrus, the Persian King he used to change the course of history: "I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,..." Here was a man who was greatly used of God, but he did not even know it, and was not aware of the presence of God. God did not lose anything, but Cyrus did. So with us, we are losers by not being aware of the presence of Christ.**

**C.S. Lewis felt that we need to be aware of our unawareness of God. He wrote, "If we cannot practice the presence of God, it is something to practice the absence of God, to become increasingly aware of our unawareness till we feel like men who should stand by a cataract and hear no noise, or like a man in a story who looks into a mirror and finds no face there..." Lewis is saying we need to become aware of just how unaware of God we are. This is necessary if we are to be motivated to do what God wants us to do-reach out and seek for His presence. The prodigal did not long for his fathers presence until he felt deeply the sense of his absence. We do not invite Christ into many situations of life, because we are unaware of our unawareness.**

**Leslie Weatherhead, the great English preacher said, "I believe we can live in a world where His presence is the very atmosphere that we breathe and where almost everything we touch reminds us of Him." This is possible to the degree that we become aware of God's presence in all of life. If we could just become aware that in Him we live and move and have our being, we could say with the poet,**

**The Presence of the Living Christ  
Seems sweeter every day.  
The overwhelming love of God  
Is felt on life's highway.**

**David S. Lampel wrote," To imagine that one meets God only during weekly, corporate worship is a little like imagining that one is only bound by one's marriage vows once a year during the anniversary celebration; the rest of the year one is free to disregard the commitment to, or even the presence of, the marital partner. Ridiculous? Precisely."**

**Keith Miller, in his book A SECOND TOUCH, tells about the problems he had with his family when he got up early for his devotions. Each morning his children would follow him, climb on his lap, and ask him questions. He finally became irritated and said to them, "Be quiet and get out, because daddy is busy." One of his girls asked her mother what was wrong with daddy, and she said, "Oh, he's learning how to be a good Christian so he could love the people downtown." When Keith heard this, he realized he had to handle this situation differently. When his daughter came in the next time, he put his arm around her and told her he was learning about Jesus. He showed his love to her, and she wanted to join him every morning for a time of reading and prayer. He came close to being one of those who was working like the devil for the Lord. Christians can become so**

**zealous in some legitimate goal, but become sub-Christian in their behavior, because they forget the presence of the Lord.**

**Asking Christ into your life is more than just an event. You do not just say, "Lord, come in and make yourself at home," and it is done. It is a process of developing a habit. You have to work at some systematic method whereby you call yourself to awareness of Christ in your life. You will forget and fail to be aware all the time, but with conscious and continuing effort you can develop a pattern that will increase your awareness, and give you daily victories.**

**Bible reading and prayer could be more easily linked as one if we could develop the awareness that the Bible is the only book in the world whose author is present when it is read. This can make prayer more meaningful, and Bible reading more of a listening side of prayer.**

**Love is characterized by a longing for the presence of the one who is loved. This is true in all relationships. You love to be near and with those whom you love. Their presence adds to your joy, and their absence subtracts from your joy. The reason courtship is so exciting is because of the high quality of the experience of presence. You are really with each other, and talk to each other. You are so dominated by each others presence that all the rest of reality takes a back seat and becomes obscure in comparison. When you get married and raise a family there are many demands that divide your attention. You no longer give each other one hundred per cent of your presence. You let your presence be absorbed by many other people and tasks. The number one battle in marriage is to keep on giving your mate a high percentage of your presence. When this gets to be a minimal part of your relationship, you have slipped into what is called a nominal marriage. That is, you are married in name only, but not in experience. It is like the nominal Christian. He or she says, "I believe**

**in Christ," but they do not seek His presence or His guidance. They do not love to learn of Christ and grow in their awareness of His being and His will.**

**There are nominal parents too. They have the label of parents because they have produced children. But they do not love to be with their children, and give them their presence. They are too busy with other things that demand their presence. The children then become an irritation because they also demand their presence. Presence is to a child a primary meaning of love. You can provide all that life offers to a child, but if you deny them your presence you deny them your love. Love's best gift is always your presence. During the Nazi bombing of London that began in 1939 many English children were evacuated from dangerous areas. Amazingly it was found that these children suffered greater emotional upset from being separated from their parents than they had suffered from being exposed to physical danger.**

**We all need the presence of someone we know who loves us to feel secure in life. You are never so lonely as when you feel a lack of the presence of someone who cares. Jesus promised to never leave us or forsake us, and so we are never alone, but we still feel alone at times because we cannot sense His presence.**

**We need to practice the presence of Christ by recognizing that His invisible nature is able to be seen in what He has made. This is what Paul wrote to the Roman Christians- "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 1:20**

**We are without excuse, but we still miss His presence because we do not pursue it in our minds. If we just look at creation and tell our**

**mind to think of its Creator we could sense His presence. We need to remember what we sing in church when we are out of church seeing the creation of God. Maltbie Babcock wrote over a hundred years ago-**

**This is my Father's world,  
And to my listening ears  
All nature sings and round me rings  
The music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world:  
I rest me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--  
His hand the wonders wrought.**

**This is my Father's world,  
The birds their carols raise,  
The morning light, the lily white,  
Declare their Maker's praise.  
This is my Father's world:  
He shines in all that's fair;  
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,  
He speaks to me everywhere.**

**This is my Father's world,  
O let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the Ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world:  
The battle is not done;  
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and heaven be one.**

**All Thy works with joy surround Thee,  
Earth and heaven reflect Thy rays,  
Stars and angels sing around Thee,  
Center of unbroken praise:  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Blooming meadow, flashing sea,  
Chanting bird and flowing fountain,  
Call us to rejoice in Thee.**

**A.W. TOZER wrote, "God is indeed there. He is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to a tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. This truth is to the convinced Christian a source of deep comfort in sorrow and of steadfast assurance in all the varied experiences of his life."**

**May God help us to practice His presence, and thereby gain more of what He desires us to experience in life.**

### **13. STEPS TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY Based on I Peter 2:1-10**

**There is one calling that every Christian has without exception, and that is the calling to maturity. We are born into the household of God as babes in Christ, but we are not to remain infants. We are to grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ. The speed with which we achieve this goal is not determined by our age, but by our understanding of and obedience to the Word of God. We make a mistake if we think we must grow slow and waste half of our life before**

**we get down to business. Some years back it was announced that St. Paul's Cathedral in London was moving down Fleet Street at the rate of one inch every hundred years, and someone remarked that the church ought to be moving faster than that. They were right, for the church was not made to be creeping along at a snail's pace.**

**Jesus did not build His church to be nursery of His kingdom. He did not give His Word to be used as a pacifier. He built His church to be the army of God, and He gave His Word to be the Sword of the Spirit that through the church He might penetrate the very gates of hell with the good news of salvation. Jesus wants people of maturity, and we dishonor His cause by thinking it is good to move in slow motion. A pastor in Chicago related a story of how a man in Wednesday night prayer meeting prayed each time, "Lord, take away the cobwebs." Every week he would say the same prayer, and finally one of the men who followed him in prayer prayed, "Lord, never mind the cobwebs, kill the spider." That is what God wants. He wants people to get to the heart of the matter and not beat around the bush. The world desperately needs Christians who will get out of the toy department and get into the accounting department, and start counting the cost of wasting their lives on the superficial. Life is serious, and it is big business. It calls for all the maturity our feeble minds can manage. Peter indicates that there are three essential steps to Christian maturity that all of us must take.**

## **I. A SPECIAL DESIRE FOR THE WORD OF GOD.**

**Diets play a major role in our society, but it has always been important in the Christian life. Your diet determines your destiny, and also the shape of your character and life. Without food your body will starve and become physically weak. Without truth your mind will starve and become mentally weak. Without God's Word your soul will starve and become spiritually weak. God has given His children a**

**manna to sustain them as they pass through this worldly wilderness of spiritual waste land. No Christian can be mature if he does not nourish his soul with the milk and meat of God's Word. A healthy Christian will have an appetite for it. His soul will get hunger pains if he does not feed on it.**

**Notice that Peter calls the Word pure spiritual milk. There is milk in other books also, but it is not always pure, for men have many ideas that they want the Scripture to support, and so they twist the Word to fit their system of thinking. We are to have mouths of our mind that drink in the milk of God's pure message if we are to grow in maturity. God's Word is to be the basis on which we evaluate all the words of men. Peter says if you have tasted that the Lord is good you will desire more. If I say ground cremptor and mashed guilite it does not stimulate any desire in you. But if I say prime rib and mashed potatoes it does stimulate desire. It is because we have all tasted these things and know they are good, and so we desire to have more. So it is with spiritual things. Only when a person gets a taste of the goodness of God will they desire to feed on His Word. The psalmist says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good."**

**Quite often you will see women in the supermarket offering samples of different kinds of food. The philosophy behind this is that once people get a taste of a product and find that it is good, they will want more. This is good philosophy, and it works. It is nothing new, however, for Peter says this philosophy is a key to Christian maturity. Our tastes change over time. When I was young I never cared for salad, but now I consider it a favorite part of the meal. Books that once held no interest are now my favorites. Parts of the Bible that I once thought were boring are now among the most interesting. It is a sign of maturity when we long to taste more of the goodness of God and His Word.**



**The mature Christian also wants to make the Gospel attractive so that others will be willing to taste the goodness of God and in turn desire more until they come to know Jesus as Savior. What would you think if the woman giving samples in the supermarket was all dirty and greasy? What if her electric frying pan was rusty and there were cobwebs on the cord she was using to fry chunks of sausage? Would you be surprised if no one bought the product? Certainly not, for even if her product was excellent, the unattractive presentation would keep people from tasting it even if it was the best on the market. If a Christian lives a slipshod shabby life before the world he ought not to be amazed that people do not respond to the Gospel and taste to see that the Lord is good. The mature Christian is an attractive Christian, and he cannot be attractive if he feeds the old man and starves the new man he is in Christ.**

**That is why Peter in verse 1 says lay aside the characteristics of the old life, for you have a new life to feed. We must clean out the vultures from the cage of our soul if we expect the dove of the Holy Spirit to dwell there. Even the Roman philosopher Seneca knew the necessity of purity before thinking of God. He wrote, "The mind that is impure is not capable of God and Divine things." If we are full of the poison of hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking we will not be able to grow, and that is the whole purpose of desiring the milk of the Word.**

**The Bible is not just a reference book. It is to be our daily menu if we want to be mature. It will put muscles on our faith, marrow in our hope and blood in our heart of love. Without it faith becomes flabby, hope empty, and our love grows weak. Peter says we are living stones, and all that is living must grow or it dies. The Christians Peter was writing to were babes in Christ, and Peter says that the only a baby can win this battle is by starving the old man and feeding the new baby. One of the two natures must die, and the one you starve will be the one to do so. So he says they are to lay aside all that feeds the old**

**nature and nourish the baby on the pure milk of the Word. It is a thrill for parents to see their child grow to the point where they can feed themselves, and it is a thrill to God to see His children grow to the point where they can feed themselves on His Word and clothe themselves with the garments of maturity. The second step we must have is-**

## **II. A SPECIAL DELIGHT IN THE SON OF GOD.**

**In spite of all we have said about the importance of the Bible, Christianity is not just a religion of a book, but of a Person. The value of the book is that it leads us to Christ. The test of whether or not the milk of the Word is being digested and helping us to grow is the place we give to Jesus in our life. This is the greatest sign to our maturity. How do we know we are growing? If Christ is precious, then you know you are a growing believer. Peter just states it is fact that to those who believe He is precious. This is a present fact. He is precious because He is rare. If you have one stamp or coin of its kind it is worth a fortune, and of how much more value is the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus?**

**The biggest step to maturity is when a believer really comes to see that Jesus is the center, the circumference, and the capstone of his faith. The danger in the Christian life is not so much unbelief as it is belief in the secondary. We can make idols out of secondary ideas and allow them to divide our loyalty to Christ. We dishonor Christ when we push Him off to the side and make any pet doctrine the primary object of our thought and concern. We must never forget that the redemption Jesus accomplished, and the Lordship of Christ is the foundation of all we believe. Christians become immature when anything or anyone becomes more precious to them than Jesus. Many professing Christians quit going to church for all kinds of reasons. This is because they put some other issue ahead of Jesus.**

**It is tragic when Christianity becomes just a religion, for all religions, including the Christian religion, do not have the power to save. The only salvation in the world is found in the person of Jesus Christ, and when He ceases to be the most precious possession we have Christianity becomes a dead religion. Charles Spurgeon use to say that you can talk on all kinds of subjects and the Christian can ignore it, but when you speak of Jesus Christ the Christian has to be full of interest and wide awake. That is why he found a path from every text that led to the person of Christ. He preached on this text often, and even when he was sick, for he said, “If I can say nothing else I have said it all when I say that Jesus Christ is precious. He is the gem of exquisite beauty and the jewel of incomparable brilliance.**

**Precious Lord beyond expression,  
Are the beauties all divine,  
Glory, honor, praise and blessing,  
Be henceforth forever thine.**

**Jesus is intrinsically precious. Other values are relative, but He is absolute in all places and times. Gold and diamonds are only precious in society, but for a man dying of thirst in the desert they are worthless. A glass of water is of more value at that point then a bag full of diamonds. They have no intrinsic value, that is they are not valuable in themselves, but Jesus is of the greatest value at all times even if one is dying in the desert, for He alone can give eternal life. When we die and get to heaven we will not need doctrine or any of the outward things of Christianity. But we will never be without our need of Jesus. He is the source of our eternal life. It is through Him that we have life.**

**The complete story of salvation comes in two volumes. We are only half Christian and immature until we get both volumes. We are born into the kingdom of God by faith in Jesus, but then we must**

**become mature citizens of that kingdom by obedience to Jesus. Those who do not come to Jesus stumble over the cornerstone and get crushed, but those who come to Jesus become the New Israel, and Christ becomes the cornerstone of their new kingdom. Israel fell because of her disobedience and rejection of the cornerstone, but to us who believe He is precious, and we want to obey Him in order to experience His sanctification as well as His salvation.**

**An experience in the life of Watchman Nee illustrates the point. He bought a book one day in two volumes, and when he got home he discovered he had only one. He went back to the bookstore to pick it up and he said to the clerk, "This has already been paid for. It belongs to me, but I forgot to take it with me." So it is in the Christian life-we often take the salvation in Christ and leave behind the power to live a mature Christian life. It is already ours, for it is paid for. All we have to do is go back and pick it up and ask Jesus to indwell us so that His beauty might be seen in us. When we have a special desire for the Word of God , and a special delight in the Son of God, then we will be ready for the third step which is-**

### **III. A SPECIAL DUTY IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.**

**Several years ago when there was a fear of war a group of Christians in Benson, Arizona disappeared underground. This part of the church failed to see its duty by trying to hide from the world. It gave the world the impression that it is only here to preserve itself. God has called us and chosen us and commissioned us to be witnesses in the world. We are not here to defend the kingdom, but to extend it. The Jews failed because they shut up the light of revelation and did not let it shine out upon the world. God forbid that we also fail by hiding our light under a bushel. If Jesus is really precious how can we help but wanting others to know Him.**

**The mature Christian senses that his most important duty in life is to make Jesus known. This is the greatest service anyone can render to both God and man. It is an immature Christian that wants to get all wrapped up in himself and never get out in the world to witness and intercede on behalf of the world. God does not want us always in church, but out in the world showing forth His praises. The church is not a building, but it is living stones. It is not stuck on the corner, but it breaks into pieces and is scattered through the whole of society. Someone said, “We have too many saints in stained glass windows and not enough in shoe leather.”**

**The mature Christian senses that it is his duty to serve God by witnessing. It is not enough to come to church to worship. He must let his light shine all through the week. Someone wrote,**

**Some wish to live within the sound  
Of church or chapel bell.**

**I want to run a rescue shop  
Within a yard of hell.**

**General Booth of the Salvation Army was a man with this spirit. One time on the cover of his magazine he had a picture of himself in a boat with men all around the boat drowning. His arm is stretched out taking the hand of one of those perishing in the water. His grandson looked at it and said, “Mama, is grandpa trying to help that man, or is he just shaking his hand?” The question is are we really trying to help the drowning who are sinking without Christ, or are just playing religion and shaking their hands? If we are becoming mature we will recognize that it is our special duty in the service of God to bear witness to the preciousness of Jesus.**

## **14. FELLOWSHIP IS FUNDAMENTAL Based on I John 1:3**

**No one can doubt that this is an age of ecumenicity. Everybody is talking about getting together with someone else for dialogue or merger. Even those who are opposed to the ecumenical movement are merging and uniting. In other words, wherever you are today you are involved in a complex world where everybody is trying to make it more simple. The Apostle John gives us some guidance by teaching about fellowship. This will help us to know what to do in all relationships of life. If we know what Christian fellowship really is, we will be able to determine which relationships in life are consistent with fellowship with the Father and Son. Verse 3 supplies us with these three things: 1. The essence of fellowship; 2. The essential of Christian fellowship; 3. The extent of Christian fellowship. We will consider them in that order.**

### **I. THE ESSENCE OF FELLOWSHIP.**

**What does the word fellowship mean apart from any Christian content? This word did not just fall out of the sky into the Bible, nor did John make it up, nor did God give it to him as a new word. It was a Greek word in wide usage long before it became a part of the Bible. Koinonia is the Greek word. It was used to refer to many relationships by the Greeks in which people shared a common bond. Business partners, trade guilds, and burial societies were all called fellowships in the first century. Those who had a common social relationship had fellowship, and those who shared a belief in a common god had religious fellowship.**

**The basic idea is a relationship persons have because of what they hold in common. This meaning is clearly seen in the New Testament.**

**This verse, for example, has that meaning for John. He is saying, we are declaring what we have seen and heard to you, because once you also know it, then we will have a common knowledge and belief. This is the very essence of fellowship. Without something held in common between two persons there is no possibility for fellowship.**

**In all four cases of the use of the word communion in the KJV it is a translation of koinonia-the same word translated 15 times as fellowship. There is no distinction between the two at all in the New Testament. Sometimes we hear, "May the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all," as if they were two different words, but they are not, for they are identical. Paul says in II Cor. 6:14, "What communion has light with darkness?" In other words, what koinonia, or fellowship, can there be, for what do they have in common? On the other hand, the Lord's Supper is called communion. The meaning is clear, for when we partake of the elements symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, we remember together the common basis of our salvation. What do believer's have in common? They have salvation through the shed blood of Christ on the cross, and, therefore, this most basic and common factor in our lives is called communion, or fellowship.**

## **II. THE ESSENTIAL OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.**

**John says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." This is what distinguishes Christian fellowship from all other forms of fellowship. It has one foundation and that is the historical Christ. Nothing else can constitute a basis for Christian fellowship. If we did not have an objective record of what the Apostles saw and heard, we could have no common basis for fellowship. The very reason the Bible is in print is not just to satisfy our curiosity about the past; it is the only way that the revelation of God can be a common**

**factor in the lives of all believers. The Word of God in print makes it available to all men, and thereby increases the basis for fellowship.**

**The Gnostics, whom John was opposing, had just an opposite attitude. They said, keep the truth in the hands of the elite. Do not make it common knowledge, or it will be contaminated. The truth is only for the intellectuals. The vulgar masses are unworthy of it. But John says, I am putting down in writing what we have seen and heard so that anyone can read and believe, and then enter into a common union with us and God. The basis of Christian fellowship is not locked up in a temple vault. It is not confined to any priestly class or body of intellectuals. It is not composed of mystical or magical incantations learned only by the elite. It is found in the form of paper and ink-the most common means of communication in the world. Christian fellowship is based on fact, and not fantasy, fiction, fallacies, or force. That which was seen and heard is recorded, and this objective factual record is the foundation of true Christian fellowship. By this alone the Christian determines what is, and what is not, Christian fellowship.**

**Many other things are held in common and provide a basis for fellowship, but only when this essential factor is involved can it be called Christian fellowship. If Jews and Christians have fellowship around the ten commandments, which they hold in common as the Word of God, it would be true fellowship, but it would not be Christian fellowship, for the essential for that is not in the ten commandments. This means there is two levels of fellowship. There is a level based on anything in common, and then there is the Christian level based on the revelation we have in Christ. This means a Christian and a non-Christian can have fellowship based on common interests, but it is not Christian fellowship. It is not even Christian fellowship when two or more Christians get together to watch a game or share in some common secular interests. It is fellowship, but it is not Christian fellowship.**



**Christians have fellowship with non-Christians in many areas of life. It might be in sports, or music, or culture of all kinds, or hobbies, or clubs, or of a professional nature. Jesus had a great deal of fellowship with unbelievers of all kinds from Publicans to Pharisees. In His manhood He had things in common with each, and He used that common bond to make contacts with all people. This enabled Him to have the opportunity to lead them into a higher fellowship with Himself as Savior and Lord, and not merely as a man and friend.**

**To criticize someone for having Christian fellowship with an unbeliever is folly, for it is impossible to have Christian fellowship with one who does not have Jesus as their Savior as a common bond. To criticize them for having natural fellowship with them is also folly, for any Christian who does not have natural fellowship with unbelievers is not doing God's will as a child of light. There is no way you can be the light of the world and the salt of the earth without some form of fellowship with unbelievers. This does not mean a Christian can participate in anything sinful with unbelievers, but it does mean they can share in common many interests which are legitimate. Jesus sets the example, for He could fellowship with sinners and yet never be defiled by sin.**

**A little boy who was lonely said to his mother, "I wish I was two little puppies so I could play together." That was a natural expression of the desire for fellowship. We have a need to have something in common with someone else. The Christian is to take advantage of this natural desire, and use it for the glory of God by finding a common basis for fellowship with an unbeliever, and then introduce him to what you have in fellowship with Christ.**

**We have seen that the essence of fellowship is the relationship of persons who have something in common. We have seen that the**

**essential of Christian fellowship is the reality of the historical Christ, and one's acceptance of Him as Savior. Now let's consider-**

### **III. THE EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.**

**You cannot be a Christian alone. When you enter the kingdom of God you can only do so alone, in the sense that only you can make that decision, but after you enter you become a part of the body of Christ, and are from then on you are not your own, for you belong to Christ. After a person is saved he is in a family where he has many brothers and sisters who share in common with him the same heavenly Father and Savior. John desired to share his experience with Christ that others might enter into this fellowship with him and the other Apostles.**

**Every picture of the church in the New Testament illustrates the concept of fellowship. It is a body with all cells in the body having a common interest in the life and health of that body. It is a building, and all the stones form a common structure. Jesus said I am the Vine and you are the branches. A branch not connected with the Vine will wither and die. Christian fellowship is not a luxury, it is a necessity, for you cannot be a Christian alone. Jesus says the shepherd leaves the 99 to go after the one lost sheep. The 99 can survive temporarily, but if the one is not found and brought back to the fold, it will perish.**

**William Morris once said, "The lack of fellowship is hell." This is literally so, for those who do not enter the body; the building; the vine or the fold-that is the church of Christ, will not have fellowship with God but be separated in outer darkness forever alone. A Latin proverb says, "One man is no man at all." You cannot have anything in common without someone to have it in common with. As soon as a person trusts in Christ as Saviour they become a part of a vast fellowship of believers from all races where all are equal in Christ.**

**The Gnostics were extremely prejudiced. They felt Christians were contemptible and absurd in treating the riff raff and lower classes as equals, but Christian fellowship is extended to all in Christ. God loves all for whom Christ died and this means all, and so our fellowship goes all the way to what we have in common with God and Christ. We have a common bond with God Himself and so our fellowship extends to the highest heaven and to the ends of the world and to all peoples. Only Christian fellowship leads us to be partners with God, for Jesus, the God-Man, is the common bond between God and man.**

## **15. TRUTH IN ACTION Based on I John 1:6**

**The story is told of how years ago a hard shell Baptist returned to his community after visiting Jefferson, Texas, and he reported to his neighbors that he had seen ice made there in July. It is claimed that the first artificial ice in the United States was made in Jefferson. When the word of this got back to the church he attended, he was promptly charged with lying, and was going to be expelled from the church. One of the brothers suggested, however, that in all fairness they should make an investigation first. So the deliberating body appointed this concerned brother to go to Jefferson and investigate. When he returned he reported that as amazing as it sounded he actually saw ice made there with the temperature nearly 100 in the shade. The church voted to expel both members for lying.**

**They were certainly uncharitable and unfair in the this decision, but they were wise to be so concerned about the matter of lying. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle which fits them all." We generally think of Eve's sin of**

**disobedience as the first recorded sin of the Bible, but there is one before that. The first sin in the Bible is a lie. It was the lie that they would not die, as God said, if they ate of the forbidden fruit. The significance of this is magnified when we go to the last chapter of Revelation and discover that the very last sin named in the Bible is also the lie. In verse 15 we read of those who are shut out of heaven, and the last on the list is "Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie."**

**In between the first and last reference there are many texts warning about the sin of lying. In Prov. 6:17 a lying tongue is among the 7 things God most hates. In Prov. 12:22 we read, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord..." Many were the miseries suffered in the Old Testament because of lying prophets. Satan is the father of lies, but man has been of considerable help in multiplying them. It was so much a part of the pagan way of life, out of which the early Christians came, that it was a sin yet wrestled with in the church. Paul in Eph. 4:25 admonishes them, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." A Christian is one who must shed the rags of deceit and falsehood, and be clothed in the garments of truth.**

**The Apostle John is very concerned about this matter because the Gnostics, like many false teachers since, were masters at the use of the big lie. John does not hesitate to expose them as liars, and warn believers that if they follow this false doctrine, they too will be liars. In verse 5 John laid down the fundamental concept of God that becomes a standard by which to judge all truth and conduct. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. In reference to the current problem in that church it would mean-God is truth and in Him is no lie at all. The Scripture clearly states it is impossible for God to lie. He has nothing in common with a liar, therefore, a liar cannot have fellowship with God.**

**Who then is the liar that John has in mind? He is the one whose profession does not match his practice; whose claims do not coincide with his conduct; whose words do not harmonize with his walk. The man who says, "I have fellowship with God," but who walks in darkness, is a liar, says John. The son of thunder has not lost his forthrightness, but now it is under control, and serving the purpose of warning believers in love. The danger is a real one yet today, and it will be for our profit to do some self-examination on this matter. We want to consider first the danger of the lie in our talk, and then the demand for truth in our walk.**

## **I. THE DANGER OF THE LIE IN OUR TALK.**

**John says, if we say we have fellowship with God, we are making a great claim, and if we do not back it up with action, this is where the lie begins. If the man who walks in darkness does not profess to be in fellowship with God he is still a sinner not doing the truth, but at this point, at least, he is not a liar. The lie that John is exposing here is the one that is most dangerous, and we can see this by considering what the Gnostics taught. They said that spirit is spirit and flesh is flesh. God as Spirit is concerned only about the spirit. The flesh is totally corrupt and evil, and has no part in the spiritual life. They had a dualism that left the body out of one's relationship to God altogether. This kind of thinking leads to a Jekyll and Hyde type of living where the man serves God with his spirit and Satan with his body.**

**What made the Gnostic heresy so dangerous was the fact that they used the same concepts as true Christians, but the perverted them. Salvation they said is all of grace and no works whatever. Any work of the body was of no value in the spiritual realm. Therefore, it makes no difference what you do with the body. You can give your body completely over to sin, and not be any the less spiritual. In fact, you would be more spiritual for recognizing the body is irrelevant to**

**fellowship with God. If good works are no help to salvation, then evil works are no hindrance to it.**

**You can easily see how this subtle lie could be appealing to the pagan mind who wanted salvation in Christ, but who wanted also the old pleasures of his pagan life. The same heresy is at work today. The father of lies may have a new label and a new approach, but the lie is still the same. Christianity is all a matter of talk and thinking is the foundational principle of this big lie. It is all a matter of creeds and words and not action. This error has invaded orthodox movements over and over again, and left them as dead orthodoxy. All of the truth is there, and everyone has the proper vocabulary, and so all are convinced they are in the kingdom of God. Words become everything. If a person does not use the right words, you doubt his salvation, even if he lives a life dedicated to Christ. But if a man is practically indifferent to the work of the kingdom, and lives a mediocre life of godlessness, he is on the in group because he has learned the code.**

**If you examine your own attitude, it ought to scare you how strong the tendency is to move toward the Gnostic heresy. I hear men ridiculed and denounced who are giants of the faith, by men who are spiritual pigmies, and the basis is almost always the subtle Gnostic heresy that true spiritually is in words. Let us note carefully: the primary lesson John is teaching here is that the truth is in the walk. A statement of faith, or a claim to have fellowship with God, is in itself neutral. It is the action of the person that determines its truth. Our second point then is to observe-**

## **II. THE DEMAND FOR TRUTH IN OUR WALK.**

**Saying the truth is a lie without doing the truth. Lack of action, or contrary action makes a lie out of what could have been true. The son in the parable that Jesus told said to his father, "I will go into the field**

**to work." When he said it, it was a potential truth, but it became an actual lie as soon as he failed to act and not go into the fields. Truth is not in words but in actions. It was what he did that made what he said a lie. If he would have acted different, what he said would have been truth. Actions not only speak louder than words, but also much clearer. I can say I have fellowship with God, but if I go and walk in darkness I lie and do not the truth. Truth is not in words but in the walk. Truth is in action or it fails to be true. All we say becomes truth or falsehood depending on our actions.**

**Light must be seen or it is no different than darkness. Talk will never be an adequate means of communicating the truth of the Gospel. Jesus did not say we were to be the sound of the world. If that had been the case, the Gnostics would have been great, for they were all noise. Many of the present day believers also feel that sound is the key to evangelism. If we just get people to hear the Gospel; if we could only get Gospel blimps to fly over every city with loud speakers proclaiming the good news, then we could reach our world. There is so much truth to this perspective it is hard to see the fallacy of it. We need to face the reality that masses of people have heard the joyful sound that Jesus saves, and they couldn't care less.**

**It is time we see that Jesus meant what He said, "You are the light of the world." He said men are to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. The Gospel needs to be seen, and so we must walk in the light and let our light shine that the truth might be seen and not just heard. Sound is essential for the truth must be heard, but it is inadequate without a visual demonstration of changed lives. Men must see the truth in action, for they are fully aware that talk is cheap. It costs something to walk in truth and apply truth in action, but anyone can talk about it. Some of the most eloquent praisers of spirituality were the Gnostics. If truth could be fully embodied with words alone, they would have been the elite they thought themselves to**

be, but truth can only be adequately and finally exhibited in action. In other words, if men cannot see truth in your actions, you just as well save your breath. It took the Word to be incarnated to adequately express God's love. The written word and spoken word were not enough.

Without the life of Christ in which He embodied all He taught in action, Christianity would not be what it has been. His talk without His walk would add another philosophy of religion to an already overcrowded field. Jesus not only spoke truth, He lived truth. He was truth incarnate, and truth in action. It is legitimate to test the truth that Jesus taught by the pragmatic standard, which is to ask, does it work? What does not work is not true. All the truth of God is truth that will stand this test if practiced, and it is our task to prove it to the world by doing the truth, and not just speaking it, for truth is not just what you say, but what you do.

Shakespeare said, "Be great in act, as you have been in thought." Again he said, "Action is eloquence, and the eyes of the ignorant are more learned than their ears." What a picture of what John is saying. Men will learn the truth faster and more surely by means of what they see than of what they hear. Whittier saw it to be true in his day and said, "Speak out in acts: The time for words has passed, and deeds alone suffice." The church in many ways is alive to this truth, but we each must be alive to it, and avoid the Gnostic heresy like the plague. We must never be content with verbal truth until it is backed up with vital truth, that is truth in action. The world is not interested in essays on piety. They want to see lives that exhibit the reality of the truths in those essays.

A man whose house is burning down does not care to listen to a lecture on the principles of spontaneous combustion. He wants help to get the fire out. His ears are not open to advice, but his eyes are



searching for those who will act to help him. The world with all its problems is not listening for advice, but it is looking for demonstrations of victorious living that exemplify the teachings of Jesus. Our task is to talk, but with a matching walk that gets the attention of a looking world who want to see the truth of Christ in action.

## **16. WALKING IN THE LIGHT      Based on I John 1:7**

John has made it perfectly clear that Christians are still sinners even as saints, and that to claim that one is without sin is to call God a liar. He is not defending sin, but warning against a false kind of perfectionism. The Gnostics attained their perfection by simply denying that anything they did in the flesh was sin. Sinlessness is fairly easy to attain if it is all a matter of words, for all you have to do is define yourself into a state of perfection. Lust is a sin, but if you call it aesthetic appreciation of art, you could define the man who lusts into innocence.

As long as men are deceived into thinking that truth is basically a matter of words only, they will be able to rationalize anything as being consistent with perfection. Pious words can be weapons against the truth, and we all need to be aware that virtue is far more than one's vocabulary. Men mean different things by the same words. Humpty Dumpty boasted to Alice in Wonderland, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less." It was no wonder that Alice was puzzled at his use of the word glory, for he meant by glory "A nice knock down argument." This kind of irresponsible use of words has no place in the Christian life. He is to

**avoid deception of himself and others by calling sin what it is and dealing with it instead of eliminating it as the Gnostics did by playing with words.**

**Our fellowship with God is not based on words but on our walk, and if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we do not have to rationalize our sin away, for God has made provision through the blood of Christ to cleanse and forgive us. Christian perfection is to be realistic. It is a matter of a very real and practical condition, and a very real and practical consequence, and it is these two things we want to examine as they are revealed in verse 7.**

## **I. THE CONDITION.**

**If we walk in the light we have fellowship with God, but if we do not, we have neither fellowship with God nor forgiveness of sin. This then is no incidental truth, but is essential to the Christian life. No one can be a Christian who does not fulfill this condition. Notice that the believers condition does not consist in making great claims like the Gnostics. They were all talk and no walk. John would caution us against bragging about our marvelous fellowship with God. Beware of laying bare your soul before men, and exalting yourself by speaking of how intimate you are with God. This leads to a superficial and sentimental mysticism that is not edifying to believers nor appealing to unbelievers. The Christian who is edifying and witnessing is the one who does not have to boast because his attitudes and actions make it clear he is walking in the light. He shares the truths and treasures he discovers in fellowship with God, and let's them speak rather than boast of this fellowship.**

**The condition all of us are to strive for is not to talk about light, but to walk in it. Walking has these two characteristics:**

**1. It is voluntary. The Christian is not one who walks in the light because he is compelled or pressured to do so. He gladly performs Christ like acts, not because they are required, but because he chooses to do them, and would have it no other way. When Christians do only what the organized church requires, the church has become an institution rather than a living organism, and is a hindrance to the true mission of the church. Christians are to voluntarily do what they know must be done, and what is right and good regardless of any other consideration. He loves and serves just because he loves to serve and be a partner with Christ in reaching the world. Out of gratitude alone he wants to walk in the light, and lead others into the light. If a Christian is fulfilling this condition he will be one who lives for Christ voluntarily, and not because he is pushed.**

**2. Walking is not only voluntary motion, it is continued motion. It is a series of steps. One who takes two or three steps is not walking. The believer may take a step or two into the dark, but this is not walking in darkness. One walking in darkness makes a continuous series of steps in sin, and, therefore, is out of fellowship with God. The unbeliever may take several steps into the light, and do acts in harmony with God's will, but these steps are not walking in the light, for they are not continuous and consistent. To be said to be walking in either sphere of light or darkness means one is making continuous strides in that sphere.**

**In Jer. 9:3 we read, "...falsehood and not truths has grown strong in the land, for they proceed from evil to evil." This is a description of walking in darkness for it is consistent and progressive. They were going on from lesser evil to a greater degree of evil. Paul gives us the same picture in II Tim. 3:13, "Evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived." In contrast, one who walks in the light is proceeding from one stage of glory to another. A Christian who is fulfilling this condition is not in the same place today as he was**

**last year. He is making progress in godliness, and is developing more fruit of the spirit. If you are not conscious of being more Christ like as time goes on, it may indicate you have ceased to walk in the light.**

**Christians can be compared to the strange substance called selenium which is used in photoelectric devices. When it is in the dark it is an insulator, and electricity will not pass through it, but when it is in the light it is a conductor, and the current passes through. The greater the intensity of the light the more effective it is as a conductor. It changes its nature and function according to its environment. It is the chameleon of the non-living realm. It illustrates the truth that the man who walks in the light of God's truth will be a conductor of that light to others, but if he walks in darkness the light of truth will not flow through him. He is a closed channel in the dark. The greater the intensity of the light, or the closer one walks with Christ, the greater will be his communication to others. Walking in the light then is essential to be an effective Christian. John then goes on to describe-**

## **II. THE CONSEQUENCES.**

**The consequences here are so important that it forces us to realize just how much the complete Christian life demands of the believer. Fellowship with God and forgiveness of sins are both conditional upon the believers walk. For the sake of clarity, let me emphasize that John is writing to believers. Therefore, this not referring to a condition of salvation. These are saved persons who need instruction on how to go on and be fully sanctified. This means that all of the acts and attitudes of the believer are important in becoming what God wants him to be. When he walks in the light, the first benefit will be-**

**1. Fellowship with God. This is one of the basic goals of the Christian life, and one of the main purposes for John writing this letter. Fellowship with God is essential to the full Christian life. Harry**

**Emerson Fosdick said, "Opinions about God are a roadway to God, but the end of the journey is a personal fellowship that transfigures life; and to seize opinions as though they were the objects of faith is like a man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road." The poet said,**

**By all that God requires of me,  
I know what He Himself must be.**

**God requires us to walk in the light for fellowship with Him, and this is just another way of saying that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. When the believer walks in light he has all things in common with God, and, therefore, has fellowship with God. The second result is-**

**2. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. This means that though the Christian is yet a sinner and cannot claim he has no sin, he can claim to be cleansed from all sin, for this is the promise to those who walk in the light. It is not the light that cleanses, but the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin ought not to be quoted out of this context, however, for it is not true unless the condition is fulfilled. It does not cleanse the sin of any who do not walk in the light. Like selenium, it only works in the light.**

**The atonement of Christ is adequate and available for all men and for all sin. But since it only cleanses those who walk in the light, many will never be cleansed, for they love darkness rather than light. Cleansing here is different from forgiveness in that it indicates a removal of the stain of sin, and the desire for sin in the person. It is a part of the process of sanctification. One can be forgiven and yet still go on sinning, but to be cleansed implies a victory over sin. Forgiveness is a change in God, but cleansing is a change in us. This means that one consistently walking in the light could be constantly cleansed, and at least temporarily be sinless. If we take the "all sin"**

**literally, then one could be totally free from sin in his life. The only way to maintain it, however, would be to never take a step out of light into darkness.**

**Here is the possibility of being restored to perfect fellowship just as Adam had with God before the fall.**

**Oh, how sweet to view the flowing,  
Of my Savior's precious blood,  
With divine assurance knowing  
He has made my peace with God.**

**The sacrifice of Christ was once for all, but it is of perpetual effectiveness. Cleanses is the present tense. The blood of Calvary is still working today, and will wash away the sin of the believer. The sacrifice at the cross was unconditional grace, and God's once for all provision for all sin, but the actual application of that blood's power to cleanse in our lives is conditional upon our walking in the light.**

**The two consequences of walking in the light are external and internal. One is made right with God and can fellowship with God. And one is made right in himself so there is inner peace and harmony as he is cleansed from sin. Our action of walking is met with God's action of cleansing. Our words of confession are met with God's word of forgiveness. We see here that just as we are justified through the blood of Christ, so also we are sanctified. Faith in His sacrifice without works saves us, but it is faith plus works that sanctifies us. It is in sanctification that faith without works is dead. Faith alone justifies, but faith and works sanctifies.**

**Since the greatest blessings of God, and the greatest benefits that can be gained from the atonement of Christ, can only be ours if we are walking in the light, it is to be our primary concern to make sure that**

**it is in the light that we walk. The degree of our sanctification, as well as the quality of our eternal life, are dependent upon our walk. Certainly nothing more could be added to challenge us to go forth and voluntarily and persistently walk in the light.**