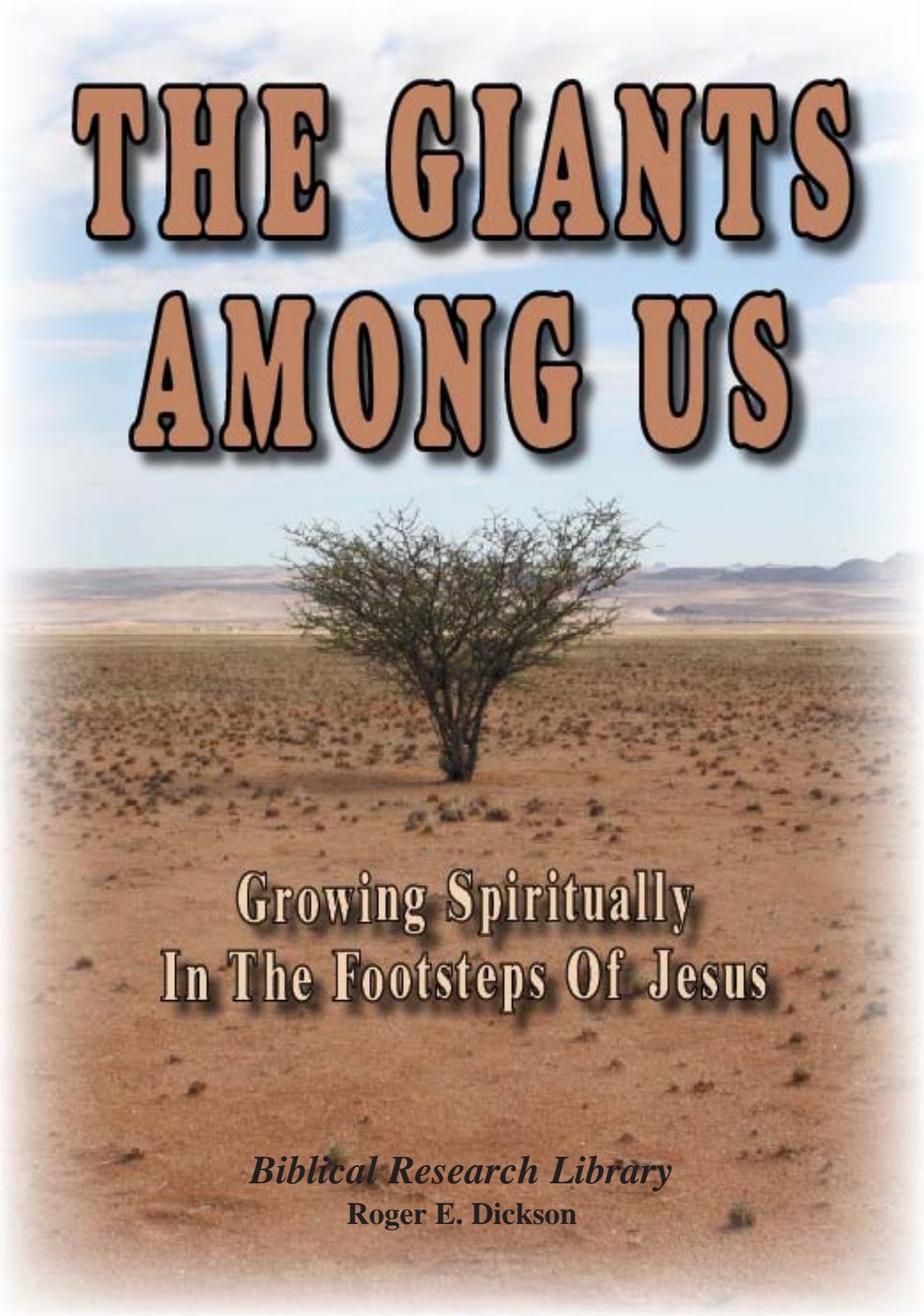


# THE GIANTS AMONG US



Growing Spiritually  
In The Footsteps Of Jesus

*Biblical Research Library*

Roger E. Dickson

## CONTENTS

**Introduction – 3**

**1 – *Nonessentials For Spiritual Growth* – 5**

**2 – *Essentials For Spiritual Growth* – 13**

**3 – *Mandated Strength* – 21**

**4 – *Armor Up For Battle* – 24**

**5 – *Partners In Christ* – 29**

**6 – *Maintaining Contact* – 34**

**7 – *Out Of Duty* – 39**

**8 – *A Road Map To Spiritual Power* – 48**

**9 – *Beaming Lights* – 61**



Roger E. Dickson  
rdickson@mweb.co.za

[www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org)

[www.blog.africainternational.org](http://www.blog.africainternational.org)

Philadelphia, Western Cape, South Africa

Copyright 2015, Africa International Missions

Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Cover Theme: *STANDING TALL* (The Kalahari Desert in southern Namibia, R.E.D.)

## THE GIANTS AMONG US

It is a beautiful thing to be a Christian. Those who are simply religious or spiritual will never understand this. They will not until they believe in the One who can grow a beautiful thing out of a frail free-moral being who is dysfunctional on his own and seems to destine himself continually to spiritual failure and eternal doom. What makes the Christian who he is, is not produced by human religious catechisms and legal rituals. His spiritual formation does not come from that which is without, or of that which is of this world. It comes only from within and is created after the image of God. We identify man-made religions by the efforts of men to orchestrate spiritually through man-made disciplines or human intuition. But we identify the Christian by his voluntary submission to the word of his Creator. This means of growth comes with a risk. Voluntary submission comes with the possibility of voluntary rejection of the word of God. Peter explained in warning Christians, “*Beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness*” (2 Pt 3:17). The disciples of Jesus in the first century continued with the mandate to “*grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). Lest we rebel against our Creator, therefore, we too must spiritually grow. If we are not spiritually developing as children of God, then we are spiritually moving away from His grace. Growing a spiritual giant takes a great deal of effort. But we can get there, for we are promised by Jesus, “*You are to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Mt 5:48). We have already been made perfect by His cleansing us of sin. Now it is our task to live up to what Jesus has done for our soul by growing up in all things in Christ.

### INTRODUCTION

When Paul sat and leaned over a table to pen his final words to some disciples with whom he had spent three years of his life in ministry of the word, he remembered the last words he had spoken personally to them many years before: “*For I know this, that after my*

*departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock*” (At 20:29). Years later after this personal encounter with the Asian presbyters, he penned a letter to the same men, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*” (Ep 6:10).

After Paul's personal meeting with the leaders from Ephesus in Acts 20, he knew that there was danger looming in the near future of the disciples of Asia. It was less than ten years after Paul wrote the Ephesian exhortation that Jesus sent a personal message of judgment to the same disciples in Ephesus. "*I have this against you, that you have left your first love*" (Rv 2:4). From the time of his personal exhortation in their presence in Acts 20, to the time Jesus judged them to have fallen from their first love in Revelation 2, it was less than twenty years. From the time of their mass conversion and excitement for Jesus that was recorded by Luke in Acts 19, to their fall that is recorded in Revelation 2:4, it was about thirty years. This is about the lifetime of a disciple. It could have been that those who were very young in Acts 19 lived to hear Jesus' judgment of them in Revelation 2. There is one very clear and important lesson we learn from the Ephesian Christians: **No matter how excited one might be at the time of his conversion to Jesus, he can lose that excitement, and subsequently lose his salvation within the period of a lifetime.** The history of the Christians in Ephesus is a lesson in the rise and fall of a working faith.

No one is saved without the possibility of losing his first love. The belief that once one is saved and is unable to fall from his first love, is Satan's effort to produce within us a false sense of salvational security. And once the false sense of security is produced, then we have set ourselves up to fall. If one con-

vinces himself that he cannot fall, then he can convince himself that he can harbor all sorts of sinful beliefs and behavior, while at the same time, remain within the grace of God. Jude warned of this when he warned of some Christians "*who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness ...*" (Jd 4).

Knowing that we can fall from the grace of our Lord Jesus, we give the more earnest heed to those things that were spoken by Him. Knowing that dark days of rebellion could come in our lives, we do as Peter exhorted, "*... to take heed, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises ...*" (2 Pt 1:19). We "*earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jd 3). We do such on the promise of the Holy Spirit that He made through Peter:

*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, for an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:10,11).*

Paul would thus exhort us, as he did the Ephesians, to be strong (Ep 6:10). He said the same to the Corinthians:

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Co 15:58).*

We would guard ourselves from falling from the Lord. And in guarding ourselves, we give the more earnest heed to spiritually grow in doing the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what produces the type of character that is conducive to developing spiritual giants. God knew this when He admonished the Israelites at the time they were about to enter into the land of promise. In reference to the law that He had given to them through the hand of Moses, He exhorted,

*Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you. So do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may prosper wherever you go (Ja 1:7).*

Individual members make up the universal body of Christ. As the Holy Spirit took the hand of Luke to give us in the book of Acts a heavenly view of the function of this body on earth, He focused on individuals who remained faithful and functional to the Lord. As these indi-

vidual disciples implemented in their lives those essential characteristics that produce spiritual giants, Luke takes us on a literary journey of what causes the body to grow as a whole. By emphasizing those essentials that make the body grow organically, we conclude that there are things that **are not necessary** for personal spiritual growth. Avoiding the non-essentials for spiritual growth will keep us on the right road. On our way to spiritual growth, we must always assume that Satan will seek to detour us by offering alternative routes. By understanding what is necessary to produce spiritual giants, we determine those things that are Satan's detours. They are his efforts to keep us as far as possible away from God.

The mandate from Jesus is to grow spiritually as individual members of the body. And when we spiritually grow as members of His body, the universal body grows. In order to reach the mountain peaks of spiritual growth, we must not be deceived into taking those paths that Satan offers that actually hinder our growth.

## Chapter 1

### Nonessentials For Spiritual Growth

We must not think that Satan is not aware of our desire to grow closer to God. So in order to divert Christians from that which they seek to do, that is, spiritually growing, we must assume that he is throwing out as many spiritual detours as possible that appear to produce spiritual growth, but actually lead one further away from God. If Satan can convince

us that we are spiritually growing according to his devices, then he has us in his grasp. The one caught in the trap of spiritual nonessentials will be detoured from true spiritual growth simply because he believes he is growing according to the will of God.

In order to grow the organic body of Christ worldwide by developing spiri-

tual giants among the members, the following are **not** needed:

### A. **Wealthy people:**

It is often the curse of wealth to divert one's mind from that which encourages spiritual growth. Jesus warned that in one's pursuit of wealth "*no man can serve two masters*" (Mt 6:24). There is the master of wealth, and there is the Master of creation. It is simply an axiomatic truth that "*you cannot serve God and wealth*" (Mt 6:24). In other words, the same level of commitment that God demands to grow spiritually cannot be placed with equal focus on the things of the world.

If one would be a spiritual giant, then his focus for growth must be on spiritual things. Spiritual giants are totally focused on God. They are totally committed to His will. They are successful in business because they focus their business on bringing glory to God. What Jesus was saying in the preceding statements was that the intensity of focus that is needed to grow spiritually as God would have us grow, cannot be split between two objectives. The intensity of our focus cannot be both on God and on wealth. Therefore, one has to make a decision, "*for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other*" (Mt 6:24). In order to "despise" wealth, Paul explained, "***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth***" (Cl 3:2).

How many times throughout our

ministry have we heard someone who said, "I want to make money so I can support the preaching of the gospel." And in the pursuit of money, the one who had a noble goal lost his direction when he was consumed by wealth. The money consumed his life by consuming his thinking. In order to make the wealth, he had to totally focus on the things of this world. And in focusing on the things of this world, he lost his spiritual dedication to accomplish spiritual things.

A good Nigerian friend once explained to us that there are some cultures in Nigeria whose total goal in life is to make money. Everything that is done is based on the world view that wealth is to be accumulated. And in the pursuit of such, dishonesty and extortion are justified. One does not have to be totally honest with others in order that wealth be acquired. This desire for wealth is manifested in the lives of many of the present religious leaders of the nation. Their religion is often "miracles for money." They preach a gospel of prosperity in order to exploit the poor into giving their livelihood into their bank coffers. They have deceived the innocent into thinking that they too will be blessed with large houses and vehicles if they would only give more.

The fact is that wealth is simply not a means by which one can spiritually grow. Jesus stood beside a poor widow who contributed her last two copper coins to pay the temple tax (Lk 21:2). At the same moment, the rich gave out of their abundance (Lk 12:4). They gave out of their leftovers. But Jesus said of the poor

widow that “*she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had*” (Lk 12:4). If by chance the rich who contributed would lose all their wealth, except for their last two copper coins, we wonder if they too would have contributed these last two coins as the poor widow? If they could not, then in Jesus’ testimony of the two contributors, who was the more spiritually minded? Sometimes, opportunities as this manifest the true heart of the rich.

Could some “prosperity preachers” make the statement Peter made to the poor cripple who sat at the gate of the temple called, Beautiful, “*Silver and gold I do not have ...*” (At 3:6)? We would conclude that wealth has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual growth. If we were to take Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:24 seriously, then we would be very cautious about the desire to be wealthy. We must never forget the burning statement of Jesus in Matthew 16:26:

*For what will it profit a man if he will gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

We have our opinion about the religious Pharisees of Jesus’ time. We would say that they were generally not very spiritual people. In Luke 16:14 the Holy Spirit explained why: “*And the Pharisees were lovers of money ....*”

There are few among us who can be spiritual giants, while at the same time, be wealthy. But there are those who can. Gaius was such a person in the first cen-

tury. In fact, John prayed of Gaius, “*Beloved, I pray that in all things you may prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” (3 Jn 2). John could pray that Gaius prosper because Gaius had already cast in his two copper coins for kingdom business. He was supporting evangelists as they went forth to preach the gospel (3 Jn 6-8). We would conclude, therefore, **that if one has not dedicated his business to the preaching of the gospel to the world, then he should not expect God to bless his business.**

Regardless of where one is in his relationship to the wealth of the world, he must always remember that the One he proclaims as his Savior did not have a fox hole in which to sleep at night (Mt 8:20). From the rich to the poor among us, we must read again of the first converts of the city of Philippi. Paul later wrote of them, “*that in great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality*” (2 Co 8:2). The physical poverty of the Philippians did not hinder their spiritual wealth, and thus, they gave of their wealth. It was out of their deep physical poverty that they were freely willing to give to the needs of others.

## **B. Famous people:**

Remember Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:5: “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth*”? We remember sitting as a young preacher many years ago before an aged preacher of the gospel. The aged preacher, Gus Nichols, told

a story that many years before the parents of a very talented son, came with their son for his advice. The parents were members of the Lord's church, and thus asked brother Nichols, "Should we encourage our son to go into the entertainment business because he has such a great voice?" Bother Nichols said, "You are a good Christian family, and it seems that your teenage son is a strong Christian. I suppose he might be able to survive the music/film industry."

The son did not. Brother Nichols said to everyone in the seminar, "I have come to the conclusion that no young Christian can spiritually survive the music/film industry." And he was right. Remember Whitney Houston? She, as many other young people, started singing in church choirs, and then went into the professional music/film industry and lost their way. And in the case of Houston, ended up dead.

If a young person thinks that he or she can grow spiritually by being famous, then they have allowed the Devil to deceive them into believing a great lie. Their youthful ambitions to be somebody famous will often lead to their spiritual doom. One cannot become a spiritual giant by narcissistically focusing on himself or herself every day. It is best to be an opera singer in the shower than a spiritually dead and fallen saint singing before millions. So if a young person would come to us and ask if they should pursue fame in the music/film industry, we would suggest that they bury their ego in Christ and His word and follow the advice of the Holy Spirit:

*Flee also youthful lusts. But pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart* (2 Tm 2:22).

We know of few in the music/film industry who pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. One does not become a spiritual giant by looking at oneself in the mirror every day to see if he or she is pretty enough to go on stage. Therefore, follow in the company of those "*who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"

### C. Multitudes of people:

When God starts something big, He starts small. Adam and Eve were sufficient to populate the earth. Noah and his family were sufficient to repopulate the world. Abraham and Sarah alone would do the job of creating a nation (Gn 12:1-4). And in order to take the gospel into all the world, twelve men were sufficient to begin the process. God's work is manifested in small numbers lest men take credit for His work.

In Judges 7 God wanted to deliver His people from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was called to accomplish the deliverance. And as most men who have little confidence in God working through them, Gideon proceeded to assemble a massive army. So 32,000 men were called to battle. But God said to Gideon, "*The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands*" (Jg 7:2). They were too many "*lest Israel exalt themselves against Me, saying, 'My own*

**hand has saved me**” (Jg 7:2). When God wants the glory, men should back off from taking ownership of something He has done or is doing through them. God is working through the church of His Son’s people. The church, therefore, should be very careful about doing anything by which we as the church seek to glorify ourselves. God does not receive the glory when the people He uses to glorify Himself steal the glory for themselves. We are to do things in the name of Christ, not the name of the church (Cl 3:17).

So God commanded Gideon to say to the men, *“Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead”* (Jg 7:3). And a wave of 22,000 men headed home. Only 10,000 remained. But *“the Lord said to Gideon, ‘The people are still too many’”* (Jg 7:4). Then the Lord told Gideon to take the men to a river to test whether some would lap the water as dogs or bow down and cuff their hand to drink from their hand. At the end of the test, Gideon ended up with only 300 men. Then God told Gideon, *“Arise, get down to the army [of the Midianites], for I have delivered it into your hand”* (Jg 7:9). And you know the rest of the story. With only 300 men, God delivered a whole army into the hands of Israel. When God goes to work for you, do not expect failure.

*“What will we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Rm 8:31). We do not need a great number of people to accomplish in our lives that which God expects us to do as a group of disciples. It is as what

Paul stated, *“But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rm 8:37). A handful of spiritual giants can accomplish greater things than a church house full of lukewarm “pew packers.”

When faith-driven people come together to accomplish the will of God, nothing will be withheld from them (See Gn 11:6). Christians must have a positive mental attitude about what they can do both individually and as a group. They must be as positive as the spiritual giant who wrote from a prison cell, *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Ph 4:13). When Christ-strengthened people determine to serve the Lord, nothing less than great things will be the end result of their labors. We must not, therefore, deceive ourselves into thinking that we need a great host of people to accomplish any task that is set before us. A few Spirit-filled people will do. In fact, one spiritual giant trusts in the God who can do *“exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us”* (Ep 3:20). We must just read our Bibles about the life of Paul, and then proceed to Hebrews 11, in order to survey the spiritual giants of the Old Testament who did unimaginable things because of their faith. We can read about the spiritual giants in Hebrews 11, but the fact is that we can be the same.

#### **D. Educated people:**

Some societies move into glorifying an elite of educated people who must

lead the way in all things. This is especially a problem in the realm of our faith. For example, some church organizations do not consider something “intellectual” or truly valid unless a proclamation comes forth from their fellowship of Bible college professors. We know we are in trouble when we allow the educated professionals among us to be the authoritative interpreters of the word of God.

Secular education is great, and God can use those who are educated in the disciplines of the world. But we must not lead ourselves to believe that education grows the church. In fact, the church grew the fastest in history when it had the least number of educated members. Even among the leaders of the disciples, the world perceived the following of them:

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that **they were uneducated and ordinary men, they marveled** (At 4:13).*

The religious leadership of Jerusalem marveled at the wisdom and teaching of Peter and John. They did not marvel because the two apostles had diplomas and degrees on which their names were written. They marveled in the fact that these two men knew Jesus and the word of God they were speaking to the people. Their education was not in the disciplines of scholarship and universities of this world. It was in Jesus and the message of the gospel.

In reference to educated men, we

must remember a truth about which Paul wrote. He reminded the puffed up Corinthians “*that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Co 1:26). Because men often puff themselves up with their education, he continued,

*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are mighty (1 Co 1:27).*

“*For since in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching*” the gospel to save the lost (1 Co 1:21). For this reason, Paul “*determined not to know anything among you [Corinthians] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Co 2:2).

We often puff ourselves up with our clergy who hang degrees on their office walls in order to set themselves apart from those who know only their Bibles. In fact, this practice has become so acute among some disciples that one cannot preach for some groups of disciples unless he has a Master’s Degree or Doctorate. We feel that we have digressed from the simplicity of the gospel when we seek to validate our status among those of the world by our “degreed” preachers. The work of preaching the gospel is not in the number of diplomas and degrees one can hang on his office wall. It depends on the degree one knows the word of God. After all, it was God Himself who called some people “more noble minded”

because they simply studied their Bibles (At 17:11). We will take a noble-minded Bible student in the bush any day over a clergyman who knows only theology, but no Bible.

If one feels that he must have a diploma or degree in Bible in order to preach the gospel, then he has fallen for the deception of trying to be validated by diplomas and degrees, and not by how well he knows the Scriptures. If one feels that he has no respect from the people because he has no Bible diploma or degree, then it is not he who has the problem. It is the people who have fallen from a respect for one who knows his Bible. Every noble-minded Bible preacher must never forget what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:3.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound teaching. But to suit their itching ears, they will surround themselves with teachers who will agree with their own desires.*

It is the people who seek the feel-good preachers who preach feel-good lessons. When the people fall from their love of the word of God, they will not seek Bible preachers. They will seek speakers who make them feel good in their apostate state of lukewarmness.

We simply must never forget that the church grew the fastest when there were only uneducated and common people leading it who knew only Jesus and His word.

### **E. Misdirected spiritual growth:**

This is a sensitive subject. And the fact that it is sensitive magnifies the problem itself. We have convinced ourselves that church ownership of a building is somehow conducive to the spiritual growth of the church. Throughout the years we have been sent numerous pictures of incomplete church buildings. The ones who send the pictures feel that they are growing because they are laying bricks upon one another. And if we would only help them financially to complete the brick stacking, then they would be validated as a strong “church” in the community. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the more we feel that a physical building produces the spiritual growth of the church, the less it does when the building is completed.

The day when we turned from focussing on one another in order to take pride in brick and bamboo was the day we started taking our minds off that which produces true spiritual growth. We do not forget the psychological influence a church building has over the people. If we ignore this influence in leading the family of God to greater spiritual levels, we will always be leading with a crippled vision to restore fully the people’s focus on Jesus and one another. When men started referring to the “church” as the building, then we knew that our focus on brick and bamboo was redirected from the people as the church to bricks and bamboo.

As we journey through some thoughts on this subject, those who are convinced that a purpose-built facility for the purpose of worship is absolutely nec-

essary to produce spiritual growth, will most certainly accuse us of being against the church owning its own buildings. But again, the accusation is evidence of the fallacy we have led ourselves to believe. The greater the accusations, combined with the obsession to have a “church building,” the greater the magnitude of the problem.

We must remember that Jesus established the context for this discussion by saying,

*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him (Jn 4:23).*

This truth was made on the foundation of what Jesus previously said to the Samaritan woman who stated, “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and You say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*” (Jn 4:20). But she was thinking in her past and present context. She was thinking carnally by trying to place the worship of the Samaritans on “this mountain” and “the place” of the worship of the Jews in Jerusalem. But now focus on Jesus’ answer.

*Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father (Jn 4:21).*

**What Jesus was saying is that there would never again be a place of worship for the true worshipers of God.** True worshipers of God worship wher-

ever they are and whenever they can. There is no such thing as “a place of worship” for Christians. When we are in discussions concerning the worship of the disciples of Jesus, “sanctuaries” and “temples” have no relevance. Though Christians have the right to build facilities for printing, Bible classes, schools and benevolence, building facilities does not build the church spiritually. If we attach spiritual growth to brick and mortar, then we are in trouble.

We must keep in mind that the body of Christ was born out of an era when there was no such thing as a “church building.” In fact, church buildings did not exist in the history of the church until Emperor Constantine of Rome sought to bring Christianity into conformity with the pagan religions of the Roman Empire. Since the pagan religions had their temples, then he thought the Christians should also have their “temples.” So in A.D. 323 he requisitioned the building of the first church building for the church. And from that time, the craze to have our own church building was started and perpetuated throughout history. The craze is so intense today that people do not consider a group of disciples to be a true established church unless they have their own church building. We have found that in some places this obsession has so misguided the people, that the people are left without copies of the Bible, while at the same time they are buying bricks and mortar to build a church building. We would build our buildings, but we would first make sure everyone has a copy of the Bible before we lay the first brick.

In the first three hundred years of the existence of the body of Christ, the function of the body was not confined to either a place or building. And yet, these were the times in which the church grew the fastest in history because it was growing spiritually. Therefore, we must dispense with this notion that church buildings cause spiritual growth. Such thinking is totally contrary to what the Holy Spirit said in the following statement:

*... from whom the **whole body** being fitted and held together by what **every joint supplies**, according to the effective **working of each part, causes growth** of the body to the edifying of itself **in love** (Ep 4:16).*

When we consider the worship of the children of God, we must not forget that worship is “neither here nor there.” The problem with establishing a “place of worship,” is that when we are in another place we feel that we are not in the right place of worship. Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman that there was a

paradigm shift coming. And it came that “in every place” a child of God can worship. It seems that in these days religious leaders are trying to return to the old paradigm from which Jesus delivered the true worshippers of God.

The Christian’s worship is not confined to a location or restricted to specific times. We must keep in mind that the more we seek to have a church building in order to cause the growth of the church, the less the growth is when we get one. The church of the West has surrounded itself with some of the most beautiful buildings in the world. And yet, the church of the West is declining in members on an annual basis. If having a church building produces spiritual growth, then the Western church has certainly failed spiritually. We have seen too many church buildings being sold to be warehouses or for demolition because those who were seated in them had confined their religiosity to a tomb of four walls. We must not be detoured by Satan into believing that his detours are necessary for spiritual growth.

## Chapter 2

### Essentials For Spiritual Growth

The more we appreciate being a disciple of Jesus, the more we seek to grow closer to Him. And the more we grow closer to Jesus, the more we grow spiritually. In fact, we are often frustrated with ourselves because we sometimes do not see ourselves growing as we think we should. This frustration is good because from our frustration we spur our-

selves on to grow. We alert ourselves to dig deep into our hearts in order to find those obstacles we harbor that hinder our spiritual growth. While we are digging, we must follow certain guidelines. Following these guidelines will help us to dig ourselves out of the hole of spiritual stagnation and lukewarmness.

## A. **Spiritual growth through commitment:**

It is a well-known truth that **“our strength is shown in what we stand for and our weakness in what we fall for.”** It is as someone said, “Giving God less than our whole lives is robbery.” There is a cost to discipleship. The cost is the totality of our lives. There is no such thing as “holding back” when we define what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. If there is “holding back,” then there will always be a plateau to our spiritual growth.

“*Seek-first-the-kingdom-of-God-and-His-righteousness*” is not a statement that is to be relegated to a Sunday morning “hour of worship” (Mt 6:33). It is a statement that is based on the definition of what Jesus explained was the foundation for all spiritual growth: “You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). It is as someone said, “A Christian should be a walking sermon, a breathing prayer, a living poem, a visible spirit, and a human candle.” Less is not good enough when discussing the life of a disciple of Jesus.

The commitment to spiritual growth that Jesus demands is defined in one statement: “*If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up **his cross** daily and follow Me*” (Lk 9:23). The word “cross” in this statement was more than a metaphor. There was a literal cross involved in being a disciple of Jesus in the first century. The cross was a means by which Rome executed criminals and

insurrectionists. The cross meant bearing the burden of a literal cross to one’s own crucifixion. And when Jesus was bearing His own cross to His own crucifixion, we are sure that this statement of Jesus was burned into the minds of the disciples who looked on in fear. It could be that they too would be burdened with their own crosses as they were crucified as insurrectionists of the Roman Empire. They surely remembered also the statement of Jesus, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27).

The commitment that these statements of Jesus taught and lived should be the foundation upon which all of us must build our faithfulness to Him. When contemplating the magnitude of all that God has done and will do for us, Paul wrote in bold print,

***Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*** (Rm 12:1).

It is “reasonable service” because when we realize the grace of the cross by which we are saved, we should be driven to our knees in appreciation. It is only reasonable that we sacrifice the totality of our lives for Him who sacrificed all for us. Therefore, it is only reasonable to refrain from being “*conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...*” (Rm 12:2). As Jesus led by an example of the crucified life before His disciples, so Paul did the same in his life.

It is for this reason that Paul could never have been speaking wistful words in the following statement:

*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gl 2:20).*

This explains the totality of the committed life. Anything less, as previously stated, is simply spiritual robbery. Discipleship calls for the maximum that we can give, not minimums by which we believe we can “get by.” There is no joy of just admiring others swim in the deep water of faith, while we are wading around in shallow water. One cannot experience the joy of being a totally committed disciple of Jesus unless he launches out into the deep. No true disciple of Jesus will be known for being such by circumstantial evidence.

(When I was six or seven years old, I desired to learn how to swim. Fortunately, I had an older brother who could lift me above his head. So into the deep water he kept throwing me, while all the time saying, “Swim or drown.” The fact that I am writing these words bears testimony to the fact that I learned how to swim very quickly. The lesson is that we must not complain to God for throwing us into deep water situations where we must learn to grow in faith, or drown for lack of commitment.)

Now some fear and run when they hear phrases such as presenting our lives

as “living sacrifices” or “crucified with Christ.” These are statements of total commitment to Jesus. Here is the problem. Those who have an institutional concept of religion confine their faith to a Sunday morning churchianity between an “opening” and “closing” prayer. They are thus fearful about taking their faith outside the “hour of worship,” lest they must assume greater responsibilities for living the committed life. Those who have hired their religiosity to be done for them by the support of a preacher have supposed that they have relieved themselves of any responsibilities outside the “hour of worship.” They are fearful of living the totally committed life of a disciple lest they must behave on the job as they behave in the “church house” on Sunday morning. Some feel that their business outside the church house is their own, while the “work of the church” belongs to the clergy whom we have supported to tend to our religious affairs.

Now we must be honest with ourselves. Do we really believe that Jesus sacrificed heaven and died on a cross just to purchase us with His blood for “an hour of worship” once a week? Total commitment means that Sunday morning to Sunday morning seven days later belong to Jesus. He bought our lives, not an “hour of worship” on Sunday morning. Our Monday morning on the job is just as important as Sunday morning. The life of the totally commitment member is not taken off the altar of sacrifice with a “closing prayer.” We cannot be crucified with Christ during a Sunday morning ritual, and then, “uncrucify” our-

selves until the next “hour of worship.” Such is only senseless religiosity that we have created after our own desires. We then create a god in our minds whom we believe is satisfied with such “church house Christianity.”

Total commitment means using our business for God. It means using our jobs for God. It means we are never “off duty” when it comes to being a disciple. Total commitment means contributing seven days a week. Yes, it can mean that one must give his last two copper coins before the collection plate is passed on Sunday morning. If we pass up the crippled man on the steps of the church house on our way to worship, and hold back our last two copper coins so we can perform a legal act of worship during the “hour of worship,” what spiritual humbugs we are.

## **B. Spiritual growth through work:**

Are we saved by good words? Certainly not! But are we saved without good works? Certainly not!

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them* (Ep 2:10).

Spiritual growth in discipleship means hands-on ministry. There will be no hands without callouses in heaven. All spectators will be in the other place. Someone once said, “Some people are bent with work, others are crooked trying to avoid it.” There is no spiritual

growth without personal involvement in work for the Lord. Therefore, the disciple who wants to find work for Jesus, will find it. But those who do not want to work for the Lord, will find it easier to find an excuse.

It is simply a principle of character development that one must work for that in which he believes. There are no sideline cheering crowds in the church. Everyone is in the ministry. Almost a century ago some unknown poet wrote:

Are you an active member,  
The kind that would be missed,  
Or are you just contented,  
that your name is on the list?  
Do you take an active part,  
To help the church along,  
Or are you satisfied to be,  
The kind that “just belongs?”  
Think this over, sister, brother,  
Are you right or are you wrong?  
Are you an active member?  
Or do you just belong?

We need to remember that at the judgment Jesus will not be looking for Bible diplomas, trophies, or medals of honor. He will be looking for scars, callouses and bruises. He will be rewarding those who experienced the joy of “*faith working through love*” (Gl 5:6). He will be rewarding those who obeyed the exhortation of James: “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). When we do His will, then we can be assured that our work is not in vain (1 Co 15:10). Therefore, if we would reap His reward, and

we would seek to grow spiritually, then we need to get to work. Idleness produces no spiritual growth. Reward is given only to those who come from the harvest fields.

Work produces spiritual growth. But we sometimes do not mean what we sing, as someone once wrote. We sing “I am thine, Oh Lord,” when really what we mean is “I resign, Oh Lord.” We will sing, “Have thine own way, Lord,” when really we mean, “Have thine own way, Lord, just not today.” And we will sing, “Nearer my God to thee,” when really we are thinking, “Nearer the ball game I would be.” And then we sing, “Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee,” but we are really thinking, “Take my Sundays and let that be, all my service Lord to thee.” And finally, we sing, “Jesus Savior pilot me,” but what we really mean is, “Jesus Savior stop this preacher preaching to me.” Yes, we sing “standing on the promises,” when all we are doing is sittin’ on the premises.

(We once hired a maid to work once a week in the house when my wife was very busy with the ministry of the work. After a short time, the maid observed the physical work that I was doing in the development of the grounds of the AIM campus. She commented to my wife, “Did your husband grow up on a farm?” She saw in my physical work the spirit of work that only farmers know. I had grown up on a farm, and my father did not have a time to check in and out of work. We worked from early in the morning to the time when the sun had long set over the western horizon, fourteen to six-

teen hours a day. Farmers learn how to work. And in order to grow spiritually, we must learn how to work. And the only way to learn how to work is to get to work. Work is not learned in a classroom seminar on work.

### C. **Spiritual growth through fasting:**

One characteristic by which Jesus said His disciples would be known runs almost counter to Western culture. Matthew recorded this counterculture identity of the disciples of Jesus:

*Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, **and then they will fast** (Mt 9:14,15).*

Those days have come, but there is still little fasting among the disciples of Jesus. Those who live the affluent life find it difficult to fast since their lives are often surrounded with food and eating. Numerous television programs have refined eating to the point that food has almost become the god of the affluent. The marketing of food is so prevalent in our culture that it is almost inconceivable that one would seek times when he would deprive himself of food for spiritual reasons. It may be that the low level of spirituality is signalled by the high volume of food we consume. A society that suffers

from obesity is a society that suffers from a lack of spirituality.

The spiritual hunger of those who originally followed Jesus is inspiring. On one occasion, the disciples were so hungry for Jesus that they forgot about eating.

*Then Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I have compassion on the multitude because they have continued with Me now three days **and have nothing to eat**" (Mt 15:32).*

It seems that our Christian behavior today is somewhat different. When we have a special camp or seminar for Bible study, we even judge the success of the event by the quality and abundance of food we have consumed. Emphasis seems to be more on the food, than on the spiritual food of the word of God. In fact, if a three-day Bible teaching session were announced, and it was stated that there would be no food served, we doubt if anyone would show up for the seminar. But in the case of the multitudes who followed Jesus, they simply forgot about food because they were so obsessed with His teaching. And if one were following John the Baptist during his ministry, then one would fast. Fasting was a part of the religious culture of the first century.

We are always asked how one should fast. To ask the question is to betray our lack of fasting. Has fasting disappeared so far from our behavior as disciples that we have simply forgotten how to fast? There is no legal system for fasting. If there were, then fasting would

not accomplish its purpose for spiritual growth. The Pharisees legally fasted twice a week. And so, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him about the legalities of fasting. In response to their questions, Jesus said, "*But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting ...*" (Mt 6:17,18). If one wants to know how to fast, then that is about all he needs to know about fasting. Fasting is about fasting, not about establishing some legal system by which one would fast.

One can abstain from anything of this world that has dominance over our lusts. Some may need to fast from certain foods that they crave. Generally, fasting is from all foods for a period of time, which time is nowhere designated in the Bible. Throughout the Bible, fasting is simply the natural thing to do when one seeks to focus totally on spiritual things. And the fact that we do not fast betrays the fact that we are not focusing on spiritual things as we should. In fact, it could be said that one will always be frustrated with his spiritual growth until he starts fasting. It is only in the midst of an extended fast that one begins to understand the reason for fasting. When we start obsessing over spiritual food, instead of carnal food, then we are on our way to great spiritual growth.

#### **D. Spiritual growth through prayer:**

When one stops praying, he has really stopped believing. We must always keep in mind that nothing lies outside the

power of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God for our lives. Jesus promised, "... *whatever things you desire, when you pray, **believe that you receive them and you will have them***" (Mk 11:24). "*Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you*" (Mt 7:7). It is for this reason that we "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Th 5:17). And it was for this reason that Paul wanted "*men to pray in every place*" (1 Tm 2:8).

Someone once said, "Desire is the engine of destiny, but the engineer is prayer." We must never forget that "*the prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much*" (Js 5:16). We are convinced that Epaphras was a disciple who truly believed in the power of prayer. When he was with Paul in a Roman prison, Paul wrote back to his home town, and reminded the Colossian disciples that Epaphras was "*always laboring fervently for you in prayers*" (Cl 4:12).

The fervent manner of our prayer is indicated by our fasting. When Paul and Barnabas designated elders in every city of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, they, with all the brethren "*prayed with fasting*" (At 14:23). Paul instructed husbands and wives concerning times when they could give themselves to fasting and prayer (1 Co 7:5). When fasting is connected with prayer, great things will begin to happen in reference to our spiritual growth.

The intensity of our prayers is manifested through fasting. Prayer without fasting often becomes habitual, and soon empty. Jesus explained to the disciples

that some things just do not happen without "*prayer and fasting*" (Mt 17:21). Anna was known for serving God "*with fastings and prayers night and day*" (Lk 2:37). Fasting and prayer is a ministry that is often neglected, but one that brings awesome results in the life of a disciple.

Christians who are struggling to grow spiritually are never satisfied with their prayer life. One way to deal with this frustration is to add fasting to our prayers. Spiritually minded people always know that they need to spend more time in talking with the Father. But our minds are often distracted from our concentration on that for which we need to pray. We are distracted by a heavy schedule of activity. We are distracted by a host of things that Satan would use to keep us from talking to our Father. This is when the example of Jesus should come into action in our lives.

*Now it came to pass in those days that **He went out into a mountain to pray.** And He continued all night in prayer to God (Lk 6:12).*

It was certainly the circumstances surrounding Jesus at this time in His ministry that hindered His prayers. His only escape was a mountain, a place where there were no people. And in order to clear our minds from pressing job circumstances, the demands of a business, or simply people, we must look for a mountain. If we cannot find a mountain, then we must find a desert or forest or beach, some place where we are alone with God. When our prayer life begins

to grow, then we know that we are spiritually growing. We must keep in mind that fasting focuses our prayers. Our spiritual growth is measured by our fasting and prayer life. Those who realize this are always conscious about their time that they spend in fasting and prayer.

### E. Spiritual growth through evangelism:

Remember the Ephesian Christians who were active in their business with themselves (See Rv 2:2)? They were busy with themselves, and thus had become introverted in their focus. Jesus pronounced the judgment that they had left their “*first love*” (Rv 2:4). That first love was manifested in the evangelistic activity at the beginning of their Christian journey (See At 19). So Jesus called on them to “*remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works ...*” (Rv 2:5).

Someone wisely wrote, “When a church is chiefly concerned with its own preservation, it has ordered its tombstone.” When the leaders submit to the whims of those who state, “I get nothing out of the worship,” then we know that we are in trouble. Introverted disciples complain about not getting something. Spiritual disciples are concerned about not putting enough in. **Christianity is not about what we get, but what we give.** This mental attitude must be manifested in everything that defines who we are as disciples of Jesus.

We know the mandates: “... *disciple all the nations*” (Mt 28:19). “*Go into*

*all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mk 16:15). But in knowing we must not forget doing. We must learn how to forget ourselves in reaching out to others. James’ words would be appropriate here. “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22). **If one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, and believes the great commission of Jesus, but is not doing the commission, then he has deceived himself into thinking that he is a disciple of the One who gave the commission.**

God “*has committed to us the word of reconciliation*” (2 Co 5:19). If a soul is lost to whom we could have preached the word of reconciliation, then on whose shoulders will that lost soul rest? (See Ez 3:18,19). “*We are ambassadors for Christ,*” and thus, if we are not taking the word of the One who sent us into all the world, then we are masquerading ourselves as His ambassadors. What good is an ambassador who holds up in his mission station without telling the nation in which he lives that he represents the God of heaven?

Spiritual growth is the serendipity of living for others. The more we serve the needs of others, the more we service our spiritual growth. There is simply no other way to grow spiritually as a disciple of Jesus than to give oneself to others.

### F. Spiritual growth through sacrifice:

Remember the words of the old song,

**All to Jesus I surrender,**

All to Him I freely give.

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.

**All to Jesus I surrender,**

Humbly at His feet I bow.

Worldly pleasures all forsaken,

Take me Jesus, take me now.

**All to Jesus I surrender,**

Lord, I give myself to thee.

Fill me with Thy love and power,

Let Thy blessing fall on me.

We remember the song, but when was the last time the song came from our lips and lives? Spiritual growth as a disciple of Jesus means to be willing to work and give, spend and be spent for Jesus. We must remember that the first and great commandment of the law is to “*love the Lord your God with all*” our heart, soul and mind (Mt 22:36-38).

There is no discipleship without sacrifice (Lk 9:23). This is true since the nature of sacrifice produces spiritual connectivity with Jesus. He was all about

sacrifice. And the closer we move to truly making sacrifices for Him, the closer we move to His character. This was illustrated in the old preacher’s story about the hen and the hog. The hen bragged about giving eggs every day to feed the master. Not a day went by when she did not brag to the hog about her sacrifice of eggs for the master. But the hog replied to the hen, “What may be a trivial sacrifice for you is a lifetime commitment for me.”

Therefore, “*let each one give according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Co 9:7). It is not that we give until it hurts. Disciples give until it feels good. If we seek God’s love, then sacrificial giving gets His attention. The word “sacrifice” in our giving reveals that the giving truly originated from our hearts. There need be no heart in legal giving. But when our giving becomes sacrificial, then our spirituality is revealed. It is then that we truly love because He truly loved us by giving His Son (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19).

## Chapter 3

### Mandated Strength

Speaking of taking ownership of one’s spiritual strength and growth, here is a command of the Holy Spirit: “... ***be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might***” (Ep 6:10). That is not a suggestion. And again He commanded, “... ***stand firm and hold the traditions that you were taught ...***” (2 Th 2:15). These

statements do not seem like the Holy Spirit is doing the standing, but is holding the individual disciple responsible for being faithful to Jesus. When one wants to shift his ownership of faithfulness to the Holy Spirit, or someone else, then we would suggest that that person read again what the Spirit mandates. Spiritual

growth can only be an individual process. It is not something the Holy Spirit will do for us. Others may encourage and exhort us, but it is the individual who must look deep inside and make a decision to grow. If we do not grow, we cannot blame others or the Holy Spirit if we fail.

In reference to the Ephesian disciples, it was not that they were in a religiously soft environment. On the contrary, they lived among some of the most hostile people of the world who were set against Christianity. The temple of Diana (Artemis) was one of the most glorious pagan temples of the ancient world. The worshipers were so fanatical about their religion and temple that they shouted out “*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians*” for two hours when just one Christian was seeking to address the people (At 19:28). Selling idols was a religious business that was associated with the temple (At 19:24,25). And when this business was endangered by the preaching of the gospel, the businessmen of Ephesus rose up against Christianity.

Opposition against Christianity in Ephesus did not cease with the great conversion that took place when Paul initially visited the city (At 19:1-20). On the contrary, the letter of Ephesians was written several years after the mass conversion in order to encourage the Ephesians to be strong in the midst of a religious environment that was truly hostile to Christianity (Ep 6:10). On his last mission journey through the area, Paul encouraged the presbyters of Ephesus and the surrounding cities to “take heed” (At 20:28). They were headed into the

stormy clouds of the state persecution of the Roman Empire. By the time of Jesus’ special messages to the Christians in Ephesus in Revelation 2, it seems that the disciples had been intimidated into leaving their first love of reaching out to the lost (Rv 2:2). They had succumbed to the hostile religious culture in which they lived, and thus, retreated into themselves. They continued with works among themselves (Rv 2:2). They made sure that they were doctrinally correct (Rv 2:2). They tested those who came to them, claiming that they were apostles sent out by the church. They persevered and were patient (Rv 2:3). But still, they had lost their first love by retreating into themselves. So Jesus admonished this intimidated family of disciples, “*Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works*” (Rv 2:5).

Now we understand why the Holy Spirit in **Ephesians 6:10-13** admonished the Christians in Ephesus to “*be strong in the Lord*” (Ep 6:10). The Spirit knew what was coming. He knew they were headed for the spiritual state of apostasy by the time of Jesus’ message of Revelation 2:1-7. When we study the context of Ephesians 6:10-13, therefore, we know what one must do in order to guard himself from losing his first love. The mandate of the Spirit is to (1) be spiritually strong, and (2) put on the armor of God in order to stand against the forces of wickedness.

In his book, *The Amateur Emigrant*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote,

You cannot run away from a weakness; you must sometimes fight it or perish; and if that be so, then why not now and where you stand?

When the Holy Spirit, through the hand of Paul, wrote the Ephesian letter, He knew where the Ephesian disciples were headed. They lived in a metropolitan area of over a quarter million people. The society of such a large city was filled with an intimidating religious culture of idol worshippers. It takes little deductive thought to realize that these disciples were headed for trouble. So the context of Ephesians 6 was to spiritually “muscle them up” for what was coming.

A weak sheep always follows the flock. And thus, in Acts 20 Paul gave a special message to the leadership of the sheep of God in order that they take heed to their own spirituality. The sheep would stand or fall on the basis of their spiritual leadership. When we read Revelation 2:1-7, we know that the Ephesian leadership did not listen well to Paul’s exhortation in Acts 20, or what he later wrote in Ephesians 6. So we would admonish all those who would presume to lead the sheep. We must listen up, for we will either lead the sheep to slaughter or to glory. We will lead them to retain their first love, or lead them in their fall. It all depends on our spiritual leadership.

A weak Christian is on the verge of falling. It only takes a little opposition or persecution to offer the weak the opportunity to fall. In order to prevent the fall of the weak, the strong have a special responsibility. They must “receive

*him who is weak in the faith”* (Rm 14:1).

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted* (Gl 6:1).

The strong have the responsibility of watching out for themselves, lest they present a stumbling block over which the weak brethren might fall. Paul admonished the strong, “*But take heed lest somehow this freedom of ours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak*” (1 Co 8:9). To the strong, therefore, the Spirit admonishes that they “*comfort the fainthearted. Support the weak*” (1 Th 5:14).

We can only imagine what it was like for Joshua to stand before a nation of over three million people and deliver the following message of God to Joshua:

*Only be strong and very courageous so that you may observe to do according to all the law that Moses My servant commanded you* (Ja 1:7).

Without all the written word of God that we have today in the Bible, especially our knowledge of the crucified Son of God, Abraham remained faithful to the call of God. Paul said of him, “*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rm 4:20). What great faith Abraham had in the absence of the evidence we have today. His faithfulness renders all our complaints foolishness.

His steadfastness to maintain his calling nullifies all our excuses. His stand makes senseless our fall.

A mother's little daughter cried out in the middle of the night. The mother came running to the bedside of the daughter and found the daughter lying on the floor. The mother responded to the tears of her daughter, "Susie, what is wrong." Through her tears, Susie sobbed, "I fell out of bed. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in." Sometimes when one is a "weak" Christian, he has actually stayed too close to where he came into Christ. When there is no spiritual growth, we remain weak, and thus we are without excuse before God if we fall out. We must remember that there is no final level to spiritual growth that we must reach in this life. We must simply continue to grow spiritually.

Because of the faith of Abraham, and others like him (See Hb 11), Paul felt no inhibitions about demanding of others, "*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tm 2:1). And to some wavering disciples in Corinth, Paul concluded, "*Stand fast in the faith. Behave like men. Be strong*" (1 Co 16:13). If any of the disciples in Corinth stumbled over unbelief, then they

would have no excuse in judgment, for they would be standing beside such faithfuls as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and a host of others who had no knowledge of Jesus Christ, but remained faithful.

David Livingstone (1813 - 1873) was a doctor and missionary who journeyed in Africa for sixteen years. He married a wife who did not fall in love with Africa, so she took their children and returned to England. After sixteen years in Africa, Livingstone also returned to England to write a book. David Livingstone, the man about whom no African has ever spoken a harsh word, became famous for his dedication to Africa and his struggle against the slave trade. He stayed his course, and as a result, monuments were made and books were written about his dedication to the continent that he so loved. After his death, the following inscription was written of him:

He needs no epitaph to guard a name,  
Which men shall prize,  
while his worthy work is known.  
He lived and died for good – be that his fame.  
Let marble crumble: this is Living - Stone.

## Chapter 4

### Armor Up For Battle

It is in verse 13 of the Ephesian 6 context that Paul begins with a flow of metaphors that explains things one must do to protect oneself spiritually from the religious environment in which he lives.

Since we must engage the hostility of "*the world forces of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places,*" we must take up the **whole** armor of God (Ep 6:12). If any part of

the armor is left off as we suit up for battle, then there is a point of vulnerability in our soul for the attack of the enemy. So the exhortation is *“take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”* (Ep 6:13). The point is that if we do not put on the whole armor, we will fall.

The Holy Spirit certainly knew that evil days were coming in the lives of the Ephesians. The days would be so evil that the Ephesian disciples would be intimidated into leaving their first love. Their loss would be so great that Jesus would later send a personal message to them to remember from where they were fallen, *“and repent and do the first works”* (Rv 2:5). Therefore, the essentials that are necessary in order not to fall to the enemy of all righteousness is to armor up with the following:

#### **A. Gird oneself with the truth.**

There is no article before the word “truth” in the Greek text in Ephesians 6:14. Emphasis, therefore, would be on a behavior of life as opposed to a knowledge of an outline of facts on “church doctrine.” John explains that *“... if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another ....”* (1 Jn 1:7). John expands on this meaning in 2 John 4. *“I rejoiced greatly that I found your children walking in truth.”* Walking in truth certainly means knowing the word of God, but also, “walking” means behaving. There is no true knowledge of the truth unless one is walking

it. And one’s walk is not in the right direction unless he has a knowledge of the word of God.

#### **B. Put on the breastplate of righteousness.**

The breastplate of the armor served to protect the vital organs of the soldier. Righteousness would mean living right before God. The best way to protect one’s self from falling is to live the life of a disciple. Sitting in endless assemblies listening to preaching and teaching is just not good enough. The fact that assemblies often become less in the number of those who attend lies in the fact that churches have developed an assembliology theology. When preachers who know little Bible see the assembly diminishing, then they need to heed the meaning of the statement that was once said to us by a frustrated member, *“We need more Bible teachers and less preachers.”*

Assembliology is the teaching that faithfulness is determined by how regular one attends the assemblies of the saints. But Christianity is not simply about assemblies. It is about living the life of Christ in a relationship with one another on a daily basis. When one is living the life of righteousness, he protects himself from the wiles of the devil. If he gives the presentation of being a saint in an assembly, but lives like the devil after the “closing prayer,” then he is an assemblologist waiting for an opportunity to fall. But if one shows up at the assembly of the saints because he is

walking in the light, then he is manifesting his desire to be with those who are also walking in the light. Those who do not show up at the assembly of the soldiers have revealed their lack of commitment to the army of God.

Righteousness means ministry. We must not lead ourselves to believe that assembly will take the place of ministry. **If there is no ministry in our lives, then showing up at an assembly of those who also have no ministry in their lives, is like meeting with the dead in a casket, ready for burial.** We are too often like the lukewarm Laodiceans who were Christian in name only. And sadly, they did not know that they were dead. Jesus said of the Laodiceans: ***“But you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”*** (Rv 3:17). The problem with the religious who are spiritually dead is that they usually do not recognize that they are dead. Sometimes we can be as the Christians in Sardis, ***“that you have a name that you live, but you are dead”*** (Rv 3:1). What makes us alive is right living. And right living means we are busy in ministry for others.

### C. Shod one’s feet with the gospel.

When engaging the enemy, the feet must be protected. The feet must stand on firm ground in order that the enemy be engaged with strength. And in the spiritual realm, it is the historical fact of the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection for our hope that provides the firm ground upon which our feet can

stand. Paul reminded the Corinthians, ***“I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand”*** (1 Co 15:1). Those who have obeyed the gospel can have confidence in the fact that their feet stand firm on the truth of the gospel. Those who have declared their own salvation before God, without obedience to the gospel, cannot have this confidence. The obedient have a good conscience before God because of their obedience through baptism of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See Rm 6:3-6).

When one follows the example of Jesus by going to the water to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness, then he can have a good conscience before God (See Mt 3:13-17). This is exactly what Peter meant when many years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, he wrote the following:

*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1 Pt 3:21).

If one follows the good news of Jesus to the cross and to the tomb of immersion for remission of sins (At 2:38), then he can be assured of his salvation in resurrection from the grave of water, after having all his sins washed away (At 22:16). This is shodding one’s feet with the gospel. If one does not obey the gospel (2 Th 1:6-9), then certainly he can have no clear conscience before God in preach-

ing the gospel since he himself has not done all that God has said one must do in order to be saved.

#### D. Take up the shield of faith.

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Hb 11:1). And for this reason, *“this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith”* (1 Jn 5:4). Through faith the Christian shields himself against doubt and despair. Faith is the fountain from which we drink the sweet savor of our victory over all who would oppose us. In this way, faith is truly a shield. It is a shield of the mind. It is as someone said, “Faith is to accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, and bear the intolerable.” And when the intolerable comes, faith takes us through to victory. It is like a muscle. It grows only when used. It is also as Spurgeon said, “A little faith will bring your soul to heaven; a great faith will bring heaven to your soul.”

When faith is exercised, it grows. It is for this reason that we must walk by faith, and not by sight (2 Co 5:7). Thomas sought to walk by sight, for he would not believe until he saw and handled the resurrected Christ. Because he did not believe the testimony of others who saw the resurrected Jesus, Thomas said, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (Jn 20:25). Thomas believed only after Jesus stood before Him. And when Jesus stood before him

and asked him to put forth his hand, finally Thomas responded, *“My Lord and my God”* (Jn 20:28). What is very encouraging about this incident is not the reaction of Thomas who personally experienced the resurrected Jesus, but what Jesus said of those who do not have the opportunity to walk by sight.

*Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (Jn 20:29).

Those who cry out for a miracle are those who are struggling with their faith. Those who seek the appearance of an angel, are also crying out for faith. Thomas walked by sight. Peter walked by sight. All the apostles personally experienced and handled Jesus after His resurrection (See 1 Jn 1:2,3). But we have not. We walk by faith. And it is through our walk by faith that our faith becomes the shield that protects our destiny. We are thus more blessed than the apostles who walked by their sight of Jesus every day. It is for this reason that we do not want the appearance of an angel, nor the dead to rise in our presence. If such were to happen, our blessed faith would be stolen away by sight. We would no longer be blessed because we believe, and yet, have not seen.

#### E. Take the helmet of salvation.

Any blow to the soldiers head would render him unconscious or dead. The assurance of our salvation, therefore, keeps us alive. We know that we are

saved by grace through faith (Ep 2:8). Our salvation is not the product of ourselves. It is the gift of God. We are created in Christ for good works, not by good work. And so, we work out our own salvation “*with fear and trembling,*” not for our salvation (Ph 2:12). In Christ, wherein there is salvation through grace, “*we are His workmanship*” (Ep 2:10). It is His grace that keeps us alive in Christ. When we take up the helmet of our salvation, we are depending on God, not ourselves in our battle against the spiritual hosts of darkness.

## F. Take up the sword of the Spirit.

There is no question about the metaphorical meaning of the word “sword” in this statement. The sword is both an offensive and defensive weapon of war. As the word of God, the sword is defensive in that we are “*no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of teaching, by the trickery of men in cleverness to the deceitfulness of error*” (Ep 4:14). On the contrary, the word of God is an offensive instrument against all sorts of error.

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hb 4:12).

Our warfare is real and spiritual. Christians do not become involved in the carnal warfare of guns and bombs in or-

der to propagate their cause. Christianity is not a religious/political system as Islam. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this very vital point:

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* (2 Co 10:3-5).

This is a very powerful statement. It defines our conflict with false religions, oppressive dictators who would lie to the people, and religious/political systems that would impose on us the imaginations of men. When there is no confrontation with evil and error, there is usually no desire to study the word of God. People do not study their Bibles when they are not engaged in spiritual warfare. Too many **are not** doing as Paul exhorted the Corinthians, that is, being “*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ...*” (1 Co 15:58).

When we engage evil and error, we will find ourselves against an entire world of darkness. It is sometimes like a son boasted to his father, “Look dad, I pulled up a great big stalk of maize (corn) by myself.” In order to encourage his son, the father replied, “My, you’re so strong, Tommy.” Then Tommy boastfully replied, “I guess I am, for the whole world had hold of the other end of the stalk.”

The whole world is against the disciple of Jesus, and thus, any who would engage the world without a knowledge of the word of God has lost the battle with the first volley of error thrown by the enemy.

Paul exhorted the young Timothy, **“Fight the good fight of the faith. Lay hold on eternal life to which you were also called ...”** (1 Tm 6:12). These were not wistful words of someone who had not fought the good fight of the faith himself. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, **“I thus run, not with uncertainty. I thus box, not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...”** (1 Co 9:26,27). And thus after the conflict of engaging the wiles of the devil, the faithful can also say with Paul, **“I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course”** (2 Tm 4:7).

John Walker was a young official

keeper of the lighthouse on Robin Reef at Staten Island in America. One day he became very ill. A medical boat was immediately dispatched to take him to the hospital. As they were loading him on the boat, he cried out to his wife, Catherine, **“Mind the light.”** Unfortunately, Mr. Walker died of his illness. But his wife Catherine minded the light of the lighthouse, keeping ships safe from the treacherous rocks of the reef. She faithfully minded the light for the next thirty years. We are reminded of Jesus’ message to the faithful disciples of Smyrna:

*Do not fear those things that you will suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison so that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life* (Rv 2:10).

## Chapter 5

### Partners In Christ

The New Testament is saturated with “one another” passages in reference to the relationship that Christians are to experience with one another. In our digital communication era, however, the word “relationship” seems to mean something different in this culture than what God intended should be among the members of the body of Christ. In fact, the concept of relationship that is commonly expressed today in the digital cultures of the world is quite different from the relationships that people have in the village life in the middle of India or Africa.

Village relationships are closer to first century relationships than that which we witness in large cities today. The concept of a “wireless relationship” through digital smart phone texting (SMS) is not what is meant by the “one another” (relationship) passages of the New Testament. Relationship is defined in the New Testament as personal contact in order to determine if one another’s needs are fulfilled, both physically and spiritually. This can be enhanced by digital communication, but we must always be careful not to allow such communication to be

substituted for face-to-face contact. Digital communication should actually bring us closer together, if such is used in reference to the disciples' connection with one another.

Spiritual growth is directly connected to the relational function of the members of the body of Christ. The following statement defines true relationships that Christians are to have with one another. We do not see smart phones taking the place of Paul's definition of how Christians are to relate with one another, as he explains in the following statement:

*... from whom [Christ] the whole body being **fitted and held together by what every join supplies**, according to the effective **working of each part**, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love (Ep 4:16).*

This is the relational function of the organic body. We are as the body of Christ, fitted and held together by what we supply to one another. Each part of the body must be working and supplying. And when we are fitted and held together by supplying one another's needs, then each member is held in fellowship with the whole body. It is then that spiritual growth occurs.

Other than the phrase "one another," the word "fellowship" is the most common word used in the New Testament to explain the organic function of the body in order that each member spiritually grows. "Fellowship" is usually the English word that is used to translate the Greek word *koinonia*. This word has a

diversity of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. However, the word basically means "joint partnership" or "having things in common." The context in which the word is used must be the final dictionary to define the word. What is significant about all the contexts in which the word is used, is that the concept of partnership and sharing is always understood.

### A. Partners in truth:

John explained,

*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you so **that you also may have fellowship with us**, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3).*

Our fellowship (partnership) with the Father and Son is based on the condition of continuing in the truth. "*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, **and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth***" (1 Jn 1:6). John further explained, "***But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another ...***" (1 Jn 1:7). We do not understand this to mean that we walk in agreement with some catechism of interpretations with which everyone must agree. The problem with such an interpretation of John's statement is that too many interpreters want to slip in their favorite interpretations, if not opinions. Since God knew that we would do this—the Pharisees were good at this—then we must conclude that "the truth" must be

something that is fundamental and clearly stated in Scripture. In the context in which John made the statement, the truth of Jesus being the resurrected Son of God was under attack. Therefore, we would conclude that if one did not walk in the truth of the resurrected Son of God, then he had no fellowship with the apostles, or God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Paul may shed some light on this. He wrote concerning our "... *fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now ...*" (Ph 1:5). Those who have obeyed the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God through immersion in water definitely walk in fellowship with one another. This would be the "truth of the gospel" about which Paul wrote, and was in danger of being compromised in the early years of the existence of the church. To the Galatians he wrote, "*To whom [the 'circumcision brethren' of Jerusalem] we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*" (Gl 2:5). This truth of the gospel can be compromised. Paul continued to explain to the Galatians concerning the behavior of some Jews in Antioch, "*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel ...*" (Gl 2:14). It is the word of God that communicates to us the truth of the gospel (Cl 1:5). If we do not behave according to this record of the truth of the gospel, then we have no fellowship with one another. Obedience to the gospel, therefore, is the foundation upon which we have fellowship with one another. This truth of the gospel is revealed

in the New Testament. If one is not following the road map of the New Testament, then he cannot obey the truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, for such is revealed only in the New Testament (1 Co 15:1-4). He simply will not know what the truth of the gospel is if he does not read his Bible.

Does obedience to the gospel establish an unending fellowship? Certainly not! One may start out his Christian walk in fellowship with God through his obedience to the gospel, but if Jesus' teaching in John teaches us anything, there are fundamental truths in which one must walk in order to maintain the fellowship we have in our common obedience to the gospel. Jesus said, "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words*" (Jn 14:23). It is not difficult to understand this. John explained, "*And he who keeps His commandments abides in Him*" (1 Jn 3:24). Walking in the light is walking in the truth of Jesus and His commandments. Jesus simply stated, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*" (Jn 8:31).

We have been called into fellowship with God through the gospel of the cross and resurrection (2 Th 2:14). Through Jesus on the cross, God calls us into fellowship with His Son (1 Co 1:9). But in order to remain in fellowship with Him, we must walk in the truth. The blessing to our walk in the truth is that we are in partnership with Father (1 Jn 3:24), the Son (1 Co 1:9), the Holy Spirit (1 Co 3:16; 2 Co 13:14), the apostles (1 Jn 1:3), and all other Christians (1 Jn 1:7).

## B. Partnership in Christ's suffering:

The Holy Spirit reminded Timothy of one very important principle of living the spiritual life in Christ: “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tm 3:12). **If we seek to partner with Christ, then we must partner with Him in His suffering.** Notice Paul’s description of this fellowship in his letter to the Philippians:

*I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being like Him in His death* (Ph 3:10).

Most people want “sweet Jesus meek and mild.” But they forget that “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pt 2:21). There is no partnership with Jesus unless we are willing to follow Him in His sufferings, even if these sufferings lead us unto death (Rv 2:10).

Discipleship means suffering. It may not be physical suffering, but indeed, there is at least the suffering that comes from being a nonconformist to the ways of the world. If we truly know Jesus, then we know that He warned everyone who would dare to claim to be His disciple that they would be hated by the world.

*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the*

*world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you* (Jn 15:18,19).

Those who partner with Jesus as His disciples, must partner with His sufferings. We simply need to remember what Jesus said: “*If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*” (Jn 15:20). Someone concluded:

For every hill I’ve had to climb,  
For every stone that bruised my feet,  
For all the blood and sweat and grime,  
For blinding storms and burning heat,  
My heart sang but a grateful song,  
These were the things that made me strong.

If there is no persecution from the world, then we should be cautioned. It may be that we are living according to the world, and the world sees no difference between us and them. It may be that we are silent concerning our beliefs, and thus, the world does not know what we believe. It may be that we have assumed that everyone in the world is saved regardless of whether they believe in Jesus. Or, it may be that all the world is Christian. We think that the latter is not the case, but all the former are true in one’s life if he is not living the life of a disciple.

If we live the life of a disciple, and are headed to eternal glory, then discipleship means sharing what we believe with others. It means rejecting those immoral practices by which the world entertains itself. Jesus lived in a more religious environment than we do today, and yet, it

was the religious world of His day that crucified Him. We thus pause and think about this for a moment. Maybe we have fallen further away from what discipleship means than we think. If there is no persecution from the misguided religious world, then we are probably not engaging the religious world concerning those teachings that are necessary to believe and obey in order to be saved.

### C. Partnership in burden bearing:

If we are disciples of Jesus, then there is no such thing as suffering alone. If one is suffering alone, then something is wrong. Either one has separated himself from the fellowship of his fellow disciples, or he is on a long journey among unbelievers. But Christianity is about helping one another through this world. The definition of “church” is fellowship among those who have partnered in Christ to make sure their journey through this world ends in the eternal presence of the Father. Paul explained, *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness ...”* (Gl 6:1). He continued, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gl 6:2). Paul even wrote a commentary on what we are to do in our fellowship with one another in Christ:

*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not*

*please Himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me”* (Rm 15:1-3; see Is 35:3,4).

Christianity is defined by a fellowship of care that people have for one another. Paul concluded his first letter to the newly baptized Thessalonians, *“Therefore, comfort one another and edify one another, just as you also are doing”* (1 Th 5:11). Even in their newness in the faith, the Thessalonians were *“contributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality”* (Rm 12:13; see 2 Co 9:12). At the very beginning, Luke defined the organic function of the body in reference to the members’ relational activity with one another: *“Now all who believed were together and had all things in common”* (At 2:44). This is the nature of the body of Christ.

### D. Partnership around the table:

Both Jude and Peter wrote their epistles in the middle or late 60s. In both letters mention is made of the “love feast” (2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12). The love feast was a vital function of the early body of Christ. There is something about eating together that brings people together. So for the first thirty or more years after the beginning in A.D. 30, the early disciples celebrated their common partnership in Christ over a full meal. Their breaking of bread together began in the early days of their fellowship and continued for years (At 2:42,46; 20:7). In fact, the love feast continued among the disciples well into the fourth century.

Because of the nature of the fellowship of the body (Rm 12:13), it was only natural that the early members seek every opportunity to share with one another through food. Though some puffed up Corinthians arrogantly manifested their lack of consideration in how they behaved at the love feast (1 Co 11:17-22), Paul still wanted them to continue eating together. So he gave some basic instructions on how to avoid their confusion. He instructed them concerning the basic ethics in how to show respect for one another when they came together to eat the love feast. *“When you come together to eat,”* Paul instruction, *“wait for one another”* (1 Co 11:33). And if anyone cannot wait to eat at the common love feast, then he should eat something before he comes to the table (1 Co 11:34). If these two simple instructions are honored, then coming together for the love feast accomplishes a great deal in bringing the members of the body together as a family. The love feast becomes the opportunity for spiritual growth. It places spiritually strong Christians in conversational company with weaker brothers. It is a special environment in which the members are bonded together in a social

environment of mutual sharing.

The goal of the local members of the body of Christ is to come closer to one another as they come closer to Christ. It is as the spokes of a wheel. Jesus is the hub. As the spokes draw closer to the hub, the closer the spokes come together. Sometimes it is as the fish farmer who had his separate pools of different fish at the bottom of a mountain. Unfortunately, there came a great rain, and subsequent, flash flood. The waters of the flood covered all the individual fish ponds. The different fish in each pond had the opportunity to swim over and enjoy the fellowship of one another’s ponds. Sometimes it takes hardships to bring members out of their independent boxes (ponds) in order that they come together into one family. Every Christian must realize that he or she is not alone in the heat of the battle for Jesus. It is as the Hebrew writer encouraged, *“Let brotherly love continue”* (Hb 13:1). We must *“love the brotherhood”* (1 Pt 2:17). Peter concluded, *“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion one for another. Love as brethren, be kindhearted, humble”* (1 Pt 3:8).

## Chapter 6

### Maintaining Contact

Some people define “church” as a series of ceremonial rituals that are performed on a regular basis, hopefully on a weekly basis on Sunday morning. Others define church as a catechism of doctrines that can be conveniently outlined,

or possibly presented in a well-written book that explains all the correct proof text of scripture that validates each point of identity. There are those who define their particular denomination by a manual of traditions or doctrines. And

then there is the definition of church to be a relational interaction of people with one another that is based on the members' common obedience to the gospel and mutual love of one another. We would agree with the latter.

In one passage of Scripture Jesus defined "church":

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*** (Jn 13:34,35).

This is the definition of the ekklesia (church) that Jesus called out of the world through the gospel. And if this is the definition of church—and it is—then doctrinal outlines fall far short of defining the organic body of Christ. Manuals of common tradition are worthless.

Love is an action word. Outlines and rituals are inert and impersonal. We may content ourselves to feel good about our correct outline of doctrine or common traditions. But we cannot content ourselves if our behavior is not identified by Jesus' definition of His disciples. What is scary is that the majority of religious people today who are connected in some way to a particular religious group, maintain their connection (fellowship) with their particular church either on the basis of tradition or theology. Love takes second place to these customary systems of church identity.

The identity of the disciples of Jesus is known by their relational love they

have for one another that is based on their common obedience to the gospel. They simply gravitate to one another and enjoy one another's presence because they have obeyed the gospel. They realize that their interaction with one another on earth is in preparation to be with one another for eternity. If they cannot work out their differences on earth, then it is questionable that they will enjoy being with one another for eternity. It is imperative, therefore, that there be no "once a month" or "periodic disciples" who refrain from being with other disciples. Nevertheless, there are those members who stay away from the body of believers. By doing such, they manifest their self-deception that they will enjoy the company of the disciples in eternity. If one cannot voluntarily fellowship with other Christians on earth, then certainly God will not force this person to be together with Christians in heaven.

The following are some erroneous beliefs of those who have deceived themselves into thinking that they will have an eternal reward for their unloving relationship with their fellow body of believers:

#### **A. Legal justification:**

Legal justification is illustrated by contributing a few coins to the function of the body, when at the same time, the contributor has many notes in his pocket. If God would meet him on his exit from the legalized assembly, he could at least say he legally made a contribution. No judgment could supposedly be made

against him because he dropped in a few coins.

As with legal contributions, one who practices legal fellowship is seeking to be with his fellow Christians as least as possible, and yet, feel justified before God. A preacher friend of ours several years ago mentioned the name of the presumptuous member who was supposedly a part of his fellowship. He said he saw the name of the member in the local newspaper. The problem was that the man gave the name of the church for which he preached. He told the newspaper that he was a member of this church. But my friend said the man never showed up at the assembly of the church.

Some people deceive themselves into thinking that they are in fellowship with God, when at the same time they maintain no fellowship with His people. John wrote of these people. *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1 Jn 1:6; see 2:9,10). So the person who claims to be associated with the disciples, but never shows up to be in fellowship with the disciples, has simply deceived himself. The fact would be what Peter and John said to Simon the sorcerer, *“You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God”* (At 8:21).

## B. Presumptuous relationships:

If one stayed away from his wife for an extended period of time without any reason, then we would question the man’s love for his wife. If one stayed away from

his job for an extended period of time without any excuse, then he would be fired. If one seeks to starve his relationship with his brothers in Christ, then he simply has no love for his brothers in Christ. If one would presume to have a relationship with Christ, but fails to be with the body of Christ, then he has deceived himself. He has presumed to have that which does not exist, that is, a relationship with fellow disciples of Christ.

Christianity is about relationships, and relationships depend on being with one another. Some have often used the text of Hebrews 10:24,25 as a legal code to instill guilt in those who forsake the assembly of the saints. But there is something far more important behind the meaning of Hebrews 10:24,25 than the breaking of a legal code of attendance. In fact, what is stated in the text is the reason why some stayed away.

We must understand the passage in the context of the time in which it was written.

*Let us hold firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised. And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* (Hb 10:23-26).

At the time the letter was written to

the Jewish Christians, there was great intimidation of the Jewish Christians to go back into Judaism. The intensity of the Jewish insurrection was rising in the Roman Empire. What eventually happened was that Rome decided to put down the “Jewish problem” by the destruction of the Jewish state in Palestine, which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and finally the destruction of the stronghold of Masada soon after.

Some Jews who were converted out of Judaism were on the verge of returning to their fellow Jews, and thus, were slipping away from their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The Hebrew letter was written in order to argue against their theological case of returning to a legal system of law under the Sinai law. After the Hebrew writer made his theological case, he concluded in chapter 10, “***But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul***” (Hb 10:39). Hebrews 10:24,25 must be understood in this historical context.

In order not to draw back into Judaism, the Jewish disciples must associate with one another. They must encourage one another to remain faithful to their former commitment that Jesus was the Messiah. The “day” about which the writer spoke, was not the final coming of Jesus at the end of time. The Holy Spirit would not lie to the readers, deceiving them into thinking that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. All the early Christians had been told the prophecy of Jesus that is recorded

in Matthew 24. National Israel, with the final destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, was coming to a close. Jesus was coming, but He was coming in time in judgment in order to conclude the age of Israel. The Hebrew writer, therefore, wrote to save Christian lives by discouraging them from repatriating with national Israel in Jerusalem. If they drew back into Judaism, indeed they would “*draw back to destruction*” (Hb 10:39).

As a culture of people, the Hebrew writer thus encouraged the Jewish brethren to assemble with one another in order to encourage one another to remain faithful to Jesus as the Messiah (Hb 10:25). And in order to remain faithful, they had to encourage one another to do two things: (1) stir up loving fellowship with one another, and (2) encourage getting to work for Jesus. Hebrew 10:24,25 is not talking about some “hour of worship” wherein one’s faithfulness is determined by his legal presence. This may be a convenient passage for preachers to beat people on the heart for not attending, but such an interpretation is certainly shallow in reference to the historical context of what was happening in the lives of the Jewish Christians when the passage was written.

The “sin” to which the Hebrew writer was referring was their apostasy to Judaism. In the book, the writer had earlier stated, “*But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hb 3:13). Turning back into “sin” meant turning away from the high priesthood of Jesus. Notice what

the writer stated would happen if they turned from the atonement of Jesus: “*For if we sin willfully after we have **received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins***” (Hb 10:26). If they turned away from Jesus, then they would be turning away from the atoning blood of Jesus.

We would understand “the Truth” in the context according to what Jesus said to the Jews during His earthly ministry: “*And you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free***” (Jn 8:32). Jesus was the revealed Word (Jn 1:1,2,14). He was the Truth. And it was He, through the cross, who set obedient people free from their sins. The Hebrews had obeyed the truth of the gospel because of their “knowledge of the Truth,” which Jesus was. But if they willfully turned away from the Truth (Jesus), then Jesus could do nothing for their problem of sin. This is something far more serious than missing the “attendance of the saints” on Sunday morning. The Hebrew writer was discussing apostasy, not legal attendance to assemblies, though the lack of attendance at the assembly of the saints is the first signal of a backsliding disciple.

It could be understood, however, that if one does not assemble around those who believe that Jesus is the Truth, then certainly he is falling from the faith. Our sweet fellowship that we have in Christ is that all of us have a “knowledge of the Truth.” We have obeyed the truth of the gospel, and thus are in fellowship with one another. Whoever would not want to be around like-minded people certainly has little knowledge of the Truth

(Jesus). Christianity is not about attendance at legal assemblies, but about being drawn together in assembly as we draw closer to Jesus. It is as Jesus said: “*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all men to Me***” (Jn 12:32).

### C. Estranged relationships:

Someone once said, “The difference between opinion and conviction is that you hold one and the other holds you.” It is not a matter of opinion that Christians are in fellowship with one another for the purpose of growing one another spiritually. It is that we are held together because of our commitment to one another. When in the absence of one another, our feelings should be as those expressed by Paul when he was away from the disciples in Thessalonica.

*So affectionately longing for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you had become very dear to us* (1 Th 2:8).

And to the Roman Christians, he wrote, “*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor **preferring one another***” (Rm 12:10). To the Ephesians, he continued, “*And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ...*” (Ep 4:32). These are powerful statements in reference to the nature and intensity by which Christians are to desire one another’s presence. Has our digital age of distance communication deprived us of this longing for one another’s

personal presence? Have we cheapened fellowship through texting on smart phones?

As we seek Jesus, we seek one another. A missionary friend of ours told of a religious woman in his community who was leprous. He mentioned that in her religious faith and longing for the saints that she crawled for two miles on her crippled hands and knees in order to be with the saints. And then she asked for forgiveness for her unfaithfulness and commitment to them.

We are often in the presence of lukewarm Christians who now define the culture of a lukewarm faith. Such happened to the disciples in the city of Laodicea. But Jesus pronounced judgment on them. *“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rv 3:16). The Christians in Laodicea may have been comfortable with one another’s lukewarmness, but Jesus was not. There were possibly some in the church of Laodicea as the husband and father identified in the following poetic statement of a lukewarm Christian:

Take my wife and let her be,  
Consecrated, Lord to thee.  
Take my children as thine own,  
As for me, I’ll stay at home.

This husband and father had forgotten

Ezekiel 18:4: *“Behold, all souls are Mine. As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine. The soul that sins, it will die.”*

In the bulletin of a church over a half century ago were the words of an unknown poet.

His four-year old climbed on his knee,  
Intent to have her daddy see,  
What she in Sunday school had drawn;  
While he stayed home and mowed the lawn.

“See there is Mom and me and Sue,  
But Daddy, I could not draw you;  
Because you never go with us,  
Did you and Jesus have a fuss?”

He bowed his head and felt ashamed,  
And found it so hard to explain;  
He vowed a vow, and kept it too,  
That miss again, he’d never do.

There is the old Chinese tale of a man traveling through a country. He saw a beggar at the side of the road, and subsequently, gave him six of his seven coins. While the traveler slept, however, the beggar stole the seventh. We would be harsh with the beggar, but we would do the same with God. He has allowed us to have and use all that we have, but we want to steal the rest.

## Chapter 7

### Out Of Duty

We can thank God that we do not have to stand before Jesus with a note-

book of our works in order to have earned, or worst, to demand entrance

through the “pearly gates.” We can throw away our notebook records of our meritorious works. We can thank Jesus for the sufficient sacrifice that He paid through His incarnation and sacrificial death on the cross. His taking of our burden of sin to the cross has relieved us of a tremendous burden. So it is in view of this sacrificial event that was coming in the lives of His immediate disciples that Jesus said,

*... when you have done all those things that are commanded you, say, “We are unprofitable bondservants. **We have done that which was our duty to do** (Lk 17:10).*

After we have performed the best we can in obedience to His commands, we must conclude that our performance was only our duty to do. We must remember that we are still unprofitable bondservants. We still lack. We are still a long way from that which we so earnestly desire. So we are not ashamed to quote over and over again, *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”* (Ep 2:8). Eternal life with Jesus is a gift because it could not be earned out of duty. No duty could ever be performed to earn such an awesome gift.

But there is still duty. Duty means responsibility. It means taking ownership of the commandments of Jesus in order that we manifest our desire to be His disciples. *“If you love Me,”* Jesus reminded His disciples, *“you will keep My commandments”* (Jn 14:15). *“If anyone loves*

*Me, he will keep My words”* (Jn 14:23). And why do we keep His commandments? Jesus explained, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love”* (Jn 15:10). So duty is necessary. Doing our duty is a manifestation of our taking ownership of our discipleship. And if we do not do His word, then we are out of duty. We will fail to grow spiritually. We can identify the spiritual giants among us by their love of, and obedience to, the word of Jesus. The Holy Spirit called the Bible students in Berea “noble minded” because they were students of the word of God (At 17:11).

### **A. The duties of discipleship:**

The word “Christian” is a noun. In today’s religious usage the name has lost much of its New Testament meaning. It is now a name that is used to portray anyone who would believe that Jesus is the Son of God, regardless of his beliefs and behavior. But we know that only those who know and do the will of the Father have a right to cry out, “Lord, Lord,” because they are doing the will of the Father (See Mt 7:15-23).

Now the word “disciple” is inherently filled with action. This is the word that means “a follower,” “a learner,” one who willingly submits to a teacher who leads the student in the direction of the teacher. This is why the word “disciple” was used in reference to God’s people at least ten years before the name Christian came into existence. For it was about ten years after the events in Acts 2, that *“... the disciples were first called Chris-*

*tians in Antioch*" (At 11:26). And they were called Christians by the unbelievers. Christians did not name themselves Christians. But since the name was appropriate to identify those who were "of Christ," the name stuck and the Holy Spirit sanctioned it when He used it about fifteen years later in the statement, "*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian ...*" (1 Pt 4:16).

Here is something that is quite interesting. It was the Holy Spirit's purpose to reveal in the book of Acts the function of the early disciples going about doing their duty. Through the guidance of the Spirit, Luke reveals to Theophilus in Acts the organic function of the early disciples as they carried out their duties as disciples. Throughout the document of Acts, therefore, Luke uses the word "disciple" to explain the function of those who went about as the body of Christ. The word "Christian" is only used twice in Acts, once in Acts 11:26, and when Paul almost convinced King Agrippa to be a Christian (At 26:28). But the word is only used in a noun form, whereas "disciple" is used in order to reveal the function of the organic body of Christ. In other words, Luke wanted Theophilus to know that disciples were on duty at all times. They were functioning parts of a universal body. They were going about the world doing that which was their duty to do as a part of the body of Christ. If one was doing nothing, then he was "out of duty" as a disciple.

If one would be a disciple, therefore, he must be at work carrying out the

duties of a disciple. It is easy to label oneself a Christian. But if one does no ministry, and yet claims to be a disciple of Jesus, then his claim is empty. Maybe this is the reason why the name Christian is so commonly used today, and the word "disciple" used so infrequently. One can claim to be a Christian based on what he believes. But one who claims to be a disciple must prove his discipleship by what he does. We have thought it interesting that few people who say they are Christians, also claim that they are disciples.

Remember what Jesus said, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*" (Jn 8:31). We have found it amazing that people will assemble on Sunday with exciting and colorful concert exhibitions, close their assembly, and then never study the word of Jesus. It is actually quite hypocritical. And it was as if Jesus knew there would be those who would claim to be His disciples, and yet be totally ignorant of His word. He spoke of such people: "*Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven*" (Mt 7:21). Jesus was saying that it is inconceivable that one would presumptuously claim to be "marching to Zion" without any knowledge of the "will of My Father."

People must remember that 450 prophets of Baal religiously jumped up and down on Mount Carmel in a plea that their gods manifest themselves before Elijah. But their religious concert of praise that led to their cutting of them-

selves with knives was useless. We can only do as Elijah who mocked such prophets with the words, “*Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is meditating or he is busy or he is on a journey. Perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened*” (1 Kg 18:27). But the emotionally mis-directed worshipers “*cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out of them*” (1 Kg 18:28). Now we must confess that this was certainly an exciting worship service. When the worshipers are rolling on the ground, cutting themselves with knives, then you know they have judged their worship to be acceptable to their god. It was their customary religious practice to behave this way in their worship. Nevertheless, regardless of their emotionally intense worship service, we look at this as religious hysteria. And yet, save for the knives, the same carries on with assemblies of churches throughout the world today. The unbeliever looks on and judges such people to be mad (See 1 Co 14:23).

“Blood gushing” assemblies are a signal that people are out of duty and out of control in reference to their knowledge of Jesus. If one by chance shows up at an assembly where they are passing out knives, it would be best to be absent from the assembly.

As disciples, we must be into the word of Jesus, lest we deceive ourselves into creating a god after our own imagination. The only way to keep ourselves from creating our own gods is that we discover the one true God in the pages of

the Bible. Remember that “these things were written for our learning” (Rm 15:4; see 1 Co 10:11). If we are not students of the word of God, **then we are out of duty**, and subsequently, out of control as we plead for our god to act, which god is possibly sleeping or on a long journey.

## B. The duties of priesthood:

1 Peter 2:5 & 9 explain a very important status of the disciples of Jesus. Disciples “*are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 2:5). Besides being a “holy priesthood,” Peter says that we are also “*a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a special people, so that*” we can proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness (1 Pt 2:9). Every Christian is a priest, and thus, every Christian is on duty to carry out his priestly duties to offer up spiritual sacrifices and praises to God.

Priests are to proclaim the praises of God to the unbelieving world. It is their duty to let the world know their origin and their destiny. There are no part time priests. All priests have presented their bodies a living sacrifice, separated from the world, and thus acceptable to God as His witness before the world (Rm 12:1). Any priest who might think that he can occasionally put off his priestly duties, therefore, is out of duty. Such a person does not have a priestly mind.

Under the Sinai law of the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was set apart as a people of priests. There was within

the nation a designated group of priests (Levites) who ministered to the people of priests. These were the Levites. But every Israelite was to represent God before the world as a priest of God.

The same is true of the church. Every member of the church is a priest of God. The more we might think that we have a special class of designated priests (“clergymen”) among us, the less we assume our responsibility to be priests before the world. Jesus is now our high priest. “*We have such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). But we are the priests of God on earth before the world. It is our duty as priests of God, therefore, to do the work of a priest for the world. Every disciple who is not doing his priestly duties to the world around him is simply out of duty as a priest of God.

### C. The duties of sainthood:

The Greek word *hagios* (holy) means to set apart. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Rome, he referred to them as those “*called to be saints [holy]*” (Rm 1:7). The ekklesia, therefore, is the called out assembly of those who are to be saints, and thus, set apart from the world. Saints are in the world, but not of the world (1 Co 5:10).

A saint is on duty in the world because he has been called out of the world. Paul explained, “*If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above ...*” (Cl 3:1). In other words, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things*

*on the earth*” (Cl 3:2). The saint’s life has been “*hidden with Christ in God*” (Cl 3:3). He is no longer his own person because he has been “*bought with a price*” (1 Co 6:20). For this reason, the saint must glorify God in his body (1 Co 6:20). The life of a saint is as Paul explained of his own life:

*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me* (Gl 2:20).

It would be superfluous for a Christian to say that he can take time off from being a saint. Sainthood is what the Christian is. It is not something that he does. Christians simply cannot cease being saints. They cannot because they have the responsibility of being the living proclamations before the world of the changed life. Spiritual giants recognize their priestly duties, and thus, they carry on daily performing their priestly duties to all those around them.

### D. The duties of brotherhood:

Spiritual blood runs thicker through the veins of those who are in Christ, than the blood of those who are only physical brothers and sisters. This is true because brothers and sisters in Christ know that they will be spending eternity with one another. Their brotherhood is a reference to eternity, whereas physical brotherhood is earthly and temporary.

**1. Physical responsibilities:** Brotherhood means that those who are in a brother relationship with one another have responsibilities toward one another. James wrote,

*If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them those things that are needful to the body, what does it profit? (Js 2:15,16).*

There is no brotherhood without obligations between those who compose the brotherhood. When Peter commanded that we "*love the brotherhood,*" he meant that we must take ownership of our responsibilities toward one another (1 Pt 2:17). John even stated that if we do not assume our responsibilities to the brotherhood of saints, we are not children of God. "*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*" (1 Jn 3:17). In fact, John was a little more specific in the following statement: "*We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death*" (1 Jn 3:14). If we do not think that these are great responsibilities, then we have not understood the nature or extent of the fellowship that must be characteristic of a disciple of Jesus. True love of the brotherhood is simply natural in being a disciple of Jesus.

Brotherhood means, as someone said, "We're not put on this earth to see

through one another, but to see one another through." And if we do not spiritually grow to the point of helping see our brothers and sisters through this world, then the love of God is not in us.

Brotherhood is our test for eternity. John explains: "*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*" (1 Jn 3:10). So in brotherhood, John cautioned, "*... let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn 3:18). We must put our actions where our mouth is. "*And by this we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him*" (1 Jn 3:19). If we feel bad because we do not help our brother who is in need, then our feeling of guilt will condemn us (1 Jn 3:20). But "*if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God*" (1 Jn 3:21). We have confidence because we are doing what love would do, that is, taking action to preserve our brotherhood because we are taking care of one another's needs.

**2. Freedom responsibilities:** Brothers and sisters in Christ will often disagree. We can ask Paul, Barnabas, Euodia and Syntyche about this (See At 15:36; Ph 4:2). Nevertheless, after their disagreement, neither Paul nor Barnabas turned from doing the work of evangelism, for they returned to exhort the disciples in the areas that they initially visited on the first mission journey (At 15:37-41). The names of Euodia and Syntyche were still written in the book of life, regardless of their disagreement (Ph 4:3).

When brethren disagree, it is the responsibility of both parties to maintain communication and harmony, though both parties have the right in matters of opinion to maintain their opinions or methods of work. God never intended for us to be clones of one another's ministry or minds. If we were clones, then there would rise up among us those who would demand that all of us be unified after their particular opinions. Brotherhood is maintained, not by agreement upon common opinions or methods of work. On the contrary, **brotherhood is maintained by allowing freedom in matters of opinion and methods of ministry.** This was what Paul sought to guard among brethren when he gave the following mandate:

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gl 5:1).*

This statement was made even in the context of those who would bind on the minds of the brotherhood that which they believed to be doctrinally right. There were some Jewish brothers who believed that circumcision was a matter of salvation (At 15:1). When one binds on the brotherhood that which he thinks is a doctrinal matter, but in actuality is only a matter of opinion or tradition, then he has perverted the gospel of Christ (Gl 1:6,7). When this happens among brothers, Paul's admonition is the same as what he practiced when false brethren sought to bind circumcision on the Gentiles. "To

*whom we did not yield in subjection even for an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might continue ..."* (Gl 2:5).

Brotherhood can be destroyed by failing to assume our responsibilities toward one another, as well as dogmatically binding opinions and methods upon the brotherhood. Brotherhood is destroyed when we do not guard one another's freedom in Christ

**3. Oneness in Christ responsibilities:** The disciples in Achaia had some serious problems about calling themselves after different individuals. In doing such they were endangering their brotherhood. The individuals after whom they called themselves had already left the region. The spirit of sectarianism had come in among the disciples to the point that some said, "I am of Paul," and others, "I am of Apollos," and then others, "I am of Cephas" (1 Co 1:12). We feel that Paul was somewhat sarcastic when he chided their immaturity, for he admonished, "I am of Christ" (1 Co 1:13). Paul rebuked, "*Is Christ divided?*"

The brotherhood of the disciples throughout the province of Achaia, and in Corinth, was established on the foundation of two facts: (1) Christ was crucified for them, and (2) they were baptized in the name of Christ (1 Co 1:13). This was the foundation of their brotherhood. No man had any right to establish his own foundation by which members become a part of the body of Christ. And since Christ died for their sins, and they each voluntarily and individually obeyed the gospel through baptism, then calling themselves after any other person than

Christ was quite sectarian. When we call ourselves after men on earth, brotherhood is destroyed. Since baptism brings us into the brotherhood of Christ, then certainly, it is not the choice of any man to add any member to any brotherhood than the brotherhood of Christ (At 2:47). When brotherhood is endangered by sectarianism, Paul's admonition is simple:

*Now I urge you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Co 1:10).*

If we fail to make sure that all the physical needs of the brotherhood are supplied, then we are out of duty. If we fail to give one another freedom in Christ, we are out of duty. If we divide ourselves after different personalities, then we are out of duty as disciples. It is the goal of every member of the body to eagerly keep *"the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ep 4:3).

### **E. The duties of servants:**

Christianity is primarily about ministry, not assemblies. Assemblies are the result of disciples who are partners in their priesthood ministry to one another and the world. Unfortunately, this order has been reversed with most religious groups. Assembly has become more important than ministry. In fact, the religious world has moved to the point that

if one of two things are supposedly correct, then one has a sure passage into eternal glory.

First, there are those who feel that if they carry out a prescribed ritual in assembly, which ritual is footnoted with a list of supposedly supporting scriptures, then they are somehow justified before God for believing and performing the correct rituals in their assemblies.

Second, there are those who feel that if they feel good after an assembly, their worship is acceptable to God, and thus, their passage into eternal glory is certain. They conclude that a hysterical assembly guarantees that they are in a saved relationship with God regardless of being involved in any ministry.

The fallacy of both the preceding concepts is deceptive. In reference to the first, the adherents are trusting in their legal performance of law in order to guarantee their acceptance before God. But Paul was emphatic when he said, *"... for by works of law no flesh will be justified"* (Gl 2:16). If we base our acceptance before God on the foundation of a worship service that is presumed to be according to law, then we have violated the very principle that Paul argued throughout the books of both Romans and Galatians.

How some can preach from the pulpit salvation by grace, while at the same time making sure that everyone is performing according to the law in a ritualistic assembly, is self deceiving, if not bewildering. For example, think of all the conflicts that have come about among the disciples concerning supposed legal

systems as to how the Lord's Supper is to be carried out during the assembly. We are quite hypocritical. We give the table talk on grace, and then make sure that we proceed according to law as to how the emblems are to be served. Some are so legally oriented about ceremonies surrounding the Supper that they will set out the grape juice until it ferments into wine so it can be legally and scripturally served as wine.

If there is a legal ritual for assembly, then the assembly becomes a legal identity by which we judge whether one is in fellowship with the body. Sunday morning becomes the legal standard by which we judge one another in reference to the salvation of individuals. Where one sits on Sunday morning, according to legalists, determines one's eternal destiny. Maybe we need to stand back and take another look at the legalistic and sectarian spirit and behavior we have established in order to make a "five act of worship" the standard by which we judge the eternal destiny of individuals. **Are we not hypocritical in trying to worship the God of grace by our strict legal definition of worship?** Have we contradicted by our legal worship the statement, "*by works of law no flesh will be justified*" (Gl 2:16).

Do not think that we have gone off course on this matter. We have written these things in order to emphasize the apostasy to which some have gone in order to justify themselves before God according to law, while at the same time, refuse to walk in the light of the gospel after the "closing prayer." The more em-

phasis that is placed on the law of assembly (worship), the further we move from our responsibilities to minister to others after the "closing prayer." We believe that we can save ourselves by a legal worship, and then fail to lead the life of a disciple after our "legal worship." When "assembly laws" become that by which we judge our eternal destiny, then ministry will always take a second seat. It does because we trust in the legalities of our assemblies more than the behavior of our lives.

As disciples of Jesus, we are servants, and service takes place outside assembly. The Greek word that is commonly used in the New Testament to explain the servanthood of the saints is *doulos*. The *doulos* are the slaves of the field. There is no metaphorical meaning here. Slaves are slaves, whether they are Christian or unbelievers. Paul was a slave of Jesus (Rm 1:1). He had made himself a slave to all (1 Co 9:19). He preached himself to be a slave for Jesus' sake (2 Co 4:5). He was not a slave because he performed some ritualistic assembly, but because he behaved Jesus in his life. And so, he says to us, "*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*" (1 Co 11:1). Owen Cosgrove once said,

A slave who balks most of the time, who gives halfhearted service and that only rarely, and who shows up only at dinner time is a poor excuse for a truly devoted servant.

Some people want to sit legally in a supposed "scriptural" assembly, but do

no slave work outside the assembly. Some people want to concert themselves into euphoria, and thus justify their sainthood through ecstatic utterances, but are worthless to the needs of others. The problem with both legalistic and emotional religiosity is that both lean toward narcissism. They are self-centered and self-gratifying, while at the same time the adherents to such religiosity will walk by the beggar on the steps of the temple.

The legalist leaves his assembly, gratified that he has performed the correct rituals. The emotionalist leaves his assembly too exhausted to even notice the beggar. There is a throne in the life of every worshiper. Either we are sitting on it, or Christ is there. And if Christ is there, we need to remember these words:

*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation, **taking the form of a bondservant** ...” (Ph 2:5-7).*

If a farmer stops planting and harvesting, he has lost his identity as a farmer. He ceases to be a farmer. If a carpenter ceases to work the wood and make the furniture, then he has lost the identity of a carpenter. He ceases to be a carpenter. If a disciple of Jesus ceases to serve others as a slave of Jesus, then he has lost his identity as a disciple. He ceases to be a disciple.

## Chapter 8

### A Road Map To Spiritual Power

The only road to spiritual heights is to first recognize our spiritual low. And in order to do this, we sometimes must go to a solitude place on a mountain or desert where we can be alone with God. We once had to make a very important decision concerning a major worldwide ministry. So we packed up our tent and headed for the Namibian desert. We stayed there for several days in prayer until a decision was made. There is something about places of solitude that help us reflect on ourselves and our abilities to do our ministry for God. We seek to grow spiritually. But we too often stumble over all the activities of the world that surround us. An activity-oriented life

is not conducive to personal reflection.

One time during His ministry, Jesus took a multitude of people to a mountain. In the solitude of the environment, He delivered what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. It was Jesus' road map to spiritual growth. Unless we follow this map, we will never get to where we should be in our spiritual relationship with Him. Therefore, we must progress with Jesus as He takes us on an adventure of growing in the grace and knowledge of Him (2 Pt 3:18). He explains in **Matthew 5:3-12** how to make this journey to the mountain peaks of spirituality in order to discover an intimate relationship with Him.

## A. **Spiritual poverty puts us on the road to spiritual growth.**

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 5:3).

The first step to spiritual growth is to recognize how far we are away from our desired destination. Recognition of our spiritual poverty initiates our spiritual journey toward Jesus. In order to go down this road, we cannot come to Jesus with a notebook of good deeds. We cannot, as the rich young ruler, approach Jesus with a completed checklist of all the laws of God that we have kept (Mk 10:17-31). This is the reason why so many sit Sunday after Sunday in a legal assembly, but feel empty. They know something is wrong with their legal approach to worship, but they do not know what is wrong. We cannot begin our journey toward Jesus by checking off legal ceremonies of worship.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with a checklist. He subsequently walked away from Jesus sad, as many walk away from legal assemblies that are intended to bring one closer to Jesus. We simply must never forget that law can take one only so far down the road of spiritual growth. If we seek to be as close as possible to Jesus in this life, we must realize how far meritorious law-keeping keeps us away from being where we so earnestly desire. When we realize we are lawbreakers, then, we will begin to experience that about which John was seeking to convey in the statement, *“His commandments are not burdensome”* (1 Jn

5:3). They are not burdensome when we understand that our obedience is not meritorious, but in appreciation of God’s grace (See 1 Co 15:10).

We can dutifully keep all the commandments, but still we must be on our knees confessing that *“we are unprofitable bondservants ...”* (Lk 17:10). After all the good deeds fail to bring atonement, and after all the law-keeping fails to bring the satisfaction of justification, we must ask Jesus the same question His disciples asked Him: *“Who then can be saved?”* (Mk 10:26). There is only one answer to this question. *“With men it is impossible, but not with God”* (Mk 10:27). With our performance of law, no one can be saved before God (Gl 2:16). With no amount of good deeds can one atone for his own sins (Rm 11:6). We simply cannot demand a spiritual relationship with God on the basis of meritorious law-keeping. And we cannot arbitrate with God with our notebook of good deeds. Mourning over sin in the pits of our own spiritual insufficiency leads to the discovery of grace. It is with this discovery that we begin our journey into the arms of God.

When we recognize and confess our spiritual poverty, then we are on our way. When we confess that our legal performance of law is flawed, then we start to reach out for grace. This is hard because we are so self-sufficient. Declaring spiritual bankruptcy is humbling, for we want to take pride in our good deeds and performance of law. Our arrogance pushes us to trust in our own abilities. Our culture teaches us to be winners in all things.

But when we start our journey to spiritual growth, we must confess that we are spiritual losers.

In our present social-media generation, we have taken so many “selfies” (pictures of ourselves) that we have convinced ourselves that we ourselves are more important than others. We conclude that since we are the stars of our own little Facebook worlds, then certainly God needs us. He needs no glory in order to add to His. When He sees our shelves loaded with awards and trophies, surely, we conclude, God would accept us on the basis of how important we are. But when it comes to running the spiritual race for the prize, this is one time when we will always come in last at the finish line. We must come to the point in our lives when we wreck our lives into the wall of pride and pomp in order that we begin to understand that the objective of our desire in the realm of spirituality is a God thing, not an accomplishment of man.

When we recognize our spiritual poverty, and our inability to bring ourselves into the presence of God on the foundation of our performance of law or good deeds, then we start reaching out to God. It is then that we will come into the realm of His blessing. It is then that we will possess the kingdom reign of Jesus as He begins to reign in our hearts. His word will begin to be done on earth in our hearts as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:10).

We admire the great ministry of the apostle Paul. It was a ministry upon which the salvation of millions of souls will be in heaven. Not a week goes by

that we do not read his Spirit-inspired writings. If one could successfully plead his case before God on the basis of meritorious works, then certainly Paul would have been a winner. But in all his works of ministry, he is the one the Holy Spirit chose to write the oracles of Galatians and Romans, which oracles proclaim the futility of doing good in order to save ourselves. As Paul’s own “works world” came crashing down after the Damascus road experience, he realized that only grace could put the pieces of his life together again.

Before the ink dried on the first seven chapters of Romans, Paul was about to inscribe the greatest literature ever written on the subject of grace. After proclaiming the insufficiency of our efforts to save ourselves according to law, he concluded chapter 7 with the outcry, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rm 7:24). Unless we come to this point in our lives, our spiritual growth will always be on a plateau of frustration.

No matter how important we may think we are in reference to kingdom business, no matter how puffed up we make our selves through the wearing of robes and gowns to set ourselves above the people, no matter how many degrees we have on our office walls, no matter how many titles we pronounce upon ourselves, no matter how many selfies we take of ourselves, each one of us must fall on our faces before God and cry out, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*”

## B. Spiritual poverty produces mourning.

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”* (Mt 5:4).

As Paul, who was in the midst of having revealed to him the climax of grace in Romans, we too must confess before God and mourn over our spiritual poverty (Rm 7:24). We must be brought to spiritual agony, tormented by our own insufficiency. It is only then that we can cry out as Paul, *“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rm 7:25). If we never humble ourselves before God and confess our spiritual poverty, then we will never begin the road to mourning over that which we cannot do in reference to drawing near to God. The mourning must begin before the comforting is given.

The road to closeness with God is covered with our tears. We mourn in frustration when we realize that we cannot dig ourselves out of our spiritual hole. We have seen light at the top of our pit of sin, but we have frustrated ourselves in trying to scale the slippery walls that are covered with our sins. So in our frustration, we cry out to Jesus to come for us.

Friends can never get us out of our dungeon of sin and into the presence of God. Worldly activities will never make the mournful sinner forget that he is so far away from God, that there is no human way to make our way closer to Him. We are so far down, only He can come and lift us up. The Corinthians were brought to this low by the judgmental words of the Spirit (1 Co 5:1,2). They

were allowing sinful behavior to continue in their fellowship. However, they were obedient to the Spirit’s call for repentance, and thus, they repented. The sinful man in their midst also repented. After everyone’s repentance, the Spirit wrote, *“For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation that is not to be regretted. But the sorrow of the world brings forth death”* (2 Co 7:10).

If we mourn after the pronouncements of God, then there is salvation. But if we continue to satisfy spiritual poverty through worldly means, then there is only frustration. When we begin to sink into the stormy sea of life, as Peter in a tempestuous sea, the only recourse is, *“Lord, save me!”* (Mt 14:30). And when the Lord extends His hand to save us and keep us from drowning in sin and self-pity, it is not for a handshake. We grasp and cling to His hand. We never want to let go. We are never on our way to spiritual recovery until in desperation we can make the same outcry as Peter as he grasped for the saving hand of Jesus.

Our mourning over our lack of spirituality is the beginning to our spiritual recovery. Our mourning can never start too soon, for we never know when it will be too late. Does this mourning over our spiritual poverty ever end? Paul would answer, *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified”* (1 Co 9:27). If mourning ends, we do as John wrote, we *“commit sin unto death”* (1 Jn 5:16). We are doomed.

Mourning over sin is a demeanor of

discipleship life. It is not a onetime recognition of sinfulness, and then immersion in water to wash away sin (At 22:16). In order to fully appreciate the comfort of the grace of God, we continue to be mournful over our own inadequate selves. It was for this reason that Paul continued to manifest his appreciation for the grace of God by the obedient behavior of his life. He wrote, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am”* (1 Co 15:10). Sins are washed away in baptism (At 22:16). But unless we walk in the light of Jesus’ word, we will not have the benefit of His continual cleansing of our sins (1 Jn 1:7). It is for this reason, that we are comforted throughout our Christian lives because of our realization that by grace we are continually cleansed of our stumbles (See Ep 2:8; 1 Jn 1:7).

A tragedy in life may spark our mourning and repentance. But after that initial tragedy when we promised to commit ourselves to Jesus, there need be no continuing tragedies to keep us on the spiritual growth road. If it takes another tragedy to get us back on the road to recovery, then the first may be questionable. Once Jesus knocked Paul off a horse on his way to Damascus, that was it for the rest of his life (See At 9:1-19). He never turned back. He remembered what Jesus said, *“No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Lk 9:62). We are sure that Peter never again wanted to hear the sound of a rooster crow. And Paul, probably with some apprehension he mounted horses the rest of his life.

### C. Mourning produces meekness.

*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”* (Mt 5:5).

When we recognize our spiritual poverty, we are driven to mourn over our inability to perform that which would atone for our sins. In true mourning, somehow arrogance and pride are all swept away. The selfies on our facebook page seem to vanish. We realize that we are simply clods of dirt in which God has temporarily invested a spirit. When we join with others who are like-minded, there is no competition for who would be first. We have begun to discover the mind of Christ, *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God”* (Ph 2:7). It is a marvelous discovery. It is a discovery that is life changing. When we are brought to meekness, we begin to understand the purpose for our existence. We understand that we were created by Him and for Him (Cl 1:16).

Meekness is not synonymous with frailty. It is power under control. Moses was acclaimed by God to be a meek man. *“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth”* (Nm 12:3). Notice how the Holy Spirit wanted this great leader of a nation to be identified for posterity. In order to be “above,” one has to go below. If we would pride ourselves with our own abilities to be “above” our fellow man, then we are following the ways of the world. If we entitle ourselves to be above other disciples, then we are

seeking glory, not meekness. But if through meekness, others set us above, then we are on our way to spiritual greatness. Therefore, we will not seek the “chief seats” (Mt 23:6).

Meekness helps us understand the nature of the leaders whom Jesus would have among us. In response to James and John, and the other disciples who sought to compete for prominent positions after a worldly manner in order to exercise power, Jesus said, “*And whoever of you desires to be first will be the bondservant of all*” (Mk 10:44). As Moses, leadership among God’s people is through meekness. “*But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant*” (Mk 10:43). This is not the world speaking. This is the One who said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mk 10:45). The leader who seeks to lead through the delegation of responsibilities to others must caution himself if he is doing such in order to be served, or to make sure that the needs of others are being serviced.

The meek will inherit the earth simply because the earth will seek to follow them. It is only natural for men to follow the one who has the dirtiest towel (See Jn 13:1-20). When we meekly wash the feet of others through loving service, we seek to follow the God of the towel. And in so following this God, others follow our towel. The earth belongs to those who have made themselves the meek servants of the world. When the meek dedicate “*themselves to the ministry of the saints,*” the saints humbly submit to their

service (1 Co 16:15,16). We are led by the meek, because it is they who service our needs.

#### D. Meekness produces hunger.

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled”* (Mt 5:6).

There is no desire to be filled, unless one realizes that he is spiritually empty. One does not recognize his spiritual emptiness unless he is meek of heart, and thus, is willing to accept spiritual filling from God. We cannot be filled with the Spirit if we are full of ourselves. One does not become meek of heart, until he mourns over his spiritual ineptitude and emptiness. And one does not mourn over his spiritual ineptitude until he confesses his spiritual poverty. It is then that we seek to fill the void of our emptiness with the word of God. Those who are not students of the Bible have a pseudo spirituality that is either controlled by another or sustained by self. The only thing that truly fills the emptiness of our soul is word from Him with whom we seek an eternal relationship. All other “fillings” only result in spiritualism. And when we are spiritualistic, we never know if we are right with our Creator.

The truly meek seek divine guidance. They hunger for the Bread of Life. Jesus fills our hunger. “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. And He who believes in Me will never thirst*” (Jn 6:35). The spiritually poor will find no real fulfillment until they find that which is above themselves.

No amount of the world's possessions can satisfy the inner yearnings of the one who seeks spiritual justification before His Creator. It is the way God made us. Men as C. S. Lewis, who wrote *Mere Christianity*, simply reasoned themselves out of atheism because they realized that there was fulfillment for their spiritual poverty only in faith. Paul wrote,

*For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse (Rm 1:20).*

If one would answer the natural call of the soul for his Creator, then he will find his way to God. God left enough evidence in creation to trigger one's search for Him. Paul simply said that there is enough witness of God in that which has been created to direct one to begin his search in the direction of God. In 1976, Dr. Thomas B. Warren had a public discussion in Denton, Texas, with the world renowned atheist, Dr. Antony G. N. Flew. Flew argued his case the best one could in denying that intelligence permeated the universe, and thus was the origin of all life. Warren argued that it is more reasonable to believe on the basis that intelligence and design cannot be denied. Since that public forum decades ago, which drew up to five thousand people together to hear two respected philosophers debate the existence of God, Flew, in his recent conclusions concerning the intelligence embedded in the

DNA of every cell, has reasoned that the existence of life cannot be accounted for on a naturalistic basis. And so, he has made his first steps toward belief. He has at least admitted that something was there, and here to create the intelligence that is embedded in the DNA of every cell. Do we see some "hungering" and "thirsting" from Dr. Flew in his old age?

"Hungering" and "thirsting" is an admission that we lack something in our inner soul. If we would relinquish to the "hungering" and "thirsting," then we will find our way out of intellectual and emotional darkness into which we have so often entombed ourselves. We will find our way to the Bread of Life. And if we eat of the Bread, we will never hunger again.

One of the greatest illustrations of the yearning for spirituality in modern times took place after the Cultural Revolution of China. The Cultural Revolution was initiated by Chairman Mao Zedong of the Communist Party. It was launched in May 1966, and continued until its final demise in 1976. It was a movement to eradicate any form of capitalism and religion from society in order to establish the true Maoist policies of communism. A few years later in 1981, the Communist Party announced that it had eradicated the failed movement of Mao, declaring that the movement was ...

... responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic

(11th Central Committee of the Communist Part of China, June 27, 1981).

And today there is no stopping of the revival of faith throughout China. It is a natural phenomenon of the swing of the spiritual pendulum of oppression to the free-will of the people to seek faith. As a result, faith is spreading like wild fire throughout the nation. The Cultural Revolution failed because it was a movement against the innate nature of man that was embedded by God in every soul since creation. When men strip themselves of pride and power, and are subsequently humbled to their knees, it is only then that the inner self is discovered. It is then that the journey begins to develop a spiritual giant. Oppressive governments may suppress this inner desire. But once the oppression is removed, society seeks to spiritually heal itself. As spiritual healing in society reacts to an oppressive past, society as a whole is on its way to making up for lost time.

The fountain of faith from which we must drink in order to reach mountain peaks of spirituality can come only from one source. ***“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”*** (Rm 10:17). When speaking of spiritual growth, one thing is certain: **Satan will seek to detour those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.** One thing distinguishes true spiritual growth from spiritism. This faith originates from the word of God. If one seeks to grow spiritually outside the guiding principles of the word of God, then he will end up only religious, or worse, only “spiritual.”

When we see people who are obsessed over Bible study, then we see people who are seeking to be more than simply religious. We see people who are searching for their Creator. Those who seek the creation only will end up with a religion they have created after their own desires. Those who seek the righteousness of God, end up with a faith that is based on the word of God.

The first stumbling block over which people usually fall on their quest for spiritual growth is to fall for the spiritual placebos of Satan. These detours come in many forms. Some have assumed that spiritual growth comes from a more organized religiosity. So creeds and catechism are written in order supposedly produce spirituality by making sure that the orders of “the church” are ritualistically obeyed. But such legal ordinances fail. They fail because it is the nature of ritual and order to stymie spiritual growth. If spiritual growth must be accomplished on the foundation of organized religiosity, then we will never reach our quest because we will always know that we are trying to orchestrate our own spiritual road maps to God.

Organized religion is burdened with an inherent system of death. The adherents know that the organization is man-made. They realize that their obedience to rituals is a meritorious effort that is based on their abilities to live up to their creeds. And if they have studied their Bibles enough to know that we are saved by grace, then they have also come to the conclusion that legal performances of man-made rituals and traditions will

never atone for the sins over which we mourn. We must remember that the more ecclesiastically organized we become, the less spiritual we are. Ecclesiastical orders are an outward pretense to spirituality. This is true because we become so worried about keeping the ecclesiastical rites of our organization that we forget our spiritual well-being. At the end of the day, our spiritual growth is not based on inventing more orders of worship in order to become more spiritual. After we make our way through all the quagmire of religious orders, all that is necessary for spiritual sustenance is a little wine, a little bread and a book.

If we are to reach the spiritual heights to which we so earnestly desire, then only God can take us there. And the only way He can take us there is through His word. We must confess that the greatest spiritual ecstasy that came over us was when we spent ten hours a day deep in study of the word of God in order to write a commentary on the entire Old Testament. There is no word from the dictionary to which we could resort to explain the surreal emotional state of connection one has with God than when one is totally immersed in a study of the word of God. It is a feeling as if the world can simply pass by without notice. Social perils and international conflicts find no consideration in a mind that is whisked away into total communion with God. Our feeling was celebrated with the final period at the end of the last sentence. After that period was made, there was an inner urge to start it all over again. We long for that emotional environment,

that suspended mind that was lifted above the affairs of this world and into the realm of a relationship with God that only His word can produce. We continue to hunger and thirst. We continue to involve our being in the ocean of His revelation.

You can go there too through the memorization of the Scriptures. We seem to have forsaken a culture that thrived on memorizing the word of God. For one example of the past, Fanny Crosby wrote almost 9,000 spiritual songs during her lifetime. By the time she was twelve years old, she had memorized the Bible books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. She once wrote, "The Bible verses were like friends that cheered me up whenever I felt sad about not going to school." And why could she not go to school? Six weeks after she was born, she was blinded because of medical malpractice. Since the time of her life in the nineteenth century, over 100,000,000 copies of her spiritual songs have been printed and sung worldwide. Many have been translated into hundreds of languages. Remember the following songs?

*All the Way My Savior Leads Me*  
*Blessed Assurance*  
*Close to Thee*  
*I Am Thine Oh Lord*  
*Rescue the Perishing*  
*Tell Me the Story of Jesus*  
*To God be the Glory*

They were all written by a totally blind person who loved her Bible. Yes, we have fallen. We have fallen from an era

when the word of God was most precious to our hearts. We feel it is time to call for a restoration to that which can satisfy our spiritual hungering and thirsting.

### E. **Hungering and thirsting produces mercy.**

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”* (Mt 5:7).

It is at this stage in one’s adventure in spiritual growth that self-realization changes one’s spirit. This is the point in our journey where we encounter the signpost that reads, “Life Change Ahead.” We begin to understand what James wrote: *“For judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”* (Js 2:13). Those who realize that God has poured out His mercy on them, reciprocate with mercy toward others. This is the “stone-dropping” moment of spiritual growth. The judgmental crowd that surrounded a woman caught in the very act of adultery sought to trap Jesus with the question, *“Now in the law, Moses commanded us that such a person should be stoned. But what do You say?”* (Jn 8:5).

It was now time for reflection. Those who hunger and thirst after the word of God start looking in the mirror of the word of God. They look into the mirror of the word and see themselves (Js 1:23). Those who are not mourning over their sins, do not like what they see, and thus, they turn away (Js 1:24). But those who are remorseful over what they see, are changed forever. They are blessed in their change.

*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues to abide in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in his deed* (Js 1:25).

In the case of the those with stones in their hands, ready to cast them on the woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, *“He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to cast a stone at her”* (Jn 8:7). We can hear the stones drop with a thud to the ground as one-by-one the judges realized that they too were sinners.

But the unforgiving servant in a parable of Jesus was self-righteous and unforgiving (Mt 18:21-35). Once he had been forgiven a tremendous debt, he went out and found someone who owed him a trivial amount of money. He demanded, *“Pay me what you owe”* (Mt 18:28). The forgiven are often unforgiving. **But the appreciative and mournful soul who has been forgiven so much, is always willing to pass on mercy to others.**

God’s mercy and forgiveness in our lives obligates us. We are obligated to be merciful to others. Jesus taught the disciples to pray: *“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”* (Mt 6:12). It is for this reason that spiritual giants continue to grow. They realize that God’s mercy on them is contingent on their mercy that they extend toward others. By our mercy we extend to others we obtain the mercy of God. It is because His mercy is conditional that we are encouraged to remain on the road to mercy.

## F. Mercy produces purity in heart.

***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”*** (Mt 5:8).

The merciful person starts to understand His creator who has extended mercy toward him. It is the same as having a loving spirit. *“We love because He first loved us”* (1 Jn 4:19). Therefore, *“he who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* (1 Jn 4:8). The loving person can “see” God, because he understands the nature of the God of love. Righteousness, faith, love and peace are to be characteristics of *“those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tm 2:22). And thus, *“to the pure all things are pure”* (Ti 1:15). Paul reminded Titus, *“But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure”* (Ti 1:15). But those who are of a pure heart can understand (“see”) God. They can see God because they are living the nature of God. And unless one lives mercy, he cannot understand the God of mercy.

The unbelieving and defiled do not understand who God is, for they create a god after their own unforgiving nature. Such was the spiritual problem of the scribes and Pharisees.

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs and indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but within are full of dead men’s bones and of all uncleanness* (Mt 23:27).

We place flowers on the coffin of the dead. In a similar way we often dress up in our “Sunday best,” but inwardly we

are spiritually dead. Exterior beauty is no solution for interior death. But when one behaves mercifully toward others, then he begins his inward cleansing. It is then that he realizes that *“the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith ...”* (1 Tm 1:5).

## G. Purity of heart produces peacemakers.

***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God”*** (Mt 5:9).

The Hebrew writer explains, *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord”* (Hb 12:14). Those who are of a pure heart understand the nature of God, and thus, they seek to establish peace among men as God brought peace between Himself and man through Jesus Christ. *“For He [Jesus] is our peace, who has made both one ...”* (Ep 2:14). Jesus not only brought peace between God and man, He also brought peace between all men. He *“has broken down the middle wall of separation”* between men, specifically between those who are of different cultures (Ep 2:14). If we would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, we will be peacemakers, for such was the ministry of Jesus. Such was the ministry of God to man through Jesus.

Those who are characterized by the heart of God are peacemakers after the nature of their Father. Those who go forth to represent God, have shod their *“feet with the preparation of the gospel*

*of peace*” (Ep 6:15). The peace was characteristic of the early disciples as they went forth to preach the gospel of peace between God and man. Their nature of peace even became their common greeting with one another. It was as Paul when he addressed the disciples in his letters: “*Grace to you and peace from God ...*” (Ph 1:2; see 1 Co 1:3; 2 Co 1:2; Gl 1:3; Ep 1:2). The early Christians went forth as peacemakers because they represented the God of peace (Ph 4:9). They were thus the children of the God of peace they proclaimed to the world.

The spiritual giants among us will be identified by their desire to bring peace, not contention and argument. While some reveal their immaturity through contention, those who began their spiritual journey to become peacemakers are revealed in times of conflict. When Paul wrote to Titus, he encouraged him to maintain his spirit of peace. When there were controversies concerning matters of opinion, Paul instructed that Titus should function as a peacemaker by not involving himself in meetings that produce contention.

*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned* (Ti 3:9-11).

**The peacemaker maintains peace by not showing up at the meetings that**

**concern discussions over “unprofitable and worthless” controversies.** He does not show up because such meetings generate more strife. “*Avoid foolish and unlearned questions,*” Paul wrote to Timothy, “*knowing that they generate strife*” (2 Tm 2:23). Sometimes peacemaking involves avoiding foolish meetings that are conducted over matters of nonsense. If one would judge a meeting to be over a matter of unprofitable and worthless discussions, then he would violate Paul’s instructions to avoid foolish controversies if he attended such a meeting. Those who would call such meetings are factious, perverted and sinning. They are self-condemned.

It is certain that when one has spiritually grown to be a peacemaker, he will be condemned by the contentious for not showing up at controversial meetings that are conducted by those who are sinning. Nevertheless, the peacemaker must remember that ...

*... the servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God perhaps will grant them repentance leading to a full knowledge of the truth* (2 Tm 2:24,25).

## **H. Peacemaking produces persecution.**

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”* (Mt 5:10). *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely*

**say all kinds of evil against you for My sake”** (Mt 5:11).

The persecution of the peacemaker will come from two sources:

**1. Persecution comes from the world:** Jesus forewarned His disciples, *“If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”* (Jn 15:20). *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”* (Jn 15:18). Jesus explained that because they did not conform to the ways of the world, then the world would pour out persecution upon them. *“Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (Jn 15:19).

**2. Persecution comes from the perverted:** We must not conclude that the persecution of spiritual giants will only come from those who are worldly. The misguided religious leaders of Jesus’ day nailed Him to the cross. They were those who cried out to a Roman leader of the world, *“Crucify Him. Crucify Him”* (Lk 23:21).

Both Timothy and Titus were certainly persecuted when they did not show up at the meeting of those who sought to debate the meaningless issues of the perverted. Perverted debaters will most certainly slander their opponents when their calls for senseless controversies are not answered. When Timothy and Titus did not show up at the meetings over contentions and controversies, then certainly they were slandered because they followed the instructions of the Holy Spirit not to become involved in meaningless debates.

Spiritual giants must always keep in mind that those who call for meetings over senseless controversies, become arrogant when their pleas to debate are not heeded. They manifest their arrogance because they seek to impose their opinions on others through intimidation, or pronouncements that one is “dividing the church.” And since the sincere do not want to “divide the church,” they will often succumb to the proclamations of the perverted who are sinning and self-condemned. They will inadvertently allow the opinions of the arrogant to become law for the intimidated. The intimidated will often allow such by forsaking their freedom in Christ in order to please the opinionated person who seeks to either bind or loose his opinions. Those who spiritually grow in Christ, must expect the wicked tactics of the self-condemned to be launched against them.

When one’s journey of mourning has taken him from hopelessness in sin to the mountain peak of willingly being silent in times of persecution, then certainly he has reached the spiritual caliber of being able to kneel down, as Stephen, and say to his persecutors, *“Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge”* (At 7:60). It is then that we become *“the salt of the earth”* (Mt 5:13). We are then *“the light of the world”* (Mt 5:14). Jesus would conclude, *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 5:16).

We conclude, therefore, that Jesus’ reference to “good works” in this statement is more than a reference to good

behavior as a disciple. He was speaking of a demeanor of life. When the world observes the behavior of spiritual giants, they give glory to God who is the cause of our good life. True spirituality, there-

fore, will always bring glory to God, and not to ourselves. We must not, therefore, hide our spiritual behavior from those of the world. The world must know that there are spiritual giants in the land.

## Chapter 9

### Beaming Lights

It was once said, “An ounce of example is worth a pound of advice.” It is for this reason that people observe our behavior for six days throughout the week in order to determine if we mean what we profess on Sunday morning. Walking what we talk as Christians is a way of life. And until we walk our talk about being servants of Jesus, we are hypocrites before the world.

We know today that the plaster that was used years ago contained lime. Benjamin Franklin, as an early American farmer, tried to get his neighbors to use plaster to fertilize their fields in order to grow better crops. As most farmers, they were somewhat difficult to convince, for they depended on the “old ways of farming.” So with one of his fields, Franklin used plaster only on a certain part of the field. Once the crop grew, the neighbors could read where Franklin used the plaster. He had written with the plaster, “This has been plastered.”

Sometimes we need to use example, rather than words, in order to get the point across. At least this is what was behind Peter’s statement to wives who had unbelieving husbands: “... *be submissive to your own husbands so that if any do not obey the word, they, without the word,*

*may be won by the behavior [example] of the wives*” (1 Pt 3:1).

Jesus said to “*let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works ...*” (Mt 5:16). The Holy Spirit says to young preachers to “*be an example to the believers, in word, in behavior, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tm 4:12). And shepherds must so live that they “*have a good report from those outside ...*” (1 Tm 3:7). Though we do not always live up to what we believe, at least those around us must see that we are making every effort to be like Jesus. We are giving our best to live Jesus as our light to the world.

We must not forget that simply because we do not live perfectly, this is not an excuse to hide our light. None of us is perfect. But every one of us is seeking to give it his best effort. If people are to understand what Christianity is, then they must see our efforts in action. Regardless of our imperfections in the specifics, there are at least some generics in shining our light before men that must identify us as disciples of Jesus.

#### A. The light of seeking God first:

Jesus said, “*But seek first the king-*

*dom of God and His righteousness ...*" (Mt 6:33). What sometimes happens in our lives is that we live the misinterpretation of what someone said, "Seek first the kingdom of men, and all righteousness will be added to you." In the developed world this may be more typical of disciples than what Jesus actually meant. It might be good for the materialist to listen to the once famous and prosperous Paul after he realized that Jesus was Lord. "*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things*" (Ph 3:8). Paul did not make this statement because he lamented over the loss of all things that he had as a Jewish Pharisee, which group of religious leaders were lovers of money (Lk 16:14). It was his transformed thinking that allowed him the opportunity to lose willingly everything for Christ. He footnoted the previous statement with the words, "*I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ*" (Ph 3:8). The Greek word for "refuse" is dung. Paul's transformed mind led him to willingly discard what became repulsive to his transformed life. When that which we so treasure becomes repulsive as dung, then we know we have spiritually grown in our attitude toward the things of the world. There will always be a plateau of spiritual growth for those who clutch on to the things of this world.

We live in the world, and thus, we must use the things of the world to survive. This does not mean, however, that we obsess over the things of the world. It is always an inward struggle to live the

spiritual example that the things of the world are not the priority of our lives. Paul wrote how to let go: "*I have been crucified with Christ*" (Gl 2:20). When one crucifies himself with Christ, he will transform in his mind how he sees the things of the world. Instead of laying up treasures on earth, one starts using the treasures of the world in order to lay up treasures in heaven. It is as Jesus said, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...*" (Mt 6:19,20). Learning to let go of treasures on this earth is an indication of spiritual growth. It may be time to empty out our storeroom of treasures and have a garage sale. When we empty our storeroom of earthly treasures, it is then that we will feel a great sense of release from the confines of this world. We will never really be free until our storeroom is empty. This is what Paul wrote:

*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them refuse so that I may gain Christ* (Ph 3:8).

We identify the spiritual giants among us by how empty we find their treasure room. But we must not confine "treasures" to worldly possessions alone. We must consider our focus and time. In a world where the cliché "soccer mom" is known throughout society, we know we might have some struggles as to where our focus is in reference to leading our

children spiritually. We have raised up a generation where our mothers are more concerned about getting their children to their next ball game, than in getting them to the next assembly of the saints on time. Where are the “Bible class moms” among us?

In an economic society where the average citizen has been allowed to borrow beyond his ability to make payments on his house, have we betrayed what is really first in our lives? The recession of 2008 will go down in church history as the recession that revealed what some Christians really believed should be first in their lives. It was not the possession of a home, but the possession of a house that was far beyond one’s means for which to make the loan payments. We must never forget that our example to the world must reflect what Jesus said.

*No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and wealth** (Mt 6:24).*

## **B. The light manifested through dress:**

We hear few discussions today on the dress of disciples. It is as if Christians are now allowed to dress themselves in any manner possible. Some even believe that it is within the realm of freedom that Christians are allowed to dress in any manner, regardless if it is judged to be modest by the standards of the world. It is true that there is a great free-

dom in this area of Christian behavior. However, there are some key statements in Scripture that limit the manner by which Christians are to attire themselves in the public. This is particularly true in reference to the sisters. Since God created men to be sexually aroused through sight, we can understand why the Holy Spirit cautioned the sisters concerning their clothing before the public. It need not be mentioned that the manner by which a woman dresses herself is an indication of her spiritual presentation.

Peter instructed, “**Your adornment should not be outward, as plaiting the hair and wearing of gold, or putting on of clothes**” (1 Pt 3:3). The phrase “putting on of clothes” defines the meaning of the statement. Of course women should put on clothes. It would be obscene for them to be naked. Putting on clothes, therefore, is assumed. What Peter teaches is that the Christian sister should not “put on clothes” in a manner that draws attention to herself. She is not to advertise her body by the manner of her dress. She can wear gold, but she should not wear gold in a manner by which she draws attention to herself. She can plait her hair, but not in a manner by which she draws attention to herself. On the contrary, her presentation must “*be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a meek and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God*” (1 Pt 3:4).

When Christian sisters dress to be precious in the sight of God, then they manifest to the world their spiritual demeanor. When a Christian sister dresses,

she should ask herself, “Is this dress precious in the sight of God?” When Christian women dress in a manner by which they seek to use their bodies as a billboard advertisement for sexuality, then we know that their dress is not precious in the sight of God.

Paul instructed “*that women dress themselves in modest clothing*” (1 Tm 2:9). The word “modest” places a boundary on how women are to dress. Since there is such a thing as “modest,” then there is such a thing as immodest. We may differ in our opinion as to what is immodest, but the fact remains that there is immodest dress. The spiritual minded woman will seek to determine what is modest dress, and thus make a decision to stay within the boundary of modesty.

Since God created men to be sexually motivated through sight, then at least the Christian men have something to say in this matter. In fact, **modesty is in reference to how the men feel about a woman’s dress, not what the women think.** Christian sisters may think that a particular style of dress is modest to them, but the men may have a completely different view. When determining modesty, therefore, it is the brethren who are to determine the boundaries, not the sisters.

In the context of dressing modestly, Paul does give some guidelines. The Christian sisters must dress “*with decency and sobriety*” (1 Tm 2:9). Again, if there is clothing that is decent, then there is clothing that is indecent. Spiritual women seek to dress decently.

“Sobriety” refers to the attitude that the woman wants to reflect to the public

through her dress. By the dress of the Christian woman, the public can determine the focus of the woman. If a woman craves the attention of others, then her craving is often reflected in the manner by which she dresses herself. This is where a Christian father or husband can advise a sister concerning her dress. Fathers who allow their daughters, or wives, to broadcast their bodies as objects of sexual arousal of other men are certainly failing in their duties as disciples of Christ.

In order to clothe oneself with decency and sobriety, Paul instructs that the woman should not present herself to the public with emphasis on “*braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing*” (1 Tm 2:9). The societies in which the Christian sisters lived in the first century were not much different than they are today. The Holy Spirit is admonishing the Christian sisters not to use braided hair, gold, pearls and costly clothing as a means to broadcast oneself as the queen of the party.

As Christians, we must focus on being “*clothed with humility*” (1 Pt 5:5). Our focus must not be on the outward clothing, but the inward heart of a godly sister. The Holy Spirit wrote, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). Our presentation to the public through clothing will reveal whether we have dressed ourselves with Christ, or whether we are still seeking to conform to the dress codes of the world. As baptized disciples, Christian disciples must “*be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new*

*man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ep 4:23,24). When a child of God awakes in the morning and prepares to clothe herself for the public, she must remember that when she was baptized, she "*put on the new man*" (Cl 3:10). The old man was washed away in the waters of baptism. And when the old man was washed away, then the new man must empty his closet of all immodest clothes.

### C. The light of good habits:

Our habits reveal our spiritual character. They do so because bad habits are an indication that we have not brought everything of this world that may control us under control. It was for this reason that Paul wrote, "*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, ... I myself should be disqualified*" (1 Co 9:27).

Every emotion and action of the Christian must be brought under control. And to do so, it takes a great deal of discipline. Discipline building can be fine tuned by fasting from some particular food we crave to eat or activity in which we like to engage. We once had a friend who was a military colonel. Playing golf with his military officers was a primary activity in which the officers of the base participated on a regular basis. One day my friend woke up and discovered that he had an obsession with playing golf. It was such an obsession that he neglected his family in order to play golf with his friends. When we met him several years after retiring from the military, he had not

played one game of golf since. He said that golf had controlled his life, and as a Christian, there were more important things than the pleasures of golf. He was on a prolonged fast from golf.

Moses did not engage in the obsession of golf. But there were other pleasures in Egypt in which royalty could engage themselves in order to be entertained. But when he discovered his destiny, it was written about him: "*By faith Moses ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer mistreatment with the people of God than to temporarily enjoy the pleasures of sin*" (Hb 11:24,25). We are sure that "pleasures of sin" included habits that were ungodly. But if a particular habit is not ungodly, but controls one's life, it can become ungodly if it hinders our relationships with others.

Habits reveal the focus of our lives. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "*Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Co 10:34). In another similar statement he said, "*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ...*" (Cl 3:17). Now where would we place our habits, or our obsessions? If we are engaged in something that cannot be named under Jesus, or eaten in thanksgiving to God, then it is time to reconsider our habits. We all live with habits, but our habits must not inhibit our spiritual growth. The things that we personally enjoy should not control our lives to the point that we have no time to minister to the needs of others. Ministry means time, and if our

time is consumed with ourselves, then we have no ministry time for others.

The Americans use mealie (maize) to cook what they call cornbread. Eating cornbread is great! The story was told that there was the man who ate cornbread in the morning for breakfast. He carried cornbread to work to eat at lunch. He snacked on cornbread. If there was no cornbread in the house, he would immediately ask his wife to make some cornbread. There is nothing wrong with cornbread, but it had become wrong for the “cornbread man” because he obsessed over cornbread. He needed to discipline his body not to crave cornbread.

Peter would exhort the “cornbread man” to add “*to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience ...*” (2 Pt 1:6). Paul would admonish the “cornbread man” to be self-controlled (Ti 1:8), knowing that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gl 5:23). And if self-control is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, then one who is out of control with a habit is not manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

Sometimes our habits infringe on others, and thus become very selfish. Smoking is such a habit. Most nonsmokers will agree that smoking is not only a danger to one’s health, but it is also one of the most selfish habits a person can have. The smoker is more concerned about the enjoyment of his habit than those nonsmokers around him who have to breathe his leftover smoke. The first admonition the smoker violates is the Spirit’s instruction that we be considerate of others (Hb 10:24).

Romans 15:1 should be considered here: “*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak **and not to please ourselves.***” Any bad habit that infringes on another should be terminated immediately. Christianity is about relationships, and if we harbor a habit that may be right within itself, but infringes on the conscience of other brothers, then we have no right to continue the habit. In the context of Romans 15, strong brethren are given the responsibility to encourage weak brethren who still associated the eating of meat with pagan sacrifices. The strong had the right to eat the meat, but if they encouraged their weak brethren to eat against their conscience, then they were not walking in love. Christian relationships mean that “*if your brother is grieved with your meat, you are no longer walking according to love. **Do not destroy him with your meat for whom Christ died***” (Rm 14:15). Paul concluded, “*It is good neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, **nor do anything by which your brother stumbles***” (Rm 14:21). This is good advice when considering those habits that infringe on one’s brother in Christ, or present an example that would steal away the time of a brother that should be devoted to others. If we persist in maintaining a habit that offends, then we are not walking in love. Paul wrote, “*Happy is he who does not condemn himself in that thing which he approves*” (Rm 14:22). Something may be right within itself, but if it hinders the spiritual growth of one’s brother then it should be suspended.

The story is told of a bird who be-

came so hungry, that in order to satisfy his lust of the flesh and eat, he traded with a sly fox a feather for a worm. After the first trade, he immediately flew away. However, since the fox was the source of the worms, then the next day when the bird was hungry, he traded a feather for a worm. Instead of taking the time to hunt for a worm, he returned to the fox and traded another feather for a worm every day. When he had traded so many feathers that he could not fly away, the fox said, "Now I am hungry." Habits have the habit of bringing us into the captivity of our own selves.

Our habits can build us up or brings us down. It is by the example of our habits that people determine where our focus is in life. Habits can identify whether our focus is on spiritual things, or things of this world wherein we seek to please ourselves above others. Decades ago someone once wrote,

You tell on yourself by the friends you seek,  
By the very manner in which you speak,  
By the way you employ your leisure time,  
By the use you make of dollar and dime.

You tell what you are by the things you wear,  
By the spirit in which your burdens bear,  
By the kind of things at which you laugh,  
By the records you play on the phonograph.

You tell what you are by the way you walk,  
By the things of which you delight to talk,  
By the manner in which you bear defeat,  
By so simply a thing as how you eat.  
By the books you choose from off the shelf,  
In these ways and more you tell on yourself.

So there's really not a particle of sense,  
In an effort to keep up false pretense.

The Holy Spirit allowed Paul to use his life as an example for others to follow. "*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*" (1 Co 11:1). But for some, it is what Montaigne said of himself, "Virtuous men do good by setting themselves up as models before the public, but I do good by setting myself as a warning."

The Holy Spirit knew that we needed models to follow in order to exemplify Jesus in our lives. We follow Paul insofar as we see Christ in Paul. Every disciple of Jesus must understand that he is the example for someone to follow. Either the example will lead others closer to Jesus, or the example will give others an excuse not to go down our road. We do not live unto ourselves, and thus we become responsible for those who would follow us. We must always remember as some preacher said,

You can never tell when you do an act,  
Just what the result will be.  
But with every kind deed you are sowing a seed,  
Though the harvest you cannot see.

We would be as Paul exhorted the Philippians, "*Only let your behavior be worthy of the gospel of Christ ...*" (Ph 1:27). And because Paul submitted his behavior to be worthy of the gospel, he could write, "*Brethren, be followers together of me, and note those who so walk according to the example you have in us*" (Ph 3:17).

## D. The light of salted speech:

Someone once said, “Your manner of speech is an indication of your manner of life.” And true this is. Jesus said, “*For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*” (Lk 6:45). Our spirituality is manifested by the things we say, by the things we talk about, and by the jokes at which we laugh. It is our speech that either reaffirms our Christianity or betrays our hypocrisy. For some it is as James wrote, “*Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing*” (Js 3:10). As disciples of Jesus, we know that such things should not be. But sometimes, the tongue “*is an unruly evil full of deadly poison*” (Js 3:8).

The only guard one has against an unruly tongue is to train our speech by our focus on the word of God. It is as Peter exhorted, “*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God*” (1 Pt 4:11). When the word of God is on one’s mind at all times, then he will direct his speech according to the oracles of God. One can always determine if a person is a student of the Bible. His words and phrases in his speech continually reflect on the vocabulary of the Bible and events recorded in Bible times. If one is filled with the speech of the world, then his speech will betray him.

## E. The light of submission:

The spiritual person manifests a spirit of submission to the needs of others. He has submitted to the will of God by being born again in the waters of bap-

tism. As a disciple, he continually submits to the needs of his brothers and sisters in Christ, and those of the world in which he lives (Gl 6:10). It is as Jesus said, “*And whoever of you desires to be the first will be the bondservant of all*” (Mk 10:44).

The Christian’s life began with the call: “*... submit yourselves to God*” (Js 4:7). This life-style was initiated with our personal submission to God, but is carried over into every aspect of our lives. “*Wives, be submissive to your own husbands ...*” (1 Pt 3:1). Disciples are continually “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ep 5:21). “*Obey those who lead you and be submissive*” (Hb 13:17).

*I urge you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints, that you submit to such, and to everyone who works with us and labors*” (1 Co 16:15,16).

Need we go on? The spirit of submission is what characterizes those who seek to grow spiritually. If there is no submission, but only rebellion, then one has sacrificed his opportunity to grow spiritual for the sake of having one’s own way. Our example of submission to our God and the needs of His people, is one of the most powerful means by which we draw people to Christ. The spirit of submission develops our personality to be approachable. People are drawn to those who seek to submit to their needs.

The world believes that it is an oxy-

moron that leadership among the disciples of Jesus is by submission to those who are the greatest slaves. In the world, leaders take command by authority and position. But those who would lead among the submissive disciples of Jesus are those who dedicate themselves to submit to the needs of the submitted. Is this not what Jesus taught His disciples in Mark 10:42,43? When the disciples put his principle of submission into action, they truly turned the world upside down.

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant.***

We know the spiritual giants among us by Jesus' concluding statement on the subject: "**And whoever of you desires to be first will be the bondservant of all**" (Mk 10:44).