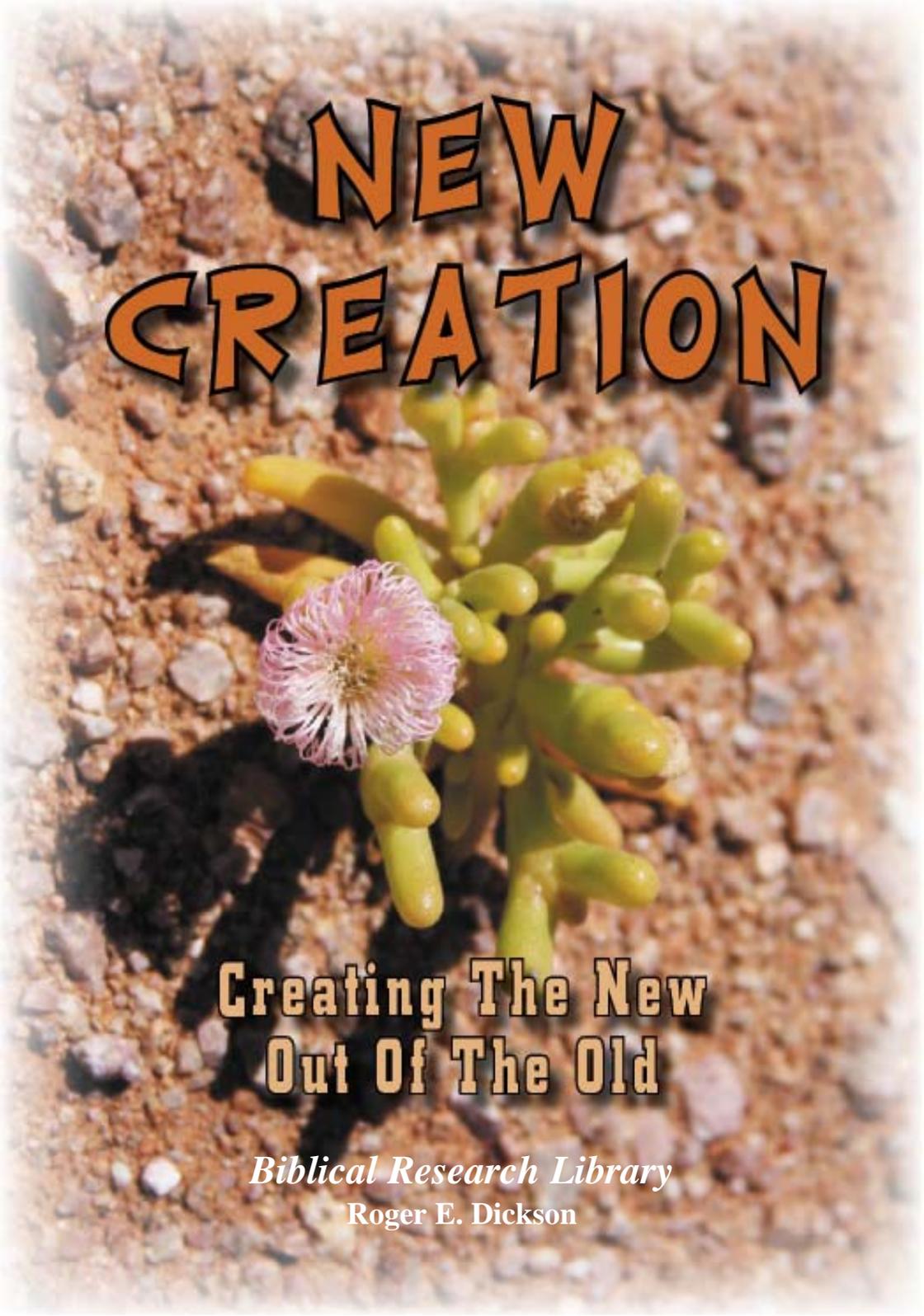


NEW CREATION

A photograph of a succulent plant with a single pink flower in bloom, growing from a bed of brown gravel. The plant has thick, green, fleshy leaves. The background is a close-up of the gravel, showing various shades of brown and tan.

Creating The New
Out Of The Old

Biblical Research Library

Roger E. Dickson

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Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Cover Theme: *WILDERNESS CREATION* (The Richtersveld Desert in northern Namibia, R.E.D.)

NEW CREATION

Jesus created us, “*for by Him all things were created*” (CI 1:16). And if we would ask why, then the Holy Spirit would reply, “*All things were created through Him and for Him*” (CI 1:16). But when we consider all the blemishes we have created in our lives, we wonder why He would create that which would be the origin of so much evil and suffering in an environment that was created for the habitat of a truly free-moral person. The answer is that He had to create us. God is love, and it is the nature of love to pour out affection on that which can respond, “I love You, too.” We are atheists in reference to any entity as a hermit god. Of necessity, therefore, the Son of God created us in order that He might pour out His love on us. And that He did. So in order to be objects of love, we were created with the ability to make a choice to either love or not to love. We were placed in an environment that allows these choices to be made. If we were not in an environment that allowed choices to be made, then we would not be truly free. We would simply be preprogrammed robots who could express no love in return for His love for us. Adam was created pure, as pure as every infant that comes into this world. We too are born pure and free. But our freedom leads us to make choices that separate us from our Creator. Before He created the world, Jesus knew we would sin, and subsequently separate ourselves from Him. Therefore, He had a plan for sin before the dust became a living soul. He had a plan wherein that which was created could be born again, recreated in Him a new creation in order that our fellowship be restored to Him in eternity. This is the thrilling story of the good news (the gospel) that was revealed on a cross outside Jerusalem and celebrated at an empty tomb. Through His death, burial and resurrection, He revealed the way by which all His creatures could be created anew in Him if they would follow Him to the cross, to the tomb, and thus, experience the glory of being resurrected as a new creation to walk in newness of life. It is truly an exciting adventure to study through the New Testament in order to discover the inspirational jewels of His plan to love us into eternity. And as we see that love, it is encouraging to see the response of the early new creations in Christ carry on throughout the world.

INTRODUCTION

The skeptic Descarte had something else in mind than spiritual matters when he made the statement, “I think, therefore, I am.” What he should have been thinking was, “I think, therefore, I sin.” Every living soul should cry out as Paul, “*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rm 7:24).

We sin ourselves into death. We cannot help ourselves. It is simply being human, the way we were created as free-moral individuals. We were not created sinners, nor with the taint of sin. Our freedom to make choices simply allows us the opportunity to be the best we can be, but it also allows us to make the worst decisions possible to bring sin and suffering, not only into our own lives, but also into the lives of others. We are truly wretched. Paul’s words were not an exaggeration of what we can become.

We do not conclude that the Son of God failed to know what sinners we would become in a world that offered all sorts of opportunities to think and do evil. He knew the risk before the first grain of dust was transformed into flesh. He knew that with the creation of a truly free individual there would come a tremendous risk. That risk was the loss of a beautiful infant growing into adulthood, and then going into sin, and subsequently lost forever. It is as a parent who invests everything possible in a child, but then the child wanders away. Jesus knew that there were no guarantees that all His created creatures would choose to remain

in fellowship with their Creator.

So with the risk, and to guard against a truly free person making bad choices, Jesus embedded within our psyche the option of not choosing evil. It is called conscience. In order to stand just in condemning the wicked, but rewarding the righteous with eternal glory, our Creator laid the responsibility for eternity upon the shoulders of each individual who should at least follow his own conscience. With conscience, therefore, came the responsibility that one must take ownership of his eternal destiny. Conscience must send one on a journey to discover his Creator. This was the road of adventure Paul sought to set us on in Romans 1:20:

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.

Our Creator knew that in our arrogance and rebellion, we would go wrong. It is not that we inherently seek evil, but the options to satisfy our own lusts often overcome our desire to do that which is right. We ignore our conscience and go wrong. We trash all the evidence of His existence that is irrefutably embedded in the created world (See Ps 8; Rm 1:20). We are thus in trouble, for it is not possible for sinful creatures to dwell in the presence of God.

We would not think that we were

created hopeless beings who are always stained with sin. God would be fiendish if creation occurred without an opportunity for reconciliation. Therefore, in order to remain a truly free-moral individual, we must take ownership of the opportunity of His offer for reconciliation, just as we took the opportunity to sin.

Taking ownership of our eternal destiny was made possible through our Creator's love offering that should draw unto Him those who seek to stand right before their Creator. Reconciliation was a matter of revealing an open demonstration of love, and then allowing our conscience to take it from there. And no matter how wretched we could become in sin, He, through His demonstration of love and grace, could create us anew. It would be creation all over again, not of the physical, but of the spiritual. We could once again be a new creation. Here is how the Holy Spirit worded it:

Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new (2 Co 5:17).

In another statement He gives an expanded explanation.

Therefore, we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4).

The new creature (creation) that walks in newness of life is not something that is created by the legalities of our performance of His law. Neither is it bargained for or bought by the offering of our good deeds. And just in case we might claim our newness in Christ as our gift to ourselves, the Spirit again said, "*For neither circumcision accomplishes anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*" (Gl 6:15). Since we cannot "circumcise ourselves into Christ," then it is our challenge to discover how to become a new creature according to the road map of God.

In order to be created anew, Jesus again must remain our Creator. We cannot declare to be new creations by the power of our works, or the work of our declaration to "receive Jesus." Creation is the business of God. And unless we want to steal away from the Son of God the work of creation, then we need to throw ourselves into His word and discover how He creates us anew in Him. We are new creatures only when He declares that we are such. "Sinner's prayers" reveal repentance. But new creatures are created by the Son of God, not by the meritorious words of a declared "sinner's prayer."

Jesus is the origin of all creation. He was the origin of the material world (Cl 1:16). And now, **He is the origin of the new creation.** Those who have washed themselves in His blood come forth from the waters of burial with all their sins washed away (At 22:16). It is He who cleans us up with His blood. It is He who keeps us clean by His blood

(1 Jn 1:7). We can take no credit for the washing, though we have relinquished ourselves to the burial. The burial is our part, but the washing is all His. For this reason, He must be given all glory for the newness of life in which we walk because His cleansing of our sins does not stop when we have dripped dry after baptism.

Our gratitude inspires our discipleship. We continually walk in the light of His word in order to be continually cleansed by His blood (1 Jn 1:7). This is the rewarding life of being a disciple of

Jesus. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but in the power of His blood to keep us continually as new creatures in His presence.

As we journey through His description of the new creatures we have become, we are taken on an inspirational journey that always ends in joy. The more we understand the nature of this new creation that walks in newness of life—this is us—the more we are encouraged to continue our journey into eternity in His loving arms.

Chapter 1

NEW CREATION

New creatures are found this side of the edge of much water, dripping wet after being created new by the blood of Jesus. In fact, John the Baptist needed so much water to clean up dirty souls that he “*was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim because there was much water there*” (Jn 3:23).

As one reads through the New Testament, he will always discover new creatures just this side of a body of water, for the Holy Spirit wrote that one’s sins are washed away in the cleansing waters of baptism (At 22:16). If there is such a thing as “washing” and “cleansing” in reference to our sins—and there is—then water must be involved in our regeneration to become a new creature. It takes more than the water of tears in repentance to produce a new creature. Therefore, when we are reading through our New Testaments in reference to new creatures,

if we do not infer water, then we have not connected all the dots that lead to the new creation. If one has hydrophobia, he will simply not experience creation anew in the blood of Jesus.

New creatures in Christ have been granted freedom because they have relinquished themselves to burial, and subsequently, to cleansing. It is as Paul wrote, “*But God be thanked that though you were the bondservants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you*” (Rm 6:17). This “form of teaching” was explained by Paul in the same chapter of Romans 6. The Roman disciples were “*buried with Him [Christ] through baptism into death,*” and thus, they walk in newness of life (Rm 6:4). In reference to the bondage of legal religiosity, Paul wrote to the Galatians that the new creation has been set free from the neces-

sity of self-atonement through either perfect law-keeping or meritorious deeds. He wrote, “*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). New creatures in Christ are not such legally. They are those who have been set free by the grace of God.

When we speak of new creations, we speak of those who have been set free from the bondage of sin by their response to the grace of God. They are free from the bondage of legal religiosity, by which one would seek to keep law perfectly in order to save himself. New creatures are free, not from law, but from the necessity of keeping law perfectly in order to be in a saved relationship with God.

A. New creatures are set free from the bondage of sin:

The Holy Spirit explained, “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Rm 6:5). When one looks back and before his obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, he can see an old dead man on the other side of the water that was in the bondage of sin. It was an old man filled with guilt, but now he is a new man in Christ. He is a new creation because his sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus at the time of his immersion (At 22:16).

One is a new creation in Christ only when he allows himself to be taken to the cross with Jesus, and then allows him-

self to be laid in a tomb of much water in order to be raised to walk in newness of life.

One is not a new creature in Christ before he has experienced the overwhelming experience of water for the remission of sins. Paul asked some disciples who needed to be reminded of this matter, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*” (Rm 6:3). One is new only when the old is dead. And since one is new this side of the water, then he was dead in the bondage of sin before the experience of going down into much water with Christ Jesus.

B. New creatures are set free by a resurrection from death:

Before one’s resurrection with Christ from the waters of baptism, he was “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ep 2:1). One is as the Ephesians who were dead in trespasses and sins when they “*walked according to the ways of this world*” (Ep 2:2). In order for the old man to die in order to give birth to the new, there must be a burial. In Romans 6 Paul makes Christ’s resurrection a pledge of God for the resurrection to come. If we have been “*united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Rm 6:5). If we do not participate in the first resurrection from the grave of water, then we certainly cannot participate in the second resurrection from the grave of death when Jesus comes again.

The first resurrection from the grave

of water is the guarantee that one will not experience the second death in being resurrected to eternal destruction (Jn 5:28,29). The Spirit revealed, “**Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.** Over these the second death has no power” (Rv 20:6). Those who have experienced the first resurrection from the waters of baptism are blessed. They are holy before God. They are holy because of what God does at the point of the first resurrection. Ananias reminded a prospective candidate who knew that he needed to become a new creature, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

Some statements in the New Testament are so simple that it is with great difficulty that some are able to understand them. The problem is not in the simplicity of the statements, but in the tremendous doctrinal prejudice by which simple statements of teaching are approached. We must never underestimate our desire to read into simple statements previous erroneous beliefs.

The washing away of sin in baptism is one of those simple statements. **Until one is baptized, he is not made holy by the washing away of sins through faith.** We cannot be blessed and holy if we have not experienced a resurrection with Jesus from death. And we cannot be holy unless we wash away our sins. Acts 22:16 is a simple statement that sins are washed away at the time of one’s baptism into Christ. The life of being a new creation, therefore, starts when our sins have been

washed away. And our sins are washed away at the time we join with Jesus in the burial of baptism. Only then is Jesus able to make one a new creature.

C. **New creatures are set free from death through sin.**

Once one is resurrected from the grave of much water, **he is free from sin, but not free from sinning.** What moves one to the cross and grave with Jesus is one’s remorse over his sins. Those who mourn over their sins realize that they have lived a life of rebellion against God. They are thus ridden with guilt, but realize that they cannot atone for their rebellion by meritorious works. The truly repentant, therefore, is ridden with guilt until he finds a solution to be reconciled again to his Creator. It is at this point of repentance, therefore, that the repentant seeks a solution for the guilt of his sin. This explains what Peter meant in the following statement:

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).

One cannot appeal to God for a good conscience unless he does what God requires one to do in order to be cleansed of sin. In other words, we will never have a good conscience before God unless we change our behavior to comply with God’s instructions on how we

are to be made right before Him.

Some would declare their own salvation before God through a “sinner’s prayer,” or a statement of accepting Jesus into one’s heart. But we must remember that one repentantly comes to God because he has realized that he was living contrary to the will of God. He was living a life of establishing his own rules. But when one comes to God in repentance, he must seek and obey God’s rules. **One cannot continue to establish his own rules in reference to the washing away of sins, and then feel that he is in compliance with the will of God.** It is God who makes the rules.

Becoming the new creature in Christ demands that we find our way to this newness of life according to the road map of God, not according to our own inventions. Repentance is all about His way, not our way. Following His way to our own salvation means that we cannot make any detours from God’s road map in order to go back to our old way of rebellion. Regardless of how many people have taken the detour of self-declared salvation, we must remember that the road is in a traffic jam with those who do not “*the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (See Mt 7:15-23).

D. New creatures are set free from self.

The manner of burial with Jesus in water is symbolic of our total sacrifice of self to follow Jesus. Discipleship involves following Jesus. It involves following Jesus to the cross, to the grave,

and then to the resurrection. Jesus led the way to our discipleship by selflessly going to the cross for us. He looks from the cross and says, “Follow Me.”

From the time of His death on the cross, to the time of His resurrection, **His body was totally in the hands of those who took His body from the cross, prepared it for burial, and then placed it in a tomb.** He was totally selfless from the time He spoke the words from the cross, “It is finished,” to the time He walked out of the tomb after His resurrection. If we would manifest our discipleship of Him, then we must follow Him by relinquishing ourselves to others in the same manner.

Everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus must relinquish himself to the hands of another for burial. Paul expressed this in the verb tense of Romans 6:4. He wrote, “*Therefore, we are buried with Him*” The verb is passive, meaning that **the subject is being acted upon.** The repentant sinner relinquishes his body to the one who buries him in the water. It is a behavior of selflessness. As Jesus allowed His body to be placed in the hands of those who buried Him in a tomb, so the repentant sinner who wishes to follow Jesus must do the same in order to be buried in the waters of baptism. And herein is the promise if one allows himself to be so “handled” for burial: “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Rm 6:5). When we allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus, we are following Jesus’ example in that He al-

lowed others to bury Him in a tomb.

Jesus continued His selflessness even in His resurrection. **It was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead** (Ep 1:20). It is no different with the one who is buried with Jesus. While in the tomb of water, one must, as Jesus, relinquish himself to the one who would raise him from the grave of water. We must entrust ourselves to one who would not leave us in the tomb of water, but would raise our body from the grave. As Jesus trusted in the Father not to leave His body in the tomb, so we must do likewise.

New creatures are new because they have relinquished themselves to God (faith) to take care of their sin problem. They have also trusted in another who lowers their bodies into a tomb of water, and then, brings them forth from the grave. Being a new creature is selflessness from the very beginning of one's journey with Jesus at the time of baptism. The new creature has left his self on a cross with Jesus. It was for this reason that Paul could later write,

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).

Baptism could never be a work of law. The emblematic union by which one joins with Christ in baptism could never be degraded to a simple performance of law in order to obligate God to produce salvation because we legally obeyed law.

It is for this reason that baptism is not for infants or children. It is for those who understand that they are relinquishing their will to God's will. The spiritual union by which one joins the Son of God in baptism is not something that is comprehended by babies. New creatures know who they are because they know what they have done in joining with Jesus at the cross, the tomb, and the experience of the resurrection. Only those who through faith would voluntarily relinquish their bodies to another for burial, and to God for life, are candidates for burial with Jesus.

E. New creatures are set free from doubt in order to walk by faith.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 is about faith in God to clothe us with a new habitation for eternal dwelling. When one comes forth from the tomb of water, his resurrection is emblematic of a physical resurrection that will take place when Jesus comes again (See 1 Th 4:13-18). One goes down into the tomb of water because of faith in God who will resurrect him in the future in order to inhabit a new body. It is in this context that Paul wrote the statement, *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2 Co 5:7). We walk by faith in God that He will provide a new habitation for us.

The beginning of faith is manifested when one seeks to be born again through the waters of baptism. It is then by faith that one walks with Jesus in life and in hope of the resurrection that is to come. Our faith is in what John promised: "...

it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He [Jesus] appears, we will be like Him ..." (1 Jn 3:2). New creatures who dwell in an earthly body will eventually be raised to indwell a body like Jesus.

Walking by faith means turning from those things about which we are doubtful concerning our future. When our faith leads us to the cross and grave with Jesus, it carries us on in hope of a bodily resurrection that is yet to come. If one allows himself to be distracted from that which is to come by focusing on that which is of this world, then he

will not participate in the resurrection to life that will happen when Jesus comes again. Our walk by faith, therefore, must be pure of anything that would distract us from total faith in the promises of God.

The walk of the new creature is one of faith. And since our walk is by faith, we must protect our faith from those things that are of this world. Therefore, *"if you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above ..."* (Cl 3:1). *"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Cl 3:2). New creatures are heavenly minded, though they are presently earthly bound.

Chapter 2

NEW COVENANT

How could we ever conceive of the concept that an individual human being could have a personal covenant relationship with the God of the universe? It is something that is simply incomprehensible in its fullest details. But such we have as new creatures in Christ.

In a covenant relationship with God, there are conditions and blessings. The blessings include what God promises if we are faithful to the conditions of the covenant. The conditions (law) are those stipulations that must be kept in order to enjoy the blessings. Our example of those who did not keep the conditions is the history of Israel. In fact, Paul admonished that *"these things [of Israel's history] happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition ..."* (1 Co 10:11). Israel's rebellion against the conditions of their covenant

with God were written in order that we be admonished not to follow after their example of rebellion.

The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai was never meant to be a covenant without end. The covenant was referred to as a "perpetual covenant." But read carefully the condition for the perpetuity of the covenant.

Therefore, the children of Israel will keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant (Ex 31:16; see Lv 3:17).

Israel's keeping of the Sabbath was their sign to the world that they were in a special national covenant relationship with God, and their keeping of the Sabbath was one of the conditions for their keeping of the covenant (Gn 17:11).

“Perpetual” meant that the covenant would last until its intended end. This end would be in Christ. The generations of Israel ended in Christ, where *“there is neither Jew nor Greek ...”* (Gl 3:28). Therefore, Israel had to keep the Sabbath until God ended the covenant.

When a Jew was baptized into Christ, the Sabbath covenant came to an end for him. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that one was dead to the Sinai law and covenant by the body of Christ (See Rm 7:1-4). The generations of Israel as a whole ended when the first announcement was made that one could be baptized into Christ and into a new covenant relationship with God. This announcement was first made in A.D. 30 on the day of Pentecost (At 2:38). The Sinai law and covenant were subsequently nailed to the cross (Ep 2:15,16; Cl 2:14), and the offer of the new covenant was made to all men with the first announcement of the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in A.D. 30.

Israel would last until their generations ceased, which they did in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. It was then that all the genealogical records of Israel were destroyed in the destruction of the temple. Within a generation or two after the destruction of Jerusalem, no Jew could prove in writing that he was a Jew. And since the generations were intended by God to end in A.D. 70, then the Sinai covenant came to a close. It came to a close with all Jews who were baptized into Christ. Because of the cross, all men are now dead to the Sinai law and covenant (Rm 7:1-4).

After the Pentecost of A.D. 30, when a Jew came forth from the waters of baptism, his newness was more than being washed of all sin. His newness was also in the fact that he was in a new covenant relationship with God, for the old Sinai covenant had passed away.

A. Prophecy of a new covenant:

The story of the transition from the old covenant to the new was first prophesied by Jeremiah at the end of national Israel in the land of Palestine. As the Babylonian Empire came down on Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to terminate Israel’s ownership of their homeland, Jeremiah prophesied of a new covenant that was coming. The Jews to whom he made the prophecy were certainly discouraged by the termination of their right to the land of Palestine. God wanted the Jews to know that eventually they must move on from the past into the future. Through Jeremiah, therefore, God encouraged Israel with something new that was in their future:

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them,” says the Lord. “But this will be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord, **“I will put My law***

in their inward parts and write it in their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be My people. And they will no longer teach every man this neighbor and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," says the Lord. "For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more" (Jr 31:31-34).

It is significant to notice some very important points that distinguish the covenant that God made with Israel as a nation and the new covenant that all new creatures now have with God in Christ.

1. Israel and Judah: Since Jeremiah was speaking to the divided kingdom of Israel, which would return 536 B.C. as a united remnant of all Israel after the Babylonian captivity, the promise was made in a way that his audience would understand that the new covenant would apply to all Israel. What was not revealed in the prophecy was that the new covenant would not only be offered to the remnant of Israel as a whole, but to all mankind. This fact would be understood only when the new covenant was offered to everyone who obeyed the gospel.

2. A new and different covenant: Israel was a nation that was in a national covenant relationship with God. Covenants between either individuals or nations are always initiated by God. In the case of the covenant that Israel had with God, it was initiated by God when they as a nation of people, came out of Egyptian

captivity. But a different covenant was coming that would not be a national covenant. It would be a covenant that God would establish with individuals who would volunteer to come into a covenant relationship with Him. The new covenant would have no reference to nationality since its ratification in one's life would be voluntarily and individually accepted.

3. Prior knowledge of law before the establishment of a covenant relationship: When Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai after they came out of Egyptian captivity, they knew nothing of the national covenant that God would establish with them. Neither did they have any knowledge of the law of the covenant. After they were informed concerning the covenant through Moses, they then had to be taught the law of the covenant which God revealed to them through Moses.

This would not be the case with the new covenant. Before one would come into a covenant relationship with God in the future, he would already know the law of the covenant because he would be taught the law before the covenant was individually established with him. He would not have to be taught to know the conditions (law) of the covenant as the Jewish children of the Sinai covenant had to be taught the law of God as they grew up in Israel.

Jeremiah prepared the Jews of the future to be ready for a change in how one would live in a covenant relationship with God. The new covenant would be received on a voluntary basis. The be-

ginning of the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:31-34 was first by Jesus with the statement, “*It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught of God.’ Therefore, everyone who has heard and has learned from the Father comes to Me*” (Jn 6:45).

Those who would be taught of the new covenant, would come to Jesus in order to establish voluntarily a personal covenant relationship with the Father. Individuals would first be taught, and then they would come into Christ.

At the foot of Mount Sinai, individual Israelites had no choice but to come into a covenant relationship with God, for the covenant was established with the nation. The individuals of the nation had to come into a covenant relationship with God because of God’s former promise to Abraham, that from his seed a great nation would come (See Gn 12:1-4). But with the new covenant, it would be different. Those who would come into a new covenant relationship with God would do so individually and on a voluntary basis.

B. Establishment of a new covenant:

When Jesus stood before His disciples on the night of His betrayal, and at the end of His earthly mission, all of the disciples surely thought of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34 when Jesus said, “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you*” (Lk 22:20; 1 Co 11:25). Jesus spoke of a new covenant, and thus the Sinai covenant that God had made with Israel was

to become old with the establishment of the new. New creatures are now “*servants of the new covenant*” (2 Co 3:6). And if we are servants of the new covenant, then we are to be obedient to the new conditions of this new covenant, not the conditions of the old covenant, one of those conditions being the Sabbath.

During His ministry, Jesus was leading the people to the new covenant by teaching the people the way of life of the new covenant. After His ascension, His disciples continued teaching. It would be the teaching that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God who would draw men unto Himself. Upon a voluntary basis, those who believed in Jesus would individually come into a covenant relationship with God. The obedient would already know the conditions of the covenant before they signed their agreement with God at the time they obeyed the gospel. Therefore, when one became a new creature through the waters of baptism, he already knew the conditions of the covenant. The obedient now walk in newness of life because they are walking in a new covenant relationship with God in Christ.

Paul makes a “progressive statement” in Romans 6:4. We are “*buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life.*” One is baptized to wash away sins (At 22:16). One is baptized for remission of sins (At 2:38). But these are onetime responses and blessings on the part of the believer at the time he is buried with

Christ in baptism. But when one comes forth from the grave of water, Paul states that we “*walk in newness of life.*” “Walk” is an ongoing process. Though remission of all past sins in baptism is a one-time event, walk is continuous. Therefore, “walk in newness of life” after one is resurrected from the waters of baptism includes more than having one’s sins washed away at the time one is baptized.

We must remember what Jesus said on the night of His betrayal: “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you*” (Lk 22:20). Now consider the walk about which John wrote in 1 John 1:7: “*But if we walk in the light ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” There is certainly a cleansing of past sins at the time one is buried with Christ (At 2:38; 22:16). This cleansing is by the blood of Christ. But when one comes into a new covenant relationship with God, **there is continual blood cleansing that follows one as he walks in the light** (1 Jn 1:7). One is baptized to become a new creature, but he is kept new by the blood of the covenant, into which covenant relationship one has been baptized. It is really a beautiful thing.

In order to reassure the Hebrew Christians that they were under a better covenant, the Hebrew writer quoted Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the context of the leading statement: “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second*” (Hb 8:7). It was not that the first covenant was flawed. The Hebrew writer ex-

plained, “*For finding fault with them ...*” (Hb 8:8). The problem was with those with whom the covenant was made. A holy covenant was established with Israel, but the people were at fault because they had not volunteered to receive the covenant, and thus, they did not consider obedience as serious as they should have.

With the new covenant, however, those who volunteer to walk in the light with Jesus, are continually cleansed by His blood. New creatures stay new under the new covenant because of the blood of Jesus, not because they live faultless lives. Therefore, the Jewish Christians to whom the Hebrew writer addressed his message could rejoice in the concluding statement: “*In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete*” (Hb 8:13).

It was impossible for the blood of animals under the old covenant to take away sins (Hb 10:1-4). The effectiveness of being cleansed by blood all changed with the coming of the new covenant. We have come “*to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than the blood of Abel*” (Hb 12:24). The old covenant was inaugurated with the sprinkling of the blood of animals (Ex 24). But the new was inaugurated with the blood of the Son of God. It was by “*His own blood He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption*” for all who would be drawn to Him by the appeal of the cross (Hb 9:12). New creatures were cleaned up by the blood of Jesus at the time of their obedience to the gospel.

They are continually washed up by the blood of Jesus as they walk in newness of life in the light. It was for this reason that the Jews could not be identified as new creatures in reference to the offer-

ing of the blood of animal sacrifices. Their cleansing by the blood of Jesus happened only when Jesus died on the cross (See Rm 3:25).

Chapter 3

NEW ATTITUDES

New creatures have a positive mental attitude about life. They stand out as beaming lights in a crowd. It is obvious why Peter stated that they must be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks them concerning their hope (1 Pt 3:15). People are going to ask concerning their hope because of their positive attitudes about life. They are just different, but different in a good way.

Ever wonder how Paul and Silas captured the imagination of all the other prisoners while they were sitting in a Philippian jail, possibly with a sentence of death hanging over them? In a Roman prison one was not sentenced to five, or ten or twenty years in jail. He was held in a holding cell (jail) until it was determined whether his offense demanded death or life. If it was an offense that did not demand death, then he was set free. And there in jail Paul and Silas were singing their hearts out to God (At 16:25). So you can imagine what was going through the minds of the other prisoners who thought that they might be sentenced to death. We could assume that there was a great deal of 1 Peter 3:15 inquiries going on that Luke did not record in Acts 16.

It is simply the nature of new crea-

tures in Christ to “*rejoice in the Lord always ...*” (Ph 4:4). And Paul wrote that statement while in prison again, a prison in Rome itself. When we understand that we are more than conquerors through Christ (Rm 8:37), and that we can do all things through Christ (Ph 4:13), then we as new creatures cannot help ourselves but to have a positive mental attitude.

There are two emotional attitudes that are inseparable in reference to what one might consider world-oriented thinking. Both mental attitudes steal the joy from the life of a new creature. These would be the spiritual thieves of depression (or, despair) and fear. Depression is usually the result of our fears in reference to our situation in life, and despair is our presupposition that our present situation will get worse. The beauty of the gospel (good news) is that the new creature is such because of the focus of his attention. His focus is on heavenly things that are above. This focus, therefore, is the cure for both depression and despair.

When Paul reminded the Corinthians of the gospel that they had received and obeyed, he also reminded them of the emotional security that their obedience to the gospel produced. He said they

received the gospel “... **in which you stand**...” (1 Co 15:1). The word “stand” is a metaphor that refers to our emotional state of being because we have established a good conscience toward God in our obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We stand on the firm foundation that Jesus did die for us, that He was truly raised, and that He is coming again to take us home. The gospel is the emotional foundation upon which the new creature is mentally secure. We can be so mentally secure that we can sing in prison when unjustly accused.

Colossians 3:1 is the continuing commentary of the metaphor “stand.” “*If you then were raised [from the waters of baptism] with Christ, seek those things that are above*” When one stands on the security of his obedience to the gospel, then his whole state of thinking is refocused. Instead of focusing on one’s self, which thinking eventually leads to depression and fear, one’s mind is directed toward what God did for him through the cross. It is the difference between trusting in one’s self for salvation, and trusting in the grace of the gospel.

A. Obedience sets us free.

New creatures are set free from despair through their obedience of the gospel. As new creatures, we should always be those of the morning. We may go to bed at night with a day of worry on our minds, but when we awaken in the freshness of the morning, it is a new day and our mental attitude is revived. In-

stead of a momentary feeling of a refreshed mental attitude, Christians should carry their morning attitudes throughout the day. The new creature awakens with the mental attitude, “*This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*” (Ps 118:24). We can rejoice and be glad in every day because we are in the grace of God.

We must never forget that Christianity is a faith of joy. When Paul wrote the following statement, he was expressing the mental state of mind of the Christian: “**Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say, rejoice!**” (Ph 4:4). This is the psychology of Christianity. Christians have a faith of joy because they know that there is a God who is working for their cause, and in answer to their prayers (See Rm 8:28). Jesus encouraged His disciples, “*Ask and you will receive so that your joy may be full*” (Jn 16:24). Christians are “**strengthened with all power according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy**” (Cl 1:11).

Happiness is the definition of Christianity because of the nature of the faith that secures the emotional being of the Christian. Happiness happens when we maintain a distant relationship with the temporary things of this world by walking in a close relationship with God. Paul explained, “... **I have learned in whatever state I am to be content**” (Ph 4:11). He was more specific with the statement, “*If we have food and clothing, with these let us be content*” (1 Tm 6:8). So the Spirit’s encouragement would be that we “... **be content with such things as**” we

have (Hb 13:5). It is as someone once said, “Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have.”

B. Faith conquers fear.

New creatures conquer fear with faith. It is interesting how many times in the New Testament the phrase “do not fear” is used. “... *do not fear those who kill the body ...*” (Mt 10:28). “*Do not fear. You are more valuable than many sparrows*” (Mt 10:31). “*Do not fear, Zacharias ...*” (Lk 1:13). “*Do not fear, Mary ...*” (Lk 1:30). “*Do not fear, for behold, I bring you good tidings ...*” (Lk 2:10). “*Do not fear. From now on you will catch men*” (Lk 5:10). “*Do not fear. Only believe ...*” (Lk 8:50). “*Do not fear, Paul*” (At 27:24). The last words from Jesus were, “*Do not fear. I am the first and the last*” (Rv 1:17). We get the point.

There was good advice in a pamphlet entitled *Attitudes Unlimited* that was distributed a half-century ago to encourage people who were apprehensive about their future:

Count your blessings, not your troubles. Live with your joys, not your fears. Cultivate the courage to dare. Dare to make that first decision toward banishing fear ... all fears. Dare to tackle that job you were afraid to handle. Dare to think creatively. Dare to organize your thoughts. Dare to become completely obsessed with a worthwhile objective. Dare to develop mastery over your emotions.

Not bad advice. This is the “new-

ness of life” about which Paul wrote when one comes forth from the waters of baptism. This is focussing one’s mind on those things that are above. This is the impetus that generates the joy of the Christian life. This is the new creation that God produces through one’s obedience to the gospel. It cannot get any better on earth than this. Therefore, when in difficult times, we should simply do what someone advised, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.”

The best is always yet to be for the disciple of Jesus. We must keep in mind what Laine said, “The shadow falling across your path may be that of your ship coming in.” Remember what one godly king wrote, “*Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*” (Ps 23:4).

Some curse themselves with “spiritual acrophobia.” Acrophobia is the fear of heights. God said to Moses in reference to what He had done for Israel in delivering them out of captivity, “*I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself*” (Ex 19:4). And such God did for us when we were raised and cleansed through the waters of baptism. We have been raised into heavenly places on eagles’ wings. We are brought into a realm wherein we reign with Christ in heavenly places (Rm 5:17). And thus, we must not be afraid of the spiritual heights to which God will take us in our lives. We must not fear to fly as high as possible because we are afraid of spiritual heights.

There will be times when we will

fall. But we must remember that we are in the care of God who will lift us up every time. Therefore, “*humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up*” (Js 4:10). He will lift us up on eagles’ wings in order that we reach the joy of heavenly heights. Since we have been raised with Him from the tomb of water, we will focus our minds on those things that are above, which means

that we must allow God to take us into His presence as saints on eagles’ wings. Therefore, we will walk by faith in Jesus, for when He comes, He will take our resurrected and changed bodies up to meet Him in the air (1 Th 4:13-18). If we have any acrophobia in our thinking, it would probably be best to deal with it before His coming.

Chapter 4

NEW SAINTS

New creatures are living saints. Some religious groups reserve sainthood for the departed. But sainthood is a pre-death reality in the eyes of God. We find comfort in the words of the Holy Spirit that were directed to one of the most dysfunctional groups of disciples in the first century: “*.. to the church of God that is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...*” (1 Co 1:2).

Anyone who has read the letter to the Corinthians might be puzzled concerning this statement. There were the arrogant, the selfish, the immoral, and the spiritually competitive among these disciples. It could only be by grace that the Holy Spirit would consider them saints of God. But such they were, and so are we with all our spiritual dysfunctions. Nevertheless, we are the saints of God. Glory hallelujah!

Sinners are called by God “*unto His kingdom and glory*” (1 Th 2:12). “*For God has not called us to impurity, but in holiness*” (1 Th 4:7). We have been

called through the gospel (2 Th 2:14). And by our obedience to the gospel, we have been washed in the blood of Jesus (At 22:16). The newness of life in which the Christian walks after baptism is a saintly walk as a new creature. We must conclude, therefore, that sainthood is a work of God, not man.

In our efforts to be perfectly obedient to God’s law, we still sin (Rm 3:23). And since we cannot atone for our own sin through good works, (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16), then we would be hopelessly impure in sin if it were not for the grace of God. But thanks be to God that the cleansing atonement of Jesus came into the world through the cross. We are now washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rv 1:5). And for this reason, we are not saints before God by our own declaration, or even some declaration of the church. It is God who has declared us to be saints as He sees each of us through the blood of His Son.

Since saints exist as such in the eyes of God, then it is His divine declaration

of our sainthood that motivates our continued walk with Jesus (Compare 1 Jn 1:7). We define the new creation by understanding the walk of a saint. Our acrostic for S A I N T would be: **S**anctification, **A**ctivation, **I**mitation, **N**obility, **T**hanks-giving.

A. Sanctification:

The word “sanctify” means to be set apart. When someone was sanctified in the Old Testament, he was set apart for a specific function and made holy to the Lord. And such were the Christians in Corinth. They were set apart from the world through their obedience to the gospel. Some of them were previously thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, and a host of other sinful characters who were not presentable to God (See 1 Co 6:9,10). But in reference to their former life-style in sin, Paul wrote, “*Now such were some of you. But you were washed. But you were sanctified ...*” (1 Co 6:11). They were washed in the new birth of the waters of baptism in order to be new creations (At 22:16). In order to be a sanctified saint, therefore, one must be washed in the blood of Jesus. And since one is baptized to wash away sins, then he becomes a saint by the declaration of God at the time He remits our sins (At 2:38).

When we consider the former life of Saul as a persecutor of the family of God, we can understand that with urgency Ananias said to him, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins ...*” (At

22:16). There are no saints in sin. There are saints who sin, but there are no saints living in the rebellion of sin. When one’s sins are washed away in obedience to the gospel, he is declared by God to be a new creature. Being a new creature and a saint are synonymous. And since one is born of the water, and thus washed in the blood of Jesus, there are no saints outside the cleansing blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

The gospel record of John was written to produce belief in Jesus (Jn 20:30,31). It was not written to reveal all the information that was necessary that one do in order to become a new creature. For example, the word “repent” is not in the book of John. John’s purpose for writing was the same purpose for which Paul made the statement of Acts 16:31: “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved.***” Belief in Jesus is the beginning of one’s journey to sainthood. Both John and Paul were addressing idolatrous unbelievers, and thus, the initial message to such people was belief in Jesus. The Philippian jailor subsequently responded to his belief in Jesus: “***And immediately he was baptized, he and all his household***” (At 16:33).

Paul had spoken the “*word of the Lord*” to the household of the jailor. In the “*word of the Lord,*” there was the teaching of John concerning the new birth. Jesus had said, and John recorded, that one had to be born anew in order to enter the kingdom (Jn 3:5,6). Such was John’s reference to being born of the water and spirit in order to be a new creature, and thus declared by God to be a

saint by His “washing away” of our sins. This is what the Philippian jailor understood he had to do.

When one is obedient to this truth of the gospel, he is sanctified by the blood of Jesus. “*Sanctify them by Your truth,*” Jesus prayed to the Father, “*Your word is truth*” (Jn 17:17). Jesus set Himself apart from heaven in order to sanctify those who would accept the truth of the cross and His resurrection. “*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself* [from heaven] *so that they also might be sanctified through the truth*” (Jn 17:19). In one statement, Peter connected all that John wrote, and what Jesus said in reference to sanctification by one’s obedience to the truth of the gospel:

Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth in sincere love of the brethren having been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides (1 Pt 1:22,23; see Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5).

One must not misunderstand Peter’s statement, “*purified your souls in obeying the truth.*” This cannot be a reference to a catechism of teaching. Our problem is that we sin against teaching (law). Law is our problem. “*There is none righteous* [according to law], *no, not one*” (Rm 3:9:10). All have sinned against the teaching (law) of God (Rm 3:23). Therefore, **there can be no purifying of our souls by perfect obedience to law** (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16).

The purification of our souls can only be realized when we are obedient

to the truth of the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins. He was buried, and on the third day raised from the dead. This is the truth of the gospel, Therefore, in being buried with Him in the waters of baptism, one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). Saints, therefore, have been sanctified by their obedience to the truth of the gospel, which truth is the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope.

Saints are those who have followed the word of God that directs one on how to become a sanctified saint. Saints have been born again because of the truth that the word of God reveals concerning the gospel and obedience to the gospel. And without obedience to the truth of the gospel, one has only eternal doom in his future (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

B. Activation:

Someone once said, “Service is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on earth.” In reference to discipleship as a new creature in Christ, we would say that “service is response we give for the grace by which we are saved.” If we would remain in the “space of grace,” then we must serve because of grace. Paul reminded the Ephesian disciples, “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). But in the same context two verses later, he said, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ...*” (Ep 2:10). So how can the two statements be reconciled?

The answer is that it is the gift of grace that stirs the Christian into action. It is not that any meritorious actions bring us into the realm of God's grace. It is in the realm of His grace that we work out our "*own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Ph 2:12). And since it is God's grace that activates the saint into action, it is as Paul reminded the Philippians, "... *for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*" (Ph 2:13). When we work in response to grace, then it is God working in us through our appreciation of His grace. Paul explained this connection between grace and action by referring to his own life. "*And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*" (1 Co 15:10). It is grace that moves the saint into service. It is grace that causes thanksgiving (2 Co 4:15). Therefore, our workmanship in Christ is in thanksgiving for what we have as a new creature.

Sometimes it is like the young man who went to a local company looking for work. The prospective employer said, "We don't have enough work to keep another person busy." The prospective young employee replied, "But you must have. You don't realize how little work I can do." Such folks should not apply at the local church of God's saints.

Jesus gave Himself for His body in order that He might "*purify for Himself a special people who are zealous for good works*" (Ti 2:14). As every leader of the church would agree, the church is often full of willing people. There are

those who are willing to work out of thanksgiving for their salvation. But then, there are those who are willing to let others do the work for them.

The nature of the thankful new creature is explained by Paul in the following words:

And let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Gl 6:9,10).

New creatures are "*fervent in spirit*" (Rm 12:11). It is their nature to work because of their thanksgiving for what they have. In reference to working in order to support oneself, the Spirit admonished some of the disciples in the church of Thessalonica, "... *if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat*" (2 Th 3:10). There is a principle in this statement. It is the principle of work. However, it is sometimes true that a brother's work is never done, especially since some have to also do the work of the lazy brothers. It is like having a government job in some places in Africa. One has a government job, not to work, but to receive a paycheck. (More later.)

C. Imitation:

New creatures imitate the One after whom they call themselves a disciple. The Holy Spirit explained, "*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example*

that you should follow in His steps" (1 Pt 2:21). It is our belief that Jesus is the Son of God that motivates us to follow in His steps. The less we are in step with His example, the less we appreciate who He is and what He will do for us in eternity (Compare 2 Th 1:6-9).

Jesus once stood before His disciples with a dirty towel in His hands. That towel was marred with the filth He had just washed from the disciples' feet. The disciples had been walking the dirty streets of Jerusalem in the mire of animal manure during the Passover feast. We can only imagine that their feet were not a pretty picture during the occasion when Jesus ...

... rose from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with a towel with which He was girded" (Jn 13:4,5).

After the disciples recovered from the shock of what Jesus did, Jesus said to them, "*If I then, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*" (Jn 13:14).

Puzzled and perplexed, we are sure the disciples were looking at one another with expressions that communicated their lack of understanding of what just transpired. They knew the custom of washing feet. As Jews, they had washed thousands of feet. But on this occasion, the One they confessed to be the Son of God, the Creator of all mankind, was on His

knees washing the feet of those whom He had created. Gods, they surely reasoned, just did not do such things. Since there was debate among themselves on this very occasion as to who was the greatest (Lk 22:24), Jesus jolted their prideful assumptions for positions with the statement, "*For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you*" (Jn 13:15). We know they learned their lesson, for after Acts 2, they grabbed their towels and started looking for dirty feet.

If one thinks that he is too important among the disciples to wash manure from the feet of his brothers and sisters in Christ, then he is only pretending to be a disciple of Jesus. There are no true disciples of Jesus who have clean towels. If one's towel smells like manure, then we assume he is following the example of the "God of the towel."

Paul once made the statement concerning his sacrificial life, "*I have become all things to all men so that I might by all means save some*" (1 Co 9:22). This is exactly what Jesus did for us. "*He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men ...*" (Ph 2:7). In order to imitate His Master, Paul started with the things of this world. He wrote, "*What things I have counted loss for Christ*" (Ph 3:7). He explained to the Philippians the extreme to which he emulated in his life that which he saw in the life of Jesus:

... I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus

my Lord ... I count them refuse [Gr., dung] *so that I may gain Christ* (Ph 3:8).

We consider the sacrificial life of Paul because of what the Holy Spirit allowed him to say in 1 Corinthians 11:1. ***“Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ.”*** If the life of Paul is an imitation of Christ, then we can better understand why the Holy Spirit allowed him to write thirteen letters of the New Testament, in much of which he explained his behavior after Jesus. One might excuse himself by saying that Jesus, as the Son of God, lived the perfect life to which we might aspire, but never reach. But when the Holy Spirit revealed the example of Paul as an imitation of the life of Jesus, then we are without excuse.

D. Nobility:

The small child of a father once asked her father, “Daddy, who was Hamlet?” The father responded, “Dorothy, you should know these things and not be so ignorant of great men as this. Bring me the Bible and we will read about Hamlet.”

There is one verse in the Bible wherein the Holy Spirit explains the character of nobility.

These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (At 17:11).

If we were to ask God who He considered to be noble people, His response would certainly be the example of the Bereans in the above statement.

Noble-minded people are those who seek information from their Creator. They are those who are fearful of becoming ignorant of the word of God, for in becoming ignorant of His word, they condemn themselves to destruction (See Hs 4:6). It is for this reason that they are diligent to present themselves *“approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tm 2:15). In the eyes of God, there are no noble-minded people who are not students of the word of God.

Nobility in the sight of God is not something that is inherited from our parents. It is forged on the anvil of following in the steps of Jesus, and fine tuned after the word of God. When one walks in the steps of Jesus, his experience molds him into a shining new creature who is fit for the use of the Master. Life may be as a grindstone, but life for a saint polishes one’s character into being the right stuff for eternal dwelling. Experiencing life grinds the word of God into the behavior of the saints.

E. Thanksgiving:

It is interesting to note that when Paul described “perilous times,” he said that some would be *“unthankful, unholy”* (2 Tm 3:2). Some would become “unsaintly” and take for granted what they had in Christ. When Paul wrote of

a time of “ungodliness and unrighteousness” in human history, he described the people of the time in the following words: “... *even though they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, **neither were thankful***” (Rm 1:21).

The body of saints is defined by the members’ thankfulness to God for all that God has done for them through the cross. For this reason alone, Paul wrote that the Colossian disciples “*be thankful*” (Cl 3:15). And why be so thankful as a saint of God? Paul again explained: “*I thank my God always for you **for the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched by Him ...***” (1 Co 1:4,5). Paul was thankful for what the grace of God caused among the Corinthian disciples. “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God***” (2 Co 4:15).

When we see a group of saints, we are thankful for the grace of God, for it was through the grace of God that they were able to become saints. When we realize that the saints are “*enriched in everything,*” then we are “*caused*” to give thanksgiving to God (2 Co 9:11).

As new creatures in Christ, the saints are to be known for their spirit of thanksgiving, for without the grace of

God we would not be saints. It would be only natural for Paul to remind the Philippian disciples that even their prayers should be coated with thanksgiving.

*Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving let you request be made known to God*** (Ph 4:6; see Cl 4:2; 1 Th 1:2; 2 Th 1:3; Pl 4).

In Christ, we abound with thanksgiving (Cl 2:7). Thanksgiving is simply the nature of those who understand all that God has done for them through Jesus. We should not only be a body of people who are truly thankful for all that God has done for us through Jesus, but also all He will do for us when Jesus comes again (See Rv 7:12). If one would ever ask why the saints should be thankful, one passage of Paul would give the answer:

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? **I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord*** (Rm 7:24,25).

So we would conclude, “*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift*” (2 Co 9:15).

Chapter 5

NEW LABORERS

Christians are recognized in the community as new creatures because they manifest in their lives the newness

of their blood-washed souls. The personality of the one who comes forth from the world and walks in the cleansing

blood of Jesus is changed. The demeanor of his behavior reveals an inner newness that cannot be concealed. This newness is expressed primarily in one's behavior of service in reference to his relationship with others. It is a new life-style of loving care by which one has refocused his entire life off himself and on others. Because Jesus focused on him through the cross, the new creature emulates in his life that "mind of Christ" that was revealed in the selflessness of Jesus going to the cross (See Ph 2:5-11).

One of the most exciting statements made in the Scriptures was written by Nehemiah in reference to the efforts of the motivated Jewish returnees who had returned from captivity. In their efforts to complete the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah wrote, "*The people had a mind to work*" (Ne 4:6). The Israelites had a mind to work in the absence of any knowledge of the cross. If they so worked in an absence of the cross, then what amazing things can happen through us because of our motivation by the cross. They had a mind to work to build something that was only physical because of their faith in what God had planned for their future. We have a mind to work to build something that is spiritual because of what God did for us in the past. And what God did for us in our past is a far greater motivation than what Israel had by faith in what God would do in their future. We believe in the reality of the cross, while they only believed in the shadow of that which was to come.

Those were exciting days in Israel.

The walls of Jerusalem had laid in ruins for years. But with the motivation of Nehemiah, the people were stirred into action. The people had fallen into indifference as someone said of some idle Christians, "Too many people itch for what they want, but are unwilling to get out and scratch for it." It took Nehemiah to remind the people of their responsibility to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Once the people were stirred, they determined to get done that which they knew they should do.

The problem that faces most church leaders is the inactivity, or indifference, among those who have digressed to believing that "church attendance" is the standard by which one is to be considered faithful. People often develop the theology that church attendance is an evidence of faithfulness because they are doing nothing outside the "hour of worship." Churches that are over concerned about the legalities of the ceremonies of assembled worship are often those churches that are composed of members who do little for Jesus outside the "hour of worship." When our assembly is relegated to being our only "service" for Jesus, then we call it "worship service." It is actually "attendance service" that is substituted for service that should take place outside our assemblies.

When people develop such a theology concerning their service to the Lord, they are like blisters. They show up only after others have done all the work. But if we are to be the type of new creatures that defines the nature of discipleship, then there must be more actions and less

factions; more workers and less shirkers; more backers and less slackers; and according to Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:5, more burden bearers and less tale bearers. **The simple fact is that if one is not a cross bearer here on earth, he will not be a crown bearer in heaven.**

When Jesus challenged His disciples with a vision of the task that stood before them, He knew that they had to take ownership of the purpose for which He came into the world. So at the very beginning of His ministry, He challenged His disciples with an awesome vision: *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest"* (Jn 4:35).

Harvest time is no time for idleness. It is a time to lay one's hands to the effort of harvesting the grain before it falls to the ground. It is a time of urgency, such as was embedded in Jesus' statement, *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. The night is coming when no one can work"* (Jn 9:4). And since the time is short for every laborer in the vineyard, then there is no time for apprehension. *"No one,"* Jesus said, *"after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Lk 9:62).

We too often become diverted, derailed, delayed, and then just downright discouraged. Someone once calculated the average time that an individual would give to certain functions of his life if he were to live to be 70 years old. This would be a total life time of 613,200 total hours. Of this, 204,400 hours are usually spent in bed. 204,400 hours are used

in one's work or occupation. On the average, 76,650 hours are spent in eating. 76,650 hours are spent in dressing, bathing, shaving, etc. And for the normal person, 40,130 hours are used for recreation, relaxing, TV and video games. This would leave the average person with 10,920 hours to spend in worship if he were to attend a church assembly three times a week. If we departmentalize our lives according to these average figures, then God is in competition with a host of distractions. Actually, He is on the bottom of the list. It is of little wonder then, that we often hear the complaint of those who offer excuses not to become involved in the work of God, "I just don't have the time."

In this context, some statements of various verses of Scripture immediately come to mind. As disciples of Jesus, *"we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works ..."* (Ep 2:10). We are to be *"a special people who are zealous for good works"* (Ti 2:14). And in your zeal for Jesus, you are to *"work out your own salvation ..."* (Ph 2:12). All of us are to be *"fervent in spirit"* (Rm 12:11). And thus, we are to guard against becoming lukewarm, lest we be spewed out by our Lord (Rv 3:15,16).

Regardless of so many exhortations in Scripture concerning the zealous function of our lives to lift up our eyes and look on the fields of opportunity, we usually digress into being one of three types of bones. We are often "wish bones," that is, we are always wishing that someone else would do the work. Or, we are "jaw bone" disciples, that is, we are all

talk and no work. And sometimes we become “knuckle bone” disciples, that is, we knock what everyone else is doing in order to justify our own laziness. But what we should be is “back bone” disciples who bear down and get the job done.

The Holy Spirit used two Greek words in order to identify the working nature of those who have become new creations in Christ. When Paul said that he labored “abundantly” because of the grace of God that moved him into service, he used two words in his letters that give us a great deal of insight into what God expects of us as disciples of Jesus.

A. Agonizing for Jesus.

The Greek word *agonizomai* is the Greek word from which we derive the English word “agony.” It was the word used in the Greek games to explain the agony by which one competed in the games in order to win, or the strain one exerted to complete a race. The word was also used to refer to a woman who agonized in labor pains to give birth.

With such intensity, Paul labored. “*For this purpose I also labor [agonizomai], striving according to His working that powerfully works in me*” (1 Co 1:29). If we searched through our Bibles in order to find one verse to explain the seriousness by which we should take our work for Jesus, this would be the passage. Discipleship to Paul was not a “Sunday morning worship service.” This unfortunate present-day definition of service is to our shame when we com-

pare our lives to the apostle Paul. Can you imagine Paul boasting about what a great “worship service” he had over in Ephesus, or Corinth, or Philippi? It is interesting to consider the things in which we take so much pride, and those things for which we work so hard to perfect.

Paul once used competition in athletic games to define what a Christian should be in his dedication to the Lord: “*And every man who strives [agonizomai] exercises self-control in all things*” (1 Co 9:25). And then he made the application to his own life: “*Therefore, I thus run, not with uncertainty. I thus box, not as one who beats the air*” (1 Co 9:26). In order to live the life of “*agonizomai*,” Paul reprimanded the Corinthians by his own example,

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).

Now we understand why the Holy Spirit gave the apostle Paul the right to say, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1). If the Holy Spirit gave any one of us the right to make this statement in Scripture, would the church be better or worse if they followed our example?

We would certainly conclude that Paul strove in his life to manifest his tremendous appreciation for the One who cleansed him of the sin of his persecution of the family of God. With great agony in service, Paul labored in thanksgiving for the Lord. We believe that Jesus

had this struggle in mind as He prepared His disciples during His ministry for those things that were to come. “*Strive [agonizomai] to enter in through the narrow gate.*” He exhorted them, “*For many, I say to you, will seek to enter in and will not be able*” (Lk 13:24). “Not-be-able” means that if one does not agonize to enter, he will never make it.

Some will just excuse themselves by saying that they are too old to enter the field of labor. But they need to remember that Michaelangelo did his best painting when he was past 80. Thomas Edison was still inventing even at 90 years of age. Tennyson wrote *Crossing the Bar* when he was 80. Verdi produced *Falstaff* when he was 80, and *Ava Maria* when he was 85. We are never too old to grow too old to labor in the vineyard. Anna was in her eighties, but was still in ministry, the ministry of prayer and fasting (Lk 2:36,37).

Harland Sanders was retired at the age of 65. He was penniless and on social security. But he had a chicken recipe. So he drove from restaurant to restaurant in America, trying to convince restaurants to use his secret recipe for frying chicken. It is told that he visited over a thousand restaurants before someone agreed to use his recipe. The recipe caught on, and after years of Kentucky Fried Chicken, Colonel Sanders is known worldwide for selling the staple meat of society in the developing world. Who has not visited KFC? One is never too old to “*agonizomai*” an idea into worldwide success.

The translation of *agonizomai* in 1

Timothy 6:12 is weak when the English word “fight” is used. Paul wrote, “*Fight [agonizomai] the good fight of the faith.*” What he meant was “agonize in the good agony of the faith.” As saints of God, we are certainly involved in an intense struggle against all evil as we agonize to harvest the white fields. The intensity of our warfare is with agony.

At the end of his life of struggle, Paul concluded, “*I have fought the good fight*” (2 Tm 4:7). What he meant in his use of the Greek word “agony” was that he struggled; he agonized in his conflict “*against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places*” (Ep 6:12). And if anyone would agonize in the spiritual war against the host of wickedness of this present world, then he must armor himself according to Paul’s instructions of Ephesians 6:13-17. The agony of the struggle against evil is so fierce that it takes spiritual armor to survive the conflict.

Every Christian soldier is needed if we are to conquer the forces of evil that prevail against the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every talent of every disciple must be mustered into action. Benjamin Franklin wrote in his *Poor Richard’s Almanac* some very meaningful words:

For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost,
 For the want of a shoe, the horse was lost,
 For the want of a horse, the rider was lost,
 For the want of a rider, the battle was lost,
 For the want of a battle, the kingdom was lost—
 All for the want of a horse shoe nail.

Unfortunately, when discussing these matters with ourselves, all of us know of those who are simply “church attendees.” They are “missing nails” who are needed to win the battle against Satan. They do not engage the enemy daily in their labor in the kingdom. It is as someone questioned concerning the whereabouts of Jack at the local factory.

“Where’s Jack?”, one worker questioned, “Is he sick?”

“Nope, Jack isn’t working here any more.”

“Is that so,” replied a fellow worker. “I wonder if management has anyone in mind to fill the vacancy Jack left?”

“Nope,” was the reply, “When Jack left he didn’t leave any vacancy.”

We often wonder if a great number of the “attendees” at the “worship service” never showed up again, if there would be any vacancies left in the work of the Lord.

B. Wearing out for Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 3:8 Paul used the Greek word *topos* that is translated “labor” in most translations: “*Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor* [topos].” The Greek word *topos* that is used in this statement means “to wear out in work.” According to Paul’s use of the Greek word *topos*, we are to be wearing ourselves out in the work of the Lord.

There is a reason why disciples of Jesus labor so hard for their Lord. The discipleship of the Thessalonians is a

good example. Paul used the word *topos* when he called to remembrance the tremendous labor of some disciples in Thessalonica who had been Christians for less than a year. “*We give thanks to God always for you all ... remembering without ceasing your ... labor* [topos] *of love ...*” (1 Th 1:2,3). The Thessalonian Christians wore themselves out in preaching the gospel, not only in their area, but also in missions to other areas. The intensity of their labor of love was defined by Paul in the following statement:

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything (1 Th 1:8).

Paul was in Achaia when he wrote the preceding statement to the Thessalonians. Before he arrived in Achaia, after leaving Thessalonica, the faith of the Thessalonian disciples had already reached Achaia. “Labors of love” will cause such things to happen.

The point is that our obsession in our faith should be so radical that our labor of love should result in the gospel going into all the world. Our labor of love should be so profound today that two thousand years from now people should be reading about our zeal just as we read about the dedication of the Thessalonians. What will be the legacy of our labor of love?

Old preachers once told the story of one brother who continually com-

plained that he was always tired from his labors. He was so worn out that he should have been exhorted with the statement, **“And let us not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up”** (Gal 6:9). Nevertheless, the brother was persistent in his complaints. So the preacher told him, “Keep on working, my brother, for when we die we will have our rest.” The brother despondently replied, “It would be my luck that when I die, the Lord will come the next day and I will have to get up again.”

Remember the parable that Jesus introduced with the statement, **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard”** (Mt 20:1)? We call it the “Parable of the **Laborers**” because it identifies those who would labor in kingdom business (See Mt 20:1-16). If any would be a part of this kingdom, labor is understood. Christianity is not a passive faith. It is not a retirement center. When one is created new in Christ, it is his objective that everyone around him be so created. At least, this is what the Thessalonian disciples concluded.

But there is a problem. There seems to be a number of people who would seek citizenship in the kingdom, but they show up only for the “worship service.” Christianity, however, is not confined to “working” through some ceremony on Sunday. New creatures are identified by what they do, not by where they sit. There is no labor happening when we sit idly on a bench, pew, or stump listening to a sermon, or singing a few songs. **La-**

bor takes place in the field. Jesus reminded His disciples,

*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that **He will send laborers into His harvest** (Mt 9:37,38; see Lk 10:2).*

When we discover where the harvest takes place, then we will discover where all the new creatures in Christ are to be located.

We have heard few prayers in our assemblies that are according to the above mandate of Jesus in reference to that for which we should pray. The reason the request is not made for more laborers is because there are too many “Sunday morning” Christians who believe that if they made the prayer, **they might be the answer.**

Kingdom business is about laboring strenuously for the Lord. The vision of John in Revelation 14:13 paints the literary picture of those who would dare be disciples of Jesus:

*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that **they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them.**”*

No person can expect to receive any rest from Jesus when He comes again if he is doing no labor in the harvest fields. If our Christianity has backslidden into an idle churchianity that is ceremonially

performed in some assembly on Sunday morning, then we are in trouble according to what the Spirit just revealed through John. There will be rest in heaven only for the weary, not for the wimpy. If one has no works that will follow him, then he should not expect to be led into the rest of eternal glory. If one is not working hard enough in order to need rest, then heaven's rest will pass him by.

We must keep in mind that we can lose our rest to come if we fall into the disobedience of laziness. *“Therefore, let us labor to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience”* (Hb 4:11; see 1 Th 2:9; 2 Th 3:8). If we remain steadfast in the Lord, then we know that our labors are *“not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Co 15:58; see Lk 10:7).

Regardless of their situation when the book of Revelation was written, at least the disciples in Ephesus labored for Jesus. In the message of the angel to the church of Ephesus, they were commended, *“And you have perseverance and patience. You have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary”* (Rv 2:3). These disciples remembered what was written to the Hebrew disciples:

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love that you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and still are ministering (Hb 6:10).

We continue to labor and suffer for Jesus because He only is the Savior of

the world (See At 4:12). *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers”* (1 Tm 4:10). When one considers the horribleness of hell, the length of eternity, and the glory of heaven, then he must be driven to the lost with the gospel of Jesus. If one is not, then he should give up the name Christian, for Christians are disciples of Jesus who are laboring in the harvest field.

If we are not laboring for the Lord, then we have signalled to others that the Lord is not in us. Paul wrote, *“For this purpose I also labor, striving according to His working that powerfully works in me”* (Cl 1:29). Paul again revealed concerning his motives, *“... but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me”* (1 Co 15:10). This is why he could say, *“And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gl 2:20). People recognize that Christ is in the new creature because of the zeal by which one lives for Jesus every hour of every day.

The problem often arises that some are so lazy for Jesus that they must boast in another man's labors. This is what happened in Corinth when some sought to take credit for the labors of Paul and others to minister to the Corinthians (See 2 Co 10:15). But if one would prove himself to be a servant of God, he must personally do so with his own labors. Remember these words? *“But in all things approving ourselves as servants of God ... in labors ...”* (2 Co 6:4,5). We will not receive a reward because of the la-

bors of others. Remember, each disciple “will receive his *own reward according to his own labor*” (1 Co 3:8; compare Jn 4:38).

We must never forget the final call of Jesus when He comes to take His laborers home into their eternal rest:

Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 11:28).

We are not sure, but when Jesus comes again, He will probably not show up on Sunday morning, and for obvious reasons.

Chapter 6

NEW SOLDIERS

The New Testament pours forth a river of metaphors by which the Spirit seeks to lift our minds from the physical world into the realm of the spiritual nature and work of those who have enlisted their allegiance in the warfare of Jesus. Words as “sons,” “living stones,” “branches,” and “pilgrims” are all words of the world that are used to define the spiritual relationship that new creatures have with God. But one of the most graphic metaphors is the word “soldier.” Inherent within the earthly definition of this word is militant warfare. But since it is used as a metaphor, then reference cannot be to carnal warfare when used to define the warfare of the Christian. In other words, **there is no scriptural justification for a Christian to take up arms to advance his faith.** As soldiers in the Lord’s army, we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

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).

The word “soldier,” and all words that explain the function of a soldier of this world, help us to understand metaphorically the militancy of the Christian who is engaged in conflict with evil. Our songs highlight our emphasis on the metaphors that are used to define our war with evil. We sing “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Soldiers of Christ Arise” in order to spur ourselves on as soldiers in the Lord’s army. We put on the whole armor of God in order to survive in our spiritual battle against the wiles of the devil (See Ep 6:10--17). By engaging the enemy of all unrighteousness, we use truth to war against error, right to prevail over wrong, and good to suppress evil. As soldiers of Christ, we are engaged in a spiritual conflict. We have already been given the victory by our Commander. It is thus our task to stay in the battle because we have already won the victory. This was the message of the entire book of Revelation that was written to encour-

age Christians who were suffering from those who persecuted them as family of God:

These will make war with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful (Rv 17:14; see 19:19-21).

As soldiers of Christ, we have assumed several responsibilities in order that we fight the good fight of the faith. If any soldier fails to take ownership of his responsibilities, then he, as a soldier of Christ, will certainly fall from the battle. We must always remember that only one fourth of the seeds that were sown in the Parable of the Sower brought forth fruit. The rest were either devoured, scorched, or choked (See Mt 13:3-9). It was only those seeds that fell on good ground that were able to withstand the elements of the environment in which they were sown (Mt 13:8). And so it is with every soldier for Jesus. If one is to survive as a soldier in the Lord's army, then he should seriously consider the following:

A. Be recruited.

Soldiers in many nations of the world are recruited through conscription. When a young person becomes a certain age, he automatically has to serve in the army. But in many countries of the world today, conscription has given way to volunteering. The military of the United

States, for example, is a military that is composed entirely of those who have volunteered for service. And so it is with the Lord's army. There is no conscription against one's will. The Lord wants only those who will volunteer to serve. An army that is composed of volunteers is far more excited to carry out their duties than an army that is composed of conscripted soldiers.

The message of recruitment goes out to those who would volunteer for the Lord's army. When the repentant hears this call, he willingly relinquishes his will to the Master to whom he enlists for service. When potential recruits realize that they are on the wrong side of the spiritual war against all wickedness, they seek to volunteer for service. When some were "*cut to the heart*" in Jerusalem in A.D. 30 because they behaved contrary to the work and will of God, they cried out, "*Men and brethren, what will we do?*" (At 2:37). In other words, they were asking where they could sign up for King Jesus who was reigning on David's throne. When shaken by surrounding circumstances, some pleaded, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (At 16:30). And to such volunteers, the recruiting officer replied, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins ...*" (At 22:16). Sign with water on the dotted line.

It was the message of the gospel that God used to call all men to volunteer for the army of His Son. God calls people "*unto His kingdom and glory*" (1 Th 2:12) by the gospel (2 Th 2:14). When repentant volunteers step forward with

faith, they are told clearly what they must do to become a part of the body of God's army. *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ..."* (1 Co 12:13; see At 2:38, Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27). Volunteers must make a behavioral declaration in obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in order to be of the Christ to whom they are giving their allegiance (See 1 Co 1:12,13).

Because new recruits in the Lord's army make a choice to volunteer, then the nature of the army of God is defined by the service of the soldiers. There can never be any barracks for the soldiers of Christ. Being a soldier in the Lord's army means that one is always on duty. The repentant believer has volunteered to serve, and thus, he is continually volunteering to serve others.

We have found that some have missed the point that the culture of the army of God is volunteerism. If one does not volunteer his life, he certainly is not a soldier in the Lord's army. Sometimes the lack of volunteering is revealed by those who will not preach the gospel unless they are supported. Others have viewed the army of the Lord as an opportunity for employment. Others have volunteered to join, but only if they were given a job. They misunderstand the culture of the army of God. It is not what one gets as a recruit, but what one gives. There can be no beggars in God's army. What one gives in service is explained by the Holy Spirit in Romans 12:1: *"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."

We must not forget that Jesus is continually recruiting volunteers for His army on earth. He said the same in His last words of revelation to all men:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me (Rv 3:20).

B. Be spiritually fit.

After being inducted into an army, a new soldier is enrolled in boot camp in order to prepare for battle. A soldier must be in top physical condition in order to war according to the disciplines of battle. Discipline, therefore, must be instilled in every soldier. Every recruit is thus trained in discipline in order that desertion not occur when the new recruits engage the enemy. New recruits must start their training to live in a new paradigm of resistance to protect their nation against any possible enemies.

In order to prepare as a spiritual soldier in the spiritual conflict in which the people of God are engaged with Satan, there must be preparation for battle. God knows that those who are new in the faith should not be thrown into the heat of the battle until they have been disciplined to endure the harsh blows that Satan will deliver. The "spiritual boot camp" of the army of God is emphasized in the following points:

1. Spiritual growth is necessary in order to transition into the new spiri-

tual paradigm. When one comes forth from the grave of baptism as a new creature in the army of God, his new birth experience does not miraculously change his character and personality. He is not “fully grown” immediately when reborn. The new birth to become a new creature is the beginning of a process of growth. It is a process that is explained by Peter’s statement: “*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pt 3:18). New recruits are to “*grow up into Him in all things*” (Ep 4:15). The new birth is the beginning of one’s growth in all things that are necessary for the spiritual battle in which we are engaged as the children of God.

We do not know the exact time line of Paul when he transitioned from being a persecutor to a promoter of Christ. He miraculously encountered Jesus on the Damascus road sometime between A.D. 40 and 42 (At 9:1-19). He then volunteered for service by having his sins washed away in baptism (At 22:16). After he was baptized, he went into Arabia, and then returned to Damascus (Gl 1:17). After three years in Damascus and Arabia, he went to Jerusalem where he stayed for about two weeks (Gl 1:18). He then returned to his home in Cilicia, and eventually came into Syria (Gl 1:21). And after some years, “*Barnabas went to Tarsus [of Cilicia] to look for Saul [Paul]*” (At 11:25).

Barnabas fetched Paul out of Tarsus in order to bring him to Antioch of Syria. Barnabas needed help in teaching the new Gentile Christians of Antioch. After another trip to Jerusalem (At

12:25), and a year teaching in Antioch, it was not until Acts 13:1-3 that the Holy Spirit eventually called Paul to the great mission of going to the Gentiles. From the time of his new birth to be a new creature in Damascus, to the time he was called in Antioch in Acts 13, it could have been as long as seven years. God knew that Paul had to grow out of the old way of life of Judaism in which he was culturally and theologically steeped for so many years. God gave Paul time to grow into the person he needed to be in order to send him on his first mission journey.

We must grow into greater works in the kingdom. God is patient during these years of transformation. Others are doing the work while we are growing to accept greater challenges. The more one prepares himself, the greater the work that will be given to him by God.

2. Grow into leadership. When the Holy Spirit inscribed the spiritual qualifications for one to be an elder (bishop) among the sheep of God, one of the qualifications was negative. Those who are to be considered for such a ministry must not be new converts. The reason for this is that the new convert has not yet spiritually refined his personality and attitudes after the word of God. The Spirit wrote in the midst of giving qualifications for elders, “***He must not be a new convert, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil***” (1 Tm 3:6). In the same context of spiritual growth, Paul instructed Timothy, “*Lay hands hastily on no man*” (1 Tm 5:22). If great responsibility is given to novice Christians, then they can be “*puffed up*

with pride,” and thus fall into the condemnation of the devil. New Christians, therefore, must be patient until they grow into greater ministries.

3. Time must be given to lay aside behavioral sin that holds one back from spiritual growth. One of the tasks of the new recruit into the army of Christ is to start the process of changing one’s character. This process continues throughout the rest of our lives as soldiers in the Lord’s army. To older Christians, the Holy Spirit instructed, *“Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Hb 12:1). The task of a new recruit in Christ is to *“put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech out of your mouth”* (Cl 3:8). When one volunteers for the Lord’s army, he begins a process of spiritual transformation. The process begins by understanding that new creatures are always changing for the better. Even when they are old they are still being transformed into the image of Jesus (Rm 12:2).

4. Put away the past and push toward the future. When one comes forth from the grave with Jesus, he must never look back to his life before his new birth. The “good old days” must be viewed as days of darkness wherein one walked in sin. Jesus exhorted, *“No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Lk 9:62).

“Looking back” means taking part in those practices of sin that one gave up when he was born anew in Christ. When

one transitions into the army of the Lord, he must give up those things that identified him as a “sinner.” If one continues to look back on his former way of life, then he will be hindered from spiritually prospering in his new life for the future.

John wrote to Gaius, *“Beloved, I pray that in all things you may prosper and be in health, just as your soul prospers”* (3 Jn 2). The greatness of Gaius was that **he continued to prosper spiritually**. He was not one to look back to the old man of sin who was nailed to a cross and buried in a grave.

5. Study the manual on warfare. *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tm 2:15). One is not spiritually growing if he is not studying His Bible. Since our faith is built on the word of God, then our faith grows as we grow in the knowledge of God’s word.

We live in an era wherein there has been a deceptive backsliding from a Bible-based faith to an experientially based subjective religiosity. Paul wrote, *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”* (Rm 10:17). As long as our faith is based on the word of Christ, then we will continue to be directed by Christ. However, in the world of Christendom, there has been a change from a word-based faith to a subjective relationship-based faith. In other words, people first define their religiosity by their relationships with others, and then they consider the word of God.

It is assumed that if one has good relationships with others in a religious

context, then it is assumed that one's faith is strong. It indeed can be strong, but one's faith is based on the wrong priority. It is based on one's personal relationships with people, not the word of God. Cults have strong relationships, but the faith of those within the cult is questionable. The stronger one's faith is based on his friends, the more he is in danger of moving away from the word of God. This is true because our friends will often lead us away from the word of God if their faith is also based on relationships instead of the word of God.

When our faith is based on people, it is based on a foundation that is constantly changing. The foundation changes because people change. When all the individuals of the group change, then they as a group change. If our faith is based first on people, and then the word of God, we will drift with the group because our faith is not first based on the word of God. If we are forced by the group to move in the direction of the group, then we are a member of a very traditional group, or possibly a cult.

If our faith is based on the unchanging word of God, then our friends can change, but our faith will not because it is based on the word of God. It may be the case that the group moves so far away from the word of God **that the word-based individual must move away from the group**. We must keep in mind that our relationship with God is not dependant on our relationship with others. We may have to be as Noah who alone remained faithful in a wicked world. Our relationship (fellowship) with others

must first be based on the word of God. This relationship (fellowship) with others begins with our common obedience to the word of God. This is what John wrote in 1 John 1:3:

That which we [the apostles] 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.

Therefore, "if we say that we have fellowship [a relationship] with Him, and walk in darkness," John wrote, "we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 Jn 1:6). "**But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship** [a relationship] with one another ..." (1 Jn 1:7). Our relationships (fellowship) with one another must first be based on our common walk in the light of the word of Christ. If our fellowship is simply based on being good friends, then we are in trouble of being led away from Christ. If our allegiance is first to the group, then we will go where the group goes. And a group that is ignorant of the word of God is moving away from God. We must keep in mind that there is no greater thing than the relationship (fellowship) that the new creature has on earth than the church of our Lord.

C. Be committed.

Since one volunteers for service in the armed forces of a nation, then it is presumed that he is patriotic to the nation he seeks to defend. If there is no

patriotism, then one has simply sought for and acquired a “military job.” But when the “job soldier” engages the enemy, he will betray his country by desertion. It is imperative, therefore, that every soldier be disciplined with faith in the country he has volunteered to protect.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “treason” to mean,

The betrayal of a trust The offense of attempting by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which the offender owes allegiance or to kill or personally injure the sovereign of his family.

Judas Iscariot was standing in the audience when Jesus said, “*And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple*” (Lk 14:27). Judas could not do this. He involved himself in a scheme that led to the killing of the “sovereign of his family.” For whatever motives, he betrayed his discipleship to Jesus because of motives that were treasonous to the commitment Jesus called on all His disciples to make. It was no hyperbole of commitment, therefore, when Jesus said the following to His disciples:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me (Mt 10:37,38).

Soldiers in the Lord’s army must remember what one wise person said, “The man who moves the world is the man the world cannot move.” If we are not committed (patriotic) to Christ, we will betray Him when times get tough. It is an axiomatic truth that there will be more conversions to Christ when His soldiers are more committed to the cause of Christ. Such was essentially the meaning Paul wanted to convey to Timothy in the following exhortation:

You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No man engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, so that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier (2 Tm 2:3,4).

D. Be trained.

Soldiers who do not continually keep themselves physically fit will be weak in the field of conflict. Our muscles maintain their strength only when they are constantly used. The assumption is, therefore, that soldiers are constantly in training in order to be ready for battle.

In reference to soldiers of Christ, they should be in great spiritual shape because they are continually in battle. From the time they become new creatures in Christ, they are in constant conflict with the forces of evil. They grow stronger because they stay in the heat of the battle.

In his first letter, Peter reminded his readers, “... as newborn babes, ***desire the***

sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation” (1 Pt 2:2). He followed this exhortation with a spiritual mandate in the second letter: “**Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**” (2 Pt 3:18). If one does not feast on the word of God in order to grow spiritually, then he has consigned himself to spiritual death.

Spiritual growth is a process that is carried throughout the life of a spiritual soldier because of the demands of the battle. We must understand that as new creatures we are not at any one time in our lives at a stage of growth that we want to be. There must always be a sense of feeling that we are not what we ought to be. Therefore, we must anticipate what we are going to be. But in this process of spiritual growth, we can always be thankful that we are not what we used to be when we lived in sin.

Spiritual soldiers must always remember that it is “*God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). He works in us through His word. It was for this reason that apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers laid the foundation upon which we exist as a fellowship of soldiers today. These ministries of the word were set forth by God “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ...*” (Ep 4:12).

We minister the word of God in order that every “*man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tm 3:17). When one allows the word of God to equip his char-

acter as a spiritual soldier, God is given the credit for the equipping. The Hebrew writer wrote to his readers that they must allow God to equip them “*in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight ...*” (Hb 13:21).

E. Be skilled.

Every soldier must be skilled in how to use the weapons of his warfare. And being skilled assumes that one must receive training in how to use a particular weapon. One then maintains his skill in the use of his weapon by continual practice.

In Ephesians 6 Paul said to “*put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*” (Ep 6:11). The armor for the soldiers of Christ includes truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel, the shield of faith, the word of God, and the helmet of salvation (Ep 6:14-17). The successful soldier of the Lord will be skilled in the use of every article of armor. This assumes that he remains in the battle against the schemes of the devil in order not to grow weak in the use of his armor.

In order to remain effective in one’s war against the schemes of the devil, he must continually use the weapons of the Christian’s warfare. Paul wrote to Timothy, “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tm 2:2). If there is no continual teaching and being taught,

then our stand against false teaching will become weak. To be able to engage the enemy means that we have been enabled by the word of God. Every soldier must be in some Bible class or Bible study in order to learn the word of God. If there are no Bible classes among a group of saints, then it is a spiritually weak force against Satan. In fact, if there is no continual study and teaching of the Bible among some groups, the band of disciples are usually held together only by a musical band on Sunday morning, and not the teaching of the word of God.

We know when we have found a group of soldiers of the cross when we step into a Bible class where people have their Bibles open in order to enable themselves with the word of God. We know we have attended the assembly of a Timothy when we leave with a better knowledge of the word of God. The curse of “cheerleading” preachers is that they stand before a group of people who are weak in the word. The people are faithful to the assembly only as long as the cheerleader entertains them for a moment of ecstasy. Some have wondered why “concert assemblies” have become so common throughout Christendom today. The answer is in the fact that the people have become tired of cheerleading preachers who preach no Bible. The people have simply sought another “spiritual” placebo in order to keep coming to an assembly.

Concert assemblies with all the electronic gadgets and cheerleading preachers who know no Bible, are far from what the New Testament says is a

spiritual-oriented assembly of the saints. It is the word of God—the things that Paul taught Timothy—that equips us to stand against Satan. We need more Bible preaching and less concerts. And when we talk about assemblies, we need only a quiet time with one another in order to meditate over the oracles of God in our relationships with one another. If we attempt to substitute anything but word from God to equip the saints to be skilled in the war against Satan, then we will fall far short of being skilled in the weapons of our warfare.

What makes Christianity so powerful in a world of false religions is that the focus of the Christian is on the spiritual, and not on the carnal. Paul wrote of this to the Corinthian disciples who had been diverted to focus on carnal matters:

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 10:4,5).

In order to “pull down strongholds” of ignorance, we must know our Bibles. In order to “cast down imaginations,” we must have a knowledge of the word of God. In order to “cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,” we must have a knowledge of the true and living God who is defined in the Bible. In order to “bring

into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” we must be obsessed with the word of Christ in order to preach what one must do to obey the Son of God. It is for these reasons that assemblies of the soldiers of Christ that do not focus on teaching the word of God are a work of Satan to keep people ignorant of their Bibles and unprepared to engage him in battle. Satan knows that if he can keep Christians excited about entertaining themselves, then he can lead them wherever their ignorance of the Bible will allow them to go.

The atomic weapon of our warfare against all that Satan would launch against us is the Spirit-inspired word that has come to us from God by the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is the spiritual power by which God intended that the written word have in the preparation of His spiritual army.

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).

F. Be disciplined.

If we were a soldier in the military of a nation, but became unruly, we would be court martialled. No military of any nation can maintain an effective defense of the nation if it is filled with undisciplined soldiers. And so it is with the army of the Lord.

We admire Paul for the discipline

by which he conducted his life, and thus, was successful in his ministry. The secret to his success was self-discipline. He wrote, “***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).

A good soldier will discipline his mind to focus on his duties as a soldier. This is what Paul instructed Timothy to do when he wrote, “*No man engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life ...*” (2 Tm 2:4). If one would be a good soldier in the Lord’s army, then he must do as the Spirit wrote to the Colossians:

If you then were raised with Christ [from baptism], seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Cl 3:1,2).

A disciplined soldier in the Lord’s army is one who is obsessively focused on his purpose as a soldier of the Lord. He does not allow his attention to be diverted by the things of this world. He may use the things of the world to support himself, but worldly things do not have priority in his life.

Gaius disciplined his life according to spiritual priorities. John prayed for Gaius that in all things of the world he might prosper, but the prosperity in the things of this world was to be “just as” he spiritually prospered (3 Jn 2). As long as our spiritual prosperity is on the top

of our priority list, then we will have no problem with controlling the prosperity of the world. This will take great discipline. But it is essential as good soldiers of the Christ to seek kingdom things first by keeping our minds on those things that are above (See Mt 6:33). In the context of John's prayer that Gaius prosper in all things, Gaius was using "all things" under his control to support evangelists who were preaching the gospel (See 3 Jn 5-8).

G. Be courageous.

What good would a soldier be in the heat of battle, if he runs from the battle. Valor should be synonymous with being an effective soldier in any army.

We would conclude from Paul's statement in Romans 1:16 that he was a soldier of valor: "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel*"

We must remember that "**God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind**" (2 Tm 1:7), "*Therefore,*" Paul wrote, "**do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord ...**" (2 Tm 1:8).

Peter and John boldly preached Jesus in the heart of the religious world of Judaism. The religious leaders of Jerusalem subsequently "*called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*" (At 4:18). But Peter and John answered these misguided religious leaders, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than God, you judge*" (At 4:19). Every disciple of Jesus must take a bold

stand as this. And then, every disciple must boldly reply to such religious opposition as Peter and John did to their religious opposition: "***For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard***" (At 4:20).

Later in the same environment of religious opposition, some religious leaders again "strictly commanded" that the apostles not teach in the name of Jesus. But the apostles boldly replied, "***We must obey God rather than men***" (At 5:29).

The greatest opposition that the soldier of Christ has comes from those who think they are doing the will of God, but are actually opposing those who are walking contrary to their religious traditions. It was those who represented the traditions of the Jews who opposed Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. It was this opposition that eventually nailed Him to the cross. Therefore, if we oppose someone's teaching, we must first check our own beliefs with the word of God. It may be that we too are opposing the preaching of Jesus because we are defending only our traditions, and not the Bible (See Mk 7:1-9).

Being a disciplined soldier of the cross assumes that we will receive opposition. When Jesus used the cross as a metaphor to explain the extent to which one must go in order to be His disciple, His immediate disciples knew exactly what He meant. There was no misunderstanding on their part when He said, "***And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple***" (Lk 14:27). It was religious opposition that resulted in His going to

the cross. The same will often take the soldiers of Jesus to their crosses.

The Romans executed criminals on crosses. But there was more to the crucifixion than the actual nailing of one to a cross. The one to be crucified was to carry his own cross to his own execution. It was like one having to dig his own grave. It was a judgment of humiliation before execution. Most of the immediate disciples of Jesus had certainly witnessed someone who was humiliated by carrying his own cross to his own crucifixion. It was surely a horrible sight to behold. And when Jesus made the preceding statement concerning the bearing of the cross of discipleship, a knot probably developed in the stomach of many of those who were following Him. If discipleship means bearing a cross to crucifixion, then one should think twice before enlisting in the Lord's army.

The reason for the call of such tremendous commitment from Jesus was explained when He concluded the context of His teaching on commitment in Luke 14. "*Salt is good,*" Jesus said. "*But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill. It is thrown out.*" (Lk 14:34,35). A soldier who has no valor is worthless in this war in which we are involved against the evil of this world.

Every one of us must realize that we will stand in judgment beside the one who made the following statement to some disciples who were less committed:

What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus (At 21:13).

This same man would conclude, "*Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*" (Ep 6:10). We must not forget "*that the lake that burns with fire and brimstone*" is reserved for the cowardly (Rv 21:8).

H. Be a servant.

Good soldiers know how to suffer in serving. The purpose of a soldier is the preservation of the nation that he has committed himself to defend. Soldiers have thus given themselves to defend the nation at all costs. Suffering in service reveals the commitment by which they seek to serve their country.

The danger of becoming a lukewarm soldier is that he will be tempted to compromise in the midst of conflict. It is for this reason that Jesus was ready to spew out the Laodicean disciples (Rv 3:15,16). The only guard against becoming lukewarm is to serve continually. Christianity is like riding a bicycle. If one does not keep pedaling, he will fall off. In reference to service, Christianity is not "on again, off again." One is continually serving because of his total sacrifice of himself to Christ (Gl 2:20). If he stops working, he will fall off.

The Christian is engaged in spiritual warfare. There is no time to lay down

one's weapons or armor. The time for rest will come at the end of our lives. It will then be as Paul said of his own life: *"I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course"* (2 Tm 4:7). Only when we can speak of our fight in the past tense can we finally lay down our armor. It is only when we have fought the good fight that we are allowed to lay down in eternal rest. So it was with Paul when he wrote his final words in prison before his beheading.

When one becomes a new creature, he has committed himself to love (serve) the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30). He has committed himself to love (serve) his neighbor as himself (Mk 12:31). This is a life-style of commitment. It is not something from which a disciple takes a furlough. Being a disciple is a lifetime commitment to serve others. Therefore, while in our conflict with those who are enemies of the cross, we press on. Even in prison, Paul would not be detoured from engaging the enemy.

Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold. But one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Ph 3:13,14).

I. Be a comrade in Christ:

Soldiers must be disciplined in team work. There must be a strong sense of camaraderie among the soldiers in order

that the army remain focused on the enemy and not on one another. In the army of the Lord, the team work of the soldiers is maintained through forgiveness. If there is an unforgiving spirit among the soldiers of Christ, then there can be no camaraderie in our war against evil. Our battles among ourselves will take our focus off the enemy (See 2 Co 11:20; Gl 5:15).

Unfortunately, many soldiers in the Lord's army have fallen victim to being the unforgiving servant about whom Jesus spoke in a parable in Matthew 18:21-35. When we think we are in the right at a time when we have actually wronged others, we are often very quick to start making judgments concerning the one we feel has supposedly wronged us. But as illustrated in the parable, the unforgiving servant forgot how much he had been forgiven.

In fact, the extreme amount that the unforgiving servant was forgiven by the king makes senseless any debt that he might extract from his own debtor. If the magnitude of our forgiveness by God does not inspire us to be merciful to others, then our newness in Christ is tarnished. Jesus concluded the parable with the statement, *"So likewise will My heavenly Father do also to you, if each one of you does not from the heart forgive his brother"* (Mt 18:35).

If we would pray for forgiveness from the Father, then it is our responsibility to forgive those who wrong us. This was the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. *"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"* (Mt 6:12). Our

forgiveness by the Father, therefore, is conditional. *“But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”* (Mt 6:15). Therefore, *“If anyone has a complaint against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also should you”* (Cl 3:13).

Forgiveness is not for the benefit of those who have offended us. It is for the benefit of our own mental attitude. If we are unforgiving of those who offend us, then our spirit of unforgiveness will boil up within us and develop a bitter spirit. It is for this reason that Jesus said, *“... if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother”* (Mt 18:15). Jesus did not

condition our forgiveness of our offending brother on him coming to us and saying, “I’m sorry.” The offended must take the initiative and go to the offender.

But *“if you bring your gift to the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar and go your way. **First be reconciled to your brother ...**”* (Mt 5:23,24). If one is the offender, then he too must head in the direction of the one he has offended. The offender and offended must meet one another on the road as they approach one another for reconciliation. When it comes to brotherhood, the desire to always seek reconciliation should typify the identity of the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 7

NEW WALK

God challenged Israel with the statement, *“Can two walk together, except they have agreed”* (Am 3:3). The metaphor of the statement is profound. In the context, God was pronouncing the judgment that Israel was out of step with His will. They were walking in the wrong direction. In fact, because they were so out of step with His will, they were spiritually moving backward and not forward.

David was specific when he defined how we are to walk with God:

*Lord, who will abide in Your tabernacle?
Who will dwell in Your holy hill? **He who walks uprightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart*** (Ps 15:1,2).

Walking together assumes that two people are in harmony with one another. They speak the truth to one another. It means that there is a relationship between the two parties as they make progress in the same direction. They have the same goal and purpose. Jesus explained this in reference to those who would be new creatures in Him.

*I do not pray for these [apostles] alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, **that they also may be one in Us**, so that the world may believe that You sent Me* (Jn 17:20,21).

Noah was one who walked with God (Gn 6:9). The result of his walk was the salvation of himself and his family. John explained this in reference to the Christian's walk with God: "*If we walk in the light as He [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 Jn 1:7).

We too can walk with God. The result of our walk with God is fellowship with Him and the continual cleansing of our sins by the blood of His Son. The condition for this privilege and blessing is that we live in harmony with the will of God. This means that God must establish the footsteps in which we walk. We do not have that right.

The behavior of the new creature in Christ is identified by one's life-style of obedience to the will of God. Paul exhorted the new creatures in Ephesus to "*walk as children of light*" (Ep 5:8). Since we often need some definition concerning what "walking as children of light" means, throughout the New Testament the Holy Spirit explains the steps we must take:

A. Walk in love.

The new commandment of Jesus was based on the extreme by which He loved us. The extreme of His walk for us defines the nature of our walk with one another. "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (Jn 13:34).

Walking together in love as Jesus

loved us is the signal to the world that we are the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:35). The intensity of our love for one another was defined by Jesus who gave His life for us. It is a "new love" (new commandment) by which His disciples were to love one another. Paul explained,

Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love as Christ also loved us, and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Ep 5:1,2; see Jn 3:16).

If we would walk with Jesus in love, then we will manifest our love for Jesus by sacrificially loving one another as Jesus loved us. And in our imitation of Jesus' love for us, we as new creatures are to love one another with the intensity of a selfless sacrificial love. John explained, "*For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*" (1 Jn 3:11). This statement was prefaced with John's exhortation, "*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*" (1 Jn 3:12).

Jesus explained that sacrificial love is the new commandment. John followed with the explanation that the lack of sacrificial love alienates one from the God of love. Therefore, the lack of sacrificial love in our lives manifests that we are not walking with God if we do not sacrificially love our brother. One is simply not righteous before God if he does not manifest in his life the sacrificial love by which God so loved the world through Jesus (Jn 3:16).

It is significant to note that neither Jesus nor John defined discipleship by one's conformity to a legal catechism of law. It is love, not law, that identifies those who have transitioned out of a walk of unloving darkness. The problem with a legal approach to a relationship with God is that one comforts himself with a catechism of law that he has prescribed as acceptable obedience. He can thus maintain the legal system of his catechism without sacrificially loving his brother.

The sincerity of Jesus' love for us was in the fact that it was not a love that was poured out on the basis of law. As created beings from the dust of the earth, we deserved no love offering from God. This was the foundation upon which the Spirit stated, "*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:8). The awesomeness of this action on the part of God was that He loved us when we deserved no love.

There was no law that Jesus should go to the cross for those whom He had created. It was love, not law, that took Him there. Nothing has changed in His definition of the love by which we are to love one another. We are to love, not because of law, but because of the manner by which He sacrificially loved us from the cross. It is this love in our lives that reveals that we are from God. It was this intensity of love that ended Jesus on a cross for our sins. If one does not walk in the love by which Jesus loved us at the cross, then he is not from God. He is not a disciple of the One who sacrificially

gave Himself selflessly for us.

It may be easy to love only our brothers. But the behavior of the love that Jesus manifested on the cross was far beyond the brotherhood love about which Peter spoke when he wrote, "*Love the brotherhood*" (1 Pt 2:17). The nature of the love that was defined by the cross is revealed in Paul's statement of Romans 5:10: "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we will be saved by His life.*" The love by which the new creature is identified is a love that extends to our enemies just as Jesus' love reached out to us when we were His enemies.

So it was not a suggestion when Jesus said, "... *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the children of your Father ...*" (Mt 5:44,45). The disciples who first heard these words would later understand the extent to which Jesus went to reconcile us to God. We were enemies of Jesus through our sins, but He still showed up at the cross.

Was Jesus asking for too much? If we would so conclude that He was, then we need to remember that we once lived as "enemies of the cross" (See Ph 3:18). We "*were formerly alienated and enemies*" of Jesus by our wicked ways (Cl 1:21). But when we were enemies of Jesus, "*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem those who were under law ...*" (Gl 4:4). Remember the following heart-warming action of what God did for us while we were enemies of the cross?

“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rm 5:8). Because of what God did for us while we were enemies of all righteousness, we can never object to Jesus’ exhortation that we love our enemies as He loved us.

Someone once said, “Faults are thick when love is thin.” The revelation of our lack of love for our enemies is often manifested in our constant criticism of the behavior of others. When we walk in love for our enemies, however, we understand that the door to the human heart is always opened from the inside. If we would open this door, as Jesus opened ours, then it is through love that we would have an opportunity to share Jesus with our enemies.

Phosphorus glows in the dark. As we live in a world of darkness, we must never forget that the darkness is an opportunity for our love to glow. So in our anticipation of a glorious future, we do not forget what Peter wrote in his final letter:

And we have more certain the prophetic word, to which you do well to take heed, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts (2 Pt 1:19).

We are thus committed to shine as bright as possible as we live in this dark world of sin. We are committed to loving people into eternal glory with us. And because of our hope of residing in the eternal light of our Father, we will walk in love.

B. Walk by faith.

We would remind ourselves of what Paul proclaimed to every new creature in Christ: *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Co 5:7). It is sometimes as the wise old statement, “Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is about us.” The Hebrew writer exemplified the necessity of walking by faith:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hb 11:6).

This is not a mental faith that simply accepts the existence of God. It is an active faith of both mind and heart that is manifested through behavior. It is a faith that signals that we are diligently seeking God. It is as James challenges every disciple: *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (Js 2:18). In other words, “Show me your diligence for God without an active faith, and I will show you my diligence for Him by my faith that works.”

Walking in faith means that we are totally reliant on God for what we are in Christ. This fundamental teaching is in the introductory statement of Paul in his discourse on grace in Romans: *“For in it [the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The just will live by faith’”* (Rm 1:17).

We are new creatures in Christ because we acted on our faith in Jesus. We proved our faith in Him by our obedience to Him. This did not make our obedience to His will meritorious. To say that we were meritoriously baptized because it is commanded (At 2:38), is to maintain a weak understanding of our obedience of faith (Rm 1:5; 16:26). This was the legal misunderstanding that Paul addressed in the letter to the Romans. His conclusion for us in reference to meritorious salvation was explained in the statement, *“Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from [meritorious] works of law”* (Rm 3:28). One is not justified by meritorious obedience to keep law perfectly, **but he cannot be justified apart from obedience that results from our faith response to do that which is commanded by Jesus.** A limited faith that allows one to either ignore Jesus’ example or commands, is simply a dead faith.

If one cannot make a distinction between meritorious works of law and obedience of faith, then he will never understand the Christian’s walk by faith. We live in a time when many religionists are so obsessed with any hint of meritorious obedience, that they have thrown out of their theology all references to obedience. We have in these days an unfortunate and fruitless theology of walking by faith only. If in the word “walking” there is any reference to obedience, the “faith only” advocates often cry out, “Meritorious.” But it would be good for such folks to make this cry to James who was dealing with the same “depart-in-peace”

people who were likewise resistant to obedient expressions of faith (Js 2:16). To such “faith only” people, James frankly stated, *“You see then that a man is justified by works **and not by faith only**”* (Js 2:24). And why? *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, **so also faith without works is dead**”* (Js 2:26).

We would suggest that those who are quick to cry out “meritorious” in reference to obedient faith, should read again James’ exhortations and definitions of the faith that is pleasing to God. Disciples of Jesus walk by an obedient faith, without which one cannot be pleasing to God (Hb 11:6).

It was an obedient walk of faith in response to the will of God that kept the Old Testament heroes in fellowship with God (Read Hb 11). Their obedient walk of faith manifested their trust in the promises of God. Our faith manifests the same today. We walk *“... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began ...”* (Ti 1:2). *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul ...”* (Hb 6:19). Our *“**faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen**”* (Hb 11:1).

C. Walk in the light.

John stated that Christians are “walking in the light” (1 Jn 1:7). As he progressed in the book of 1 John, he referred to the will of God with terms as the truth, the light, and finally, the commandments of God. Walking in the light in 1 John 1:7, therefore, is a reference to walking in the realm of God and His will.

New creatures in Christ were once walking in the darkness of sin. But in the new birth, God ***“has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us unto the kingdom of His dear Son”*** (Cl 1:13). Sin is darkness because it is a realm of behavior that is outside the sovereign will of God. In the realm of darkness, we *“were dead in trespasses and sins”* because we were walking *“according to the ways of this world ...”* (Ep 2:1,2). But as new creatures in Christ, this walk was changed.

We were once as the Ephesians about whom Paul wrote, ***“For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”*** (Ep 5:8). We were darkness because our former way of life constituted the darkness of sin in the world. But when we turned to a walk in the light of God, we turned to representing before the world the light of God. Jesus explained: *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (Jn 8:12). When we walk with Jesus, we have His light by which we light up those around us.

Because we are disciples of the One who is the light of the world, our walk in His light is an advertisement of His light. Christians are the reflection of Christ to a world that continues to be in the darkness of sin. Of His disciples, Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world”* (Mt 5:14). His disciples would be as He was in the world: *“As long as I am in the world,”* Jesus said of Himself, *“I am the light of the world”* (Jn 9:5). However, when He left this world, His disciples

continued to be His only light in the world as long as they walked in His light. As new creatures in Christ, we have been entrusted with the light of Jesus.

As Paul and Barnabas went from city to city on their first mission journey, they realized the light-bearing responsibility that was laid on their shoulders as disciples of the Light. They rebuked those Jews who rejected them with a statement concerning their God-given responsibility to be the light of Jesus to the world: *“For so has the Lord commanded us, ‘I have set you to be a light of the Gentiles so that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* (At 13:47). Every disciple of Jesus carries with him the same light-bearing responsibility. In a world of darkness, and as the light of God in the world, the disciples of Jesus offer hope to the world. They are the light of the world as they reflect the light of the One who leads their lives.

D. Walk in the Spirit.

New creatures reveal the light of God through their walk in obedience to the will of their Father. Paul explained:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Co 4:6).

The knowledge of the glory of God is revealed through the walk of those who walk in the light of God’s will. This would be walking in the knowledge of

the Spirit-inspired word of God (2 Tm 3:16). Paul explained this walk to be as one led by the Spirit: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God”* (Rm 8:14). *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (Gl 5:25).

In the context of Jesus’ statement that we let our light shine before the world (Mt 5:16), reference was not to a boastful display of one’s works. Reference was to a behavioral life-style that manifested God before the world by those who have obeyed Him. When we let our light shine, we are manifesting to the world that we are being led by the Spirit of God. And being led by the Spirit means that we are obediently walking according to the Spirit-inspired word of God. Though such a righteous life-style is not empirical evidence that God is working through us, the fact is that if we were not living the righteous life people would not conclude that God is working in us. People know that God is working in us when we do His will.

There are no side roads to the “leading of the Spirit.” In other words, the Spirit does not lead parallel to the road map of His direction through His written word. All objective leading by the Spirit comes to us through the inspired written word of the Spirit (2 Tm 3:16). Following the Spirit through His word is objective, that is, we read and walk. For this reason, one can walk in the light with confidence when led by the Spirit through the inspired word of God.

However, if there is a supposed direct and subjective leading of the Spirit

through nudges and intuition that are separate from the written word of God, and is also contrary to the written word, then this leading would be false. If the leading is subjective, then one is left to his own declarations as to what the Spirit is supposedly doing in his life. And if one must personally declare his leading by the Spirit, then one can only give a personal testimony of the Spirit’s work in his life. Such a testimony cannot be used as an evidence to others that the Spirit is working in one’s life. We must keep in mind that many good people who have not obeyed the gospel, give their own testimony that the Spirit is leading them. But the Spirit does not work in the life of those who have not obeyed the gospel, otherwise the promise to “receive the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 has no special reference to the baptized believer.

The Spirit of God indeed works in the life of God’s new creatures, **but His leading is never contrary to what He has written.** And certainly, if one would claim to be led by the Spirit, then we must assume that this person has been born again of the water (baptism) and of the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Any leading by the Spirit is reserved for new creatures in Christ.

It is the word of God that reveals the light of our Father. And it is our obedience to His Holy Spirit-inspired word that manifests the glory of God and the realm of obedience in which God’s children walk. The psalmist wrote, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”* (Ps 119:105). Since it is not in us to direct our own ways (Jr 10:23), then our only option for walking with God in

confidence is to walk in the light of His word. By our walk in His word, we manifest that we are His sons since we are obedient to Him as our Father.

This explains the meaning of the following prophecy that Paul quoted from Ezekiel that was made in reference to those who would be born into Christ: *“I will dwell in them and walk in them. And I will be their God and they will be My people”* (See Ez 37:26,27; 2 Co 6:16). John’s commentary of this walk is easy to understand: *“And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it”* (2 Jn 6). This was Gaius’ *“walk in truth”* (3 Jn 3), and also the apostle John’s greatest joy (3 Jn 4). Christians are those about whom the Spirit wrote,

There is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rm 8:1; See Ep 2:10).

We objectively walk according to the Spirit when we live according to His directions. We can only know the direction in which we must walk by reading His road map.

E. Walk in obedience.

In reference to the preceding points, the following explanation of our walk with God would be redundant. Nevertheless, when the metaphor “walk” is

used in the Bible, **all reference is to something that involves obedience.** “Walk” can never be metaphorical of some mysterious sensation that might come over us. It can never refer to some supposed inner urge of the Spirit that is not reflected in obedience. “Walk” is an action word, not a justification for spiritualism or an inactive faith. It is an action word that explains something we do, not what the Holy Spirit does. Walking assumes that we have taken ownership of our behavior, and thus, we will give account of our behavior before God (2 Co 5:10).

Paul wrote, *“But God be thanked that though you were the bondservants of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you”* (Rm 6:17). Teaching is inert if it is not put into action. An outline of scriptures on a piece of paper is worthless if there is no walking in life of the teaching of the Scriptures. Before outlines of teaching change lives, the teaching must get from the head to the heart. The Roman disciples had been delivered the outline. However, the teaching was brought to life only when they were obedient to what the Spirit wrote in the book of Romans.

Some fall into a deceptive religiosity in reference to our obedient walk with God. Some believe that they are walking with God as long as they have memorized a code of teaching, but do not necessarily respond by living the teaching. This would be a “faith only” belief in the sense that as long as one has faith in a correct doctrine, then he is saved with-

out any behavioral response to what he knows. The error of this “faith only” religion is that we are not saved by knowledge, but by our walk (See Jn 13:34,35; 2 Co 5:10).

Other “faith only” folks refuse to make any outline of teaching, lest they be constructing some legal form of obedience by which they might be meritoriously justified before God. The error of these “faith only” folks is in the fact that their faith supposedly replaces any obedience from the heart to that which God commands. These are those who believe that obedience to any “form of teaching” is not necessary for one’s salvation.

In both of the above theologies the adherents have difficulty in putting their faith into action. One relies on his knowledge of the truth, while the other relies on his fear of being meritoriously justified by obedience. The non-response of either group to any form of teaching has led them to have difficulty in getting the truth of God into a heart response. Both groups fail to understand that Christianity is a behavior of life that is guided by the word of God.

We would remind any “faith only”

people that faith without works is dead (Js 2:17). Those the Holy Spirit used to be examples of faith in the greatest chapter of the Bible on faith, were those who responded with obedience to their faith in God. “*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place that he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed*” (Hb 11:8). “*By faith Noah ... prepared an ark ...*” (Hb 11:7). “*By faith Abel offered ...*” (Hb 11:4). In view of these heroes of faith, we must conclude that obedience is a manifestation of a faith that is pleasing to God. Those who would eliminate obedience from faith should take their argument to Abraham, Noah and Abel, for it is beside these obedient fathers of the faith that we will all stand in judgment.

New creatures stay new because they walk in the light. In their walk in the light, the blood of Jesus keeps them new. If they would by chance terminate their walking, their cleansing by the blood of Jesus would also terminate. And because we know this, we keep on walking. We keep walking in order to stay new.

Chapter 8

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

With the blessing of being created new in Christ, there comes new responsibilities. When Jesus spoke of bearing our own cross, He had more in mind than negative feedback from opposition that would result from living the life of a new creature. He bore a cross for us. That

cross was more than a few hours on the cross itself. He bore the cross of Sonship from the moment of the cry of a newly born infant in a barn in Bethlehem to the time He bowed His head in death. In the garden, and before He assumed the responsibility of the old rugged cross out-

side Jerusalem, He prayed to the Father, “*Your will be done*” (Mt 26:42). And it was done to the moment He looked into heaven and said, “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30). With the same willingness that Jesus relinquished His will to the Father, we too must bear our burden by relinquishing our own will to others. This is the cost of the cross, and thus the definition of discipleship as a new creature in Christ.

In Galatians 6:1-5, Paul concluded the letter to the disciples in Galatia with exhortations concerning discipleship responsibilities. He wrote, “***Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ***” (Gl 6:2). It is the responsibility of all new creatures as a community of believers to help one another. “*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves*” (Rm 15:1). We might ask why we have the responsibility to bear the burdens of our fellow new creatures. The answer is in our common obedience to the gospel and our character development for eternal dwelling. Therefore, “*let every one of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification*” (Rm 15:2).

Bearing the burdens of others is the responsibility of following in the example of the One after whom we call ourselves disciples. Every day we remember the statement of Jesus, “*Your will be done.*” Paul explained this responsibility: “*For even Christ did not please Himself...*” (Rm 15:3). When Jesus bore the cross, it was a selfless act of not pleasing Himself, but acting on behalf of others. There can be no such thing as narcissis-

tic discipleship. If we believe that we are the stars of our own little worlds, then we have not discovered the nature of Christianity. Christianity is never about us, but always about others. And when we have others first in our order of priorities, the serendipity is that we minister to our own spiritual well-being. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He made the following statement while holding a dripping towel in His hands that was marred with the dirt of His disciples’ feet: “*If you know these things, **happy are you if you do them***” (Jn 13:17).

In Galatians 6:5 Paul turns to using a different word than the one he used in verse 2 in reference to the burdens (responsibilities) we bear as new creatures. The “load” one is to bear in verse 2 refers to a heavy load of responsibility. The Greek word in verse 5 refers to the burden a soldier must bear. In his duty to serve, a soldier has the responsibility to bear his own armor. In bearing our own responsibilities, we also have the responsibility of covering the back of our fellow soldier. In fact, bearing our own responsibilities includes being responsible for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so it is with the soldiers of Christ as new creatures. When one becomes a Christian, he must take ownership of burdens that must be born. **This means every disciple must assume the responsibilities to do all that is included in being a disciple of Jesus.** There are no freeloaders in the body of Christ. If one is not assuming his responsibility as a disciple, then he is dysfunctional as a member of the body.

One must be careful not to be guilty of that about which Jesus judged the religious lawyers of His day: *“Woe to you lawyers also! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers”* (Lk 11:46). The religious lawyers of Judaism were binding legal requirements of obedience on the people that were hard to bear, which burdens they themselves could not bear.

There will always be those who will bind where God has not bound. For example, some bind the teaching that one must be present at a certain number of assemblies of the saints in order to be considered “faithful.” Others bind certain ceremonial procedures of assembly by which the Lord’s Supper is to be served. We have always been fascinated with the inconsistency by which some, in their ignorance of the Scriptures, have bound that the bread must be served before the fruit of the vine in the Lord’s Supper. They have never considered the historical fact of Luke’s record of the event that **Jesus first served the cup**, then the bread, **and then the cup again** (Lk 22:17-20). The list could go on as legalistic lawyers make it their duty to bind burdens where God has not bound.

But there are other ways one can bind burdens on others that are difficult to bear. It can be that when one does not assume his responsibility of being a responsible disciple, he too loads a burden on other brothers that is hard for them to bear. Lazy disciples, for example, are always a burden to someone else.

Those who will not assume their re-

sponsibility to bear the burdens of discipleship cannot be disciples. In fact, the Holy Spirit said the following in reference to those who would not work at a job in order to support themselves financially:

*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly and not after the tradition that he received from us*** (2 Th 3:6).

The tradition that Paul and his fellow traveling evangelists left with the Thessalonian disciples was that he and those with him *“worked with labor and hardship night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you”* (2 Th 3:8). In the historical context of Paul’s statements, there were some who had quit their jobs, and thus, had become a financial burden to the church. If one becomes a financial burden to the body, then he is to be put out of the body. He is to be disfellowshipped because he is not assuming his responsibility to work with his own hands to support himself.

As a disciple of Jesus, we have assumed burdens that come with our new relationship with God. Becoming a new creature is not like joining a social club wherein one simply shows up on Sunday morning to keep up his membership. Burden bearing means work, and work means assuming responsibilities. It means that we must engage in the ministry of the saints. This was the ministry for which Stephanas and his family were

known, for they had “*dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints*” (1 Co 16:15). The following are general areas of responsibility that one must assume personally as a disciple, as well as general areas of ministry to others:

A. Responsibility of faithfulness.

Faithfulness means that one assumes the responsibility to act on the opportunities that have been set before us as disciples. It means taking ownership of our discipleship. If taking ownership costs us something, then this is the cost of discipleship we must pay. For example, if one has the opportunity to buy a Bible by which he would be further taught in the word of God, then he must personally buy the Bible. He must not expect someone else to take ownership (buy) to buy a Bible for us, for it is our personal responsibility to take advantage of opportunities that are set before us. This is being faithful to Jesus as His disciples. Someone who owns a cellphone, but clamors to others to give him a Bible, is not taking ownership for his spiritual growth and discipleship.

It was not coincidental that Jesus presented three parables at the end of His ministry concerning faithfulness in taking ownership of our discipleship. Each parable explains a different aspect of the responsibilities that we must bear if we would be saints prepared for eternal dwelling.

1. Parable of the virgins (Mt 25:1-13): Jesus explained the nature of two

groups of people in reference to their preparation for the coming bridegroom. Five virgins were defined as foolish because of their lack of acquiring that which would guarantee their preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. Their lack of preparation resulted in their being left. They were foolish simply because they did not assume their responsibility to provide for themselves that which would allow them to be prepared.

The wise virgins assumed their responsibility to be prepared. They had bought for themselves extra oil for their lamps, and thus, did not expect someone else to give them the oil, as did the foolish virgins. They were wise in that they foresaw a delay of the bridegroom, and thus took ownership of being prepared by acquiring extra oil.

Jesus concluded the parable by saying, “*Therefore, watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour*” of the coming of the bridegroom (Mt 25:13). New creatures have the responsibility to be prepared at all times for either their end in this life, or the end of all things. And being prepared means that we must assume the responsibility of preparing ourselves. We must not think that we can borrow from others in order to be spiritually prepared for Jesus.

2. Parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30): In view of the outer darkness that is coming, Jesus metaphorically illustrated His coming as a master who delivered into the hands of his bondservants a number of talents. Five talents were given to one bondservant, two to another, and only one to the last. The assumption was that

each bondservant would be faithful by assuming his responsibility to use the talents to the advantage of the master. Unfortunately, only two bondservants were faithful in their responsibilities. The one-talent bondservant simply buried his responsibility, while giving the excuse that he was afraid of the master. The master judged this individual with harsh words: *"You wicked and lazy bondservant ..."* (Mt 25:26). If one is not responsible in using those opportunities given to him, then he is wicked and lazy.

3. Parable of sheep and goats (Mt 25:31-46). This is the parable of assuming the responsibilities that come with discipleship. When presented with the opportunities to serve, those on the right hand were faithful in their service. The Son of Man then said to them, *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 25:34).

However, those on the left hand were not responsible disciples in their service of others. To these it was said, *"Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Mt 25:41). These had refused to accept the burden of service, and thus, they were not worthy of any reward. When speaking of discipleship in the kingdom, reward always presupposes service.

When one becomes a new creature in Christ, he must take ownership of his responsibilities as a new creature. For example, Jesus said, *"But I say to you, that every idle word that men will speak,*

they will give account for it in the day of judgment" (Mt 12:36). As a new creature in Christ, we are responsible even for every foolish word that might come from our mouths.

When our brother is falling under the load of a difficult burden in his life, it is the responsibility of other brethren to faithfully aid in bearing his burden. Paul exhorted, *"Bear one another's burdens ..."* (Gl 6:2). Each disciple has the responsibility of bearing the burdens of those who have fallen under their burdens (See Gl 6:1). When Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he listed one fruit to be "faithfulness." This use of the word "faithfulness" was not in reference to faithfulness to God, but faithfulness to one another as members of the body. We must always be there for our fellow brother in Christ. Paul wrote, *"Let each one not look out merely for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Ph 2:4). This is Christian faithfulness. Christians can never live isolated lives in reference to the brotherhood of believers. There is simply no such thing as a hermit Christian.

Faithfulness means that one is steadfast, or consistent as a disciple throughout his life. One's faithful consistency in behavior allows him to be a rock of steadfastness for others. It is as John revealed: *"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life"* (Rv 2:10). We must *"not become weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not give up"* (Gl 6:9). New creatures must always keep in mind what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:58:

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.

New creatures are new in behavior because they have obeyed the gospel (Gl 3:26-29). They are “in Christ,” and thus their labors are not in vain in reference to the reward that is coming for the faithful. If we keep our minds focused on the reward that results from faithfulness to God, we will not become weary in doing good. We are thus steadfast in the Lord because our labors are profitable for eternal purposes. When enduring the trials of this world, every new creature must remember the encouraging words of James:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him (Js 1:12).

B. Responsibility of growth:

The book of Hebrews was written to those who had been disciples for a number of years. It was not written to novice Christians. The problem the Hebrew writer approached was that the Jewish Christians to whom the letter was addressed were being intimidated by their hostile Jewish environment in the latter years of national Israel. The hostility of Jewish zealots against Rome eventually generated the anger of Rome. God used this anger to unleash His proxy judgment against national Israel which eventually

led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This termination of national Israel was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets who said that Israel would come to a close. But during the few years leading up to the end of national Israel, there was a great deal of intimidation by the zealot Jews who sought to gain independence from Rome.

In the middle of all the political turmoil of the day, some Jewish Christians were on the verge of relinquishing to the social pressure of the nationalistic Jews. They were on their way back to Judaism from which they had been previously set free through their obedience to the gospel (See Gl 5:1). The fact that they were even considering a return to the Sinai law and sacrifices was because **they had not grown in the knowledge of the fullness of Christ**. It was in this context that the Hebrew writer wrote the stern rebuke of Hebrews 5:12:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. And you have come to need milk and not solid food.

This is one statement that should never have to be written to those who have been Christians for some time. The problem of apostasy with these Jewish Christians was that they failed to keep studying the Scriptures in order to grow to be teachers. This may shed some light on what the Jewish Peter said to some of his fellow Jews about three years before the fall of Jerusalem: “*But grow in grace*

and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 3:18).

We think that both Hebrews and 2 Peter were written to Jewish Christians immediately before the end of national Israel in A.D. 70. Some Jewish Christians had already succumbed to the nationalistic movement of Judaism as dogs returning to their own vomit (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). Both the Hebrew writer and Peter sought to stop the flow of Jewish Christians back to Judaism. Some Jewish Christians had succumbed to the intimidation of the zealot Jews, and were thus giving up their total faith in Jesus.

The embarrassing rebuke of the Hebrew writer assumes that **there must be growth in knowledge of the word of God**. There must be growth to the point that there is absolutely no other option but Jesus Christ. If there is no growth, then one is in the process of backsliding from Jesus into his former religiosity. And herein is the problem with many who vainly cry out, “Lord, Lord” and pretend to be dedicated to Jesus. **They seek to substitute a vigorous assembly that is patterned after the religions around them for a knowledge of what Jesus desires**. We must not be deceived into thinking that colorful assemblies are a substitute for a knowledge of Jesus. Some religious groups have given up a knowledge of the word of God, and thus, seek to validate their faith by a liturgical concert on Sunday morning that is often in competition with the group down the street. The group that has the best band wins out. But narcissistic assemblies can never produce the acceptable faith that

is to be based on the word of Christ (Rm 10:17).

If there is no growth in the word of God, then there is a slow death. The process of death is so slow that few wake up to the fact that they have created a religion that takes the place of a faith that is based on a knowledge of the word of God (See Hs 4:6). They replaced a word-based faith with a religiosity that is validated by the extreme emotional outpouring of the adherents. This was the case with the Jewish opposition to Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Jesus ministered among religious Jews who had rejected the commandment of God in order that they might keep their traditional religious behavior (Mk 7:9). This religion was so foreign to what God administered to Israel through the Sinai law, that Paul, who was previously zealous in the religion, later, after his conversion, referred to the religion as the “Jews’ religion,” or Judaism (Gl 1:13). Would Paul write of some religions today as the “African’s religion,” or the “Philippine’s religion,” etc.?

Our lack of spiritual growth is often manifested in the childish ways by which we conduct ourselves with our brothers in Christ. At least this was the problem with some of the disciples in Corinth. Paul indirectly rebuked them with the statement, “*When I was a child I spoke as a child. I understood as a child. I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things*” (1 Co 13:11). When one behaves as a fifty-year old child among his brethren, then he is a child who has not put

away childish ways. When we conduct our worship to God in a way that is pleasing to our children, then we have gone backward, not forward. Those who are mature in Christ do not worship as children.

As a baby yearns for milk, so should new creatures yearn for the word of God in order that they may spiritually grow. “*As newborn babes,*” Peter exhorted, “*desire the sincere milk of the word so that you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pt 2:2). Notice that Peter used a simile in reference to our yearning. One is not to be a child, but **as a child** who yearns for milk. Those who are adults, but are as children, are such because they have not yearned for the word of God. The simile is used in reference to the yearning of the disciple who seeks to grow. One’s maturity in Christ is revealed by his yearning for the word of God. If there is no yearning, then there is no spiritual growth in the word of God.

When one who has been in the faith for years is tempted to fall back into the ways of the world, or to a previous false religion out of which he came, then he has not taken ownership of his responsibility to grow in the knowledge of the word of God. If one is fearful of teaching others what he knows about the Bible, then he has not accepted his responsibility to study his Bible in order to have the confidence to teach. There is no excuse for not growing in the faith. If one does not spiritually grow, then he has not taken ownership of his faith. If one does not study his Bible, then he is a new creature in the process of becoming old.

C. Responsibility of self-control:

Taking responsibility of our faith involves self-control over our attitudes and behavior. Self-control is to be exercised over the totality of our behavior, both in the physical realm, as well in the emotional. Paul continued to exercise self-control over the desires of the flesh: “*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection ...*” (1 Co 9:27).

James focused on the most difficult part of our behavior that we must bring under control. “*For every kind of beasts and birds ... is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no one can tame the tongue*” (Jas 3:7,8). He wrote, “*It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison*” (Jas 3:8). It is an unruly evil that must be brought under control, for “*every idle word that men will speak, they will give account for it in the day of judgment*” (Mt 12:36).

In reference to self-control, Jesus went deeper into the heart of man. He said, “*... whoever is angry with his brother will be in danger of the judgment*” (Mt 5:22). And, “*whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Mt 5:28). It may be easy to exercise self-control over one’s behavior. But it is most difficult to dig deep into our hearts and discipline our thoughts and intents. Nevertheless, it is the challenge of the new creature to grow in self-control of his thoughts. And according to Hebrews 4:12, there is only one way this task can be accomplished in reference to the will of God:

For the word of God is living and pow-

erful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart.

If one does not know the will of God concerning how we must think in his heart, then certainly he cannot control himself according to spiritual matters. Those who do not know the word of God often use the thinking of the world as the standard by which they judge their attitudes and actions. For new creatures in Christ, however, the world is not the standard of Christian thinking and behavior. The Christian's standard is the word of God, for it is only the word of God by which Christians seek to guide their innermost feelings and intentions.

D. Responsibility of service:

When one becomes a new creature in Christ, he has joined himself to a group of slaves who are daily looking for someone to serve. The community of new creatures is defined by those who have dedicated themselves to serve the needs of one another (See 1 Co 16:15,16). The behavior of this community was explained by Jesus: *"But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant"* (Mt 20:26).

In order that there be no misunderstanding among His disciples, Jesus went beyond the use of the word "servant," to the slaves working in the field. *"And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your bondservant"* (Mt 20:27).

The Greek word for "bondservant" is *doulos*. This is the word for slave. The community of God, therefore, is a community of slaves. This community is thus defined as a culture of service, not superiority; humility, not haughtiness.

E. Responsibility of brotherhood:

When Peter said to love the brotherhood, he was taking our love to a vast worldwide body of people (1 Pt 2:17). We might view our responsibility to love and serve into two realms of application:

1. Community of priests to the world: As Israel of old, the church is a community of priests (1 Pt 2:9). Israel had the responsibility as a nation of priests to exercise their duties as priests to the rest of the world that would pass through Palestine.

So also must the church of priests who are new creatures in Christ. We are not priests simply to ourselves, but to the world around us. When the world needs comfort, we must be there for those who need comfort. When the world needs prayer, we must be there as mediators to God on their behalf. When those of the world fall into unfortunate circumstances, we are to be priests of God ministering to their needs (Gl 6:10). This is the nature of the brotherhood with whom every new creature in Christ has a priestly part. Someone wisely wrote, "The best exercise for the heart is to reach down and pick somebody up." So we will love our neighbor as ourselves as we look for opportunities to carry out our priestly

duties (Mt 19:19).

2. Community of priests to themselves: Every saint of God is in service as a priest to other saints. When God sequestered the attention of Cain concerning the whereabouts of Abel, his brother, Cain responded to God, “*Am I my bother’s keeper?*” (Gn 4:9). And the answer is Yes!

As Cain was to be the keeper of his physical brother, every brother in Christ is the keeper of his spiritual brother. In the world of sin around us, it is simply unnatural for the strong to protect the weak. Animals devour the weak. Politicians overcome the weak. Society as a whole often ignores the weak. But in the community of God, **it is natural to pro-**

tect the weak. Brethren are to “*receive him who is weak in the faith ...*” (Rm 14:1). “*We then who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak ...*” (Rm 15:1).

Our concern for one another is as someone wrote, “We are not put on this earth to see through one another, but to see one another through.” So it is true as another said, “A man is never so tall as when he stoops to help another.” New creatures in Christ must start their journey on how they can care for others as they were cared for as novice Christians. It is the responsibility of every disciple to become strong in the faith in order to be able to care for the weak.

Chapter 9

NEW RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Hebrew writer spoke of the “*new and living way that He [Jesus] has consecrated*” for us (Hb 10:20). This is the “way of righteousness” into which one is born as a new creature in Christ (2 Pt 2:21). It is a new and living way because of the blessing of the righteousness of God, as well as our walk in His righteousness.

In Ephesians 6:14 Paul exhorted Christians to “*put on the breastplate of righteousness.*” This exhortation is in the context of his statement to “*take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day ...*” (Ep 6:13). In the context of the verb tense, “having done,” Paul’s exhortation is that we stand on what has already been

done for us. The Ephesians had girded themselves with the truth, for they obeyed the truth of the gospel. They had shod their feet with the gospel of peace. And in this context, they had put on the breastplate of righteousness. Because these things had already been done in their lives at the time they came into Christ, they were to stand on this firm foundation.

According to Greek dictionaries, the word “righteousness” means integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness; correct thinking, feeling and behavior. All these attributes refer to something for which those who possess them are responsible to maintain, and in which to spiritually grow. Paul reflected on righteousness as our defense when he made the statement,

*“But in all things **approving ourselves as servants of God ... in the armor of righteousness ...**”* (2 Co 6:4,7). In the context of this statement, it seems that Paul set forth his behavior as proof of his servanthood before God. His defense was his obedience.

The word “righteousness” refers to doing that which is right in the sight of God. It is this righteousness that new creatures do. **But the righteousness of God is something that God does for us when we are born again as new creatures in Christ.** This is the “imputed” righteousness whereupon God makes us new creatures through the cleansing blood of Jesus. It is imperative that we make a distinction between the righteousness we do, and the righteousness that God gives as a blessing in reference to our obedience of the gospel. The context in which the word “righteousness” is used will define which righteousness is under discussion.

The unbeliever must seek the righteousness of God that comes through obedience of the gospel. The believer must take ownership of the righteousness by which he is approved to be a servant of God. If one is an unbeliever, he must seek the righteousness of God. If he is a believer, he must live righteously before God.

A. Seek the righteousness of God:

Romans 10 is Paul’s conclusion to his argument about the futility of unbelieving Israel to obtain the righteousness of God. *“For they [Israel] being igno-*

rant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rm 10:3). Israel sought the righteousness of God through their own means of law-keeping. And in doing so, they established their own righteousness, that is, their own system of law by which they sought to be justified before God. But they were mistaken in their efforts.

“For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rm 10:4). Paul added, *“For with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation”* (Rm 10:10). The righteousness of God is not acquired through meritorious works of law, but through faith. Since it is *“the righteousness that is of faith,”* then it is not attained by meritorious obedience (Rm 9:30). Paul reminded his readers, *“But Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law”* (Rm 9:31). Israel did not attain unto the righteousness of God, *“because they did not seek it by faith, but as if it were by works”* (Rm 9:32).

The righteousness of God is in being right before God. But since all have sinned and fallen short of perfect law-keeping, then no one can attain unto the righteousness of God through meritorious works of law. In reference to law-keeping, *“There is none righteous, no, not one”* (Rm 3:10). It is for this reason that we seek the righteousness of God through our trust (faith) in God to provide His grace through our Lord Jesus

Christ. His righteousness is not demanded through our keeping of law, but graciously given as a result of our obedient response to the sacrificial offering of His Son.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God that is by the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe ...” (Rm 3:21,22).

Therefore, all new creatures who have been baptized into Christ are “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rm 3:24). All those who would seek the righteousness of God in Christ, must do that which brings one into Christ (See Gl 3:26-29).

We thus seek to be “*found in Him,*” Paul wrote, “*not having my own righteousness that is from law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is from God by faith*” (Ph 3:9). We thus seek His righteousness, but we seek it on His terms (Mt 6:33). In our obedience to His terms we fulfill the meaning of Jesus’ statement in the beatitudes: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled*” (Mt 5:6).

B. Workers of righteousness:

We seek the righteousness of God in order to become new creatures by His grace. But once we come into Christ, we are responsible to be workers of righteousness, or doing that which is right

before God. This is the devoted life about which Peter commended Cornelius: “*But in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*” (At 10:35). The Hebrew writer spoke of those heroes of faith, “*who through faith conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness ...*” (Hb 11:33). So Paul exhorted Timothy, “*But you, O man of God, ... follow after righteousness ...*” (1 Tm 6:11). “*Pursue righteousness ...*” (2 Tm 2:22).

When one works righteousness, he is identified as one who has been born of God. “*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been born from Him*” (1 Jn 2:29). There is, therefore, no “faith only” business among the new creatures in Christ (See Js 2:14-26). The “practice of righteousness” is not meritorious, but living in obedience to the One who made them righteous through the blood of Jesus. For this reason, John cautioned, “*Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous*” (1 Jn 3:7).

Doing that which is right in the sight of God is the signal of discipleship according to John’s definition. “*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not from God, nor the one who does not love his brother*” (1 Jn 3:10). Practicing righteousness is a life-style. It is walking in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

In our behavior of doing that which is right, Jesus cautioned His disciples about their behavior. The religious leaders during His ministry wrongly sought to be righteous according to law. But

Jesus said that the righteousness of His disciples must go beyond law-keeping. Since they were to be motivated by love (Jn 13:34,35), then their righteousness must not be limited to law. Jesus expressed this truth in the following statement:

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:20).

Unless our love takes us beyond the limits of law, we are not practicing the righteousness of the God of love. God did not “so love the world” through law (See Jn 3:16). His love for us was through grace, not law. In the same manner, if we would practice the righteousness that goes beyond law, then our righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

C. Preachers of righteousness:

To define the righteousness that we preach, the Hebrew writer stated in the context of his rebuke that his readers should be teachers of the word, “*For everyone who partakes of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe*” (Hb 5:13). When one is skilled in the righteousness of God, then he is knowledgeable of His Bible. Paul explained, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ... for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Tm 3:16). One is instructed in righteousness when he studies to show himself ap-

proved before God (2 Tm 2:15). Since the word of God is that which instructs one in righteousness, then those who do not know the word of God cannot attain unto the practice of righteousness.

It is the word of righteousness that Noah preached to his generation. Noah was a “*preacher of righteousness*” (2 Pt 2:5). And for this reason, he “*became heir of the righteousness that is according to faith*” (Hb 11:7). Noah became the heir of righteousness because he preached the will of God to the people. In doing the same, the disciples of Jesus can increase the fruit of their righteousness. “*Now He who provides seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the fruit of your righteousness*” (2 Co 9:10).

Bringing forth fruit from our righteousness involves our proclamation of the righteousness of God to the world. This point is clearly revealed in Paul’s explanation of how the Gentiles attained unto the righteousness of God through the preaching of the gospel. He begins with a series of questions:

How then will they [Gentiles] call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? (Rm 10:14).

These questions must stimulate within us a Noah’s faith that should move us to preach the righteousness of God. Paul concluded his series of questions with another question: “*And how will they*

preach unless they are sent?” (Rm 10:15). The Hebrew writer commended Noah for being a preacher of righteousness, and thus an heir of the righteousness of God. Paul blessed the feet that would take every new creature into all the world with the word of righteousness: *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things”* (Rm 10:15).

It is in this context of preaching the word of righteousness that Paul made the statement, *“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”* (Rm 10:17). When we preach the righteousness of God (grace and faith), faith springs forth in the hearts of those who hear. And without this faith, the unbeliever is not motivated to respond with obedience to the good news. It is for this reason that we must do today what the early disciples did in the first century: *“Their sound went into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world”* (Rm 10:18).

D. Persecuted for righteousness:

In the beatitudes, Jesus explained the journey of the transformed life from the time of mourning over one’s sin to the time when one lives righteously before God (Mt 5:1-12). He concluded that the world would not appreciate the one who gives up the ways of the world. One’s righteous living will intimidate and embarrass those of the world.

Jesus’ final words of the beatitudes were words of encouragement for those who dedicated themselves to live the life

of the righteous new creature: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Mt 5:10). The righteousness of the new creature shames those who walk in the world. And for this reason, Paul encouraged Timothy, *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tm 3:12). If one would choose to live the life of righteousness, then he will suffer persecution (1 Pt 4:16).

Those who persecuted Paul and Barnabas were labelled by Paul to be enemies of all righteousness. The enemies were such because they were *“full of all deceit and all fraud,”* and thus, they were the *“enemy of all righteousness”* (At 13:10).

Because of persecution from the enemies of righteousness, some early Christians turned back to the pollutions of the unrighteous. They again entangled themselves in the ways of the world. Peter wrote of such backsliders: *“For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them”* (2 Pt 2:21). The way of righteousness in a world of deceit and fraud is a way of persecution.

If the new creature endures the persecution, he will receive the crown of life (Rv 2:10). Those who are persecuted for righteousness sake must always remember the promise of the Holy Spirit:

Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he will receive

the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him (Js 1:12).

E. Judged by righteousness:

God has appointed a time when He will judge the world through Jesus. We must all stand before Him in order to give account of our deeds (2 Co 5:10). God ***“will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained”*** (At 17:31). Those who are unrighteous before God should be in fear of this coming judgment. At least Felix believed enough in the prophets that Paul’s speech before him stirred his conscience. *“Now as he [Paul] **reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to***

come, Felix became frightened ...” (At 24:25).

Those who have given themselves to trust in the grace of God need not be terrified of the coming judgment. They know, *“that as sin has reigned in death, even so **grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**”* (Rm 5:21). The righteous must never forget what Paul, in the final hours of his life, never forgot:

*Finally, there is laid up for me **a crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me at that day, and not only to me, **but also to all those who have loved His appearing** (2 Tm 4:8).*