

Seven
Deadly
Sins

UPDATED AND EXPANDED

Dr. Stanford E. Murrell

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“These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: ¹⁷ A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

—PROVERBS 6:16–19

1

Soul, Be Not Proud

“There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. . . . There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-conceit; and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility.”¹

AT THE END of the sixth century Gregory the Great divided all sins under seven heads. He said that every sin a man commits can be classified by seven words. He named the sins: pride, anger, envy, impurity, gluttony, slothfulness, and avarice. They have been called down through the centuries “the Seven Deadly Sins.” The Bible too has a list of “Deadly Sins,” for sin is something God hates. Matthew Henry writes that there are “those things which are in a special manner odious to God, all which are generally to be found in men of Belial. God hates every sin. But there are some sins which he does in a special manner hate; and all those here mentioned are such as are injurious to our neighbor. Those things which God hates we must hate in ourselves.”² These sins include pride, falsehood and fraud, cruelty and murder, subtlety in the contrivance of evil, vigor and diligence in the

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 103.

² Matthew Henry, *Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 743.

pursuit of iniquity, a false testimony, and the sowing of discord among others. The Church of Christ is blessed when these deadly sins are recognized and vigorously dealt with in self and in others. The Church of Jesus Christ suffers when these deadly sins are manifested. Unfortunately, many of these seven sins are manifested in the Church because they are socially acceptable and yet, like cancer cells undetected, they spread to produce sudden death.

While spiritual death stalks the saints, many people are concerned with other things which are not socially acceptable such as smoking, cutting down trees, and polluting the air. Meanwhile, the sins of the mind and the tongue which God hates so much go almost unchallenged, and so Satan finds a way to gain an advantage over the saints.

The Church of Christ, now into the twenty-first century, must once more determine to challenge those expressions of transgressions which the Lord Himself finds so offensive. This will not be easy to do because when certain things are so common in self and in others we do not like to talk about them. So we change our conversation and continue to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit.

By changing our attention, the forces of evil are hidden. To make matters worse, certain philosophical systems such as Communism, atheism, and secular humanism contend that sin does not even exist. Even the Christian Science religion teaches that all sin is an illusion of the mind. Other religions put a mild label on sin calling it error, negative confession, an errant fault, or low self-esteem.

After a minister had spoken strongly against sin one morning, a member of his congregation came to visit him and said, "Pastor, we do not want you to talk so plainly about sin

because if our young people hear you mention it, they will more easily become sinners. Call it a mistake if you will, but do not speak so plainly about sin.”

The minister went to a room and brought back a bottle of strychnine marked “POISON”. He held the bottle up and said, “I see what you want me to do. You want me to change the label to something such as ‘PEPPERMINT CANDY.’ Can’t you see the danger? The milder you make the label, the more deadly the poison.”

The Bible teaches that every person is born with a deadly poison in the soul that will ultimately lead it to physical and eternal death if an antidote is not found. The antidote for sin is the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Christ died to take away the power and the effect of sin.

The first sin that God declares to be an abomination is that of *pride*. Pride may take various forms, but they all emanate from the haughty human heart. Some people take excessive pride in their looks. God has blessed some men and women with unusual beauty and attractiveness. The vanity of actors and actresses is legendary. Athletes are susceptible to this sin.

Perhaps the most blatant expressions of physical pride is manifested by the body builders who pose and strut about before others barely clothed while looking for the eye of the camera and the adulation of others.

Some people take pride in their race. Adolph Hitler was not the first person to promote racial superiority, nor will he be the last. Part of the conflict in Bosnia during the 1990s can be traced to a desire for so-called ethnic cleansing. The examples are numerous.

Other people take pride in their business or in their social life. There are namedroppers who thrive on being close to

celebrities. It is pride. So pride may be spiritual, intellectual, material or social.

The most repugnant form of pride to God is spiritual pride. It is marked out for the Lord's special judgment. Spiritual pride is manifested by self-satisfaction. It is the Pharisee of old standing to pray, "God I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Spiritual pride is smug, self-satisfied and full of conceit. James 4:6 says, "God resiseth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."

The Apostle Paul had to deal severely with the Jews of his day because of their spiritual pride. They thought that because they had Moses and the Law and the prophets that they could kill Christ as a false Messiah without being blamed. They killed Christ because they were too busy boasting about being God's Chosen People. They would not listen when warned that God looks on the heart and not on the outward appearance to see if the spirit of the Scriptures is being kept and not merely the Letter of the Law. Puffed up with religious pride, the Jews had forgotten the spirit of the Law. That danger faces the Church again today.

There is a type of religion that is reserved only for the pretty people. The uneducated, the unclean, the unkempt men and women, boys and girls are clearly not welcomed by most. One of the reasons why Mother Teresa was so beloved by millions in the impoverished third world countries is because she gave her life to helping the poor.

Mother Teresa tells the story of a dream she had. She went to heaven and met St. Peter at the Gate. St. Peter stopped Mother Teresa from coming in and said to her, "Teresa, there are not enough people from the slums here in heaven. You must go back to earth and minister to them."

Mother Teresa went back to the poorest of the poor. In the filthy streets of Calcutta, India she ministered. One day, she found a beggar lying in the streets. He was dirty and ugly. Mother Teresa had to make a decision, and she made it. In the name of Jesus she picked up that poor beggar and took him to a hospital. The doctors did not want anything to do with the man. “He is dying,” they said. “We do not want him taking up any space.”

“He must die with dignity,” responded Mother Teresa adamantly.

“Go away,” cried the doctors. “Take him back into the streets.”

But Mother Teresa would not go away, and she would not go back into the streets with the man. She too could be stubborn. And the world was made better. She often said that if she had not picked up that first dying beggar, she would never had stooped to help the thousands of others who need the touch of God through her fingers. Her dying words were, “Jesus, I love you.” Christ made a difference in her life and she made a difference in her religion.

Another form of pride is intellectual pride. The Bible warns that such pride is a delusion. 1 Corinthians 8:1–2 says that, “Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.”

Intellectual pride can be the great enemy of the gospel of Christ. Ministers are scorned. The Word of God is rejected and the gospel is made fun of. Such pride makes a person unteachable and a possessor of self-confidence rather than God confidence. Proverbs 3:5 reminds men to, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

In considering the sin of intellectual pride, something should also be said about taking pride in ignorance. There are those who seem to believe that any serious student of the Scripture is somehow less spiritual than those who make no effort to discover the things of God. The Bible says very plainly that all Christians are to study to show themselves approved of God. The Lord has set His highest seal of approval upon those who give themselves to the Word.

The philosopher Plato once entertained some friends in a room where there was a richly ornamented couch. One of his friends came in, very dirty as usual, and getting on the couch and trampling on it said, "I trample upon the pride of Plato."

Plato mildly answer, "But with greater pride, my friend." There may be greater pride in those who promote ignorance than in those who are serious about submitting themselves to the rigors of biblical study.

Another manifestation of pride is the *pride of material things*. The Bible says that every gift we have is a blessing of God. Deuteronomy 8:18, "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." Material pride tends to make a person covetous. The intense longing for money and the things that money can buy can be just as addictive and more habit forming than the desire for drink or drugs. The Bible warns in 1 Timothy 6:9 that, "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."

There are a multitude of schemes telling people how to get something for nothing, or a lot for just a little investment of time and money. These are the very same principles and philosophical concepts that led to the great Stock Market crash on Wall Street in 1929. Christian people need to guard their hearts against the

pride of possessions and remember that the “Roaring Twenties” led to the Great Depression of the 1930s. It is also true, that most people who pursue money ultimately drift away from the Church.

Then there is social pride. This type of pride is expressed in a class status, racial caste, or community arrogance. Adolph Hitler taught that the German people were a superior race. Many white, male, Protestants here in America believe that they are the superior race. Slurs are cast against Jews, Poles, and other ethnic groups. It was not too many years ago that blacks and Indians were denied service in restaurants because of the color of their skin. Social pride is an abomination before the Lord when it is used to hold others in contempt. The Bible tells us that we can do something about pride.

First, we can confess pride as sin.

Second, we can humble ourselves in the sight of God. We humble ourselves in part by going to the Cross of Christ and asking the Lord to be merciful to us the sinner.

Third, we can determine to be more like our Lord who went to Calvary for us. The Bible says in Philippians 2:5–8,

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made of Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a Servant and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.”

For the Creator to become like His creation is a marvelous manifestation of humility. The Lord Jesus was not a proud person.

Born in a stable, reared in obscurity, willing to wash the feet of others, Christ is the Perfect Example. No one will ever go to heaven as a proud person. No will ever knock at the portals of heaven and shout with arrogance, “Open up. I belong here.”

God has no use for the pride of man but He will look with mercy and favor upon the humble. Pride is a deadly sin. May the Lord deliver us from the death it will bring. Someone has said that no one is closer to Satan than when the heart is filled with pride for it was Satan’s pride that first introduced sin into the universe (Isa. 14). May the Lord cause us to think on these things and to be different as we say to ourselves, “Soul, be not proud.”

The Curse of Lying Lips

AS THE CONSCIENTIOUS mother made her way to the school, she was concerned. The call had come for a parent teacher's conference. Her child had not been telling the truth about several matters. Things were becoming very serious. When the mother was told the situation she suddenly burst into tears saying, "My own mother was a habitual liar and now my child is one too."

The French essayist Montaigne wrote, "Lying is a hateful and accursed vice. We have no other tie upon one another, but our word. If we did but discover the horror and consequence of lying, we should pursue it with fire, and sword, and more justly than other crimes."³

The temptation to lie comes to the best of men. Several years ago a well-known television minister got into a scuffle with a male host on a major airline prior to departure. There was pushing and shoving and people were shocked at who was involved. Because of the high profile of the pastor, the story broke into the newspapers. The minister was asked to comment and he said, "I have done nothing wrong. I have never broken one of the Ten Commandments." Several weeks later he admitted to an assault charge. He was fined and ordered to engage in community service. While an outburst of anger is understandable, there was no real need to lie to the newspaper reporters about the incident other than to protect a public image of being sweet and always kind.

³ John Scott and John Taylor, *The London Magazine*, vol. IX (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1827), 573.

While some people lie to protect themselves, others, such as Joseph Fletcher, justify lying as something that is moral. Mr. Fletcher wrote a book dealing with situational ethics. He argued that there are times in life when lying is absolutely justified. He pointed to the Old Testament story of Rahab who lied to protect the two spies of Israel from the Canaanites.

Many people would agree with Mr. Fletcher's position such as Colonel Oliver North who, years ago during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, tried to make lying a virtue during the Iran-Contra hearings in Washington D.C. When a handsome and very brave Marine officer goes on national television and boldly declares to the leaders of the land, "I will trade lies for lives," the patriotic emotion is difficult to control. Lying does seem to be justified. And yet God has written in His Word that lying lips are an abomination in His sight. The Bible prohibits situational ethics from controlling behavior. The Bible says that God *is* truth. He cannot lie, and it is His will that His children reflect this aspect of His honor.

Lying is more of a characteristic of the Devil. Jesus said in John 8:44 that the Devil "is a liar and the father of it." Satan first deceived Eve by lying to her when he said that she would not die if the forbidden fruit were eaten. In fact, Satan said that Eve would be *more* like God. It was all a lie. So the Christian does not want to have the same characteristics as Satan. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:25, "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor."

When a person becomes a Christian he becomes a new creature in Christ. Old sinful habits and old sinful customs need to be put away which includes so-called "white lies." The white lie is illustrated by the infamous phone call that is unwanted. A

businessman may have the secretary tell the caller he is not in. Or a husband may have the wife say he is not home when he is.

Then there are the social lies. People do not know how to decline an invitation gracefully, for example, and so the impression is given that perhaps they will come. But they never arrive. They never intended to.

Another form of lying, prevalent in our society, is found in the business world in the form of false advertising. False advertising lures people into investing in a product that does not meet expectations. This too is an abomination before the Lord.

There is another facet of lying found in our society and that is the lie that comes from not honoring verbal commitments. It is easy to practice this lie because there is the conveyance of having “forgotten.” Or the excuse is made, “I will get to that soon.” But there is an eternal delay. Or the excuse is given of being “too busy” and “overworked” which may in itself be true. Nevertheless, being active does not negate the responsibility to honor a commitment that was made and never fulfilled within a reasonable amount of time. As verbal commitments are made and not honored so written contracts are broken. This too is a form of lying. The Bible says that the last days shall be perilous times. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers” (2 Tim. 3:2–3).

It is possible for individuals and organizations, including religious ones, to sell a large portion of their integrity for just a few dollars when a contract is signed and then is unilaterally not honored. At the very least, restitution should be made when the Holy Spirit convicts of this transgression. It is a sign of salvation to honor others and do right by them. When Zacchaeus became a Christian, the very first thing he did was to promise to make

restitution to those he had cheated. Despite the passage of time, Zacchaeus knew that there were individuals who should be compensated in some way. He would find them and do right by them.

The example of Zacchaeus is worthy of emulation and for good reason. Revelation 21:8 plainly warns that, “All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” And Revelation 21:27 teaches that there shall in no wise enter into the Holy City “anything that maketh a lie.” Revelation 22:15 says that outside the sphere of heaven are those who “loveth and maketh a lie.” If a person will lie to another individual, they will also lie to God.

In Acts 5 the story is told of a certain man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They had a piece of property that they sold in order to give money to the Church. This couple was under no compulsion to sell. There was no one asking for money. But they sold their land and brought the revenue to the apostles with the desired results. Many of the saints were impressed, for the sell and the gift represented a great personal sacrifice. Ananias and Sapphira were the talk of the Church. People stood back and looked on them with special awe for great wealth can be very impressive.

However, not everyone was pleased with what Ananias and Sapphira had done. Peter was disturbed. He discerned in his spirit that something was fundamentally wrong. Ananias and Sapphira were not being honest. They were misrepresenting the truth. Instead of giving all the proceeds to the Church as their act suggested, the couple had kept back a portion for themselves. Their sacrifice was not as real as they wanted others to believe. Their half-truth had become a whole lie in the sight of God. William Penn once cautioned, “When thou art obliged to speak,

be sure to speak the truth; for equivocation is halfway to lying, and lying is the whole way to hell.” The poet Tennyson said, “A lie that is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies.”

Peter the apostle would have agreed. Speaking to Ananias, the apostle exposed the corruption of his heart in the public assembly, for judgment must first begin in the House of God. Some sins are so serious that they must be dealt with in the open. The early Church did not try to pretend that problems did not exist. Rather, the Church dealt with private sins privately and public sins publicly. They did not try to pretend that nothing was wrong.

Once, a court painter omitted the disfiguring warts on the face of Oliver Cromwell, the man who had become the Lord Protector of England following the execution of King Charles I. When Cromwell saw the portrait he said, “Take it away, and paint me warts and all.” That is what the Word of God does. The Bible presents people warts and all. There was sin in the early Church. There was the sin of lying by telling a half-truth to the congregation. This half-truth became a whole lie to God the Holy Spirit.

When Ananias heard Peter expose his sin, the Bible says that he fell down and died. It is on record that once Edward I shouted with great anger at one of his courtiers and the man dropped dead in sheer fear. Perhaps something like that happened to Ananias. He realized the magnitude of his sin and he died in horror and shock. The result of this act of spiritual accountability was that great fear came upon the congregation. Proverbs teaches that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Men need to fear God more and public opinion less.

The body of Ananias was taken out of the holy sanctuary by strong young men and buried. Three hours later his wife Sapphira

arrived at the assembly. She was there to bask in the glow of her new reputation of being spiritual, sacrificial, and a servant of others. Sapphira did not expect to be questioned about her gift. She did not anticipate that her deceit would be uncovered. But she should have for the Bible says that God will not be mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Those who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap destruction. Judgment came to Sapphira and great fear came again upon all the Church.

A strong message is sent forth from the experience of Ananias and Sapphira. The message is this. Christianity is not child's play. Christianity is not for the weak of spirit or of mind. Christianity is man meeting with His God on the basis of holiness. The Church is no place for lying to be practiced. Men and women and young people should be more afraid of lying than of telling the truth. Telling the truth will lead to purity of heart and eternal life. Lying will poison relationships and destroy the soul for time and for eternity. The spiritual lessons concerning lying are significant. Commitments must be honored. The truth must be spoken.

What is suggested to others as being done should be done and if it is not, that too should be made known. Living with deceit, living with a guilty conscience, living with a poor reputation will be too high a price to pay for any lie or deception to be enjoyed.

The gospel challenge comes to all Christians to live in the sphere of truth. But this is not always easy, for a life style of lying can corrupt one's character by degrees. Therefore, the saint must look for the signs of this sin.

- The sin of lying is manifested when the lips say one thing and the heart knows that something else will be done.

- The sin of lying is manifested when a reasonable time passes and a commitment is not honored nor even attempted to be honored.
- The sin of lying is manifested when calm words are spoken to conceal more than they reveal.

As the Church of God senses the seriousness of this sin, the prayer of David can be offered as found in Psalm 119:29. David prayed, Lord, “Remove from me the way of lying.” People who are prone to telling less than the absolute truth discover that other sins are associated with lying. There is the sin of exaggeration, which is going beyond what really needs to be said. The root of this sin is pride which leads to boasting.

Perhaps the *worst sin associated with lying* is that of religious deception. It is possible for a person to live a life that is a religious lie. If the truth were told, there are individuals who are associated with the Church but who do not really care for it at all. The prophet Isaiah spoke of people in his generation who were like this. Wherefore the Lord said, “Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa. 29:13).

That is the danger that faces every generation. It is possible for people to live a religious lie. It is possible for people to be associated with the Church and with the pulpit who do not really care for either if the truth were known. And God knows the truth. It is possible for lying lips to confess what the heart does not possess, and that is an honest affection for Christ and His people and a longing to be in Church.

The lie of a religious life is the most dangerous type of lie because it is the most damning. The only way to escape certain

destruction is for such a soul to learn to speak the truth and to tell God what He already knows. The person who is living a religious lie can say honestly, “Lord, you know my heart. You know that I am living a religious lie. I do not really care for the preaching of the Word. I will use every excuse that comes my way to justify being absent from the services and prayer and God’s people. Lord, change me. Cause me to love what you love, the Church, and to live in the sphere of truth.”

It may be that the Lord will have mercy and will remove the religious deception. After all, Jesus Christ died for this sin too. He invites individuals to come to the Cross of Calvary and just be honest. In as far as the Holy Spirit brings conviction, may we ask the Lord for a greater measure of honesty to characterize our public and private lives. For Christ sake.

The Madness of Murder In the Heart

DURING THE EARLY days of America's history, when the Continental Congress was still in session, a lady walked up to Benjamin Franklin and said, "Well, Dr. Franklin, what have you given us?"

Dr. Franklin replied, "You have a republic, Madame, if you can keep it."

Benjamin Franklin was wise. As a student of history he knew that nations brought into existence by bloodshed and violence can be destroyed in the same way. Franklin also knew that even if a nation is not overthrown by external force, it could still be conquered from within by social unrest and moral decay.

There are those who believe that our country today is self-destructing. There are those who believe that our nation is in danger of collapsing from the internal sickness produced by multiple sins. More than one political, cultural, and religious thinker has become alarmed over the unraveling of the ethical fabric of modern society. A prominent author has written a book with the title *Slouching Our Way Towards Gomorrah*. He is concerned that America is slowly but surely moving towards an encounter with divine destruction because of moral depravity.

Many people see America as a nation adrift from the anchor of its spiritual and ethical heritage. There are serious problems, for new meaning is given to familiar commandments. For example, God says, "Thou shalt not kill." God says this because life is sacred as it begins at the moment of conception. However, in 1973, the Supreme Court of our land decided that life is not so

sacred and this commandment of God does not have to be honored. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled that destroying the viable being of an unborn child is not really killing life after all. As a result of this wicked and foolish decision, the term “pro-choice” has now become popular with the result being that over a million precious babies have died each year in their mother’s womb. The place designed by the Creator to be an environment for protection and nourishment has become a chamber of horror. In addition to abortion, other horrendous sins have been camouflaged with new terminology.

God calls excessive drinking “drunkenness;” society calls it a disease of alcoholism. If it is a disease it is the only disease by an act of the will. It is the only disease that requires a license to propagate it. It is the only disease that is bottled and sold. It is the only disease that requires an outlet to spread it. It is the only disease that is habit-forming. It is the only disease socially acceptable. It is the only disease that is advertised. It is the only disease without germ or viral cause, and there is no human, corrective medicine. Drunkenness is not a disease; it is self-inflicted foolishness. We only hurt ourselves by calling it by another name. God calls homosexual behavior sodomy; society calls it gay rights in an alternative lifestyle. God calls films of sexual perversion *porneia* or pornography; society calls it adult entertainment. God calls the betrayal of marriage vows adultery; society smiles and calls it the new morality of free love. God says that He hates divorce but modern society says that it is all right for men to put away their wives for every and any cause and for wives to leave their husbands for the arms of another man.

With the dissolving of biblical standards of absolute morality, America’s crime rate has spiraled until now it cost taxpayers over two billion dollars a year. A serious crime is

committed every 3.5 seconds. A robbery takes place every 83 seconds, and one murder occurs every 27 minutes. Certain forms of drug addiction remain in epidemic proportions.

There are more than nine million alcoholics and more than 500,000 heroin addicts that live in the United States. Forty-three million Americans have experimented with marijuana. Suicide is the second largest killer of teenagers.

While there are laws against rape and robbery, murder and mayhem, prostitution and pornography, drug addiction and domestic abuse, the will to resist these evils has been eroded away so that perversion saturates our society. “You have a republic,” said Dr. Franklin, “if you can keep it.”

As America must do more to protect herself from internal enemies so she must guard against external foes as well. In addition to the lingering threat of communism, there are radical Islamic Arabs who wage a holy war upon the United States reflected in the bombing of the World Trade Center and countless subsequent terroristic acts. Somewhere today, in dark huts and in ivory palaces, there are various governments and individuals who are plotting and planning to disrupt our economy, agitate racial unrest, and disarm our military machine. “You have a Republic, said Dr. Franklin, “if you can keep it.”

Many good people have died trying to keep American safe. They have gone into harm’s way to help the country they love.

- 25,324 visionary men, women and young people died in the Revolutionary War to keep it.
 - 498,332 died in the Civil War to keep it.
 - 116,710 died in World War I to keep it.
 - 407,316 precious souls died in World War II to keep it.
 - 54, 546 died in the Korean War to keep it.

- 58,098 died in Vietnam to keep it.

Over 100 soldiers died in Operation Desert Storm to keep it. And even this generation is willing to fight and die because of a confirmed belief that America is still great in many ways.

Certainly America is great in natural resources. The world looks at this country and marvels at the vastness of our land. God has shed His grace upon us. The oil, the timber, the water, the soil and climate have all combined to nourish a wealthy civilization that spreads from sea to shining sea. As important as our resources are, much more important are the people of this republic. Lyman Abott once said,

“A nation is made great, not by its fruitful acres, but by the men who cultivate them: not by its great forests, but by the men who use them; not by its mines, but by the men who build and run them. America was a great land when Columbus discovered it: Americans have made of it a great nation.”⁴

In particular, this nation was built by those Americans who had their hearts rooted in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Alexis De Tocqueville of France, nearly two centuries ago, visited this country. Upon his return home he wrote these words.

“I sought for the greatness of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there! I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her

⁴ Lester S. Grant, “The Boss and the Employee,” *Colorado School of Mines Magazine*, vol. XIII, no. 10, February 1924, 9.

public school system and her institutions of higher learning, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the greatness of her power. America is great because she is good . . . and if America ever ceases to be good . . . America will cease to be great.”⁵

One way that America has been good is manifested in our national ability to forgive our military enemies. Following World War II, most of Europe lay in rubble. Many of the Nazi warlords were either dead or under arrest. As America looked upon the carnage caused by the foolishness of men who wanted to enslave others, Secretary of State and former general, George C. Marshall offered what is now known as the Marshall Plan. Millions of U.S. dollars, he promised, would be given to assist in the rebuilding of Europe. America would not exploit the countries she had helped to conquer. Nor would America dominate them for long.

The Marshall Plan was the right thing to do because there is no value in retaining hatred in the heart. I do not say that it is easy to remove dark feelings; I only know that such feelings will produce the madness of more murder, which God condemns. So America, historically, has forgiven her former enemies and offered them a helping hand. But America’s heart has not always been so noble or pure reflected in the struggle for civil rights.

During the mid-1950s and all through the 1960s, Americans had to deal with the horrors of racial prejudice which had exploded into the national limelight. Southern whites were taking southern blacks and lynching them from trees or hiding their mutilated bodies in the swamps of the Deep South. Violence bred violence because of the hatred in hearts. Something was terribly

⁵ Sermon Illustrations, “America: The United States and Its Citizens.”

wrong. All people should be able to have equal access to food, clothing, jobs, entertainment, housing, and education. Racism is inherently evil. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was correct when he cried out that white children and black children should not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. If left alone, racism like Nazism only lives to hurt again and again!

When Nazi Germany shed the blood of innocent Jews, God said to Adolph Hitler, “This is an abomination” and He moved to destroy the Third Reich. When the Ku Klux Klan in the southern states burned their crosses and lynched fellow citizens, God said, “This is an abomination,” and He moved to begin to tear down the barriers of racism. The progress that has been made historically between former military enemies and hostile racial groups resulting in physical murder, should encourage the Church today to proceed in seeking better personal relations with one another.

While few Christians commit physical murder, there is the danger of committing soul murder in the heart through the sin of hatred, which is an extreme form of anger. Jesus Himself warned of this possibility in Matthew 5:21–22.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Leviticus 19:17 says, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart.” My brother is my neighbor. My neighbor is anyone I come

into contact with. There is to be no place for hatred in my heart. God knows that excessive anger leads to other sins such as strife.

Proverbs 10:12 teaches that anger *stirreth up strife*. When one person is angry with another, small matters are magnified, arguments are deliberately provoked, and unkind words are carefully crafted until they can be willfully communicated.

Second, excessive anger in the heart *creates an unpleasant social environment*. A person with strong feelings of animosity towards someone brings an electrifying presence into the midst of a gathering. No one has to say a word. There is unspoken tension and a heavy silence. True fellowship is impossible. Proverbs 15:17 states the situation by observing that, “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”

There is something else. Anger in the heart *breeds a lifestyle of concealment*. Proverbs 26:26 speaks of those whose heart is covered by duplicity. There is the deceit of lavish compliments not really meant. There is the deceit of humor whereby sarcasm covers hostility. There are innuendos and double meanings with veiled references in normal conversations. And all of this takes place because of hatred in the heart.

Why do people grow to hate each other? There are many reasons.

First, individuals harbor anger and resentment because of the fallen condition of the soul. Hostility is as natural to the unregenerate heart as breathing, as one embarrassed mother painfully discovered in public. While she was waiting to check out at the counter, her little daughter, under five, began to throw a tantrum. The mother tried to calm the child, but without success. Suddenly the child screamed out for all to hear, “I hate you!”

With those simple words the child expressed the natural depravity of the human heart.

Second, some people hate because they are angry and want to hurt those who have hurt them. One night on a television talk show, a guest told of a Hollywood actor who stepped out on his wife to pick up a beautiful woman in a bar. He slept with her that night. In the morning when he awakened, she was gone. Scrawled in lipstick on the bathroom mirror were the words: “Welcome to the wonderful world of AIDS!”

The woman was angry. She was seeking revenge on any and all. Other people harbor hatred in their heart because they are uninformed. Many years ago a young girl had been given up for adoption. All of her life she was hurt by what she perceived to be betrayal and abandonment by her biological mother. She hated her mother. Then one day she decided to trace her mother to a local address. Knocking on the door with pent up fury, the young woman waited to accuse. The door opened, and a blind lady stood before her. It did not take long for the true story to unfold. Years before, when the mother realized she was going blind, she felt she had to do something for the little daughter she loved so much. After much agony she decided to give her beloved child to a Christian couple who could provide in ways she felt she could not. The mother had not betrayed her daughter but had bestowed on her an environment of riches beyond her dreams. The mother had not abandoned her daughter but had arranged for her child to have a different lifestyle. The anger and the hatred in the heart of the young woman turned into pure love once fully informed.

A third reason why people hate is because they enjoy the emotional thrill and the power of this perverted emotion. Intense anger is a very potent tool. It is also forbidden to the Christian. Ephesians 4:31 commands, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and

anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.” To harbor hatred in the heart is to be barred forever from the presence of God. 1 John 3:10 says that, “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Jesus has taught His followers to love their enemies, “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” I use to believe that this injunction was designed to be the proper attitude to express towards those outside the Church. I now know it is important to use this concept for all people in all places. While the world can hurt the Church, the Church can hurt its own members unless it is careful. By obeying the wisdom of Christ, we can learn to banish whatever hatred or ill feelings we may harbor toward others.

As the Holy Spirit brings conviction, our hearts need to be examined. It may be that there is unconfessed anger in our hearts. God the Father wants us to acknowledge this sin in particular and then forsake it as a good soldier of the Cross of Christ.

The story is told of a dying warrior in a war. In the hospital tent, as his strength ebbed away, he could be heard to say, “Here, Sir!” A nurse came by. “Why do you keep saying that?” she asked. And the young man replied. “The heavenly roll call is being made and I am answering, ‘Here, Sir!’”

When the Lord calls forth those with clean hands and a pure loving heart without hate, we want to be able to answer, “Here, Sir!”

Images of Iniquity

IT IS A statistical fact of life that as people of God meet to worship, other individuals also meet for the purpose of manifesting wickedness. Individuals gather to plan bloodshed and violence.

Some are old. Others are young. Some are men. Others are women. The one thing they have in common is that God is not in their hearts; they are planning terrorist activities that kill people in public places. They are meeting to plot the overthrow of a government by military force. They are meeting to plan a rape, a robbery, or a physical act of violence. God wants the world to know that He hates the heart that is devising wicked plans.

The Bible records the story of a time in human history in which the wickedness of man was great and every imagination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:1–8). Several significant facts can be said of this generation.

First, it was a time in which a great population explosion had taken place, for we read that, “And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them” (Gen. 6:1). One reason why the earth’s population grew rapidly was the longevity of men. It has been suggested that there was better health in the antediluvian days because the harmful ultra violet rays of the sun were not as forceful upon the flesh as they are now. We do not really know why people lived so long but they did. It was not uncommon for people to be seven, eight, and even nine hundred years old.

Second, it was a time of great sexual misconduct. Jesus said that in the days of Noah people were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage (Matt. 24:38). Some Bible students believe that the reference implies every form of illicit sexual activity to include bestiality, lesbianism, pedophilia, necromancy, partner-swapping, and homosexuality.

In Genesis 6:2 we read that the “sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” Many conservative commentators agree that the reference to the “sons of God” is a reference to the *godly* line of Seth marrying into the *ungodly* line of Cain. The degenerate children of a degenerate father, governed by the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, welcomed with wicked malice those who were born again, born from above, and made children of God by the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3, 5–6; Gal. 5:6). The time came when society was saturated with unnatural human relationships. Godliness disappeared as all barriers of modesty and morality were broken down.

- There was no mystery to life among the youth.
- There was no holy anticipation of marriage.
- There was no shock to the sensibilities.

Then third, the generation in view enjoyed a time of fantastic accomplishments. The Bible speaks of individuals who became “mighty men of renown” (Gen. 6:4). They were “giants” (Gen. 6:4) in the sense of great accomplishments much like people speak today of giants of corporations. There were people who were well known for their great knowledge, their great piety, their great courage, their great musical abilities, their great artistic skills, their great literary powers, and their great wealth. There were Captains of Industries, Political Pilots to guide the Ship of

State, *Prima Donna*'s of the theater and popular sports heroes. A multitude of individuals became "mighty men which were of old renown" (Gen. 6:4).

There is a fourth observation. Though many were great in individual accomplishments, society as a whole was prominent in collective wickedness. The Bible says plainly that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Here are terrible words to read and yet they serve as a warning: it is possible for the soul to become so sin saturated that no holy thoughts, no kind thoughts and no noble thoughts are produced.

This is no hyperbole of sacred Scripture. Rather, it is the divinely given historical narrative of what happened to one generation of the human race. The Bible says that it is possible for the soul to come to the place where it knows nothing but a relentless, addictive, pre-occupation with unholy habits. All mental energies, all physical energies concentrate on how to have more, more, more of the same. There is no room for godly thoughts.

When the soul becomes obsessed with vain imaginations there is hardly any escape. There is some hope, but only if God supernaturally intervenes. Unfortunately, the testimony of time is that wickedness kills more often than it allows a cure to be found.

If God does not show grace, then there is only the certainty of Divine judgment upon the wicked imaginations of the workers of iniquity. In the days of Noah the judgment God brought upon mankind was a worldwide flood. Only eight people were prepared to survive the great deluge. The rest were left to their own plans and programs. All of humanity could have been prepared for the Flood. Early twentieth-century Baptist preacher

A. W. Pink points out that the world was not without spiritual information.

First, man had the promise of a Redeemer. In Genesis 3:15 the Lord God Himself had promised that one day the woman's Seed should bruise the serpent's head. Once people believed that. The sons of God looked and longed for the Redeemer until they began to lust after the women of the world that God had not chosen for them.

Second, man was aware of the proper procedure for approaching the Lord. People knew all about the expiatory sacrifices. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God in matchless grace made a covering for their sins. An animal was killed and the blood was shed. As Cain and Abel knew about the right way to approach and appease God, so did the rest of mankind so that all were without excuse.

Third, there was the mark that God set upon Cain (Gen. 4:15). It was a physical mark with spiritual implications. Whenever anyone looked at Cain they knew that the hand of Divine judgment had fallen upon him. To look at Cain should have given people concern so that they would consider their own ways and be different.

Fourth, the pre-Flood world knew about the Sabbath. God rested on the Sabbath and people understood. The Lord had appointed a set time for worship (Gen. 4:3) and fellowship with Himself. The Sabbath was instituted during the creation week. It was to be observed each week thereafter to teach the descendants of Adam to honor the Lord. Though it was violated, the Sabbath testified to the presence of a spiritual witness.

Fifth, the longevity of the patriarchs was a testimony that the people had spiritual information. There was Adam and Methusaleh. A. W. Pink notes, "For nine hundred and thirty years

the first man lived to tell of his original creation and condition, of his wicked disobedience against God and of the fearful consequences which followed his sin.”

Sixth, there was the preaching of Enoch through whom God warned the world that He was coming in judgment (Jude 1:14, 15).

Seventh, there was the translation of Enoch. In a supernatural way he was taken into heaven. He walked with God and was not, for the Lord took him.

Eighth, there was the preaching of Noah (2 Pet. 2:25) and the visual illustration of the Ark that he began to build. Noah and the colossal super structure were daily visible reminders that God will not be mocked. Though He is a God of mercy, He is also a God of terrible justice.

One day justice began to be administered to the fallen sons of Adam. One morning a cloud appeared in the sky. The people looked up at it in amazement. No one had ever seen a cloud before. People came outside their homes and places of business to witness the new wonder in the expansive heavens. The sky turned from being a lovely blue to a deep color of gray. The sun disappeared.

There was a question as to whether it had stopped shining for no one could see it. Individuals became afraid and then terrified as something wet fell from the sky and splashed on upturned faces. The people did not know what to think. Perhaps God was angry with them. Suddenly, they remembered the words of the Lord. This was the Day of Judgment. Noah had been preaching about this day for so long that people had stopped listening and started laughing. But no one mocked the man of God now. No one was laughing now. People must find Noah and listen again as to how they could be saved.

“Where is Noah?” someone cried. “He is in the Ark he had been building,” came the reply. “We must find him!”

There was a mad dash to the edifice that sat on the open plains of the land. Thousands upon thousands of people swarmed in terrified panic towards the Ark. Voices began to scream for suddenly the earth shook and millions of gallons of water came surging up from the deep.

From the bowels of the earth gushed more water. The droplets of rain had become a torrent of drenching water and now the ground was spewing forth more water. It was everywhere. Women screamed. Children cried. Men howled. It was obvious that all this water would soon destroy everything and drown all of civilization. Voices were raised,

“Noah! Open the door!” some bellowed.

Others cried, “Noah! How can we be saved?!”

Still more, “Noah! Help us!”

“For mercy’s sake, Noah, help us!”

But Noah could not help the people. The situation was far beyond his human control. He had done what the Lord had instructed him to do. He had believed that a Flood was coming according to Divine revelation and according to Divine instruction for the Ark was to be 45 feet high, 75 feet wide, and 450 long. His oldest child Shem was still twenty years from being born when the work on the Ark began. But Noah, moved by faith, at the age of 480 years began to build something that would save him and his children and his children’s wives.

Though the people fled to the Ark after the Flood began, they could not get in. They pounded on the door. But God had shut the door and no man could open it. Leaving the sides of the Ark the people fled home and then moved to the rooftops. There, they watched in stricken horror as the waters rose rapidly around them.

They stared at Death and Death stared back without blinking. They who had no time for God now found themselves the objects of divine fury. They who had no voice to pray to God now found heaven to be brass to their pleas for help. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

God had tried to warn men. For a hundred and twenty years the gospel message had gone forth. But it was ignored. Life was too good to think of spiritual matters and things of the soul. There was food on the table and money in the bank. There were clothes to enjoy and friends to fellowship with. There was a world to see and community events to enjoy. Why should the soul seek God? There is time to repent. There is time to be more sober minded.

So thought the people of Noah's day. And so think the people of our day. Jesus said that as it was in the days of Noah so it will be just prior to His return. Are we that generation? I do not know. Certainly there are similarities. This one thing we do know. God hates sin. He hates sin as a principle of life and He also hates specific or particular sins for they are an abomination to Him. Because of this, the Word of God challenges individuals to examine the heart. It may be that the thought of the heart is only evil continually. It may also be that the thoughts of the heart include signs of saving faith. Saving faith is needed because sin is deadly. It is more deadly than the AIDS epidemic. It is more widespread than the various forms of cancer. Sin is the plague of all plagues. There is just one cure and that is the blood of Jesus Christ.

In spiritual terms, the Cross of Calvary is the ultimate Ark of safety to all who will believe. As Noah fled to the Ark and God shut him in, so you and I must flee to Calvary for safety from the penalty, the power, and the pollution of sin. When we come to the Cross God will shut us in Christ Jesus and we shall be eternally

secure. Nothing will then matter. The winds of time may whip all around with hurricane force; the gales of judgment may blindly blow; the turbulent waters of destruction may rise; the white capped waves of death may consume us and yet we shall be safe in the Ark which is Jesus Christ.

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

When Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior He transforms the will and the mind. He gives to people new thoughts. Divine grace will substitute the wonderful plans of God for wicked imaginations. Doris Simerson wanted to put away her wicked imaginations and so she prayed this prayer.

“Dear Lord, my heart and life I yield,
Submission to Thy will; I only ask that I may have
Some humble place to fill.
“I do not yearn for worldwide fame.
But, rather, to exalt Thy name.

I know Thou hast some special task
That Thou wouldst have me do;
Speak now, my Lord, ‘tis all I ask
And may I then be true
To all that Thou desirest of me:
Allow me, now, Thy will to see.”

Since God hates pride, it is imperative that those who call upon His name judge every impulse to pride and every boastful

word. Since God hates a lying tongue, falsehood must be confessed. Since God hates murder, hatred in the heart must be rooted out. Since God hates the heart that deliberately plans wickedness, new thoughts must be pursued. This radical change of heart can only begin with a full surrender to Jesus Christ. When our faith and trust is in the Person and work of Christ, there is no need to fear the future. Noah was not afraid because he was in the care of God. By faith Noah had appropriated the means of salvation which God had provided. The Bible tells us that there is a terrible future for all unbelievers. Universal judgment happened once and it will happen again. The first time was by flood, the next time shall be by fire. No one should be surprised.

Can it be that the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons will not ultimately be used? Perhaps these weapons of mass destruction will explode over the earth or something even worse. The Bible tells us plainly that the world will be destroyed in the future by fire. The apostle Peter tells us,

“The day will come wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:12–14).

A Daughter of Destruction

IN THE ANCIENT world the feet were well taken care of, for healthy feet were essential to travel and work. A person with diseased or disabled feet was in serious trouble in life. That is not necessarily the case today. A handicapped person in modern society can still enjoy great mobility by way of electric wheel chairs and specially designed automobiles. President Franklin Roosevelt was crippled by polio and yet he was able to serve America during some of the most turbulent days of the twentieth century. Roosevelt was among the first to drive a car by special levers on the steering column.

In the ancient world feet were used to speak symbolically of great power. In Psalm 8:6 the observation is made that man would rule and reign over creation by Divine design. “Thou madest him [man] to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet.”

Because of the special attention given to feet, God speaks about the misuse of them. In particular God says that He hates the feet that are swift in running to evil or mischief. Turning to the gospel of Mark the narrative is given of a young girl who used her feet to swiftly run to evil.

The setting for this sad story takes place in the palace of King Herod. The reference is to Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. Officially, Antipas was not a king but this title was used of him and by him. When the word came to the palace that a prophet from Galilee was causing a great stirring among the masses, Antipas grew concerned. His

conscience was smitten and fear gripped his soul. *Was it possible*, he thought to himself, *that John the Baptist was risen from the dead?* Antipas had good reason to be afraid. He had broken the moral Law of God. The Law said, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife” (Exod. 20:17). Antipas had coveted his own brother’s wife, a woman named Herodias. Herodias was not innocent for she availed herself of the illicit advances of the king and was willing to divorce her husband Philip for another man. This incestuous and adulterous relationship was denounced by John the Baptist.

Though other people in Palestine were just as guilty in acts of inappropriate behavior as Antipas and Herodias, John looked at the leadership of the land and declared, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” Neither the passage of time nor the acceptance by society of this lifestyle would change the eternal law of God. Spirituality is not obtained by democracy nor is it obtained by capricious behavior or a monarchy.

Former U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield once spoke at a Christian chapel service in Manhattan, Kansas I attended in the late 1970s. He talked about ethics in government. At that time, the infamous Watergate break-in scandal was on everyone’s minds. Senator Hatfield was defending the politicians in Washington as a group. “People in government are no different,” he said, “than other people. They merely reflect the mainstream of society.” Perhaps he is right, and yet people desire their government officials to be good, to be honest, and to be moral.

Former Speaker of the House Jim Wright learned this lesson the hard way in the summer of 1989 after he illegally took royalties for a book he had written. The public outcry was so great he was forced to resign.

John the Baptist looked at Herod Antipas and said to the king, “You are morally wrong to live as you do,” and Herod agreed. By now Antipas realized that the wisdom of Proverbs was still valid.

“He that goeth after her [an adulterous woman] straightway, [is as] an ox [that] goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hastenth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life” (Prov. 7:22–23).

Antipas had come to know Herodias a lot better. He discovered that she was more than the beautiful bride of his brother that he had coveted. Herodias was as vile a person as hell ever produced. She was proud, sensual, arrogant, beautiful, brilliant, but hard as iron in her soul. Beneath her breast was a cold and ruthless heart capable of the most cruel and vindictive revenge that a daughter of the devil could devise.

When word came that John the Baptist was condemning her lifestyle before the nation, Herodias was furious and declared war on the saint. How dare this wandering nomad question her actions? How dare this self-righteous son of the desert speak in a disrespectful manner? How dare this coarse eater of locust and wild honey make her a public example of sin and shame? Who did he think he was!

If Herodias hated John, Herod Antipas had a different reaction which was rooted in fear. Herod knew that John was a just and holy man. Antipas had observed John carefully. Here was no charlatan. Here was no charismatic revolutionary leader trying to form a personal following. Here was a prophet of God, anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach with power those sermons that he received from heaven.

While Herod reacted differently to John, his heart was not fundamentally different from that of Herodias for Herod Antipas was no friend of righteousness.

Though he feared John and even stood in awe of him, though Herod possessed powerful feelings of guilt, though he desired to keep peace with Herodias, Herod's heart was given over to evil, as time would soon tell.

If Herod Antipas did not kill John immediately, it was only because of restraining grace and the fact that he feared John. Perhaps there is an indictment in this passage against many Christians. No one fears them. No one is afraid to do wrong around them. In fact, if the truth were told, there are some Christians who look at one another and wink at sin.

They communicate an unspoken language that says in effect, "I will support you in acts of unkindness and injustice if you will support me. And we will appeal to the Scripture to do this for there is a passage which says that 'love covers a multitude of sins'." And so it is that precious souls for whom Christ has died enter into a mutual contract with spiritual death.

The Church at the end of the twentieth century must learn to walk once more in holy fear, as did the Church of the first century. The Bible says that there was a time when the presence of God was manifested in the Church and people were afraid to sin. "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

When the early Church held all of its members in high esteem and cared for them to the point that they would do nothing to harm them, when the early Church held its members to a high level of holy accountability there was a godly fear that was welcomed by all. "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

Today, as a social force in society, Christians fear neither God nor man and no man fears them. But long ago, Herod Antipas feared John because he was a Christian and because he was a communicator of the gospel of God.

If Antipas feared John, Herodias hated him and was determined to destroy him. But for that to happen, Herod had to agree to the execution. Herodias knew just how to make him agree for Herodias knew the heart of her husband and how to manipulate it. She would simply bid her time and waited for a convenient day. Her day came when Herod's birth date was to be celebrated. Herodias saw her opportunity and seized the moment by sending her daughter to dance before the king at the banquet.

According to custom, Antipas had invited many guests which included high civil officials, military commanders, and the socially prominent of society. The wine flowed freely and Salome entered to dance. The king was well drunk with wine.

As Herod and his guests looked on with licentious delight, this Daughter of Destruction danced in an erotic and suggestive manner. With mincing steps and the magical movement of her body, Salome seduced the slobbering sovereign of the land. When the dance was over, the impulsive king spoke to Salome saying in a drunken slur, "Ask for anything you wish and I will give it to you."

The girl hesitated. Antipas repeated his promise. "Whatsoever you ask I will give to you, up to the half of my kingdom." Salome giggled with delight. How generous the king was being with that remark. Laughing over her shoulder, Salome exited the room and ran to her mother. "What shall I ask for mother?" And mother replied, "Go back and tell Antipas that you want the head of John the Baptist." What? Is it possible? Is Herodias serious? Would any sane mother instruct her daughter

in the way of bloody destruction and certain damnation? The answer is, “*Yes!*” And do not be shocked. It still happens every day. The story is told of a young girl who was admitted to a hospital with a fatal illness. She was the only child and the darling of her parents. Her every whim had been gratified. One day after examining her, the doctor whispered in the mother’s ear. But the sick girl overheard. She was going to die. Calling her mother to the bedside the girl said, “Mother, you have taught me how to dance, how to sip my cocktails, how to hold my cigarettes and how to dress. But one thing you have failed to teach me. Mother, you have not taught me how to die.”

Salome did not even hesitate in her return to Antipas. Her feet were swift to run to execute an evil plan hatched in hell and the hardness of a scorned woman’s heart. The vile deed was to be done. Not willing to lose social respect in the presence of so many, Herod Antipas ordered the execution of John the Baptist.

The licitor was sent. Into the filthy prison hole the guards went and laid hands on John. His chain rattled. Quickly he was moved to an execution cell. There, he was forced to kneel. Death came swiftly as a powerful soldier raised a sharp axe and brought the blade with a mighty force upon the sacred neck. The head was severed from the body. The blood gushed forth upon the ground. The golden voice was now gone forever that had once cried, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

The hand that had baptized the Son of the Living God suddenly lay cold and lifeless. The soul was silent now that in humility had said of Christ, “He must increase but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

The finger that pointed multitudes toward the Man from Galilee rested.

But people would never forget that it was John who had first said, “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”

With studied callousness the guard reached down on the dirty dungeon floor and picked up John’s severed head by the tangled massive hairs drenched in blood. He threw it violently on a platter and slammed the expensive covering down on the royal dish. The king’s soldier gave the silver platter to Salome, who, in a mock ceremony brought the prophet’s head to Antipas.

And so it was that this Daughter of Destruction took the charger and actually carried it to her mother. Her feet were swift in running to do evil. And heaven watched her run. The feet of that young and beautiful dancing damsel were an abomination to God. “I hate all those who walk in the path of the ungodly,” says the Lord, “and the feet that be swift in running to mischief.”

In contrast to Salome are the feet that God thinks are beautiful. They are spoken of in Romans 10:15. “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

For those who would have God think well of their spiritual feet, two things must be done.

First, the gospel of peace must be preached. By life as well as by lip the gospel must be proclaimed. Many years ago in the mountains of Georgia there lived a poor widow. She had a few acres of ground where she raised berries and one thing and another, and made a little money keeping chickens and selling eggs. She also took in washing and did other humble work for a living. The one bright spot in her dreary life was a very intelligent son who surpassed everyone in the district school. The mother worked hard to get the money to send him on to college. The son also worked hard to make good grades in college.

Finally, he graduated with high honors and won a gold medal for special excellence in study. When it came time for him to graduate he went up to his mountain home and said, “Mother, you must come down and see me graduate.”

“No,” said his mother. “I have nothing fit to wear, and you would be ashamed of your mother before all these grand people.”

“Ashamed of you?!” he exclaimed with his eyes full of love. “Ashamed of you?! Mother, never! I owe everything I am to you, and you must come down. What is more, I will not graduate unless you come.”

Finally, she yielded. He brought her to the town. When the graduating day came the mother went to the commencement exercises in her plain calico dress, her neat but faded shawl and her simple mountain bonnet. He tried to take her down the middle aisle where sat the richest people of the town, friends of the graduating class, but she refused and insisted on sitting way off under the galley.

The son went upon the platform and delivered his graduating address. He was handed his diploma and received his medal. No sooner had he received the gold medal than the son walked down from the platform and way over to where his mother sat and there amidst the applause of the throng, he pinned the gold medal on her faded shawl and said, “Mother, that belongs to you. You earned it.” The son knew that the gospel had been preached to him by the sacrificial life his mother had lived.

As the gospel must be preached by our lives, so the glad tidings are to be brought to others. Every Christian can bring good news to others. And the best news is that Christ will save us and forgive us of all our sins.

“Sinners Jesus will receive;

Sound this word of grace to all
Who the heavenly pathway leave,
All who linger, all who fall.

Sing it o'er and o'er again;
Christ receiveth sinful men;
Make the message clear and plain:
Christ receiveth sinful men.”⁶

God wants us to have beautiful feet, feet that preach the gospel and feet that bring glad tidings. He does not want us to have feet that are swift to run into mischief.

⁶ “Sinners Jesus will Receive,” written by Erdmann Neumeister (1671–1756), translated by Emma Frances Bevan (1827–1909), and composed by James McGranahan (1840–1907).

The Silent Savior

THERE WAS ONCE a time when buffalo roamed by the millions upon the American continent. Indians and scouts in the Old West record watching vast buffalo herds pass by, hour upon hour. Then came the settlers who started to slaughter the bison. Some wanted the fur. Others wanted the bones. And some wanted only the tongue of the buffalo because it made a tasty steak.

A Greek philosopher asked his servant to provide the best possible dish. The servant prepared a dish of tongue saying, “It is the best of all dishes, because with it we may bless and communicate happiness, dispel sorrow, remove despair, cheer the fainthearted, inspire the discouraged, and say a hundred other things to uplift mankind.”

Later the philosopher asked his servant to provide the worst dish of which he could think. A dish of tongue appeared on the table. The servant explained. “It is the worst of all dishes because with it we may curse and break human hearts; destroy reputations; promote discord and strife; set families, communities, and nations at war with each other.”

Solomon wrote, “Whoso keepeth his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble.”

Had Eve kept her tongue, she would not have talked to Satan and fallen into sin.

It can also be stated that, “Whoso keepeth his tongue, avoids the hatred of God.”

Our text teaches that God hates the lying tongue. In particular is the tongue that breathes out lies in false testimony. Whether in

a court of law or in the court of public opinion, the tongue that speaks a false witness is hated by God. Here then is a holy duty for Christians. We are to set a guard upon our mouths. The tongue is to be made secure because words that wound, once uttered, can never be retrieved.

“How like an arrow is a word,
At random after speeding,
To find a target never meant
And set some heart a-bleeding.

Oh, pray that Heaven may seal the lips
Err unkind words are spoken;
For Heaven itself cannot recall,
When once that seal is broken.”

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he had two tablets of stone written upon by the finger of God. The first tablet set forth man’s duty to God. The second tablet set forth man’s duty to his neighbor. In stone it has been recorded as a permanent mandate, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). There are good reasons for the Divine prohibition.

First, a false witness will use harsh words that only hurt.

“One day a harsh word, harshly said,
Upon an evil journey sped,
And like a sharp and cruel dart
It pierced a fond and loving heart.
It turned a friend into a foe
And everywhere brought pain and woe.

A kind word followed it one day,
Sped swiftly on its blessed way.

It healed the wound and smoothed the pain
And friends of old were friends again.

It made the hate and anger cease,
And everywhere brought joy and peace.

And yet, the harsh word left a trace,
The kind word could not efface,
And though the heart its love regained
It left a scar that long remained.

Friends can forgive but not forget,
Nor lose the sense of keen regret.
Oh, if we would but learn to know
How swift and sure our words can go.

How we would weigh with utmost care,
Each thought before it reached the air
And only speak the words that move
Like white-winged messengers of love.”

A false witness that speaketh lies will use harsh words that are meant to wound and inflict pain.

Second, a false testimony is unnecessary. What makes interesting conversation may not be spiritually profitable or necessary. Words are not neutral. They always have an effect, which is why,

“A careless word may kindle strife,
A cruel word may wreck a life,
A bitter word may hate instill,
A humble word may smite and kill,

A gracious word may smooth the way,
A joyous word may light the day,
A timely word may lessen stress,
A lovely word may heal and bless.”

Colossians 4:6 commands Christians to “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

Then third, a false witness brings self-destruction. In the matter of bearing a false witness, God Himself will not be silent, but will so order providence that a just judgment is administered upon the false witness.

Proverbs 19:5 says that, “A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.”

Proverbs 21:28 promises that, “A false witness shall perish.”

The prophet Isaiah took comfort in the promise that, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isa. 54:17).

Despite the Divine prohibitions, and despite the words of warning of certain destruction, the heart is so hardened in sin that false testimony is still given far too often. There are a number of reasons why this happens.

Sometimes a false statement is motivated by lofty ideals. During the days of Joshua, a group of people called the Gibeonites sent ambassadors into the camp of the Israelites to perpetuate a deception. The impression was given that they came from a distant region when in fact the Gibeonites lived in the immediate vicinity. A misguided philosophy that it was all right to trade lies for lives only made the matter worse in the end.

Angered by the deception, the Israelites enslaved the Gibeonites instead of negotiating with them as with equals.

Other people make no pretensions of having lofty ideals. They are not so noble minded. There are those who want revenge and thus are motivated to lie. The sons of Jacob devised a lying scheme to destroy the Shechemites. They made promises that they never meant to keep. Lies were used because the thirst for revenge was strong. It was believed that their sister Diana had been sexually mistreated by one of the men of Shechem. The sons of Jacob were determined to exact vengeance upon all the Shechemites.

And then there are those who lie, alter the truth, or conceal it, as a means of self-protection, much like the Roman soldiers who said that the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus. According to Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, the guard on duty had to serve out the sentence.

Still others give a false testimony in order to embellish a story. Something dull can be spiced up by adding an extra measure of sensationalism. The Amalekite claimed to have killed Saul when in fact the King had committed suicide at the Battle of Gilboa.

So there are many motives for lying. What is significant, is that all false testimonies have something in common: someone always gets wounded. In Matthew 26 the story is told of how Jesus suffered because a false witness was made against Him. He who came to heal was made to hurt. He who came to love was hated. He who spoke truth became the object of falsehood.

Behind the arrest of Christ and the false witnesses were the chief priests of Israel, the elders, and the council of the Sanhedrin. The names of these people are not given, but heaven has recorded their deeds, and one day they will kneel before the very Lord they

hurt. One day they will give an account for the things that they said. What a shame it was that religious leaders lied in the first place. Religious people arrested Jesus. Religious people lied about Christ. Religious people came to a point that they did not care how much pain and suffering they inflicted upon another.

Under Jewish law two witnesses had to be produced in order to condemn a person. The chief priests and others tried to find two people to lie who would also agree. It was a challenge despite the fact that there were many false witnesses. There were many that were willing to sell their soul to Satan. But the practical problem was that the liars could not agree. If briefed, they were having a hard time keeping their stories straight. Abraham Lincoln once said that liars have to have good memories.

Finally, the Sanhedrin found two witnesses. Both men could agree that Jesus had said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Literally, the temple of God refers to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem first built by Solomon and then rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Herod. So sacred was the Temple that to deface it in any way was a penalty subject to death and here was Jesus declaring that He able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days. What Jesus meant by this statement is fully explained in John 3:19–21. In context, Jesus had cleansed the Temple of illicit trading, and the religious leaders were upset with Him. In fact, they were furious for it is the nature of people to resent correction even when well deserved. "What sign," the priests demanded of Jesus, "can you show us, seeing that thou doest these things?" And Jesus gave them a sign, the only sign He ever gave to validate His authenticity. The sign was that of His resurrection. "Destroy this Temple," He said, "and in three days, I will raise it up." The Jewish people did not understand that Jesus

was not referring to the *literal* Temple of Stone, but He spoke of the Temple of His Body.

Time passed and the words of Christ came back to be used against Him, for people twisted His words. And when that happened, Jesus did not challenge them. In the face of the false witnesses Jesus was silent. It was not easy, but it was the wise thing to do. The greatest of all the saints have learned to be silent when a false witness is being given.

David was slandered by Shimei, the son of Gera, who not only cursed him, but cast stones at the king (2 Sam. 16:5–6). When Abishai wanted to go and take off the head of Shimei, David said, “Let him alone, and let him curse.” But why David? Why are you so silent? Two reasons are given.

First, “the Lord hath bidden him,” said David. And second, “It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day” (2 Sam. 16:11–12). God will have pity upon those who suffer unjustly and for righteousness sake.

One of the great issues that face the Church, as the book of Proverbs is read, is “How can the people of God make personal application of selected passages? How can Christians be different than the world in the matter of being a witness to the truth and avoiding falsehood?” Deuteronomy 13:14 provides the answer. Divine guidance comes, and truth is spoken, as the heart remembers that God hates a false witness. The biblical command is to be different. “Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and ye shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him.”

One way that the Christian walks after God is by not bearing a false witness. And if the truth cannot be told or received then let the lips be more silent. If the Savior can be discrete, so can the

saints. It may not be easy, but it is the will of God that His people at least always tell the truth. The way of the Lord is something to be sought. If this concept can be expanded upon, then a word of caution must be said about the bearing of a false witness to the ideas of other faiths or position. The temptation arises to misrepresent what the Catholics or cults believe in order to enhance the Protestant faith. This should not be done.

Finally, there must a warning about misrepresenting a particular situation. Both the pessimist and the optimist should be careful not to give a false witness.

The Danger of Sowing Discord

ONE OF THE greatest challenges that face any local assembly is that of keeping peace among the people. It has been said that when two Baptist get together there are three opinions presented. Such has always been the case. In the first century, just like today, the believers wrestled with personal relationships. Sometimes the tensions became so great that physical separation took place as illustrated in Acts 15:36–40 over the issue of John Mark. Paul and Barnabas broke fellowship over whether or not to allow Mark to be part of their second missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to show grace and give Mark a second chance, Paul wanted nothing to do with someone who had proven to be faithless in the hour of testing. The anger between Barnabas and Paul was so great that they went their separate ways.

Unfortunately Christians can and do hurt one another. Sometimes the pain is inflicted without malicious intent, but there is agony all the same. The great Apostle Peter offers one illustration of how discord can be sown among the brethren, even though he did not mean for that to happen. The trouble began when Peter moved from one group to another and one person to another, with a different story for each. The sad situation unfolds rather simply.

Peter had gone to minister to various churches being established in South Galatia. He visited all the important cities: Psidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. When Peter arrived in Antioch, there was a serious problem. Two groups of people had emerged to contend with one another.

First, there was the Gentile Group. The Gentile Group consisted of born again believers who had never been under the Law of Moses.

- They had no history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- They had no memories of a glorious past.
- They had no religious Temple or rituals of sacrifices.

What the Gentile Group did have was a newfound faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And so Peter began to eat a fellowship meal with the Gentiles, followed by the Agape Feast, or the Lord's Supper. It was this eating of the Lord's Supper which became a matter of great controversy (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17–34). In Antioch, segregation had taken place among racial lines as Jewish Christians separated themselves from Gentile Christians. At the heart of the separation was a single great question: “Was it proper for Jewish Christians to eat with Gentile Christians who had never been under the Law of Moses, and who did not honor the rituals of the Mosaic Law, especially those regarding the diet?”

The problem was a challenge for the Church for this reason: Jews, who had turned to faith in Christ, were being asked to think in a whole new way, and it was not easy. Christian Jews were being asked to give up the ritual and rules of the Mosaic Law for a life of faith and simplicity. This was not easy to do.

For centuries, the Jews had observed strict dietary laws concerning clean and unclean animals (Lev. 11). The Gentiles had no such heritage. The Gentiles had no dietary boundaries. Therefore, when a Gentile brought certain meats to the Love Feast that were considered unclean, could a devout Christian Jew, eat with the Gentiles? Some Jewish Christians had decided the

answer was “No,” which naturally offended the Gentiles. In the Antioch Church, two cultures clashed, and division set in to disrupt the harmony, and the sweet fellowship once found in the Church. It did not have to happen, but it did happen because individuals who should have known better set aside the basics of the gospel.

Was not the death of Christ for all types of men, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich or poor?

Did not Christ, by His death fulfill and therefore abolish the shadows of the Old Testament?

Was not the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile broken down never to be rebuilt again?

The answer to each question is, “Yes!” “Yes!” “Yes!”

And yet, these biblical truths were now forgotten. Doctrine had not yet fully transformed hearts so that personal application of gospel principles was in effect. From this narrative we learn afresh that there is a large difference between the head and the heart. People may know what to do, and yet act contrary to that knowledge.

When Peter arrived in Antioch, he knew what to do. Peter understood as a Jew, the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross. Peter correctly knew he was free to eat with the Gentiles. But then one day, something happened. Into this Gentile assembly walked a delegation from Jerusalem (Gal. 2:12).

In this delegation were some militant Messianic Jews who were determined to maintain their cultural identity. They would believe in Jesus as the Messiah. But, they would also keep their Jewish cultural heritage. Moreover, they would insist that Gentile converts also honor the ancient Jewish rituals and rules of dietary conduct.

The stage was set for an explosive incident. It did not take long for the conflict to begin. As soon as the delegation from Jerusalem arrived, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and separated himself. The Bible tells exactly why Peter did what he did. Peter was afraid of those which were of the circumcision (Gal. 2:12).

The fear Peter felt is both interesting and instructive. It is interesting because it is very much a characteristic of Peter to be forceful and fearful, strong and weak, brave and cowardly. We remember that it was Peter who had once boasted to Jesus, “Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.”

However, a short time later, Peter was found cursing and shouting, “I do not know the man!” That was the fearful, weak, and cowardly Peter.

Then came the Day of Pentecost. Peter boldly stood to proclaim the gospel of Christ. And when he was arrested, he sang songs in jail. That was the brave, loyal, and fearless Peter. So Peter could be heroic. But he could also be found halting between two opinions (Jas. 1:8). When a few legalists from Jerusalem showed up at the Church in Antioch, Peter fell apart. He became afraid, and in his fear, Peter acted in an emotional and irrational manner.

The fear found in Peter is instructive because it explains in part why good men, godly men will succumb to harmful practices. The word is fear. There is fear of losing people. There is fear of not being liked. There is fear of losing financial resources. There is fear of being considered unloving. There is fear of confrontation. There is fear of appearing foolish. There are many fears to be found in the ministry. Of course, no one wants to admit to being afraid. Peter would never have admitted that he was scared of the opinion of the Jews from Jerusalem, but he was.

And so, in a moment of weakness, Peter lacked the moral and spiritual courage needed to call the legalists to repentance and spiritual renewal. Such is the nature of fear. Fear can paralyze the voice. Fear can redirect one's thinking to call wrong right. Fear can cause others to sin (Gal. 2:13).

The rest of the Jews in Antioch joined Peter in playing the hypocrite. There is no easy way to say it, but Peter became a religious hypocrite. He acted one way with the Gentiles. Peter ate all types of meats. But then, when the Jews from Jerusalem arrived, Peter acted in an opposite manner. He acted as a hypocrite.

The charge of being a hypocrite hurts, but that is what the Holy Spirit declares of Peter. He was acting contrary to his inner convictions. Peter knew that Jesus had made all meats clean according to Mark 7:19. Peter knew that Jesus had invited all sinners to come to Himself. And all that came, were in no way cast out (Matt. 11:28–30). The Gentiles had come to Christ. There was something else. Peter could remember how God had given him a personal vision that he was not to regard as unclean what the Lord had cleansed (Acts 10:9–16). Peter was to eat meats set before him even though at one time the meats were called unclean. After his heavenly vision, Peter ate with Gentiles. But now, because a few legalists were insisting once more on keeping the traditions of men, Peter violated his own beliefs.

Peter's bad behavior, along with others, convinced even Barnabas to be carried away with the height of hypocrisy, which absolutely amazed Paul. Paul had thought that surely Barnabas would hold out against renewed legalism. But no, Barnabas too was overcome by peer pressures. It does happen. Just like that. Those who know best can be found to act the worse. Those one

would think would stand firm, are found to be weak and a disappointment. Why?

Because bad behavior generates its own momentum, and grows in power, emotion, and intensity. People instinctively believe that bad behavior has to be justified to the bitter end; no matter how much more damage will be done. And so, for a short while, error was triumphant in the Church of Antioch.

Doctrinally, the gospel was no longer preached as being according to free grace. Salvation was once more bound up with good works. The result of this false spiritual emphasis was that the Church divided. Unity gave way to division. Brotherly love was no longer manifested. Grace was replaced by the traditions of men. Into this sad situation came Paul who immediately discerned what was happening. When Paul assessed the circumstances, his holy soul was stirred with righteous indignation.

What the delegates from Jerusalem had insisted upon was not right! What Peter was doing was not right! Nor was it right that Barnabas was carried away by all the rest! What will Paul do? Paul will stand for the gospel truth. He will stand as one man against the many. He will do what is right, and he will insist that others do right as well. As Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. used to say to students, “Do right! Though the stars fall from heaven, do right!”

Paul will do right. He will go and speak to Peter so that we read, “When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I spoke unto Peter, before them all . . .” (Gal. 2:14). There was a day that Paul challenged Peter, because Peter was to blame. By his attitude and by his actions Peter was guilty of sowing discord among the Brethren. He needed to be reminded that the gospel way is still the only way for those who will be

faithful to the original cause of Christ. Erroneous doctrines will come into the Church, but the Word of God still abides forever.

When Paul spoke to Peter, he did so because he realized that no Church is any stronger than its spiritual leadership. When Paul spoke to Peter, he did so on the basis of the Word of Truth, not on the basis of personal differences. There is an old adage that says that doctrine divides. And it does. Doctrine divides the wheat from the tares. Doctrine divides the sheep from the goats. Doctrine divides the lost from the saved. Doctrine divides the elect from the non-elect. Doctrine divides those who will obey the Lord from those who will not. But doctrine also unites. Doctrine brings boundaries to believers. Doctrine provides a rally point to focus upon. Doctrine brings unity and harmony to the congregation of the righteous. For this to happen, two things must be present.

First, a measure of fearlessness must be manifested to preserve, protect, and present doctrinal truth. If Peter is fearful, Paul is fearless enough to teach what is right, and insist that others also do right, according to gospel terms.

Second, someone must have knowledge of the truth, if things are going to be done according to gospel terms. Personal opinions and private interpretations have no place in the plan of God, or the Church of Jesus Christ. God has spoken, but not haphazardly. He has given to His people a faith, a body of truth which must be contended for (Jude 1:3). God has also given to the Church, apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–12).

God has entrusted truth to faithful people who are commanded to impart it to other faithful individuals. Why? Because someone has to know the truth if the Church is to move

forward. When Paul spoke to Peter, he did so because the doctrine of grace teaches that man is justified, not by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). Justification is one of the great doctrines of the Bible. Dr. William Hendriksen, in his Commentary, provides an excellent definition. “Justification is that gracious act of God whereby, on the basis solely of Christ’s accomplished mediatorial work, He [God] declares the sinner just and the [sinner] latter accepts this benefit with a believing heart.”

Justification happens at the point of salvation. The gospel is preached. The Holy Spirit illuminates the darkened mind so that the free grace of a free gospel is understood: Christ died in the place of the guilty. “I am guilty,” says the soul. “But Jesus took my place. He became my substitute. This I believe.” And God the Father declares the believing soul to be justified in His sight. To be justified means that the sinner’s guilt is imputed to Christ. To be justified means that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner.

Consider the scene in a Courtroom. The Judge of the Universe is on the Bench. Before Him is the record of the Accused. The trial is over. The prisoner is standing to listen to his sentence. The jury has passed the verdict. “Guilty as charged!”

The spectators are silent. Justice must be served. The Judge speaks and His words catch everyone by surprise. “The prisoner is not guilty but righteous!”

He declares, “The prisoner is free to go.”

“Foul!” cries the Accuser.

“How can it be?”

“Not foul!” responds the Judge. “Another One has already stood before Me in the place of the Guilty. He has become the substitute. I executed the full penalty of the Law upon Him. The

price has been paid in full. I have charged the prisoner's debt to His account."

Such is the nature of grace.

Paul would do anything he could to protect the pure gospel of free grace, even to the point of challenging another pillar of the Church. And if we know anything about Peter, he was grateful that Paul corrected him. Now, Peter can stop being afraid. Now, Peter will no longer be a pawn, used by others. Now Peter can stop sowing discord among the Brethren for it is something that God hates.

A Balm In Gilead

DESPITE THE FACT that individuals are great sinners in the sight of God, there is “a balm in Gilead.” There is healing for the deadly disease of sin, and that healing is found by being justified by God’s redeeming grace. No one needs to despair for Jesus came to be “wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:20).

In a very brief and very brilliant biography of a famous preacher, it says that he had some very strange habits. One of these habits was to carry in his pocket a handful of precious stones: a diamond, a sapphire, a ruby, an emerald, and so forth. He would walk into a park and take one of those precious stones and hold it up to the light of the sun, moving it around, seeking different shades or different illuminations from it as the sunlight hit it. And as the people would go past, particularly the children, they would all shake their heads indicating that they thought this fellow was just a little bit odd.

The preacher that I am referring to is Jonathan Edwards, and on July 8, 1741, preached one of the greatest sermons ever preached in America. It was called, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” In Enfield, Connecticut, a congregation of people fell off their seats and clung to the pillars that were holding the

gallery up—crying out in despair. Jonathan Edwards did not say, “Oh friends, please excuse me. I never meant to embarrass you like that.” Not at all. He let the Spirit of God move.

There was a reason for the Lord’s spiritual power and anointing that day on Mr. Edwards and that was because before he preached, he prayed. Over and over and over again, he prayed, “Oh God, stamp eternity on my eyes.” I do not know anybody else who has ever prayed it. Maybe we have “said” it, but if God should stamp eternity or even judgment upon our eyes, I am quite convinced we would be a very different people.

Someone once said to that great scholar and statesman, Daniel Webster, “You have a colossal mind. What is the greatest thought that you have ever had?” He said, “I’ve thought about many things, but the most awesome, the most terrifying, the most shattering thought I’ve ever had is my personal accountability to God one day.”

There are roughly 783,137 words in the Authorized Version. One hymn writer calls the Bible, “A golden casket where gems of scriptural truth are stored. Each gem of scriptural truth is a heaven drawn picture of Christ, the Living Word.” I suggest that like Jonathan Edwards who selected a precious stone and lifted it up to the light of the sun, we select one word out of this “golden casket” and hold it up to the light of eternity in order to have a great thought. The word to examine is—“justification.”

A biblical understanding of justification begin at the cross of Calvary when Jesus cried out, *tetelestai* which means, “It is finished.” When Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” He was stating the greatest fact in all of human history for this was a divine pronouncement that the work of redemption was now accomplished. Christ had come into the world to redeem souls

unto Himself and now that act of purchasing them from the power, pollution, and presence of sin was a spiritual reality.

That the sons of Adam need redemption should be obvious, for there is much sin in the soul. Jesus said “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²² Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21–22). Worldly wisdom that teaches man is innately good finds no confirmation in either the Word of God or human experience. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Man has earned death. He deserves to die not only a physical death but an eternal death as well, for his transgression is great. So heinous is the sin of a soul that only the Sovereign of the universe can help Him. The plight of man is desperate. But who will be His advocate? Who will defend his case before the bar of divine justice and plead for mercy and grace?

It is without dispute that man is guilty as charged for the Moral Law of God has been violated (Exod. 20:1–20). The Law says:

- “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
- “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.”
- “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.”
- “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”
- “Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”
- “Thou shalt not kill.”
- “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

- “Thou shalt not steal.”
- “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”
- “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor’s.”

Before the Just Judge of the Universe the Accused is brought. You are the Accused and so am I. If we are both honest, we shall say that Isaiah the prophet is right. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). Now the heavenly verdict is rendered. “Guilty as charged!” The sentence is passed: eternal separation from the face of God. The Prisoner is to be taken away.

But wait. There is a word to be said from the Defense Attorney, even Jesus Christ the Righteous One. If the Court please, a proposition is to be made. Will the Divine Lawgiver of the Universe allow the sentence imposed on the guilty prisoner to be executed or carried out by a Substitute? The answer is, “Yes.” The Court will allow a substitute and the Law shall be satisfied as long as the penalty is paid. And so it is that Jesus Christ went to Calvary as a substitute for sinners. Jesus died in your place and mine, if you believe in Him. The wrath of the Father was poured out on Christ. See Him now suspended between heaven and earth suffering the fury of Divine wrath against sin in the act of crucifixion.

Shall I tell you about a crucifixion? Crucifixion was a form of Roman torture, reserved for slaves and rebels, combining the height of disgrace with the extremity of suffering. The agonies were so excruciating that men died in blasphemy and despair. Seneca, the Roman Stoic of the first century, says that those being

crucified cursed heaven and earth, all mankind, the hour of their birth, their judges and executioners, and that they spat in fury at those who looked on.

Sometimes the horror was so great that the victims had their tongues cut out, or their mouths gagged, to silence the desperate torment of their cries. On these occasions there were always those who, sadistically inclined, gathered to see the “fun.” They maliciously taunted and tormented the helpless victims, exacerbating and aggravating their pain. The rulers, not content with having engineered the crucifixion of Jesus, were also there to watch the end. “He saved others,” they sneered, “let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God” (Luke 23:35).

The hardened soldiers, brutalized and callous, took up the cry, “If thou be the king of the Jews, save thy self” (Luke 23:37). The malefactors who had been crucified with Jesus began to rail on Him casting the same in His teeth: “If thou be Christ,” they cried derisively, “save thyself and us” (Matt. 27:44; Luke 23:39). The irony is that what the unbelieving people uttered in jest was actually taking place. Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

In the strange and mysterious economy of the Father, the cross is not simply the symbol but the instrument of our salvation. It is the means by which we are reconciled to God. The Cross is the basis of justification whereby souls are declared righteous by faith. In the act of justification comes peace with God.

“Without justification it is impossible to have real peace. Conscience forbids it. Sin is a mountain between a man and God, and must be taken away. The sense of guilt lies heavy on the heart and must be removed. Unpardoned sin will murder peace. The true Christian knows all this well. His peace arises from a consciousness of his sins being

forgiven, and his guilt being put away. . . . He has peace with God, because he is justified.”⁷

We return once more to the courtroom for the Adversary of men’s souls has leveled a renewed charge. The Accused stands. The Holy and Just Judge asks, “How plead ye? Guilty or not guilty?” This time the entry is made, “Not guilty!” How can that be?

The answer is this. The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, does cleanse those who have cast themselves upon Him from all sin (1 John 1:7). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). The Cross is the means by which souls are reconciled to God.

There is a lovely story told in a work by the English author, Charles Dickens. Mr. Peggotty, in *David Copperfield*, bids Ham and Mrs. Gummidge put a lighted candle every night in the little window of the boat-turned-house. Emily has run away, and Mr. Peggotty is going out through the entire world to seek her. But he says, “Every night as regular as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say, ‘Come back, my child, come back.’ ”

God calls the wayward and the lost, not by a candle but by a Cross. It is at Calvary that our burdens are lifted and our sins are forgiven. “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, RSV). “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isa. 59:1).

William Cowper celebrates this saving truth:

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Foundations of Faith*.

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”⁸

The guilty stains are lost because it is finished, the great work of redemption has been accomplished and can now be applied to all those who cast themselves upon Jesus Christ and say,

“Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
“Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me Savior, or I die.”⁹

Dr. J. Vernon McGee reminds us there are only two kinds of religion in the world: those that list every “ism,” every cult, every religion under one category. They all say, “Do, do, do.” However, only Christianity says, “Done!” Christ *has done* it all; there is nothing left to accomplish, nothing left to do in order to merit God’s favor. The price has already been paid in full. And this is the “balm of Gilead” (Jer. 8:22).

⁸ “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood,” written in 1772.

⁹ “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me,” written by Augustus Toplady in 1776.

Ye Must be Born Again

BECAUSE EVERY HUMAN being, without exception, has sinned (1 John 1:8), and because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), every person must be born again to see life. The apostle John explains.

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: ² The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. ³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? ⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:2–6).

In 1976 a new phrase became part of the American social lexicon. The phrase was “born again.” Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter said he was a “born-again” believer. The late Chuck Colson, former presidential advisor to Richard Nixon, wrote a book entitled *Born Again*. Newspaper editors, television commentators, and those in the public spotlight began asking well-known personalities if they too were “born again.” The

phrase was unfamiliar to a lot of these people and many had to do some quick studying in the Bible to find out just what was meant.

The words “born again” come from the story of Jesus meeting with a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus. The Pharisees were a particular religious group in Israel that was dedicated to honoring all 618 commandments of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees were zealous to please God and that was the problem. How does a man please God? By keeping the law?

That would please God to be sure, but then who can really keep the Law perfectly? The standards are too high—and too holy.

Individuals are weak and even the best intentions are mixed, good with bad. Self-righteousness emerges unless a soul is sensitive enough to be honest and the honest heart says, “I am not all I should be.”

There are people with the heart of a Pharisee today. In their minds they are religious but they are not righteous. Years ago I attended a poignant funeral service at a rural church in southwestern Pennsylvania. The ceremony was led by a deacon for his recently departed friend. The mindset of this man, however, was such that he felt he was a righteous man and yet he had made no profession of faith, honored no church creed, offered no prayers, and had no expressed interest in the Bible or what it said.

Nevertheless, this man believed God was kind and good and if there were a heaven he felt he would go there when he died. On what basis did the man place his hope of heaven? What this man had to offer God was his morality. After all, he did not lie. He did not cheat. He did not steal. He was faithful to his wife. He had been a good provider and a kind father. His friends were

numerous and all spoke well of this man. What more could God want?

While we do not want to diminish all the noble characteristics of a good life lived (humanly speaking, that is), the truth is that there is more. In the sight of God morality is not enough to merit heaven. Something more is needed because our lives are fields that primarily contain weeds. We cannot produce edible fruit in and of ourselves. We can mow the weeds, so to speak, but that effort alone will never produce acceptable fruit. If we really want that kind of fruit we will have to go deeper. We must plow up the whole field and start again with new plants.

When Nicodemus went to Jesus in the middle of the night, he went as a zealous Pharisee. He went as a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus went as a good moral man.

Nevertheless, immediately and without hesitation, Jesus still said to him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

To be “born again” is to receive from God a new birth. The new birth can be understood as nothing less than a radical transformation of moral character. It is being converted.

Conversion by way of definition is the decisive act in which a person turns away from sin in genuine repentance and accepts the salvation that Christ offers. The imagery in conversion is that of turning.

A person is going along a road and realizes that he or she is on the wrong track. They will never reach the destination if they continue in that direction. So the person “turns,” or “is converted.” He or she ceases to go in the wrong direction and begins going in the right one.

Some people are on the wrong track morally. Multitudes today are living together more like unthinking animals with

passion rather than as humans with a sense of honor and decency and commitment. One national morning news show recently reported how the perfume industry is marketing its products by making women out to be objects of sensual desire without restraint or inhibition. The thinking is simple: *sex sells*. The Bible, however, says sex is sacred. The author of Hebrews puts the whole matter this way. “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). Potipher’s wife tried to seduce Joseph but she was not successful because he fled from her presence. Joseph ran from temptation because he was morally moving in the right direction.

Some people are going in the wrong direction financially. Covetous eyes are cast about and items are wanted that cannot be afforded or should not be sought. Ahab, the eighth king of Israel had covetous eyes. He reigned in splendor from Samaria from 874 B.C.– 853 B.C. But Ahab was not satisfied with what he had. He wanted more. Specifically he wanted a plot of land near his palace. The owner was a poor farmer named Naboth. When Naboth refused to give or sell the land to the king Ahab began to sulk. He went into a bedroom chamber, laid down on a royal couch, turned his face to the wall and pouted. When his wife Jezebel found the pouting king upset because of his greedy heart she arranged to have Naboth murdered and the desired land confiscated.

The Bible teaches Christians not to have a greedy heart and seek to grab what cannot be afforded. Excessive debt will sneak up to destroy all happiness. It is easy to become trapped by grabbing for too much.

Men who trap exotic animals in Africa for zoos in America say that one of the hardest animals to catch is the ring-tailed monkey. For the Zulus of that continent, however, it’s simple.

They've been catching this agile little animal with ease for years. The method the Zulus use is based on knowledge of the animal. Their trap is nothing more than a melon growing on a vine. The seeds of this melon are a favorite of the monkey. Knowing this, the Zulus simply cut a hole in the melon, just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand to reach the seeds inside. The monkey will stick his hand in, grab as many seeds as he can, then start to withdraw it. This he cannot do. His fist is now larger than the hole. The monkey will pull and tug, screech and fight the melon for hours. But he can't get free of the trap unless he gives up the seeds, which he refuses to do. Meanwhile, the Zulus sneak up and nab him. When a Christian is free of grasping for the toys of time resources are available to advance the kingdom of God. It is better to invest for eternity than for time. Move in that direction.

Some people are moving in the wrong direction by embracing inappropriate relationships. For example, no Christian man or woman should date or marry someone who denies the faith. In fact, it is forbidden by Scripture. 2 Corinthians 6:14 states plainly, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" Charles Spurgeon has rightly said, "There is not a man or woman on earth who is worth going to hell over." Christians *must* marry other Christians. It is as simple as that. It is the will of God. Conversion changes the direction of one's course of life from the wrong way to the right way, the way that God wants.¹⁰

When Jesus spoke of being "born again," He was not speaking of simply adjusting one's basic attitude and actions; He

¹⁰ See *The Shaw Pocket Bible Handbook*.

was speaking of a radical transformation. To be born again is to become alive to a whole New World—the world of the Spirit.

The Bible says that God is a Spirit. Individuals must worship God in spirit and in truth. Harold Vaughan observes three truths about the new birth, and I share them with you.

First, the new birth is *supernatural*. No person can recreate a new life principle in his or her own soul. Jesus likened the new birth to the wind. The wind blows. No one knows where it came from or where it is going. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. The secret sovereign ministry of God the Holy Spirit moves in the hearts of men and women and young people alike.

Perhaps the Spirit of God is speaking to someone now.

You have heard the Scripture read.

You understand the message, and you realize Jesus Christ has come to save sinners.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

No one can tell what God will use to bring a soul to Himself. He might use a television program such as this. He might even use the playful voice of a young child.

Listen to the words of St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo, as he tells how he came to faith.

“I was weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when I heard the voice of children from a neighboring house chanting, ‘take up and read; take up and read.’ I could not remember ever having heard the like, so checking the torrent of my tears, I arose, interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book and read the first chapter I should find. Eagerly then I returned to the place where I had laid the volume of the apostle. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: ‘Not in revelry and

drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.’ No further would I read, nor did I need to. For instantly at the end of this sentence, it seemed as if a light of serenity infused into my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”¹¹

The new birth is supernatural.

Second, the new birth is *spiritual*. When one is born again, the heart is warmed, the mind is persuaded, the personality is purified, and the will is bent to obey God’s commands. The soul is alive to God. Billy Graham remembers the day after he was converted. He says that the whole world took on a new color.

The sky seemed to be much bluer.

The air was cleaner.

The grass was greener.

People were precious and not objects of ridicule or exploitation.

Religious services became a delight, not a duty.

Billy Graham as a young teenager became alive to the spiritual side of creation.

Because the new birth is spiritual the soul must be sensitive to spiritual matters.

“There is a time, we know not when,
A place, we know not where;
Which marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen,
Which crosses every path,

¹¹ *Confessions*, ch. XII.

Which marks the boundary between
God's mercy and His wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,
To die as if by stealth;
It does not dim the beaming eye,
Nor pale the glow of health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirit light and gay;
And that which pleases still may please,
And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God hath set
Indelibly a mark;
Unseen by man, for man as yet,
Is blind and in the dark.

He feels perchance that all is well
And every fear is calmed;
He lives, he dies, he walks in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned!

O, where is that mysterious line
That may by men be crossed,
Beyond which God himself hath sworn,
That he who goes is lost?

An answer from the skies repeats,
'Ye who from God depart,'
Today, O hear His voice,

Today repent and harden not your heart.”¹²

Third, the new birth *imparts holiness*. The Bible says, “Follow holiness without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). The Christian will find no lingering delight in sin. Sin loses its fascination for it is sin that nailed the Savior to a wooden cross.

Nicodemus wanted to be saved and, led by the Holy Spirit, Nicodemus embraced Christ as His Lord and Savior.

A series of questions are now asked of you.

- “Have you ever become concerned over your soul?”
- “Where will you spend eternity?”
- “Have you searched out the Savior?”
- “Have you ever heard Jesus say, ‘You too must be born again?’”

Hear now the words of Divine imperative. “You must be born again.” This is not only an invitation but also a command. Without the new birth, no man shall dwell in heaven in God’s place. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

Notice the Divine urgency. Jesus did not respond to the kind flattery of Nicodemus. He went right to the heart of the issue. “Today is the day of salvation. If you hear His voice harden not your heart.”

A Welsh minister was speaking some years ago. He leaned over the pulpit and said with a solemn air, “Friends, I have a question to ask. I cannot answer it. You cannot answer it. If an angel from heaven were here, he could not answer it. And, if a

¹² “The Hidden Line (The Destiny of Men),” by Joseph Addison Alexander first appeared in the *Sunday School Journal* on April 5, 1837.

devil from hell were here, he could not answer it. The question is this: 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation'?"

The Loveliness of Jesus

IT HAS BEEN said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus loved to tell parables. It was one of His favorite teaching methods. In a parable, a simple truth can be told, while a spiritual lesson is learned. In the Parable of the Vineyard, the Lord told a story that everyone in the Temple could relate to in all of its parts. This is what Jesus told the people.

“Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: ³⁴ And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. ³⁵ And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. ³⁷ But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. ³⁸ But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. ³⁹ And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. ⁴⁰ When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? ⁴¹ They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. ⁴² Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected,

the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? ⁴³ Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. ⁴⁴ And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. ⁴⁵ And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. ⁴⁶ But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet" (Matt. 21:33–46).

The people knew how vineyards were planted, and then protected by a hedge of thorns. The thorn hedge was designed to keep out wild boars, and thieves.

In addition to the hedge, most vineyards had a winepress nearby for pressing the grapes. Often there was a tower built in the vineyard. From the tower, a watch could be kept over the area. Also, in the tower, temporary lodging could be found. The people of Palestine were familiar with the financial transactions associated with the vineyard. There were three ways an owner of a land could make money.

First, he could simply rent the land for a flat fee. Second, he could require a certain percentage of the crop after it was taken to market. Third, he could demand a fixed amount of the fruit.

The householder in the Lord's parable had decided to take a fixed amount of the fruit. When the time of harvest was near, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of the vineyard. But the husbandman surprised the servant. For whatever reason, the servant was beaten. Another was stoned, and still another servant was killed.

As the Lord told His simple story, the people of Palestine knew that such things really did happen. Disputes between management and labor, with violence in the workplace, is as old as civilization. In the Lord's Parable, the owners of the vineyard sent more representatives to negotiate his business, but all of those that were sent were hurt. In an ultimate act of good will, and as a sign of good faith, the householder sent his own son. "Surely," he thought, "they will honor him."

But they didn't. The workers of the vineyard were so angry, and unreasonable, that they killed the heir to the vineyard, thinking that if they killed him, the owner would die in due time, and then the land would be up for public auction. Perhaps they could take it for themselves. As contemporary as the Parable was to those who heard Christ speak, the spiritual overtones were not difficult to discern by the Chief Priests, and by the Pharisees.

The Certain Householder was God the Father. The Vineyard was Israel. Isaiah 5:7 says, "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant."

The covenant of circumcision, and the ceremonial Law, were a hedge, or a wall of partition around the Jewish church.

The altar of burnt offerings was the winepress, to which all the offerings were brought.

The Husbandmen were the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. To them was the vineyard let out.

Meanwhile, the Householder went into a far country. That happened spiritually, when the Shekinah glory was withdrawn from Israel. Still, the Servants were sent, a reference to the prophets. The prophets came to Israel because God was looking for fruit (Matt. 21:34). He expected it.

The expectations of God, says Matthew Henry,

“were not hasty, for the Lord did not demand pre-payment. The expectations of God were not high payment, for the Lord did not put the laborers in peril of being penalized if they did not come to Him. The expectations of the God were not hard, for the Lord did not demand more than He Himself has planted.”¹³

The expectations of God were reasonable.

Nevertheless, the servants of the householder were treated cruelly. Jeremiah was beaten. Isaiah was cut in half. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was stoned in the Temple area.

Still God persevered in His goodness. He sent other prophets. He sent John the Baptist, who was beheaded. And He sent the Twelve Apostles. But the religious leaders of Israel were drunk with the blood of the saints. Finally, the Householder sent His only son, the heir of all things. The householder’s Son was Jesus Christ, who was to be honored. But instead of showing the reverence that was deserved, the Son was cast out of the vineyard and killed.

And that is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was plotted against (Matt. 21:38). Pilate, and Herod, and the princes of the world, plotted against the Lord, but only because they knew Him not. “For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8).

The chief priests and the elders knew who Jesus was. They understood that this was the Heir. At least some of them understood, and still they said, “Come, let us kill Him.” Jesus was taken outside of the city of Jerusalem, and crucified.

Some wanted Jesus dead, out of envy. Some wanted Jesus dead, out of fear. Others wanted Jesus dead, out of hatred.

¹³ See Henry, 1312–14.

The only question left to answer, was what should be done to the Husbandman and His helpers?

Should not those who hurt the servants, and killed the Son, be punished?

And should not the vineyard be given out to others?

While the chief priests, and the Pharisees were considering all the spiritual interpretations of the words of the first parable, the Lord told another one.

Jesus spoke of the Stone which the builders rejected, and how the same became the head of the corner.

Again, the chief priests, and the Pharisees understood immediately.

In this parable, Jesus was the Chief Stone. The builders were the religious leaders of Israel. They had rejected him, but he was still to become the most important part of the national life of Israel, no matter what. Though the builders would stumble over Him, as men stumble over hidden stones, He would grind them to powder, as a large boulder can easily crush a man.

The rejected Stone crushed Israel, because the people pulled it down upon their own heads, when they cried out before Pilate, "Let His death be upon our heads and upon our children." And so it happened.

In these short parables are many truths about God, about man, about Jesus Christ, and about national Israel.

Concerning God, we discover first, that God is great. The greatness of God is revealed in the fact of His creation. It is incomprehensible in its majesty, and complexity. Man has turned his mind outward, and subdued creation.

He has channeled his energies downward, through the microscope, to discover the world of viruses, and find cures for

cancers. Man has gone down in the oceans, to touch the bottom of the sea.

Now man is turning his eyes, and energies outward, in earnest, and discovering the wonders of the stars, and galaxies.

As God is great, so God is good. The goodness of God is revealed in the work, and provision He gives to His creation. God has given adequate resources for the work He has called man to do. He has entrusted all His resources to man, asking only that proper respect, and honor, be returned to Him.

As we learn that God is great, and God is good, we also discover something about man. First, man has many privileges. The vineyard was equipped with everything: the hedge, the winepress, and the tower, which would make the task of labor easier to discharge.

The Father has not only given man a task to perform, but He has also provided the means to do the task. Man is very fortunate.

Second, man is a free agent. "God," says William Barclay, "is no tyrannical task-master; He is like a wise commander who allocates a task and then trusts a man to do it." Man is therefore responsible for his attitude and actions concerning Christ.

Then third, man is accountable. To all men there is coming a day of reckoning. We will have to answer to God for the way in which we have carried out the tasks entrusted to us by God. Every idle word will be evaluated. Every intention of the heart will be investigated. There will be no secrets in the Day of Judgment. The Books will be opened, and the record will be read.

One thing that the record will reveal about man is how deliberate his sin was. The religious leaders of Israel, like the husbandman of Christ's parable, carried on a deliberate policy of rebellion, and disobedience towards the Master.

But they did not always do that, for the time came when the Father made the hurting to stop. And then the privileges of the religious leaders were taken away from them, and given to others.

While this was happening, the Son was exalted.

“The Stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the building.”

The exaltation of the rejected Stone is declared to be something majestic, and marvelous, and so it is.

Today, in the eyes of millions, Jesus is precious, He is marvelous, and He is altogether lovely.

To the artist Jesus is the One altogether lovely.

To the architect Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone.

To the astronomer Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness.

To the baker Jesus is the Living Bread.

To the banker Jesus is the Hidden Treasurer.

To the biologist Jesus is the Life.

To the carpenter Jesus is the Sure Foundation.

To the builder Jesus is the True Cornerstone.

To the doctor Jesus is the Great Physician.

To the educator Jesus is the Great Teacher.

To the farmer Jesus is the Sower and the Lord of the Harvest.

To the florist Jesus is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley.

To the geologist Jesus is the Rock of Ages.

To the horticulturist Jesus is the True Vine.

To the judge Jesus is the Righteous Judge.

To the juror Jesus is the True Witness.

To the jeweler Jesus is the Pearl of Great Price.

To the editor Jesus is the Good Tidings of Great Joy.

To the oculist Jesus is the Light of the Eyes.

To the philosopher Jesus is the Wisdom of God.

To the printer Jesus is the True Type.

To the servant Jesus is the Good Master.

To the student Jesus is the Incarnate Truth.

To the one who labors Jesus is the Giver of Rest.

To the sinner Jesus is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

To the Christian, Jesus is the Son of the Living God, the Savior, the Redeemer and Lord.

Jesus Christ is precious—and He is altogether lovely.

While the chief priests, and the Pharisees, plotted the death of Christ, He claimed that they could not deny Him His honor, for in reality, they were His servants. He was the Son of the Living God.

This passage contains one of the clearest claims of Jesus ever made, to be unique, Jesus claimed to be different from even the greatest of the servant prophets who went before Him. He is very God of very God.

Our passage also reveals the sacrificial reality Jesus knew awaited Him. The Lord knew that He would be taken outside the city of Jerusalem and killed. He did not die because He was compelled to.

Jesus died because He knew what the Father had sent Him to accomplish. The Father wanted Him to create a new nation, called the Church. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

For the last one hundred and fifty years many Christians have been enamored with national Israel. They should be more enamored with the church. The church is the most unique institution on planet earth, not the current Christ rejecting secular

nation that once had a unique spiritual legacy with great privileges.

There is something majestic, and marvelous, in all that Christ has done, from His work at Calvary, to the creation of the church. As there is something majestic, and marvelous, so there is SOMEONE, who is the same. He is the Father's Son. He is the Chief Cornerstone.

Come to Christ. Confess Him as your Lord and Savior. Embrace His loveliness right now.

An Atonement for Sin

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. ²⁷ And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; ²⁸ For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. ²⁹ But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. ³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives” (Matt. 26:26–30).

MEANWHILE, PREPARATIONS for the Passover had already been taken care of by Peter and John. On the 14th of Nisan, the Thursday before the Passover, the disciples had gone to the Temple to purchase a lamb, which would have been offered to God by a priest. The roasted lamb was then taken to a special, large Upper Room, that Jesus had appointed.

In the Upper Room, the disciples made themselves comfortable by reclining on couches placed around a prepared table.

Originally, the Passover was to be celebrated standing with a staff in the hand, to symbolize the haste with which Egypt was left.

However, this custom had been modified. Now the people reclined for a lengthy meal that was filled with numerous rites, and several distinct stages.

As the disciples positioned themselves around the table, it soon became obvious that something was wrong. There was tension in the air.

A controversy had arisen as to who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It is not hard to believe that Peter felt he had a natural right to a position of pre-eminence, but he was not alone. Others in the small group also wanted to occupy the places of honor.

It is probable that the whole controversy started because of the seating arrangement.

From the Gospel narrative, there is evidence that Judas Iscariot had boldly taken a position on the left hand of Christ, while John had taken the couch on the Lord's right hand. Across the table at the foot, was Peter. Then the other disciples were scattered about.

The problem was, Peter did not like being at the foot of the table across from the Lord. He wanted one of the two places of honor. Peter wanted to be on the right hand, or on the left hand of Christ.

As the unpleasantness continued, Jesus humbled the entire group in an unexpected manner.

Arising from the table, the Lord laid aside His outer cloak, girded Himself with a towel, and took a basin of water. It was obvious what Jesus was about to do. He was going to wash the feet of His disciples, including the feet of Judas.

The water was poured from a pitcher over the feet, and caught in a basin, and Peter would be first to be washed. In a sudden state of shock, Peter whispered in a hoarse voice, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Thou shalt never wash my feet!"

Peter thought he was being humble until he heard the Lord say, "Peter, if I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Always able to think quickly when on the spot, and still seeking to be some sort of leader, Peter immediately said, "Lord, wash not only my feet but my hands and my head too!"

And so once more Peter had to be gently corrected, by being taught that the one who has been bathed needs only to wash His feet. In spiritual terms, this means that there is an initial salvation by being identified with Christ by faith, and then there is the sanctification of a holy life.

None of the disciples ever forgot the lesson of humility demonstrated by Christ. Each Christian should be ready to offer any humble service that is needed by another.

Having brought an end to the disciple's quarreling, the meal continued. But the coming events weighed heavily upon the Lord's mind. Finally, He would keep His thoughts silent no longer. Speaking in a general way, Jesus said in a simple, but quite manner.

"One of you will betray me!"

At first, there was a shocked silence. What did Jesus mean? One disciple looked at another in suspicion and mistrust. Who would it be?

Who would dare to betray Jesus?

Would it be Andrew? Andrew was the disciple of John the Baptist, who had been directed by the same to Jesus. It was Andrew who had first introduced his brother Simon Peter to Christ.

Would it be Peter? Who would betray Jesus? Formerly called Simon, or the son of Jonas, Peter was a fisherman until the day Christ called Him to become a fisher of men.

Would it be Bartholomew? Bartholomew is thought to be the surname of Nathanael, who was brought to Christ by Philip.

Would it be James? James was the brother of John, and the son of Zebedee and Salome. He and his brother were partners with Peter and Andrew in the fishing business.

Would it be John? Would John, the brother of James, and the cousin of Christ, betray the Lord?

Would it be James? The son of Alphaeus and Mary. James was called “The Less.” This may refer to the shortness of his stature, or it may refer to the fact that he was younger than the other James.

Would it be Judas? Called Thaddaeus and Lebbaeus.

Would it be Matthew? Who was also called Levi. He was a tax collector. Would he have gone back to a corrupt lifestyle?

Would it be Philip? Who lived in Bethsaida. Philip had brought Nathanael to Jesus.

Would it be Simon? The Zealot who was called Simon the Canaanite.

Would it be Thomas? Called Didymus, meaning “a twin.” Thomas was always doubting things that were said.

Would it be Judas Iscariot? The treasurer to the apostles. Surely he could be trusted! No one suspected him of anything.

Finally, Peter could stand the suspense no longer. Gesturing to John, who was seated at the right side of Christ, Peter told John to ask who the traitor was.

The question was asked, but the reply was unclear, for in a general way Jesus simply said that the one who betrayed Him would be the one who dipped the sop with Him. But what did that mean? All the disciples were eating with Christ, and dipping in the common bowl.

Only later would it be remembered that the Lord had given the sop to Judas. The sop was a piece of bread and meat, which had been dipped in the gravy of the common dish in the center of the table. It was a choice morsel of the meal.

By giving the sop to Judas, Jesus was extending to him the last act of friendship this side of eternity. But the heart of Judas was too far gone to care.

The dye was cast. What he had to do needed to be done quickly. Rising from the table, Judas departed into the darkness of eternal destruction.

With Judas gone, the meal continued. And on that solemn night of the Paschal supper, the old dispensation of Judaism came to an end; and Jesus, as the true Paschal Lamb, typified for so long by the Passover, took its place in anticipation.

There was to be a New Feast embodying the essence of Christianity, as the Passover had embodied the essence of Judaism. Though there would be great differences between the two systems, there was this unity. Both spoke of deliverance.

The Ancient Passover spoke of deliverance from temporal bondage, while the New Feast spoke of eternal deliverance from spiritual bondage.

Spiritual freedom would come because Christ would give His life to secure the remission of sins for those whom the Father had entrusted to Him.

Taking the traditional elements of the Passover meal, in a simple ceremony, Jesus gave a cup of wine and a loaf of bread new meaning, as He began to speak of His body, and His blood, which would be poured out in a great sacrifice.

As usual, the disciples did not fully comprehend all that Jesus was saying. It did not matter. One day they would understand. One day they would fellowship with Christ anew in the kingdom of the Father.

The day of spiritual understanding came soon after everyone left the Upper Room, for monumental events began to happen

rapidly. Later, the disciples would remember that they had gone to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus liked to pray.

Abruptly, there were torch lights, and soldiers, and shouting. Judas was leading the way for the soldiers!

Suddenly, death was in the air. Fear set in. The disciples fled. Jesus was taken into custody. Within hours, word filtered back. Jesus was being beaten. He was being questioned. Jesus was being spit upon and mocked. He was being prepared for crucifixion.

The hours passed. Things were happening too quickly. Crowds were gathering. People were shouting. Voices were heard crying out, “Kill Him!” “Kill Him!” “Crucify Him!” “Crucify Him!”

The governor, Pontius Pilate, was as amazed as anyone else. For some reason, the Jewish leaders wanted this Man killed as soon as possible. What was one more rapid death to Rome?

The deed was done. Jesus was taken and crucified. Then, for three hours, time seemed to stand still.

A strange darkness covered the land. There was a scream from the Cross, and then silence. Word came from some women. Christ had died on the Cross. The body would be taken down and buried. The Sabbath ended. The first day of the week came.

There was new information. Jesus was alive! He was alive! The disciples gathered to discuss what this all meant. They returned to the Upper Room.

And then came Jesus. He came to eat and to drink with them. The disciples could go and tell the world the good news of redeeming grace and love, which is exactly what they did.

Do you believe these things? Would you like to eat and drink with Christ, by faith, in the kingdom of His Father? That

opportunity is being extended to you today. Come and dine with Christ in the Kingdom of our Father.

“Jesus has a table spread
Where the saints of God are fed,
He invites His chosen people, ‘Come and dine;’
With His manna He doth feed
And supplies our every need:
Oh, ’tis sweet to sup with Jesus all the time!

‘Come and dine,’ the Master calleth, ‘Come and dine;’
You may feast at Jesus’ table all the time;
He Who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine,
To the hungry calleth now, ‘Come and dine’.”¹⁴

¹⁴ “Come and Dine,” written by Charles B. Widmeyer in 1907.

A Love that Will Never Let Go

SOME YEARS AGO, on a hot summer day in south Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole that was behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. In the house, his mother was looking out the window.

She saw the two as they got closer and closer together. In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could. Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed, and made a U-turn to swim to his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms, just as the alligator snatched his legs. That began a very incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was much too passionate to let go.

A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, raced from his truck, took aim, and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred by the vicious attack of the animal. On his arms, there were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to the son she loved. The newspaper reporter, who interviewed the boy after the trauma, asked the boy if he would show him his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs. Then, with obvious pride, he said to the

reporter, “But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my Mom wouldn’t let go.”

You and I can identify with that little boy. We have scars, too. No, not from an alligator, but the scars of a painful past or the scares of sin, or suffering, unwanted and unexpected. Some of those scars are unsightly, and have caused us deep regret. But, some wounds, are because God has refused to let go. In the midst of your struggle, the Lord has been right there, holding on to you. “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3).

“The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.

The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled
And pardoned from his sin.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints’ and angels’ song.”¹⁵

There is no sin too great for the grace of God. There is no sin that takes a person so far down, that the love of the Lord is not deeper still. Come to Christ. Receive Him today as the One who loves sinners and will forgive all of your iniquities. Jesus is more

¹⁵ “The Love of God,” written by Frederick M. Lehman in 1917.

willing to forgive you, than you are willing to sin. Every deadly sin can be forgiven if repented of, confessed, and forsaken. Flee to the One who is willing to forgive you in this very hour.

Dr. T. T. Shields was the pastor of Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto, Canada. He tells this wonderful story illustrating the love of God.

In the home of a friend one day, as he reclined on the lounge opposite, and I in an easy chair, we were having a pleasant chat until dinner was called, when his little boy, named Neil, about three or four years old, came in. He went to his father's side and I heard him whisper, "Papa, get up and show Mr. Shields how much you love me." I knew at once there was a secret between them, as it is fitting there should be between father and child, and that was a secret in which the child rejoiced. His father smiled, and said, "Oh, run away, Neil, and play; we are busy talking, and Mr. Shields knows I love you." "Yes," said the little fellow, "but I want you to show him how much." Again and again the father tried to put him off, but the child persisted in his plea that the visitor be shown "how much" the father loved.

At length the father yielded, and as he stood, the child stood between us, and holding up his index finger, with a glance first at his father and then at me, he said, "Now you watch, till you see how much my papa loves me."

His father was a tall and splendidly proportioned man. First, he partially extended one arm, but the child exclaimed, "No, more than that." The other arm was extended, but the little fellow was not content, and demanded, "More than that." Then one after the other both arms were outstretched to the full, only the fingers remaining closed. But still the child insisted, "More than that."

Then, in response to his repeated demands, as he playfully stamped his little foot and clapped his hands and cried, "No! No!

It's more than that!" One finger after another on either hand was extended, until his father's arms were opened; their utmost reach, and to each was added the full hand breadth. Then the child turned to me, and gleefully clapping his hands, exclaimed, "See? That's how much papa loves me." Then he ran off to his play content.

I charge thee, sinner, let not thine unbelief drive thee beyond the far reach of mercy's fingertips! There is no country this side of hell which is not shadowed by that Cross. Behold, and believe how much the Lord Jesus loves thee! Believe how willing Jesus is to save you, now.

"Only believe, only believe;
All things are possible, only believe,
Only believe, only believe;
All things are possible, only believe."¹⁶

¹⁶ "Only Believe," written by Paul Rader in 1921.

Confessional Form

First Love Publications
P.O. Box 2190
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DEAR SIR,

I have read the material on seven deadly sins, and have seen my need of the Savior, Jesus Christ. I now see my sin as *sin* and no longer excuse it. My heart grieves at my sin, much like the apostle Peter who “wept bitterly” over his sin, and I can truly say with the psalmist, “against you, you only, have I sinned.” I once was a slave to my sins, but, because of Jesus, I am now a servant of righteousness. I do believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for sinners, according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again on the third day. I know that in dying for sinners, Christ paid the price necessary to redeem me and to forgive me of my sin. I acknowledge and confess that I deserve hell and the judgement of God. However, I am grateful for God’s marvelous grace, mercy, and love. I do place my faith in the Lord Jesus with full confidence that He has forgiven me of my sins and has received me as a child of God. I want to know the one true God and enjoy Him forever. I want to live for Jesus and serve Him all the days of my life.

I would appreciate any further help you could give me as I grow in grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Date:

Name:

Address :

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