



Following Christ

By D. L. Stephens

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Contents

Are you sure you are
following Christ?

Do you know Jesus? Does
Jesus know you?

I never knew you

Ashamed of the cross

Who has ears to hear

Set your mind on things
above

The Risen Christ

Purpose in suffering

Glory

Are you sure you are following Christ?

The Bible in the Old Testament book of 1st Kings tells a story about a young man who was about to take on greater responsibility. He spoke first with the older men who had advised his father, and they gave him advice on how he should proceed. He did not like that advice. After that, he spoke with his friends and they gave him their advice. He decided to accept the advice of his friends.

The result was bad. Because of the young man's decision to follow the advice of his friends the greater part of the people rebelled and formed their own kingdom. In the end the young man fell into dishonor and defeat.¹ His name was Rehoboam.

Too many times people decide to accept the advice of friends about their life choices rather than ask for the wisdom of elders, or more importantly, rather than seek God's advice.

Even Solomon, the wisest of kings, was influenced by his wives to abandon his faith in God. He ignored God's advice after God had said concerning the idolatrous people in the neighboring countries, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods."²

On the set of a Sci Fi Channel program there was a wall plaque that read: "Faith, family, friends."³ Apparently, the plaque indicated the priorities of the

¹ 1 Kings 12, the story of Rehoboam's foolish decision, and the resulting division of the kingdom of Israel into two warring nations.

² 1 Kings 11.

³ *Flash Gordon*, Syfy Channel.

actor or actors in the series. Better if it read: “Jesus, family, friends.” Nowadays, people cite as the most important priority in their life their relationship with their family—their wives and children. Family obligations and relations are important, but our relationship with God is more important.

Matthew in his gospel records what Jesus said about devotion to Him,

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

Love of Jesus is the highest priority; it is not family. Family is at best, second. In the gospel of John we read that Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”⁴ Many people profess to love Jesus, but when the time comes to choose Jesus over an illicit desire, or a promotion, or loyalty to friends the ones who profess love deny that love and, instead, yield to their true priorities.

People who love Jesus are willing to confess him. The New Testament doctrine of confession carries the idea of declaring allegiance to Christ “...as one’s master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgement on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant, His loyal follower.”⁵

No one could be considered a loyal follower of Christ if he is not following the words of Christ. If someone thinks he is a follower of Christ, yet is making important religious and spiritual decisions based on advice from friends and relatives, he is deceiving himself.

⁴ John 14:15.

⁵ Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Vol. 2, p. 224. ὁμολογέω.

John, in his gospel, tells of an incident that happened after Jesus had healed a blind man. The Pharisees called the parents of the man who had been healed, asking how he had been healed.

John 9:20 His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

Religious authorities will use intimidation to ensure that people comply with religious doctrine. Family and friends even have been known to use economic, social, or even physical pressure to gain compliance from a nonconformist. John also tells of this type of conflict and the reason it succeeds.

John 12:42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

Simply put, there are those who prefer to be approved by men, rather than God. Herein is the test of a saving faith. Are you seeking the approval of your spouse rather than that of God? Are you seeking the approval of your family, or your employer, or your friends rather than that of God?

If you would have a saving faith you would seek the approval of God—first.

Is the church a part of your family heritage, something that you have accepted without question?

Many people belong to a church, not because they have studied its doctrines and have become convinced of the truth of them, but because they think to believe otherwise would be to betray their family.

Is the church a national inheritance for you? For example, until 2012 the Evangelical-Lutheran religion was the official religion of Norway.⁶ The Church's position in a Norwegian's life was contained in Norway's basic laws. The problem with this is that a nation's law cannot make people Christians. The Christian faith comes from hearing the words of Christ; it is not imparted any other way.⁷

Moreover, the admonition from Luther went quite against the Norwegian Constitution. Luther said,

“I pray you leave my name alone and not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anyone...How does it then benefit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with all of them; and let us call ourselves only Christians, after Him from whom our doctrine comes.”⁸

Doesn't this admonition apply to all the other denominational names that people professing Christianity have adopted? Or if you think Luther was the only one to hold that opinion, consider what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same

⁶ Associated Press, June 2013.

⁷ Romans 10:17.

⁸ Tomlinson, L. G., *Churches of Today in the Light of Scripture*, p. 38, as quoted in Michelet, *Life of Luther*, p. 262.

mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name.

The Apostle did not intend that the church of Christ be divided up into separate factions; i.e., denominations. The church is to be united under the doctrine of Christ. Manmade doctrines, confessions, disciplines and catechisms should be abandoned, along with the divisions that come with them. The Holy Scriptures ought to be used to settle all religious issues.

Alfred Edersheim tells how the Jewish rabbis elevated the place of traditions above that of the Scriptures. He writes,

The ... *halakhah* was, so to speak, the Rule of the Spiritual Road, and, when fixed, had even greater authority than the Scriptures of the Old Testament, since it explained and applied them.⁹

The effect of the *halakhah* was to overrule the plain teaching of the Scriptures. Jesus confronted the influential Jews on this issue once. Matthew wrote in his gospel,

Matthew 15:1 Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the

⁹ Edersheim, Alfred: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1896, 2003, S. 1:11

elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5 “But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ”

In this exchange Jesus expressed His dislike of doctrines that originate with men. He is the one who originates doctrine on religion; no one else has that privilege. Religious teachers should take note, as should the people who accept the teachings and practices that did not originate with Jesus.

Following this exchange with the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew tells us that,

Matthew 15:10 After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand. 11 “It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.” 12 Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” 13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. 14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

No one will be able to argue that they went wrong spiritually because they depended upon someone else, whether that is a relative, a spouse, a rabbi, a minister, a priest, or a televangelist. No one will be able to claim: “But my church said...” If a belief or practice cannot be traced to a biblical command, or cannot be inferred necessarily from a biblical teaching that is honestly read in full context, or cannot be found in an approved Apostolic example then it should be avoided.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians wrote regarding the divisions that were in that church,

1 Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

Therefore, in spiritual matters, do not be eager to please a relative, a friend, a minister, a priest or rabbi; be eager to please Christ. The reason for this is—Christ is the one who will judge your performance. Please Him.

Avoid the tendency—a laziness tendency—to allow someone else to do your religious thinking. There are many doctrines in the world put there by people who think they know the truth. The test of truth is to compare the religious doctrine to the biblical doctrine that one learns by reading the Scriptures.

Remember the admonition that Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter,

2 Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in

righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

God has gone to great lengths to ensure that through Jesus there is a gospel through which we must be saved. The gospel is not a clever narrative, a tale invented by artful writers to convince people to be better. The gospel is a demonstration of God's power, a fact of history accomplished by the Son of God, and impressed on the memory of man by the Holy Spirit through inspired words and convincing miracles. It is good to know the doctrine of the New Testament, and to derive one's faith from that, rather than to depend upon any church council, confession of faith, or wisdom that originates with man; in fact, God has so designed the Scriptures that they need no editing to teach, reprove or correct our beliefs.

The test of truth is whether the doctrine is biblical or not. Consider the Bereans,

Acts 17:10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

The Bereans understood that the test to determine whether the teaching of the apostles was true or not was to compare the teaching to what the Scriptures said. You can be sure if the teaching had not agreed with the Scriptures then it would have been rejected. In the case of Paul's teaching it did agree and was therefore eagerly accepted.

Many of the churches of today have adopted the hierarchical structures and the ceremonies of pagan religions. The pomp and ceremony of their worship

services bear no resemblance to the simple observances of the New Testament church. Many of the doctrines modern churches teach are pagan in origin and heathen in effect.

Therefore, are you sure you are following Christ? If you were to compare your church to the church of the New Testament, would they be identical, or similar, or would yours bear no resemblance to the church of Christ? If not, then would the Apostle Paul include you in the following admonition?

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Love the Lord. Read the Scriptures that tell about Him. Keep His commandments. Become a member of His church.

Do you know Jesus? Does Jesus know you?

Do you really know who that person is?

Billie Burke was an actress of some note a number of years ago. She enjoyed success as a performer, although not considered a legend of the silver screen. As it happens in so many cases, her success on the screen affected her judgment about her knowledge in other matters.

She was on a ship once, going to Europe, and was in the dining room, when she noticed that the man sitting at the next table had a terrible cold. After watching him sneeze, cough and blow his nose for a few minutes she was unable to contain herself any longer, so she said to him, "I'm Billie Burke of Hollywood. You know, my grandmother taught me a wonderful remedy for the cold. You go to your room and take a steaming hot bath. Then you wrap yourself up in a wool blanket, and drink a tall glass of bourbon, and go to bed. I know it will work. You can depend on it. I'm Billie Burke of Hollywood."

"Thank you," the man said. "I'm William Mayo, of the Mayo Clinic."

Sometimes success can lead a person to think they are more knowledgeable than they really are. A little education can do the same thing, and a PhD can be downright dangerous.

A woman who thought Jesus was just a Jew.

The scripture tells us that one time Jesus left Judea to go to Galilee, but he decided to pass through Samaria. He came to the city of Sychar, and in the 4th Chapter his gospel John says,

John 4:6 and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Had the woman of Samaria known who this man was she could have asked the right question. Events had brought Jesus to her own town, to the very well where she drew water. Jesus was the One who could fulfill her deepest need.

But she did not know.

Jesus before Pilate

Pontius Pilate thought that as Governor of Judea he wielded a power greater than anything else on earth—the power of Rome. He did not know that there was a greater power there at the same time. He misjudged because he judged from appearances.

John 18:33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be

handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” 38 Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

Pilate stood before his Creator, and questioned Him as if He were a criminal. Pilate had no idea of the rank and power of the One who stood trial before him. Pilate judged from outward appearances and to all appearances Jesus was powerless.

After this exchange Pilate had Jesus scourged.

The Lord’s Prayer and the mechanic

John Comer told a story about the time that he attended Chapel Services in England during the Second World War. On this day a large, awkward soldier in oil-stained coveralls and muddy shoes stumbled down the aisle of the chapel and took a front seat. Obviously, he came directly from work. His appearance contrasted sharply with the English people from nearby, and from the soldiers. Comer said when he saw him he thought the man should at least take a seat in the back row, since he was dressed in his soiled clothes, and the civilians in their best.

A few minutes later the big bear of a man in the grimy clothes stood and faced the audience. Suddenly, he was transformed: the notes of the "Lord's Prayer" in a powerful and beautiful baritone voice filled the Chapel. It was a magnificent solo, as good as any of the top rated baritones of that day could deliver. When the last notes died away, his shoulders sagged and he was once again a weary G.I. mechanic. He nodded to the chaplain and left.

Comer said that he never learned his name.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Combat Crew*, John Comer.

To many of the people who met Him Jesus was merely a carpenter from Galilee who was also an unauthorized Jewish rabbi.

Pilate questioned Jesus again after he had been scourged. Pilate and Jesus came out, Jesus wearing the purple robe and a crown of thorns.

Pilate said, "Behold the man."

In our way of speaking today he said, "Look at Him! Can he be a king?"

But He was.

John 19:6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God." 8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid; 9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."

Pilate had the power of life and death—he thought. Jesus corrected him, and told where the true power resides.

It is said that the great Emperor Ivan, of Russia, liked to go about disguised as a beggar, testing his people for signs of respect and dignity towards even the poorest of the poor.

One night he was wandering in the suburbs of his city, knocking on doors as a wandering tramp, just

asking for a crust of bread. At one door after another he was refused, or chased away.

At last he came to a humble little cabin where a man was busy attending his wife and their newborn baby. He opened the door and invited the tramp in kindly, and treated him with courtesy. He offered a humble supper, and pointed him to a crude bed with a gracious good night. The emperor Ivan lay thinking instead of sleeping. In the morning, he left with a thank you.

Late in the afternoon his royal carriage came up to the door of the same cabin and stopped. The poor man was alarmed and came to the gate, throwing himself at the feet of the emperor, begging to know how he had displeased him. He feared he would be taken away for some false crime.

The Emperor Ivan assured him that he had nothing to fear. "I have simply come to thank you for your good kindness last night. I came as a beggar to test your love and I come now as your king to reward you." Then he gave the poor man a bag of gold for his newborn child, adding, "As he grows up I will adopt and sponsor him as my child, and will give him a place of high and honorable service in the empire. If I can be of any other service to you - command your emperor."

Jesus Christ was the King of Kings in disguise when he came the first time. He is that same King of Kings today.

If Pilate had only known Who stood before him. If our fellow man only knew Who He was.

Jesus and the Blind Man

Perhaps the great irony of our Lord's visit is that it took a blind man to recognize Him. The blind man was one who saw with a heart uncluttered by delusions of power, or naiveté. John says that as Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. Jesus spoke to his disciples about the man, afterward He healed him.

John 9:6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied

the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing. 8 Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, “Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?” 9 Others were saying, “This is he,” *still* others were saying, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the one.” 10 So they were saying to him, “How then were your eyes opened?” 11 He answered, “The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash’; so I went away and washed, and I received sight.” 12 They said to him, “Where is He?” He said, “I do not know.”¹¹

But the Pharisees were convinced that Jesus could not be of God because He healed this blind man on the Sabbath. To them Jesus must be a sinner. But the blind man said, “He is a prophet.” But the Pharisees were determined to prove that Christ could not have done the miracle.

John 9: 24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, “Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner.” 25 He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26 So they said to him, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?”

27 He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?” 28 They reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of

¹¹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Jn 9:6–12). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Moses. 29 “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” 30 The man answered and said to them, “Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.

The blind man confounded the Pharisees with simple evidence. It was evidence that spoke convincingly to the honest, to the powerless, to the lowly and to the simple. Yet to the Pharisees it spoke not at all. So, the Pharisees put the blind man out of the synagogue.

The Pharisees thought themselves to be righteous because they observed the traditions of their fathers, but their observances became an obstacle. They thought that because Jesus healed the blind man on the Sabbath that he could not possibly be of God. Their traditions and their hypocrisy stood in the way of knowing Him.

And so it happened as Jesus said,

Matthew 11:25 ... “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.

The babes, the humble, the poor and downcast and those who know they are sinners will know Christ before the great ones.

The rank required to enter into rest

There is the story about the Hapsburgs of Europe who were the ruling family in Austria and Hungary for nearly 600 years. When the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria died in 1916 his was the last of the extravagant imperial funerals to be held.

In the cortege that escorted the coffin there were dignitaries in their elaborate uniforms, and personages of the Emperor’s court in their elegant attire. The coffin, draped in the black and gold of the Emperor’s colors moved along, accompanied by a military band playing a somber dirge. Torches also accompanied the procession

as it descended the steps of the Capuchin Monastery in Vienna. At the bottom of the stairs there was a great iron door that led to the Hapsburg family crypt. Behind the door was the Cardinal-Archbishop of Vienna.

The officer in charge following the ancient ceremony cried, "Open!"

"Who goes there?" the cardinal replied.

"We bear the remains of his Imperial and Apostolic Majesty, Franz-Joseph I, by the grace of God, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, Defender of the Faith, Prince of Bohemia-Moravia, Grand Duke of Lombardy, Venezia, Strygia..." and so the officer continued as he listed the 37 titles the sovereign had held.

When he finished, the Cardinal said, "We know him not! Who goes there?"

The officer spoke again. This time he used a much abbreviated and less ostentatious title that had been reserved for times of expediency.

"We know him not!" the Cardinal said again. "Who goes there?"

The officer tried again. This time he said, "We bear the body of Franz-Joseph, our brother, and a sinner like us all."

At that the doors swung open, and Franz-Joseph was admitted.

And so it is. In death, we are all reduced to the same level. Neither wealth nor fame can open the way to salvation, but only God's mercy and grace.

His grace is free to those who are humble enough to receive it. Just like the man who had been healed of blindness. The one who accepted the Lord for Who He was.

John wrote concerning this blind man,

John 9:35 Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the

one who is talking with you.” 38 And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.

Here is the Truth recognized, and accepted in its purity and simplicity. The blind man knew that Jesus was Lord because He could be no other. The blind man received sight in a way that power and position had denied to Pilate; and hypocrisy had denied to the Pharisees.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter, the 8th Chapter and the 2nd verse,

1 Corinthians 8:2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

To the Galatians he wrote,

Galatians 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. 8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Turn away from the weak and worthless things.

Consider what Jesus said to the woman at the well, and what it means to us,

"If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Receive the water of life.

Recognize Jesus, and He will recognize you, and He will allow you into the eternal rest.

“I never knew you”

Rami Khouri, the former Editor of the Jordan Times, and a syndicated political columnist spoke with an interviewer on National Public Radio a few years ago. He told how King Abdullah II of Jordan had followed a family tradition by going out in public in disguise to hear the concerns of ordinary people. Once the king, dressed as an ordinary Arab with a long white beard, wearing a shabby white robe and the traditional red and white checkered head dress—stood in line at the Jordanian income tax office. He had come with his brother to submit a form claiming an income tax return. While they waited they mingled with the people in the line asking questions and listening to their answers.

Only he and his brother knew who he was. Despite his face being printed on the country's bank notes and stamps, his disguise was so effective that workers in the tax office only realized who the visitor was when they heard the sirens from his motorcade as he sped away. King Abdullah and Prince Ali had dressed themselves as common citizens and had come to the tax office to find out how the bureaucrats were treating the common citizens.

What he found out the king never said. In this case King Abdullah appeared in a disguise, but arrived in a limousine. Jesus came disguised as a poor Galilean carpenter and He was born in a stable. Jesus' subjects did not recognize Him either.

John, in the 8th Chapter of his gospel, tells us about a confrontation that occurred between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus came early in the day to the temple and was teaching the Jews, but His adversaries brought a woman caught in adultery and placed her before Him for judgment. [You remember the story. “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.”] Jesus revealed the guilt of all of the accusers and set the woman free. But His enemies

persisted in their arguments against Him. Later on they claimed freedom on the basis of their lineal descent from Abraham.

Here was one of the favorite beliefs of the Jewish people of that time. They took great pride in their descent from Abraham. They thought that it set them apart from the rest of mankind, and in a sense it did. So thinking this way they offered their best reply to Jesus,

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him,
“Abraham is our father.”

Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children,
do the deeds of Abraham.

Abraham believed God. As the scripture says, “...by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was going.”

He dwelt as a stranger in a foreign land—believing in God. He became the father of Isaac in his old age—believing in God’s promise. He was willing to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, knowing that God could raise him from the dead if it should be necessary. Such was the man’s faith in God.

And great was the reverence and respect the Jewish people had for Abraham because of his faith. According to the rabbis The Merits of Abraham provided an almost unlimited supply of benefits to Israel.¹² Edersheim said that according to common belief in Israel of the 1st Century “...the vials of divine wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, while, Israel, as Abraham’s children, were sure of escape—in the words of the Talmud, that ‘the night was only to the nations of the world, but the morning to Israel.’” Further, no principle was more fully established in the popular conviction than that all Israel had part in the world to come. This reward would come to Israel because of their connection with Abraham. Moreover, the ‘merits of the fathers’ is

¹² Ibid., Edersheim, *Life and Times*, vol. 1, p. 271.

one of the commonest phrases in the teaching of the rabbis.

In their teachings, the rabbis represented Abraham as sitting at the gates of Gehenna to deliver any Israelite who might have been delivered there. The rabbis argued that by their descent from Abraham all the children of Israel were nobles, infinitely higher than any proselyte. The rabbis said further that, "... the ships of the sea were preserved through the merits of Abraham; the rain descended on account of it." For his sake alone had Moses been allowed into heaven and receive the Law. For his sake had the sin of the golden calf been forgiven; Daniel had been heard for the sake of Abraham; nay, Abraham's merit availed even for the wicked. [The Midrash says, "If thy children were even (morally) dead bodies, without blood vessels or bones, thy merit would avail for them."]

All this these Jews would have known when they told Jesus, "Abraham is our father."

It did not matter that in contradiction of this idea that John the Baptist had told them that "God was able of... stones to raise up children to Abraham. Of course, Jesus knew all this, too. He said to the scribes and Pharisees who had challenged Him,

John 8:40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 "You are doing the deeds of your father."

Jesus implied that their father was not Abraham but Satan. His enemies replied with an *ad hominem*, a disparaging remark that amounted to an attack on His person.

John 8:41 They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God."

This was a popular criticism of Jesus because of the circumstances affecting Mary and Joseph. The Jews did

not believe that Jesus had been born of a virgin. Nevertheless, Jesus went on to say to them,

John 8:42 ... “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”

The character that a person has rightly has its source in their true father. Human beings have a physical descent (indicated in the Greek word: *teknon*) and a spiritual descent (as contained in the meaning of: *huios*). Jesus spoke to them of their spiritual descent and therefore their characters.

He was saying that these Jews were spiritual descendents of Satan.

John 8:48 The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Alfred Edersheim wrote concerning this statement by the Jews,

“By no strain of ingenuity is it possible to account for the designation ‘Samaritan,’ as given by the Jews to Jesus, if it is regarded as referring to nationality. Even at that very Feast they had

made it an objection to His Messianic claims, that He was (as they supposed) a Galilean.

Nor had He come to Jerusalem from Samaria;^b nor could He be so called (as Commentators suggest) because He was ‘a foe’ to Israel, or ‘a breaker of the Law,’ or ‘unfit to bear witness’—for neither of these circumstances would have led the Jews to designate Him by the term ‘Samaritan.’

But, in the language which they spoke, what is rendered into Greek by ‘Samaritan,’ would have been either [the Hebrew word] *Kuthi* (כּוּתִי), which, while literally meaning a Samaritan, is almost as often used in the sense of ‘heretic,’

or else *Shomroni* (שׁוֹמְרוֹנִי). The latter word [literally] means ‘Samaritan;’ but, the name *Shomron* (perhaps from its connection with Samaria), is also sometimes used as the equivalent of *Ashmedai*, the prince of the demons.⁶

According to the Kabbalists (people who use mysticism to interpret religion), *Shomron* was the father of Ashmedai, and hence the same as *Sammael*, or Satan.

That this was a wide-spread Jewish belief, appears from the circumstance that in the Korân, Israel is said to have been seduced into idolatry by *Shomron*, while, in Jewish tradition, this is attributed to Sammael.^b If, therefore, the term applied by the Jews to Jesus was *Shomroni*—and not *Kuthi*, ‘heretic’—it would literally mean, ‘Child of the Devil.’¹³

John 8:49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50

¹³ Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 2: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (174–175). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

“But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”

Edersheim says further,

Then, as if lingering in deep compassion on the terrible issue, He once more pressed home the great subject of His Discourse, that **only ‘if a man keep’—both have regard to, and observe—His ‘Word,’ ‘he shall not gaze at death [intently behold it] unto eternity’**—for ever shall he not come within close and terrible gaze of what is really death, of what became such to Adam in the hour of his Fall.^{14 15}

John 8:52 The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My

¹⁴ Ibid., Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 2:* (175). On the expression ‘keep (τηρεῖν) His word,’ Bengel beautifully observes: *doctrinam Jesu, credendo; promissa, sperando; faoienda, obediendo.*¹⁴ [the teaching of Jesus, believing it was promised, hoping; faoienda, obeying.]

¹⁵ St. John, in distinction to the Synoptists, here uses the expression *θεωρεῖν* (St. John 6:19), which in the Gospels has the *distinctive meaning of fixed, earnest, and intent gaze*, mostly outward, but sometimes also inward, in the sense of earnest and attentive consideration. The use of this word as distinguished from merely *seeing*, is so important for the better understanding of the New Testament, that every reader should mark it. We accordingly append a list of the passages in the Gospels where this word is used: St. Matt. 27:55; 28:1; St. Mark 3:11; 5:15, 38; 12:41; 15:40, 47; 16:4; St. Luke 10:18; 14:29; 21:6; 23:35, 48; 24:37, 39; St. John 2:23; 4:19; 6:2 (*Lachm.* and *Treg.*), 19, 40, 62; 7:3; 8:51; 9:8; 10:12; 12:19, 45; 14:17, 19; 16:10, 16, 17, 19; 17:24; 20:6, 12, 14. It will thus be seen, that the expression is more frequently used by St. John than in the other Gospels, and it is there also that its distinctive meaning is of greatest importance.

word, he will never taste of death.’ 53 “Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?”

The unbelief and denial of the scribes and Pharisees is shown in these statements in all its stark reality. They did not know Him.

John 8:54 Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; 55 and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

This statement must have astonished the enemies of Jesus.

John 8:57 So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”

Jesus gave them a blunt declaration of Who he is. It was a stunning remark that throws off His disguise and reveals plainly to his enemies His true identity. Even in the face of their stubborn denial and unbelief Jesus tells them Who He was.

They were speaking with Jehovah—their Creator. But they persisted in their unbelief. They did not know Him.

The name Jehovah is a name of God, devised during the Renaissance by artificially combining the consonants of the name Yahweh (held by the Jews to be unutterable)

and the vowels of the substitute name Adonai (“the Lord”).¹⁶

Today pious Jews substitute the name Hashem rather than pronounce the name which to them is unpronounceable.¹⁷

These sacred names of God aroused deep emotions. Therefore, at this revelation the Jews became hostile.

John 8:59 Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

These people threw stones at their Creator. Had they only known who He was they might have avoided this disgraceful act.

The Jews once asked of John the Baptist,

John 1:19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” 21 They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” 24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

The Jews did not know who John was either.

¹⁶ Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (561). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans. “Jehovah.”

¹⁷ Ibid., Myers, A. C. (511). **The Term “I Am Who I Am”** (Heb. *ehyeh* ^{ašer} *ehyeh*).† is An expression used to explain Yahweh, the covenant name of the God of Israel, given to Moses when he encountered the burning bush (Exod. 3:14). It is also rendered “I will be what I will be” or, perhaps more correctly, “I create what (ever) I create.”

Paul, on the Road to Damascus, did not know who had met him. He told the king and the Roman governor,

Acts 22:6 “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ 8 “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’”

But the demons knew both Jesus and Paul.

Acts 19:11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. 13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” 14 Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” 16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

The demon recognized Jesus and Paul. But he did not know Jesus in an important sense. The demon was the enemy of Jesus.

Peter said that he did not know Christ—at a time when the Lord needed his loyalty the most.

Matthew 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, “**I do**

not know what you are talking about.” 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 And again he denied it with an oath, “**I do not know the man.**” 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.” 74 Then he began to curse and swear, “**I do not know the man!**” And immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Here is an example of an important meaning of the term “to know someone.” He knew the name of the Savior, but Peter was disloyal. He denied Christ. He “...did not know him.”

Paul wrote to the Galatians and spoke to them about their drift from Christ back to the practice of the Law of Moses and the traditions surrounding it.

Galatians 4:8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

When you did not know God you were slaves—slaves to false gods. But now, you have come to know God—and he knows you. Do not deny God and turn back to slavery. Who is the one known by God? Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Cor 8:1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has

not yet known as he ought to know; 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

If you love God—he knows you. If you have good will toward God and pursue His interests—He knows you.

The one who loves God always thinks of God and God’s interests. He puts God’s interest above his own. He is like the wise virgins in the parable,

Matthew 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 “Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 “For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 “Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 “But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 “Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 “The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 “But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10 “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 “Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 “But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

To the unwise the Lord will say, “I do not know you.” The Lord denied the foolish ones—the ones who were unprepared to meet the bridegroom.

The destiny of the foolish virgins is in many ways similar to the destiny of the deniers of Christ. On that

day when the Lord returns in glory accompanied by his mighty angels. We will see Him in all His grandeur. There will be no disguise. For on the Judgment Day people will stand before the Lord to argue their merits, but it will be as Jesus said,

Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

On that day the Lord will deny and reject their appeal.

Be sure you know Christ here, and He will know you there.

France’s Nobility Directory

The *Dictionnaire De La Noblesse Francaise* is a directory of the French nobility. It is authored by Count Fernand De Rouvroy and Baron Etienne de la Sereville who spent 15 years researching and 14 months writing the 1,214-page book. To the dismay of many the book lists only 4,057 genuine noble families for all of France; it leaves out 23,943 other families who have tacked titles onto their names.

The research showed about 28,000 families in France with noble titles, but only 4,057 true noble families with blue blood decreed by the French crown in recognition of their lands or services under the pre-revolution, the restoration or the empires. According to the book, about 24 persons per family in France, or a total of

564,632 French citizens claiming titles were false.¹⁸

The LORD'S book of nobility is the Book of Life. He knows all of the people whose names are entered there, and He will acknowledge them on that coming Day of Judgment.

Be sure He knows you.

¹⁸ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Ashamed of the Cross...

William and Mary is the nation's second-oldest university after Harvard. It was founded by royal charter in 1693 with a mission that included training Anglican ministers. In connection with the purpose of its founding the university keeps a chapel. The chapel is a wing of the Wren Building, which the university says is the country's oldest academic building in continuous use, built between 1695 and 1699. In October of 2006 the university's chapel became the center of controversy.

The president of the university unexpectedly created a ruckus when he ordered a cross removed from an altar in the chapel to make the chapel more welcoming to students of all faiths. The 18-inch brass cross had been displayed on the altar since about 1940.

An *ad hoc* committee tried to defuse the conflict by offering a compromise between the school president's plan and its critics over the placement of the cross. The committee unanimously recommended that the cross be prominently displayed in the chapel in a glass case, accompanied by a plaque explaining the school's Anglican roots. The cross would not be displayed on the altar under the compromise they announced. However, its exact placement had not been determined.¹⁹

There are people who are offended by the cross as much as they are offended by the exclusive nature of the worship of Christ. And I must point out that Christianity is not worship of a cross; it is worship of a person, namely Jesus Christ. But in this case the cross became an issue because of what it symbolized. The issue here is the same as it was in the First Century.

¹⁹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/06/AR2007030601456_pf.html

The cross is a stumbling block and an offense. G. G. Findlay, writing in the Expositor's Greek Testament, said, "To Jews the word of the cross announced the shameful reversal of their most cherished hopes; to Greeks and Romans it offered for a Savior and Lord a man branded throughout the Empire as amongst the basest of criminals; it was 'outrageous' and 'absurd.'²⁰

In modern times the cross carries not the same stigma; nevertheless, it is offensive to many because of what it represents. To the saved the cross symbolizes the forgiveness of sins and the refuge from wrath, but to the unbelieving it represents an indictment of their behavior and the exclusive means to acquittal of their condemnation.

In the gospel of Mark we read,

Mark 8:34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? 37 "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

The university showed that they were ashamed of the exclusive worship of Christ. The writer of a commentary said this about Jesus' statement in Mark 8:34:

"Or ... what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Thus, in language *that is* the weightiest, because *it is* the simplest, does our

²⁰ Findlay, G. G., *The Expositor's Greek Testament, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 770.

Lord shut up His hearers, and all who shall read these words to the end of the world, to the priceless value to every man of his own soul. In Mark and Luke (Mk 8:38; Lu 9:26) the following words are added: “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words . . . in this adulterous and sinful generation of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels.” *Jesus then . . . will render back to that man his own treatment, disowning him before the most august of all assemblies, and putting him to “shame and everlasting contempt.”*²¹

“The sense of *shame* is founded on our love of *reputation*, which causes instinctive aversion to what is fitted to lower it, and was given us as a preservative from all that is properly *shameful*. To be *lost to shame* is to be nearly past hope.²² But when Christ and “His words” are unpopular, the same instinctive desire to *stand well with others* begets that temptation to be ashamed of Him which only the expulsive power of a higher affection can effectually counteract.²³

In short, our love and loyalty to Christ must be great enough to motivate us to be proud of the testimony regardless of the circumstances.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his Roman letter,

²¹ Daniel 12:2.

²² Zephaniah 3:5; Jeremiah 6:15; 3:3.

²³ Jamieson, Robert ; Fausset, A. R. ; Fausset, A. R. ; Brown, David ; Brown, David: *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. Mt 16:26

Romans 1:15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

There is no reason at all to believe that Paul was ashamed of the testimony. There is every reason to believe that he took advantage of every opportunity to proclaim the benefits of service to Christ. The cross of Christ was not a shame to Paul—quite the contrary.

Paul was not ashamed to preach the gospel before the assembled royalty in the persons of King Agrippa and Bernice, also the Roman Governor, Festus, and a host of Jewish authorities.

In Acts Chapter 26 we read that when Agrippa spoke to Paul,

Acts 26:1 Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 “In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all acustoms and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Paul was not ashamed to speak to kings and governors on behalf of Christ. When he was on trial before Agrippa, Festus and the Jewish authorities, Paul made it an occasion to tell them about Christ and the resurrection, and judgment to come.

Paul said them in verse 6 of the same chapter,

Acts 26:6 “And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?”

Even though Paul was on trial for the very message he preached, he did not hesitate to speak the truth. To Paul the gospel was always foremost, always more important to his hearers than his own reputation, or his own safety.

He said,

Acts 26:19 “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

No. He did not prove disobedient. He kept up the testimony.

Acts 26:24 While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.” 25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. 27 “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.” 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” 29 And Paul said, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day,

might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

Even in chains, Paul maintained the testimony. He was not ashamed of Christ regardless of the worldly power and reputation of the people he faced.

This is the embarrassment that some people fear the most. To be highly educated and yet be required to unveil their faith in Christ before a skeptical audience of prominent people, especially an audience of their own colleagues or peers.

Paul was not ashamed. He proclaimed Christ and the resurrection to this socially prominent group—and he was in chains. Later, Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter, and said,

2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore **do not be ashamed** of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² For this reason I also suffer these things, but **I am not ashamed**; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. ²⁴

And what day is that? None other than the day of which the Lord spoke to His disciples—when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

²⁴ Highlighted verses are for emphasis only and are not in the text of the Scriptures.

In the 17th Century there was a young girl named Maria Durant. She lived in the south of France. She was attractive and intelligent, and she enjoyed life. The record says that she was a devout Christian, and that she was **not ashamed to speak out for her Lord**. Soon the persecution in that area became so severe that her testimony was no longer tolerated. However, she refused to be silent. As a result she was imprisoned. For 38 years, while life with its pleasures passed her by, she maintained her testimony. For her there would be no joy of marriage, and no family. Her stand for the truth was costly, but rather than yield to pressure and renounce her Lord, she stood firm. The years of privation slowly sapped her strength—her physical strength. Yet she remained spiritually strong. She died a martyr's death. Maria Durant resisted unto blood.

But she was not ashamed. Unlike many of our own contemporaries who claim to be Christian, Maria Durant was not ashamed of Christ or His words. We should remember the example of loyal Christians who have gone before us. Keep the testimony in the face of worldly ridicule, resistance and persecution.

Perhaps the conditions that you confront are not as severe as Paul's or even Maria Durant's. You could be in the same category of Christians as the writer of Hebrews addressed when he said, "You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."²⁵ Even so, we certainly do not want to find Paul's admonition to Timothy necessary in our case,

2 Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as **a workman who does not need to be ashamed**, accurately handling the word of truth.

I read the account of a businessman in Brooklyn, New York, who called upon a minister of a church and asked him if he could be admitted to the church, but said that he wanted to be as it were—a silent partner.

²⁵ Heb. 12:4.

“Why do you ask?” the minister said.

“Because I want to be a member, but I don’t want anybody to know about it.”

The minister said to him, “Christ takes no silent partners.”

This man was like the ones who heard Jesus and saw the things he did, yet would not confess Him,

John 12:42 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

A person might gain the approval of men by denying Christ, but the benefit will be small and temporary. However, the approval of Christ endures into eternity and is of great value.

If anyone had bitter memories about his loyalty and service to Christ it was Peter. For Peter had boasted that he would never deny his Lord, but he did. And we read in Luke chapter 22 that,

Luke 22:54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance. 55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them. 56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, “This man was with Him too.” 57 But he denied it, saying, “**Woman, I do not know Him.**” 58 A little later, another saw him and said, “You are one of them too!” But Peter said, “**Man, I am not!**” 59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.” 60 But Peter said, “**Man, I do not know what you are talking about.**” Immediately, while he was still

speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter’s shame was great. But Peter did not remain disloyal, and the Lord welcomed him back. Tradition says that Peter remained faithful to Christ until he died as a martyr, suffering crucifixion as had his Lord.

Much wiser, and more resolute, Peter wrote in his 1st letter,

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, **he is not to be ashamed**, but is to glorify God in this name.

There is the story about Henry Clay, the great American statesman and orator, who once lodged overnight at a humble cabin in his native state of Kentucky. The family was in the habit of holding worship morning and evening but the father was ashamed at the thought of doing so in the presence of a guest so distinguished as Henry Clay.

It hour grew late, the children became sleepy, and the wife, by significant gestures, suggested that the time for prayer had come. The man hinted to Mr. Clay that perhaps he would like to go to bed. But Mr. Clay with great politeness said that he did not feel at all sleepy, and that unless it was intrusive, he would be happy to enjoy

the company of his host longer, Of course the man could not object. Still the host could not postpone the evening prayer without sending the children to bed contrary to their settled custom.

At last, with considerable trepidation, the father told his guest that he could stay and unite in their devotions or retire at his leisure. Mr. Clay promptly replied that he would remain.

When they had performed the accustomed exercises and that with much fear and trembling, Mr. Clay, with no little feeling, approached the man and said, "My dear sir, never again feel the least hesitation in the discharge of your duty to God on account of the presence of man. I saw your embarrassment and remained on purpose that you might never feel it again. "

"Remember that every man of sense will respect the individual who is not ashamed to acknowledge his dependence upon his Maker; and he deserves only contempt who can cherish any other feelings than reverence for the consecrated hour of an audience with Deity. I would rather know that the prayers of a pious man, no matter how humble his position in life, were ascending in my behalf than to have the wildest applause of listening senators."

Mr. Clay then retired for the night. The man remarked that it was the best lesson he had ever received in his life.²⁶

The moral of this story is: do not be ashamed of Christ—under any circumstance, especially in the presence of people of high rank or reputation. When one comes to the end of life the burden of shame for having denied Christ is too heavy to bear.

In the famous legend The Forty Wrestlers were Roman soldiers who had been converted to Christ. Their Legion was on a campaign in the high mountains of Armenia, in Asia Minor. It was winter and bitterly cold.

²⁶ Source: University church of Christ bulletin: University Voice, Oct. 11, 1997.

The Emperor issued a decree to the commanders of all his armies that on a given day the soldiers had to march past a statue of the Emperor, do obeisance, pour out a libation of wine, and drop incense on the fire. These were acts of worship to Caesar, treating Caesar as a god.

At the appointed time the trumpets blew and the Legion marched past the statue of the Emperor. All the soldiers bowed their heads, poured out the wine, and offered the incense to the Emperor as to a god—all, except the forty wrestlers. These Christians refused to pay divine honors to a man. They believed such devotion was reserved for God alone.

Their commander, who thought highly of them, begged them to obey the decree. It is said that they considered the offer, the sweetness of life, and their families at home, but in the end they answered the commander, “For Rome we will fight on any field and under any sky. In the service of the Emperor, if necessary, we will die. But we worship no one save our Master, Jesus Christ.”

With sorrow the commander pronounced judgment upon them. They were stripped of their armor. Their helmets, breastplates, shields, spears and swords were taken from them. Then the commander ordered their garments taken from them, and their sandals. Naked, they were driven out in the sub-zero cold upon a frozen lake.

Night fell, and the soldiers of the legion sat around the fires in their bivouacs. They could hear the voices of the forty wrestlers as they sang, “Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee O Christ, claim for thee the victory, and from thee the crown.”

As the night passed their voices became weaker and weaker as, one by one, they succumbed to the cold and died. At length, only one survivor was left. Shivering and trembling, he presented himself before the tent of the commander and said to the soldier on guard, “I will drop the incense, and pour out the wine.”

But the guard, who had been unfaithful to Christ, had been moved by the heroic faith of the men condemned to death. He said, “Since you have proved a coward, and have broken your fellowship with the Forty, I will take your place.” With that he stripped off his armor and his clothing then went out into the night to take his place upon the frozen lake. Standing amid the thirty-nine who had fallen, he sang, “Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee O Christ, claim for thee the victory, and from thee the crown.”

At last, he too fell dead. When the morning sun rose above the wintry Armenian mountains it looked down upon forty wrestlers who had died for Christ, and from whom they had received the crown.

Whether or not this story is true the moral is the same. As Christians we do not want to bear the shame of denying Christ, for that would be too great to bear. We have as our goal to be as the Apostles who appeared before the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem—accused of preaching the gospel of Christ...

Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

The Jewish authorities wanted to kill them, but Gamaliel persuaded them not to, and...

Acts 5:40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then

released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The conclusion, and the lesson for us is this:

Do not be ashamed of Christ. Keep on preaching the gospel of Christ because it is the gospel of Christ that saves souls. And always remember that those who are not ashamed of Christ here, He will not be ashamed of them on that last day.

He who has ears, let him hear

Nowadays we are inundated with a deluge of information. Television, radio, phones, smartphones and more all vie for our attention. We deal with the flood by developing coping methods like Do Not Call Lists, Do Not Buy Lists, or mute buttons. We ignore the noise and we develop personal filters so that we hear only the information we want to hear.

Coping methods are something we adopt as a sort of defense, but we have to be careful not to filter out something important.

There is a form of deafness known to physicians in which the person affected is able to hear and interpret every sound except words. In this case the ear may be so perfect in its hearing that the person can hear the song of a bird or even the tick of a watch and can distinguish it. But because of a problem that lies in the brain itself, all spoken words of the person's native language are as unintelligible to the sufferer as if it were a foreign language. Give him a book and he may read as understandingly as ever, but every word addressed to him through his ear reaches his consciousness only as a sound, not as a word.²⁷

This unusual affliction is caused by a problem in the brain. The words go into the ear but they do not go into the understanding.

This affliction is physical. Other people have a similar problem, but theirs is an affliction of the heart. It is spiritual and not physical.

²⁷Tan, P. L. (1996, c 1979). Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers. Garland TX: Bible Communications.

In Matthew Chapter 13 we read the Parable of the Sower,

Matthew 13:3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 "And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 "He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus is saying, if you are equipped with ears, you need to listen to this. No one is exempt. The message of this lesson is: "He who has ears, let him hear."

"The Lord Jesus repeatedly warned people about the wrong kind of hearing, and His warnings are still needed. "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). In other words, "Take heed that you hear." Use every opportunity you have to hear the Word of God."²⁸

King James II in 1687 commanded an Act of Parliament called the "Liberty of Conscience Act" to be read in all the churches. The king was Roman Catholic attempting to exert Catholic influence in protestant England. The people came near rebellion because of his policies. So the king issued the Liberty of Conscience Act, but the clergy were unwilling to read it. Some even of their congregations did not wish to hear it either. One Sunday, when the time came for reading the document, the minister said to his congregation: "Though I am

²⁸ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (1 Th 2:13). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

compelled to read this, you are not compelled to hear it,” upon which the people rose up and left the church, and then the clergyman read the Act of Parliament to the pews, hassocks, and to the walls.

So it was that the people did not even want to listen to what the King of England said. In the same way that this was true of the King of England it is also true of the God of Heaven. Not many want to listen to what God says either.

In the parable of the Sower the Lord described four types of hearers of the word of God: the one who does not understand; the one who immediately receives it; the one who allows the cares of the world to choke what he heard; and the one who hears it and bears fruit.

Three out of four of these have a problem with hearing.

Luke wrote that Jesus said,

Luke 8:16 “Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. 17 “For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. 18 “So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.”

- Take care **how** you listen.

For years the ABC television network has broadcast an evening news program. Management wanted to know how well they were communicating the message to their viewing audience. Andrew Stern, who was a former ABC News staffer and a member of the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley, telephoned TV viewers after a newscast.

He found that 51% of those who had listened could not recall even one of the show’s 19 items. Among all those people he called, the average memory rate was one

item. The calls were made over a period ranging from immediately after the show's sign-off to 3 hours later. The lead story was the most frequently remembered. Far and away the most quickly forgotten material was the show-ending commentaries.

Stern blamed the poor retention rate on "disrupting factors," especially dinner. His recommendation: the networks should shift their major newscasts of the day to 10:30 p.m.

Disruption, distraction, interruption are things that draw away a person's attention from the message.

This also happens in churches.

Jesus said, "Take care **how** you listen."

Men offering prayers often say, "That we should listen as if in view of eternity." And they are right. It was Ambrose Bierce who said, "To know that one will be hanged on the morrow does wonderfully focus the mind." We should also apply Bierce's idea to our listening to the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Listen carefully to the message from the Scriptures because they can save your soul.

Jesus said another important thing about listening. In Mark we read,

Mark 4:24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides.

- Take care **what** you listen to.

Don't listen to just anything concerning religion. Be selective, and when you do listen, listen critically. A lot depends on what you conclude. The best recommendation is to listen to what the Scriptures say.

Alexander Woolcot once said of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address that of the fifteen thousand persons present "only a few heard what Lincoln said." The speech was over before the "arc of attention" had been fully established. He spoke for only about 2 minutes. On the same occasion Edward Everett gave a speech that

lasted for nearly 2 hours and included about 13,000 words, all of which he had memorized. Reporters wrote in awe of his gestures, saying, that if anyone ever saw these gestures they would never forget them. The speech was, however.

In other words, Lincoln did not speak long enough to garner the attention of the crowd. Everett spoke too long to be remembered. Regrettably, most of the people there missed what might have been the most important political speech in their lifetime.

It happens a lot of times that people who have assembled to receive instruction in a class, or to hear a sermon—by habit or for whatever reason—must spend several minutes attending to personal items that occupy and divert their attention away from the message—but the message is the reason for their being there in the first place.

There is the story of the minister who delivered a sermon about the relationship between fact and faith. He said, “That you are sitting before me in this church is a fact. That I am standing, speaking from this pulpit, is a fact. But it is only faith that makes me believe anyone is listening.”

A speaker cannot always tell if everyone is listening. But they should be listening. Hopefully, the message is **what** they are listening to...

- Take care **what** you listen to.

When we think about listening we are reminded of Calvin Coolidge who was the 29th president of the U.S. One time he attended church alone because Mrs. Coolidge was sick. When he arrived back at home he went up to his wife’s room to see how she was feeling.

She reassured him that she was feeling well, and then she asked him if he had enjoyed the sermon.

He replied with a weak, “Yes.”

“What was it about?” she continued.

“Sin.”

“What did the minister say?”

“He was against it.”

President Coolidge was widely known as a man of few words. He was president, and he was a busy man. Nevertheless, we will never know how much of the sermon he either heard or retained. But we believe that he got the gist of it.

Therefore, take care **what** you listen to, and **how** you listen. Some day you just might get a quiz.

Listen to the message of the Bible.

An Example of proper listening

In Nehemiah the 8th Chapter we have an example of proper listening,

Nehemiah 8:1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.

- They gathered as one man.
- They asked Ezra; Ezra didn't ask them.

2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

- All who could listen with understanding

3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

- All the people were attentive.

4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

- When he opened it, all the people stood up.

6 Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

- Ezra blessed the Lord, and the people concurred.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.

8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Here are some of the things we learn from this reading,

- The people came with purpose.
- They asked for the reading.
- It was a long reading, yet the people were attentive.

- When Ezra opened the book they stood up (in respect).
- The people responded with, Amen!
- The words were read and translated giving the sense so that the people understood the reading.
- They were careful about **what** they listen to and **how** they listened.

These people understood because they wanted to understand. It was not always so in Israel. In the gospel of Matthew we read what Jesus said once to His disciples,

Matthew 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”
 11 Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

‘2 YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, 3
 BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;
 4 YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT
 WILL NOT PERCEIVE;
 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS
 PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
 WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY
 HEAR,
 AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR
 EYES,

OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE
WITH THEIR EYES,
HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR
HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’

16 “But blessed are your eyes, because they see;
and your ears, because they hear. 17 “For truly I
say to you that many prophets and righteous
men desired to see what you see, and did not see
it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Luke tells us what happened in Jesus’ home town
once when He came there,

Luke 4:16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had
been brought up; and as was His custom, He
entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood
up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet
Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the
book and found the place where it was written,

18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS
UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO
PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM
RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE
BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE
OPPRESSED,
19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE
YEAR OF THE LORD.”

20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the
attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the
synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began
to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been

fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” 23 And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” 24 And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. 25 “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; 26 and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” 28 And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; 29 and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, He went His way.

- The people of Nazareth did not want to hear the truth.
- There are people today who resist or violently oppose the truth like the people of Nazareth did.

Wisdom warns everyone to seek knowledge of the type that will promote spiritual health. Proverbs says,

PROVERBS 1:20 WISDOM SHOUTS
IN THE STREET,

SHE LIFTS HER VOICE IN THE
SQUARE;

21 AT THE HEAD OF THE NOISY
STREETS SHE CRIES OUT;
AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GATES
IN THE CITY SHE UTTERS HER
SAYINGS:

22 “HOW LONG, O NAIVE ONES,
WILL YOU LOVE BEING SIMPLE-
MINDED?

AND SCOFFERS DELIGHT
THEMSELVES IN SCOFFING
AND FOOLS HATE KNOWLEDGE?

23 “TURN TO MY REPROOF,
BEHOLD, I WILL POUR OUT MY
SPIRIT ON YOU;
I WILL MAKE MY WORDS KNOWN
TO YOU.

24 “BECAUSE I CALLED AND YOU
REFUSED,
I STRETCHED OUT MY HAND AND
NO ONE PAID ATTENTION;

25 AND YOU NEGLECTED ALL MY
COUNSEL

AND DID NOT WANT MY REPROOF;

26 I WILL ALSO LAUGH AT YOUR
CALAMITY;

I WILL MOCK WHEN YOUR DREAD
COMES,

27 WHEN YOUR DREAD COMES
LIKE A STORM

AND YOUR CALAMITY COMES LIKE
A WHIRLWIND,

WHEN DISTRESS AND ANGUISH
COME UPON YOU.

28 “THEN THEY WILL CALL ON
ME, BUT I WILL NOT ANSWER;
THEY WILL SEEK ME DILIGENTLY
BUT THEY WILL NOT FIND ME,
29 BECAUSE THEY HATED
KNOWLEDGE
AND DID NOT CHOOSE THE FEAR
OF THE LORD.
30 “THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT MY
COUNSEL,
THEY SPURNED ALL MY REPROOF.

Listen while there is opportunity. A time is coming when the opportunity to listen will be history. Then calamity comes upon the ones who have shut their ears.

The people who shun wisdom are they who will not listen.

Jeremiah 26:2 “Thus says the Lord, ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the Lord’s house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! 3 ‘Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.’ 4 “And you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord, “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, 5 to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.” ’ ”

The prophet was to speak every word that God said. The people were obligated to listen. If they did not listen there would be consequences, unpleasant consequences. The Jews of Jesus’ day were a lot like their ancestors.

Zechariah 7:8 Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, 9 “Thus has the Lord of hosts said, ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; 10 and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’ 11 “But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing. 12 “They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. 13 “And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,” says the Lord of hosts; 14 “but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate.”

- They refused to pay attention.
- Their deafness was willful.
- They turned a stubborn shoulder.
- They stopped their ears from hearing.

They were no different from the ones who heard the preaching of Stephen,

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58 When they had driven

him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

- Stephen’s accusers were convinced of the truth of his words.
- So angry were they that they gnashed their teeth at him.
- They covered their ears so that they could not hear what he said.
- They drove him out of the city and stoned him to death because of what he told them.
- **BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU LISTEN TO AND HOW YOU LISTEN.**

In the 10th Chapter of Matthew Jesus explained the parable of The Sower. He said,

Matthew 10:18 “Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and **does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and **immediately receives it** with joy; 21 **yet he has no firm root in himself**, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 “And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the **worry** of the world and the **deceitfulness of wealth** choke the word, and it becomes

unfruitful. 23 “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who **hears** the word and **understands** it; who indeed **bears fruit** and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”²⁹

- For the one who hears and does not understand Satan takes it away.
- There is one who hears and immediately receives it, but then affliction and persecution cause him to fall away.
- Then there is one hears but worry and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word.
- And there is one who hears, understands and bears fruit.
- **BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU LISTEN TO AND HOW YOU LISTEN.**

George Whitefield was an Anglican minister, who lived from 1714-1770. He was a preacher in what was called the Great Awakening and he must have been quite a preacher. Once Whitefield was preaching to a great throng of listeners. A man who was an unbeliever went there to see Whitefield when he preached. But he didn't want to hear him. He only wanted to see his performance. So, to have a good vantage point, he climbed up into a nearby tree. When he found a suitable perch in the tree he put his fingers in both of his ears. Having prepared himself he began to **watch** the mighty preacher.

Then it happened that a fly lit on his nose. He shook his head, but the fly wouldn't move. Finally, in desperation he removed his fingers from his ears so he could swat the fly away. Just as he removed his fingers

²⁹ Emphasis, mine. Author.

to flick the fly away, Whitefield quoted the verse, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15).

Then the preacher spoke about the willful refusal of many people to hear the Word of God. It is told that the unbeliever was so impressed by what happened that he was converted that very hour.

The Apostle Peter in his address to the Jewish people on that famous Day of Pentecost said this,

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words:

Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

- These words are the gospel of Christ. Listen.

Continuing with verse 32,

Acts 2:32 “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at My right hand,

35 Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” ’

36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

The result of listening is in the next verse:

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Therefore, take care of what you listen to and how you listen. Listen to what Peter told the crowd on Pentecost. Be among those who the Lord our God will call to Himself.

One day the angel of God will shout as the Lord descends from Heaven. Be listening.

That shout will have different meaning depending on whether you have listened now while you have the opportunity, or whether you have ignored the words spoken to you.

Set Your Mind on Things Above

There is the story of the Gypsy who was converted to Christianity, and being filled with joy he returned to the wagon in which he lived with his children. There, he told them all he had learned about the Savior and the Scriptures. Then he prayed with them that they might devote themselves completely to the Lord. This he did because there was one thing that troubled him. He had a violin that was the dearest treasure of his heart. Here was an instrument that was both his greatest pleasure, and now his greatest danger. Could he continue to play the violin in the same way as before? Could he return now to the old associations where there was lewd dancing and drinking? Could he revisit the bawdy parties and bars where he had played his violin to encourage and assist his hearers in lascivious celebrations?

He made his decision quickly. The following morning he went back to town and he took with him his violin. When he returned that night he was without it. He sold it. He realized that the old associations would become too great a distraction for him in his new service to Christ.³⁰

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians said,

Colossians 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

A few years ago a girl named Samantha Smith of Manchester, Maine, met with Soviet premier Michael

³⁰ Knight, W. B., Knight's Treasury of Illustrations. p. 444.

Gorbachev and talked with him about the arms race that could lead to the nuclear destruction of both the Soviet Union and the United States. She was eleven years old at the time. After the meeting with the premier she became a spokesperson for the anti-nuclear movement, and launched a modeling and acting career as a result of the publicity.

She was killed in the crash of a commuter airplane in August 1985 while traveling with her father. She was thirteen. The moral is: she should have been more concerned about the risks of travel than of nuclear war.

- Set your mind on things above.

When God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage He worked great miracles to overthrow the gods of Egypt; He brought them through the Red Sea when conditions looked hopeless to them. Then He led them into the wilderness—and they became distracted.

Moses wrote in the Book of Exodus,

Exodus 16:1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

In Egyptian bondage, despite their hard life, the Israelites had enjoyed a variety of food and they remembered it with nostalgia in the wilderness. In Egypt

there was fish in plenty, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic.³¹ So, they complained.

Then God gave them manna to eat, but that was not enough; they complained to Moses,

Numbers 11:4 ...the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? 5 “We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.”

There are Christians who are a lot like the ancient Israelites. They have just enough religion to make them miserable. They can no longer enjoy the world, but neither can they enter into the joy of the Lord. They stand, deprived of the “leeks, and the onions, and the garlic” of Egypt, yet they avoid the milk and honey of Canaan.

The Lord’s admonition on this subject is blunt, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”³²

In the present day we allow our thoughts to rest on personal security and advancement, or on our progress toward financial security. We think about pleasure, or visions of travel. Sometimes we see ourselves rising to higher levels of authority and influence. When we do this we fall into Satan’s trap. Paul said,

“Set your mind on the things above.”

The reason the Apostle said that was because of his mindset. His vision was radically different from most of us. He saw himself as dead. And a dead person has no thought of what is happening on the earth. The dead person knows nothing of good restaurants, NFL football

³¹ Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (375). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³² Lk 9:62

games or vacations in the Bahamas. The dead are separated from all the pleasures of this life. The Christian should be aware of the temporal, transitory nature of earth's pleasures and should not allow them to rise to such an importance that they crowd out everything spiritual.

There is the story of a man named John Sung who came to America in 1920 to work on his doctorate in chemistry. He excelled in his studies. As a result of his scholastic work he received attractive job offers. Then a day came when he heard the call of the gospel. He responded, but not totally because he struggled between the call of his career in chemistry and the call of Christ. He said that his struggle continued until one night he had a dream. In the dream he saw himself in a casket—dead.

After a time he began to understand that the dream to mean that John Sung is dead—dead to the world, but alive to Christ. Then the corpse began to stir, to move. After that he became a preacher and returned to Asia. Many acclaimed him as the greatest evangelist in China.³³

Should we not have the same attitude? Should we not see ourselves as dead to the world but alive to Christ? For, what good are money, worldly power or beauty to a dead man?

Once, Jesus told a parable to his disciples,

Luke 12:16 ... saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required

³³ Ibid., Knight, W.E.

of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Here was a rich man who allowed his possessions to rise to such importance to him that they crowded out the spiritual. He was rich in earthly things, but he was poor toward God. His mind was on preservation of his wealth—his earthly things.

Jesus introduced the parable of the Rich Fool by saying,

Luke 12:15 ... "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

The same is true of earthly fame, or of beauty. Wealth, fame and beauty last only a moment and then they are gone. No one really owns any of the three. If you don't believe that then ask a dead man.

No matter how long a person may live or how rich he may become, money cannot bring him happiness. In his book *For Better or For Worse*, Walter Maier included this story: "A rich man had committed suicide. In his pockets they found two items: \$30,000 in cash and a letter. The letter read in part: "I have discovered during my life that piles of money do not bring happiness. I am taking my life because I can no longer stand the solitude and boredom. When I was an ordinary workman in New York, I was happy. Now that I possess millions, I am infinitely sad and prefer death."

The rich man learned something important, but it came too late.

A Christian magazine reported that a songbook had a misprint in one line of the hymn, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." It should have read, "Land me safe on Canaan's shore," but it was printed, "Land my safe on Canaan's shore." The editor said, "The revised version

might be acceptable to many who have fallen into the trap of the love of money.”

We know that a person’s wealth does not follow him into the hereafter. There is a lot of truth in the saying, “You don’t see U-Haul trailers behind the hearse that carries the deceased into the cemetery.”

Not long ago a pirate and port town resident said that near Mogadishu, Somalia, five Somali pirates who had released a hijacked oil-laden Saudi supertanker drowned with their share of a reported \$3 million ransom after their small boat capsized.

Pirate Daud Nure said the boat with eight people on board overturned in a storm. Dozens of pirates had left the Sirius Star following a two-month standoff in the Gulf of Aden. He said five people died and three people reached shore after swimming for several hours. Daud Nure was not part of the pirate operation but knew those involved.³⁴

What good was the ransom to them? The difference between the pirates and the greedy in this life is that the pirates learned immediately that the money was a deception; the ones who allow wealth to occupy their focus in this life will learn later.

Don’t let money become a distraction. Focus on Christ. Set your mind on things above.

Setting one’s mind on things above involves focusing on Christ and consecrating one’s self to Him. It is not devotion to the external forms of religion because that leads to hypocrisy.

Alfred Edersheim says that to become a Pharisee a candidate had to undergo a period of probation after which he committed himself to obey the rules of the community. The object of the association was twofold: (a) to observe in the strictest manner, and according to traditional law, all the ordinances concerning Levitical purity, and (b) to be extremely punctilious in all laws connected with religious dues; i.e., tithes and other dues.

³⁴ Foxnews.com, Saturday, January 10, 2009.

[A person might undertake only the second, without the first obligation. In that case he was a Neeman, and “accredited one” with whom one might freely enter into commerce. One who undertook both was Chabher, an associate.]³⁵

How extreme they were in observance of the laws of purity may be seen in the statement of a Rabbi who would not allow his son to remain in the room while he was in the hands of a surgeon, lest he be defiled by contact with the amputated limb. [The amputated limb was dead and therefore impure.]

Another chasid went so far in his zeal for the Sabbath observance that he would not build up again his house (that had burned) because he had thought about it on the Sabbath.

It was even declared improper by some to entrust a letter to a Gentile, lest he should deliver it on a holy day.

More extreme Chasidim refused to save a woman from drowning for fear of touching a female, or waiting to put off the phylacteries before stretching out a hand to save a drowning child.

Edersheim further says of Pharisees,

“There was probably no town or village inhabited by Jews that did not have its Pharisees, although they would prefer Jerusalem.”

“There would be no difficulty recognizing a Pharisee. If you were to walk behind him, he would soon halt to say his prescribed prayers. If the fixed time for them had come he would stop short in the middle of the road, perhaps say a section of them, then move on, again say another part, and so on, till, whatever else might be doubted there could be no question of the conspicuousness of his devotions in market-places or corners of streets.”³⁶

The Pharisee in prayer, “...would stand, as taught by the traditional law, would draw his feet well together,

³⁵ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 311.

³⁶ Edersheim, A., *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, p. 214.

compose his body and clothes, and bend so low ‘...that every vertebra in his back would stand out separate.’ The workman would drop his tools, the burden-bearer his load; if a man had already one foot in the stirrup, he would withdraw it. The hour had come and nothing could be suffered to interrupt or disturb him. The very salutation of a king, it was said, must remain unreturned; nay even the twisting of a serpent around one’s heel must remain unheeded.”³⁷

On entering a village, and again on leaving it, he must say one or two benedictions; the same in passing through a fortress, in encountering any danger, in meeting with anything new, strange, beautiful, or unexpected. And the longer he prayed the better.

The Rabbis taught that, “...much prayer is sure to be heard. And lengthy prayer prolongs life.”

At the same time, as each prayer expressed, and closed with a benediction of the Divine Name, there would be special religious merit attaching to the mere number, and a hundred benedictions said in one day was a measure of great piety.

Such were some of the extremes of the Pharisees. They performed religious rites, and they observed rules that appeared to be extremely religious, but their observations were merely external. They were not from the heart. The Lord quoted from the following passage from Isaiah in His condemnation of the Pharisees,

Isaiah 29:13 Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*, 14 Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their

³⁷ Ibid., Edersheim, *Sketches*, p. 214.

discerning men will be concealed.” 15 Woe to those who deeply hide their plans from the Lord, And whose deeds are *done* in a dark place, And they say, “Who sees us?” or “Who knows us?” 16 You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, “He did not make me”; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?³⁸

The Pharisees made the mistake of focusing on the traditions of the fathers and the externalities of their religion. They did this to the exclusion of inward purity and as the Lord said, “...the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” Matt. 23:23.

Our service to Christ must not consist of “tradition learned by rote.” External religion is a great deception because it leads its practitioners to believe they have met their obligations to the Creator when in reality they have only surrendered to the distraction of hypocrisy.

The common thread among these stories is this: many of the people in these examples set their minds on earthly things, and took no thought of heavenly things. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians,

Philippians 3:18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory,

³⁸ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Is 29:13–16). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

The story is told of a heathen whose name was Chromatius. Chromatius was sick and he sought a cure from one of the early Christians who was reputed to have the gift of healing. When the Christian came to him he demanded that Chromatius destroy all of the idols in his house. To accomplish this Chromatius gave the keys to his house to the Christian, who then went through the house and destroyed all the idols he could find. Afterward, he prayed to God to heal Chromatius.

His prayer, however, was not answered. The sick man was as sick as ever. At this point the Christian confronted Chromatius and said, "There is yet an idol in your house that must be destroyed."

Reluctantly, the heathen confessed. "I have one idol of beaten gold. It has great value, and I wanted to save it."³⁹

Gathering his strength of will, Chromatius destroyed the idol. When he had broken it he was healed.

Do you have an idol remaining in your house that stands between you and Christ? Is it something you value as beaten gold? If there is then it is a distraction that must be removed.

The Christian is to remember always what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians,

Colossians 3:2 Set your mind on the things above,
not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you
have died and your life is hidden with Christ in
God.

³⁹ Foster, E., *6000 Sermon Illustrations*, p. 554.

THE RISEN CHRIST

In ancient Rome the place where the prisoners were held was called "*carcer*" for prison, or "*publica vincula*," for state bond.⁴⁰ Occasionally an accused person might be detained to await trial, but usually the ones merely awaiting trial were encouraged to go into voluntary exile. More frequently the prisons served as holding places for those who were condemned to die.

The Mamertine Prison, otherwise known as the Tullianum, was located on the east side of the Capitoline Hill, adjacent to the Roman Forum, and near the Arch of Septimius Severus, and below the church of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami. The prison consisted of two vaulted chambers, one above the other. The lower chamber is often referred to as the "Tullianum" as it is thought that the room was originally constructed to be a water cistern.⁴¹

Legend has it that the Apostle Paul was imprisoned at Mamertine, and was later executed at Aquas Salvias. Eusebius wrote that he was beheaded at the behest of Nero in AD 67.⁴² The date is in question because,

According to later reports, in A.D. 65 Paul of Tarsus was imprisoned in Rome, beheaded, and then buried in the family tomb of a devout Roman noblewoman, Matrona Lucilla.⁴³

⁴⁰ <http://www.unrv.com/government/Roman-prisons.php>

⁴¹ http://www.rome-tour.co.uk/mamertine_prison.htm

⁴² Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, pp. 104-5. Eusebius provides no date, but only states that Nero ordered his execution. He says that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that the execution is confirmed by the fact that the cemeteries there are called by the names Peter and Paul, and further confirmed by a churchman named Gaius who tells where the remains of the apostles were buried.

⁴³ http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/12/061211-saint-paul_2.html

The year of the apostle's death may be in question, but the loneliness of the final days of his missionary journey are not. Paul the Apostle ended his missionary journeys at Rome as a prisoner. Clouds and darkness gathered about him. In a circular dungeon, just back of the Capitoline Hill, and alongside the Roman Forum he awaited his death, his "departure" as he called it.

The church, still in its infancy, had fallen upon perilous times. False teachers were attacking the central teachings of the gospel: the Incarnation, the death on the cross, and the Resurrection. "... Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me..." he said. "Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me."⁴⁴ Thus, defections had reduced the number of companions of this lonely apostle.

But in the face of this apparent defeat, does he ask for pity from the one he calls his "son" in the faith? No. To Timothy he gives an exhortation to faithfulness. And such an exhortation it is, coming as it did under such deplorable circumstances that it must underline forever the great strength of the truths upon which Christianity stands.

The temptations Timothy faced were numerous. Many good men had fallen victim to them. The false teachers of that day spoke with a great show of learning, and with words that were hard to ignore. Besides that, they said, "... Only the dull of mind could depend on the ideas preached by Paul." From all appearances, the apostle had lost his struggle. His imprisonment was full proof of his failure. Not only that but the sword of persecution had been drawn. For the ones who followed Paul, death followed them. It seemed that the whole work that Paul had undertaken would collapse under the persecution. But Paul does not for a moment lose courage. Not for himself. Not for his followers. To Timothy Paul says,

⁴⁴ 2 Timothy 4:10-11.

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

Further on he says,

"Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything." Having said that, the apostle now points out to Timothy—and to us as well—the source, and the fortress of his own strength. He says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel."⁴⁵

Remember

Jesus once said to his apostles a thing that applies broadly to the church,

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. 19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Many of the Lord's enemies not only did not keep His word but they also put Him to death. They did the same to most of the apostles. Why should the faithful church fare differently?

In an interview of Gayle Sayers by Terry Bowden on ESPN the two talked about Gayle Sayer's friendship with Brian Piccolo. Sayers and Piccolo were running backs on the NFL Chicago Bears football team, and both were great. Some may remember that Brian Piccolo died

⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 2:8.

of cancer at the age of 29 at the height of his NFL career. Sayers, and many others were strongly affected by Piccolo's death. Gayle Sayer's wrote a book entitled, "*I Am Third*," in which he told about the competition, friendship and encouragement he received from Brian Piccolo. As he remembered Piccolo and the years with the Chicago Bears, and the tragic death of his friend, Gayle Sayers said, "If there is a lesson in the death of Brian Piccolo it is this: life is short. Better get your priorities in order."⁴⁶

We could say a similar thing about the death of Jesus Christ, and of His Apostle Paul. Life is short. They had their priorities in order. Better get your priorities in order.

Remember Jesus Christ

The name "Jesus" signifies savior. The name of "Christ" signifies anointed. Priests were anointed among the Jews, as their inauguration to their office. Kings also were anointed. In the New Testament, the name "Christ" is equivalent to Messiah, the name given to the long promised prophet and king. This Christ the Jews had been taught by their scriptures and their rabbis to expect. The use of this name, as applied to the Lord, always has reference to the promises of the prophets. The name of Jesus is the proper name of the Lord, and that of Christ is added to identify him with the promised Messiah.

To remember Jesus Christ the Lord left us a simple monument, one that informs on the simplicity and efficacy of the gospel.

In Luke's gospel we read,

Luke 22:19 And having taken some bread, when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. And in

⁴⁶ ESPN, Saturday, December 2, 2001.

the same way he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

This monument has survived two millennia. This is the monument that causes us to remember his words and his death each Lord's Day.

Therefore, remember Jesus Christ.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead

In Acts, chapter 25, Luke tells us about Paul's appearance before King Agrippa and the Roman governor, Festus,

Acts 25:13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. 14 While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, “There is a man who was left as a prisoner by Felix; 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. 16 “I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. 17 “So after they had assembled here, I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me. 18 “When the accusers stood up, they *began* bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting, 19 but they *simply* had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.

It is certainly true that the Jews had some "points of disagreement" with Paul about their religion. It is also true that the Jews had some points of disagreement with the Jesus whom Festus thought to be dead. And those points of disagreement were not trivial. They involved perceptions about the truth, and issues about behavior. At times the Jews rejected the Lord's counsel and disputed with Him about His teaching.

An ancient historian tells us of an eastern tribe that was so bothered by the blazing heat of the sun, that it became their custom, each morning, when the sun rose, to unite themselves together in hurling curses at the great light. Little did they understand that it was the light of the sun that kept them alive.

So it was with the Jews of Jesus' time.

One of the most astonishing features of the ministry of Jesus is mentioned in John, chapter 1.

The Apostle says of Jesus,

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him.

It is incredible that the one who made the world, Who had gone to such great lengths to save his own people, would come to his own people, and be rejected. Not rejected only by the Jews, but by the theocratic chiefs, by the assembled Sanhedrin, and by the very populace to whom Pilate appealed to save his life.

It was Stephen who said in his defense before the Jews,

Acts 7: 51 You men who are stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the holy spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who

received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.

Isaiah said concerning the Messiah,

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; he has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him. Nor appearance that we should be attracted to him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, and we did not esteem him.

And in the words of the song, (#278)

"Tell of the years of his labor, tell of the sorrow he bore; he was despised and afflicted, homeless, rejected and poor."

But even though he was rejected by the Jews, deserted by his own disciples, condemned and crucified by the gentiles, God, His Father, did not forget him. On that historic first day of the week, when Peter and the other disciples huddled in fear, and the women prepared spices to mourn his death, they came to the tomb and found the stone rolled away.

Mark 16: 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; he is not here ..."

He is risen!

Paul said concerning Jesus in his letter to the Romans,

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through

his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 concerning his son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared with power to be the son of God by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord ..."

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David.

Matthew tells of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem,

Matthew 21:4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 "Say to the daughter of Zion,

'Behold your King is coming to you,
Gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!"

Matthew noted that they shouted the words of Psalm 118:26, Blessed is He who comes in

the name of the Lord. To Him they shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David. “Hosanna” is from the Hebrew *hōšî‘âh nā’*, “Save (us), we pray,” taken from Psalm 118:25. It came to be a note of praise as well as petition.

While the crowd did not fully understand the significance of this event, they seemed to be acknowledging that this One is the promised Seed of David who had come to grant them salvation. Both their actions and words bestowed honor on this One coming into the city, at last presenting Himself publicly as their King.⁴⁷

The Son of David in whom the hope of Israel comes to fulfillment is the Savior who turns aside sorrow and heals sicknesses.⁴⁸ In His earthly way Jesus has come to Israel as the Son of David in whom the promises of Scripture are fulfilled. But the community that confesses Him knows that He who has worked as the Son of David on earth is also the Lord (*Kurios*) and Son of God to whom all power is given both in heaven and on earth.⁴⁹

Christ is twice called the Root of David in Revelation at Chapter 5:5 and Chapter 22:16. He is the shoot which has sprung forth from the race of David (cf. Is. 11:1, 10), the Messianic Ruler who holds the key of David in His hands, 3:7. This picture is taken from Isaiah 22:22, but it is used in a new sense. What is meant is no longer the key to David’s palace. It is the key to the door of the Messianic banqueting hall. As the

⁴⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Mt 21:9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴⁸ . *Vol. 8: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (486). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Mt. 22:41–46; 28:18.

eschatological scion of the house of David
Christ holds in His hands the key with which He
opens up the way to salvation. By the transfer of
Old Testament and Jewish titles to the crucified,
risen and ascended Christ it is emphasized that
the promises of God are fulfilled in Him.⁵⁰

God did not abandon him. And it is like Peter said
concerning him on the Day of Pentecost ...

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words:
Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by
God with miracles and wonders and signs which
God performed through him in your midst, just
as you yourselves know -- 23 This man,
delivered up by the predetermined plan and
foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by
the hands of Godless men and put him to death
...

Acts 2:32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which
we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been
exalted to the right hand of God, and having
received from the father, the promise of the holy
spirit, he has poured forth this which you both
see and hear."

Therefore, remember Jesus Christ, risen from
the dead -- vindicated.

In the 17th Century a young girl named Maria Durant
lived in the south of France. She was attractive and
intelligent, and life beckoned joyously to her. She was
also a devout Christian and unashamed to speak out for
her Lord. Soon the persecution in that area became so
severe that her witness was no longer tolerated. She
refused to be silent, however. As a result she was
imprisoned. For 38 years, while life with its pleasures

⁵⁰ *Ibid. Vol. 8: Theological dictionary of the New
Testament. Root of David: ἡ ῥίζα Δαβίδ.*

passed her by, she maintained a shining testimony. For her there would be no joy of marriage, and family. Her valiant stand for the truth was costly, but rather than yield to pressure and renounce her Lord, she stood firm. The years of privation slowly sapped her strength, physical strength. She died a martyr's death. She resisted unto blood.

In the Book of Hebrews we read,

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

Paul suffered for Christ and for the church. He resisted to the point of shedding blood. He wrote to the Corinthians about his opponents, saying,

2 Corinthians 11:22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my*

countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Indeed, Paul suffered for the Lord and for the gospel. In the end he gave his life. Yet through all this he lamented not his loss of earthly fame or comfort. His focus was clearly upon the risen Christ. As he said to the Philippians,

Philippians 3:7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Purpose in Suffering

On November 16, 1997, the NFL Indianapolis Colts who were 0 and 10 on the season had to face the Green Bay Packers. The Packers were the winners of the Super Bowl the previous year, and had a winning record. No one gave the Colts a chance to win the game. The coach, Lindy Infante, in a bid to encourage his team brought in a speaker to give a motivational speech. The speaker was Bob Wieland, a man who had crossed the country—on his hands. He was also the man who had run for five days just to complete the Boston Marathon—but had finished the course. Wieland had lost both his legs in Vietnam to a booby trapped mortar round, and he was familiar with difficult obstacles. He told the Colts to “...dig a little deeper.”⁵¹

The Colts may have thought they had nothing more to give, but Wieland’s message got through. The Colts won the game 41 to 38. Afterward, Infante gave the game ball to Bob Wieland.

Bob Wieland could have given up after he lost his legs, but he didn’t. When he counsels to “dig a little deeper” you know it comes from a man who has been there, who has felt the pain of adversity yet who found a way to overcome.

When we face adversity there are two roads before us. The temptation is to blame God. That’s the low road, the road that leads to defeat. And remember, there are many reasons why we suffer, but God is not one of them. God is the Physician who comes to heal. He undertakes to repair the damage, and He does it in His own way. The second road is the road the Lord has walked. That road leads to victory. To understand why

⁵¹ The Indianapolis Star/News ; ESPN ; http://bobwieland.com/new_site/index.php

this is true we must understand something important: an artifact ought to praise its maker. The principle applies to everything man makes, and to man himself.

There is a story out of England about the managers at Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering, Ltd. whose factory is at Barrow, England. These managers suffered severe embarrassment when workers welded a large section of a nuclear powered submarine onto another section—upside down. The British Navy ordered an inquiry to determine how it could have happened. "I don't think anyone can remember quite such a blunder," an employee of the company said. Correcting the mistake cost about \$1.86 million dollars, according to a trade union leader quoted by the British domestic news agency Press Association.⁵²

The blunder was an embarrassment to the company, and to the workers who did it. A man's work ought to praise him. God's work is no different. And He intends that His work praise Him.

In Jeremiah chapter 18 the Scripture says,

Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* you in My hand, O house of Israel!"⁵³

⁵² The London Daily Telegraph.

⁵³ Quotations are from The New King James Version. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S.

To the Romans, Paul wrote concerning the right of God over His creation,

Romans 9:20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

I have seen people who work in ceramics painstakingly shape the vessels they want, then place it in the furnace to bake it. Afterward, they may look it over, break it, and then the throw it on the trash heap.

Why do they break them? Why do artists throw away something they have spent hours creating? The answer is easy—because it does not please them, and they can't correct it. A work of art ought to please its maker by the way it is crafted, both in its beauty, and in the function of it.

Discipline is the way God corrects His work. The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Robert Milligan wrote a commentary on the Book of Hebrews. He died during publication of the book. Writing a book is not an unusual thing to do, but for Milligan it was an achievement worthy of note. Milligan entered life as a farmer's boy. He learned early in life the virtues of work. Once, as he removed a stump from a field, an accident caused him a severe internal injury. Afterward, impaired and feeble, his physical disability caused him to give up farming. Searching for an occupation to employ himself, he entered the university. He distinguished himself in every course he studied. While still a young man, he suffered a violent attack of inflammatory rheumatism. The illness nearly proved fatal. It left his system further enfeebled, and vulnerable to other diseases. Neuralgia of the brain followed the rheumatism. The brain disorder affected his optic nerves, and rendered his eyes extremely sensitive to light. The sudden flashing of a light pierced his eyes as would a knife. Afterward, the pain forced him always to direct his eyes to the floor. That led strangers to wonder why he did not look them directly in the face. For some years before his death he could not read by lamp light, but depended entirely on the light of the sun. Even in the daytime he spared his eyes as much strain as he could by having members of his family read to him. Besides all this, his digestion was imperfect, and his throat and lungs became involved in his general prostration.

Robert Milligan wrote his commentary on the book of Hebrews in spite of his illness.

Commenting on "chastisement" in Hebrews chapter 12, Milligan wrote, "All chastisement, both human and Divine, give us present pain. This is its object; and without pain there can indeed be no chastisement. And hence it is for the time being, a matter not of joy but of grief. So we all feel and think. Though it is at first bitter to the taste, it nevertheless afterwards becomes a tree of life which yields constantly '...the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' That is, it produces righteousness as its fruit; and this fruit gives peace and consolation to the

once grieved and troubled soul. ‘It is, (as he quotes Tholuck) fruit in righteousness to be enjoyed in peace after the conflict is over.’⁵⁴

Milligan saw in suffering, as he said, “...the kind and gracious hand of God. It never fails to bring peace, joy, and consolation.”

Another farmer might have said when Milligan lay stricken with disability caused by the root of a tree that here is a man whose life is over. He could never farm again. Yet, not all artwork is thrown away. Someone unfamiliar with the work might see the intermediate result and think the work is spoiled. The Lord saw something else. He had another occupation in mind for this young, would-be farmer, and He had more shaping to do on the clay.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart.

Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not

look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Chastisement is painful for the present. It is a matter not of joy but of grief. But it is no different from the sufferings of Christ. In another place the writer of Hebrews says concerning Him,

Hebrews 5:7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications,

⁵⁴ Milligan, R., *The New Testament Commentary*, the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 351.

with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him...

“He learned obedience through the things that He suffered...” How can the Christian expect any less?

There is a story about a businessman who enrolled his son in a well-known Ivy League university. The man visited the dean and looked over the catalog of courses. Dismayed, the businessman asked the dean, “Does my son have to take all these courses? Can’t you make it shorter? My son wants to complete his degree more quickly.”

“He could take a shorter course,” the dean answered, “but remember, when God makes an oak, He takes twenty years. A squash, however, takes only two months.”

The moral in this story is that we should not faint when God takes us to school. Some degrees take a few months; others take longer. God’s reproof should not discourage us. It proves His interest in us. As the writer says, “...illegitimate sons are ignored.” Only the sons are disciplined, and that for our good. So, being a son does not exempt us from the discipline of the Lord; on the contrary, it guarantees we will receive it.

In a similar way, Christ received the discipline of the Father. Not that He was punished for wrong doing, but that in the depths of God’s counsel He determined that the Messiah’s training included hardship. The obedience the Hebrew writer refers to is compliance with the will of God. In this compliance the experience of Christ transcends the experience of every man. Although God honored Him, and exalted Him as worthy at the last, nevertheless, Christ went down to the lowest depths of human sorrow and suffering. For this, God designated

Him High Priest, One preeminently qualified to serve at the altar, and to call attention to the sacrifice he brought.

The meaning of the word that is translated “designated” is properly, “saluted.” It is as the soldier who, standing in the ranks, is called by his commanding officer to receive the Medal of Honor. The soldier steps forward. The commander places the ribbon holding the coveted medal about his neck. Then the commander steps back, and in recognition of conspicuous gallantry in the performance of duty, salutes the soldier in the manner he deserves.

I once saw a newsreel that showed a naval aircraft carrier of the Second World War returning from duty in the war ravaged Pacific. A soldier watched from atop a hill that overlooked the entrance to San Francisco Bay. He looked on as the ship, battle scarred and listing to starboard, made its way slowly into port. Then, out of the depths of respect, as one soldier to another, he raised his hand in salute. It is the only fitting response, and one that is richly deserved for another who has served well and honorably in service.

The pattern, therefore, is suffering hardship in this life to be followed by reward later. God Himself confers the proper reward on the service. Worthwhile achievements follow the same pattern. This is true in any aspect of life.

After suffering defeat at Brandywine and Germantown, General George Washington led his army of 11,000 regulars to an encampment at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The land lay in the icy grip of winter. Washington made his camp on the banks of the Schuylkill River, only 22 miles from Philadelphia. The British housed themselves in Philadelphia. So, while the British warmed themselves over the fires in Philadelphia, Washington shivered at Valley Forge. Wintering there was bad enough, but the winter of 1777 was harsh. No one could say that the ones who deserted did so without reason. The British had beaten the Continental Army twice; it was ill-housed, ill-fed, and

literally thousands of the men were "...barefoot and otherwise naked." Worse still, there was rampant disease and death. One must also add to these privations, the mismanagement of the food supplies, the inadequacy of transportation, the neglect of Congress, and public criticism. Perhaps in all this the Republic could have been stillborn.⁵⁵

Yet, leadership prevailed, and that by the grace of God. The vindication of Washington's courage and endurance came at Yorktown in 1781. Lord Cornwallis, the commander of the British Army, surrendered to Washington. The ragtag, and oft beaten, Continental Army had its victory. The electorate of the new country exalted Washington to the presidency of the republic in 1789. His reward provided a fitting consummation for a life of duty and devotion.

The pattern that Washington and the Continental Army followed was the same that Christ laid down—suffering followed by honor. Worthwhile achievements in this life follow the same pattern established by Christ.

In the book of Acts Luke tells us that Jews from Antioch and Iconium, along with a multitude..."

Acts 14:19 ... stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Luke tells not of luxury and comfort, or of days of ease, but of tribulations.

⁵⁵ Macartney.

The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

A Christian today should not expect to be treated any differently by the world than were the Apostles, or the Lord. We accept our burdens and bear them in the knowledge that God knows, and has provided for all things. Suffering for the moment—which is in this life—may be difficult to bear, but we take comfort in the thought that it is only temporary. More than that we believe with Paul that it “...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...”

Glory

Prominent in the New Testament, and in the writings of the early Christian Fathers, is the idea of glory. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, robes, thrones and splendor like the sun and stars. C. S. Lewis said the word “glory” at first suggested two ideas to him: either it was fame, or it was luminosity. The first seemed wicked, the second, ridiculous. In the New Testament the word “glory” is translated from the Greek word “*doxa*” which means, “good opinion concerning someone, and resulting from that, praise and honor.”⁵⁶ The meaning is best illustrated by the words of Jesus when He said in the parable of the talents,

Matthew 25:23 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

“Well done...” are the words every man wants to hear. They are the words the Christian longs to hear. Praise from the Master is the proper fulfillment of the life of the Christian. And it is not wicked to desire it.

But there is more.

As C. S. Lewis said, “The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.”⁵⁷ For example, the proper reward for lovers is not money, but marriage. And as the Lord said, faithfulness in a few things finds as its reward to be made ruler over many things.

Jeremiah said,

⁵⁶ Thayer, J. H., DD, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, δόξα.

⁵⁷ Lewis, C. S., *The Weight of Glory*. p. 2

Jeremiah 17:10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings. 11 "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool."

A man receives from the Lord according to the fruit of his doings. As Paul wrote to the Galatians in chapter six of that letter,

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

The writer of Proverbs said,

Proverbs 21:21 He who follows righteousness and mercy Finds life, righteousness and honor.
Proverbs 21:21.

In this connection, Matthew records a remarkable thing that Jesus said,

Matthew 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. 40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a

righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

The meaning of what He said is that if a man knowingly befriends the representative of Christ and of God then the man will receive a reward of the kind that belongs to that representative. Christ insists that the character of a man be good. The character of a prophet must be of good quality in keeping with his message. In this saying of Christ, character is the fundamental issue, but respect for it is next best. The underlying principle is: the thing we respect shapes our own character. So, if you are looking for the reward that comes to a worthy character, then respect characters that are worthy. What do you admire? Do you admire a Hollywood icon whose virtue is questionable, or do you admire the Apostle Paul? A vice ridden rock star, or Joseph? A Rambo-style super-hero, or Jesus? Christ says reward attends a proper respect to God, a prophet and a righteous man.

Randy White, who played defensive tackle for the NFL Dallas Cowboys, owned a ranch. The NFL inducted him into the Hall of Fame in July 1994. In his acceptance speech he said that he had named his ranch, "The Fourth Quarter." The fourth quarter of a football game is important to players, and fans alike. Frequently, performance in the fourth quarter decides the outcome of the contest; it is the fourth quarter that exposes character. The fourth quarters are dominated by the players with endurance and determination. White knows that.

Years ago my wife and I traveled to Chatuge Village, North Carolina, to visit her parents. Her parents had retired there. Houses in the village were mostly small, A-frame dwellings built on steep hillsides. Below the hillside village lay Chatuge Lake. Many of the people who retired there had put on their houses, and mailboxes, signs that reflected the professions they had practiced in their working careers. One of them, painted

by a school teacher, read: "Aftermath." On my father-in-law's mailbox was "Photo Finish." In life, people had known him more for his work in photography than the job he had at the telephone company. His sign was more prophetic than he evidently knew. He died there.

So it is that the things we do in this life become a part of us. Our characters are seen in what we do, and what we say.

The Scripture says in Revelation,

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

In Acts, Luke tells us about Tabitha, a woman whose life abounded in deeds of kindness and love. In the ninth chapter, Acts says,

Acts 9:36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

The great truth of the gospel is that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. That is, the benefits of redemption that God freely gives us are in Christ, and have as their basis the work that Christ completed by suffering in the flesh and dying upon the cross. It is through His efforts, and on His merits that we are saved, and not according to our merits. In this connection Paul said to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Indeed, we are His workmanship.

And, although that work of redemption is complete, other work is not, and He continues to work with us, to teach us, and to improve our characters. Lessons come hard. Some of them are painful. Yet, he even uses the pain, and turns it into something of value for the perfecting of the believer. Whereas Paul gave no place to human works in the matter of redemption, he insisted that they do have their essential place in the life of the believer. He said, we are "...created in Christ Jesus for good works..."

Tabitha was walking in those good works just as God had prepared for her. The Scriptures do not indicate that Tabitha had a high social standing. She evidently was not a rich or influential woman. She was not young and beautiful. But she was kind and charitable. Luke uses the Greek middle voice indicating that the disciples were wearing the tunics that she had made. Dorcas was known for her good works. They attended her.

A person's life is not hidden from view. Paul said,

1 Timothy 5:24 Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. 25 Likewise, the

good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

Here the Apostle mentions one class of deeds—
“...sins that go before.”

The Pulpit says, “Some men's sins are notorious, requiring no careful inquisition in order to find them out; nay, they of themselves go before—before the sinner himself—into judgment.”⁵⁸

The book of Second Chronicles records a grim and bitter epitaph for readers to ponder. It is the epitaph of Jehoram, king of Judah. In the 21st chapter of that book we read,

2 Chronicles 21:20 He was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

The NASB says it differently. Jehoram was “...thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years; and departed with no one's regret...”

What a grim legacy Jehoram left. Jehoram had a reasonably good start in life. His father was Jehoshaphat—one of the best kings of Judah. But in this case—as we have seen in many cases ourselves—the best of men can have the worst of sons. Proverbs says, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” But Jehoram married the daughter of Ahab. Association led the son of a reasonably good king to consort with wicked friends.

Jehoram had six brothers—he murdered all of them when he became king. The Bible says,

2 Chronicles 21:4 Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also others of the princes of

⁵⁸ Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, p. 101, 1 Tim. ch. 5, v. 24.

Israel. 5 Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6 And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

Worse, Jehoram was not content with his sin—he caused his people to sin.

2 Chronicles 21:11 Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray.

What sinner, or scoffer, is there who is content with his sin? Not many. Jehoram was a cruel man, a murderer, and an idolater, and he led his nation into sin. He had sunk so low, morally, that he was not worth a visit from the prophet. The judgment of Elijah came by "letter."

2 Chronicles 21:14 behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction; your children, your wives, and all your possessions; 15 and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.

At length, a disgusting disease smote him according to Elijah's prophecy, and he died a lingering death. When news got out in Jerusalem that Jehoram was very sick, and probably could not get well, nobody was sorry. The sacred writer says that "...he departed with no one's regret."

The sins of Jehoram went before him into judgment.

Have you ever known someone at whose passing there was no regret? Maybe a sigh of relief? A prayer of thanks? Others of the class of Jehoram are: Judas Iscariot, Nero, Adolph Hitler, and Lee Harvey Oswald. The list goes on. Their sins have great notoriety; they are quite evident, because they do them where all can see,

and the sins are open to judgment. The lives of these men, and how they ended are visible evidence of how God punishes sin, here and now. They tell also of a final and terrible judgment. They go before their perpetrators into judgment. They tell of an ordeal that has only begun. They tell of an eternity as a murderer, or as a thief, in which the agony of their perversity will never cease.

Paul mentioned another class of deeds—sins that follow after men to find them in judgment.

America, and the world for that matter, remembers Jim Thorpe as one of the greatest athletes who has ever lived. In 1911 and 1912 he was an all-American left-halfback at the Carlisle Indian school in Pennsylvania. He led his team to victories over Harvard, Army, and the University of Pennsylvania. In 1950, the U.S. Sportswriters and Broadcasters selected Thorpe as the greatest American athlete of the first half of the 20th Century.

In 1912, Jim Thorpe went to the Olympic Games at Stockholm, Sweden. At those games he won the pentathlon, and the decathlon. But the Olympic Committee forced him to surrender the medals he had won. Thorpe had once taken pay as a semiprofessional baseball player, and as minor as the offense might seem, it was a violation of the rules. As was the humiliation of Jim Thorpe in the Olympic Games, so will be the humiliation of many people in the Olympic Games of life. What a man might consider a minor infraction could rise up at the last and rob him of his prize.

On that day when they reach for the medal it could be as Matthew wrote,

Matthew 7:22 "Many will say to Me in that day,
'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Run so that you may attain unto the prize of the high calling that is in Christ Jesus. If you don't you may be sure that your sins will find you out. Moses said to the children of Israel,

Numbers 32:20 ... "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, 21 "and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, 22 "and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the LORD and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. 23 "But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out.

There is an Eastern proverb that says, "Curses, like chickens, always come home to roost." If we are fortunate, our mistakes find us here—we repent of them, and find forgiveness.

In Judges the First Chapter we read that after the death of Joshua, Judah and his brother Simeon went up to fight against the Canaanites, and the Perizzites. The Lord gave them into the hands of Judah and Simeon. The Scripture says they defeated ten thousand men at Bezek.

Judges 1:5 And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. 7 And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

Sins will be brought to light. They will find us out.

Paul said,

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

The sins that follow after, and find the ones who commit them in judgment, are the sins of the many. These are sins that are not so notorious, but are, nevertheless, sins. These are sins that are hidden, but they warn of justice that must find us out.

In his book, *I Am Third*, Gayle Sayers tells of his friendship with Brian Piccolo. Both men were football players, both running backs for the Chicago Bears of the National Football League. Both men were gifted athletes. Both had the opportunity to attain unto greatness. And they were great. But Brian Piccolo died at the height of his career—from lung cancer.

In one of the great stories about sports, Sayers portrays Brian Piccolo as the man who carried his destruction in his breast. There is a moral in the suffering of Brian Piccolo: the cancer he carried was as the sin we harbor within us. That sin, like cancer, has a small beginning, but it can grow, and at the last find us reaching for the prize, and then drag us down.

"...our sins follow after us into judgment."

There are also deeds done in righteousness. These deeds also follow the doer. Regrettably, these are the deeds of the few. They are as the deeds of Tabitha, for she was "abounding with deeds of charity and kindness, which she continually did..." Tabitha's works follow with her, as our works follow with us. Our works—by God's grace—show evidence of our character. The Scripture says, "...you know a tree by its fruits." And so it is of people.

God rewards good character. It is not pride to work for glory, honor and approval from the Maker. That approval is proper. Milton, Johnson and Aquinas looked

upon glory as fame—as good report, but glory of the proper kind is to be famous with God. Zig Ziglar, that salesman's salesman, has remarked that if you sow a habit you reap a character, if you sow a character you reap a destiny. In this he is right. Let us sow habits as did Tabitha, so that we may reap a character that will endure in eternity.

I read an article once in which the writer of a periodical said, "The fundamental thing is how we think of God..." His advice goes wide of the mark. Truly, he is not even close to the bull's eye. His view is reversed. It is not how we think of God, but how God thinks of us. It is not, "What will you do with Jesus?" But, "What will Jesus do with you?"

We must all stand before God one day to be inspected. Creatures great and small will tremble before that awful majesty. It will be as John said in the Revelation,

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

In view of the warning about that terrible day, let us perform deeds as advised by Malachi,

Malachi 2:6 The law of truth was in his mouth,
And injustice was not found on his lips. He
walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned
many away from iniquity. Malachi 2:6.

Paul admonished the Ephesians,

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as
dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also

has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. 3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."

Even the best of Christians make some mistakes, and have bad days. They should not lose heart, but should rely on the Lord both for correction and comfort. Bart Starr, the former quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, tells a story about his son when the boy was quite young. Starr said he made a practice of rewarding the boy for "perfect" papers that he brought home from school. If the youngster got a perfect score on a composition, Starr left a dime for him. If he scored a hundred percent on a test, he got a dime.

Starr believed this would teach the boy to love excellence in his work, and to show that reward follows good performance.

As it happened, Starr performed poorly in a football game one Sunday. After the game he told reporters that he could hit any receiver, except those from his own team. It was one of those days when no play seemed to work for his Green Bay Packers, but it was a day the opponent made everything look easy. These are the games the athlete wishes he could end quickly, if for nothing else, to put the agony to rest. Starr said games like these require much more of a person than the ones where victory is assured.

Does that remind you of your struggle against evil?

When Starr came home that night, he arrived after everyone had gone to bed. He was glad, too. He felt terrible about his performance, and was in no mood to face his family, or to make the excuses. So he went up to his room to go to bed. When he got there he looked down at his pillow, and found two dimes. Beside the dimes was a note. The note said,

"Congratulations Dad, on the greatest of games you've played. Love, your son."

On those days when you know you have been outplayed—you know you have suffered a defeat—and the only thing you want to do is forget it, remember that there is someone watching, someone sympathetic, and someone who has your best interest at heart. He is there to ensure that you do not lose in the game of life.

For those who feel they have worked hard as a Christian and wonder why the rewards seem to go to others there is the story of the missionary who served for forty years in Africa. A day came when he headed home by boat. It happened that the same ship carried Theodore Roosevelt. When they arrived in New York Harbor President Roosevelt received a great welcome—a band played, and officials offered words of welcome home.

Dejected, the missionary left the ship thinking that after forty years laboring in a foreign mission field he

ought to get something of a welcome when he got home. Then a small voice said to him, “Henry, you’re not home yet.”

The Potter spins the wheel, and shapes the clay until He is satisfied with the work. When He is satisfied with the work, then the work can be satisfied with itself—not until.

Honor and approval await only those who have chosen the high road to glory. Remember, Paul said that God,

Romans 2:6 ... "will render to each one according to his deeds": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath...

To avoid the indignation and wrath, consider the lives of those who have gone before, especially Jesus. Avoid not only the notorious sins, but secret sins; instead, pursue deeds of kindness and love as Tabitha did. Paul also warns that there will be,

Romans 2:9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

Work what is good because you have chosen the better way. You’re in the glory land way.

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