

Volume 4

A Word in Season:

Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life

R. J. Rushdoony

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Mark R. Rushdoony

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Old-Line Americans

Our experiences as a child often color our thinking as adults.

I lived as a child in California. My immigrant parents, refugees from Armenia and the Turkish massacres, moved to California from New York a few weeks after my birth in 1916. We lived on a farm near Kingsburg, a Swedish town. Even when I was in high school, Kingsburg's mayor, a Swede, spoke a heavily accented English. Besides the Swedes, there were Armenians, Danes, Portuguese, Japanese, Mexicans, and a few others. When I started kindergarten, my English, like that of the other children, was limited. In the first grade, I met my first "real American," an elderly woman teacher named Mrs. Pinkley. I have forgotten the names of others of my early teachers, but I remember hers, because we were all impressed by this "real American." Years later, I realized that a very few old-line Americans did live in the area, but none were near us.

In the early 1920s, when my father became pastor of an Armenian church in Detroit, we left by train for that city. As a youngster, it was for me a great adventure as well as a major dislocation. On board the train, I was immediately interested in the man who seemed to me to be the most important man running the train, and the strongest, the Pullman porter. He was also the first black man I had ever seen. I followed him around, to his tolerant amusement, and I began to ask questions. As a boy in Kingsburg, I knew that there all of us identified people in terms of their country of origin: "What country does your family come from?" Accordingly, I asked him the same question, and, "What language did they speak?" The answers were surprising: he came from Chicago, and his family from Alabama. His grandparents? Alabama. His great-grandparents, his great-great-grandparents? He was amused: "As far back as I know, Alabama," and all spoke English. I then knew that I had met my second "real American."

Looking back years later, I realized how right I was. Apart from the Indians, most of us are immigrant stock of relatively recent origin. Two groups have a long history here, the English and the Negroes, and both have English names and deep roots in the United States. These two groups best qualify as "old-line Americans" and "real Americans," because their lives, culture, and outlook are most formed by an American tradition. The United States is their county in a deeper sense.

The presidential candidacy of Jesse Jackson was a noteworthy step in American history, but it was not without some unhappy aspects. In particular, Jackson played the role of the black outsider demanding entrance. Valid reasons for this stance are by no means lacking, but the more important and positive fact that needs emphasis and development is that of the insider.

My perception as a child was right. Blacks are old-line Americans. As such, they have a major stake in American life in the protection and development of their country.

In Europe, there are growing hostilities against the large members of Middle Eastern minorities who came there after World War II to fill the needs for workers. In Africa, there are racial and

intertribal hostilities of major character. In Asia, we find that India, Pakistan, and other countries have ancient and explosive racial conflicts.

The United States and the Americas are almost alone in working to relegate such tensions to past history. In that effort, blacks have a necessary role as old-line Americans working to strengthen and develop the American hope.

Crippled Minds

A friend today told me of a serious problem in her family business. They provide corrective shoes for crippled people. The shoes fit, and they do everything the doctors require of them, but the patients and customers are increasingly unhappy. The problem is a new and a growing one: many of these cripples somehow dream that a pair of corrective shoes will make their defect disappear. The shoe fits, is a major help, and is comfortable, but they burst into tears or go into a tantrum because they expect more from a pair of shoes than shoes can deliver.

In this, these cripples are like all too many people of our day. They demand laws to give them a status which other people have won the hard way. The laws are passed, and major social adjustments are made, but too often their basic problems remain. They have expected of law more than law can deliver, and their reaction is a revolutionary rage.

Such people have crippled minds. Handicaps are real in this world, and they are not pleasant. It is even worse when men themselves make or create handicaps for others. But life always involves a struggle. The farmer cannot order weather to suit his needs, nor prices to fatten his bank account. He must live with reality and work to master it. The crippled mind, however, holds a grudge against life and against other men for his handicaps. He demands that a magic wand be somehow waved and all handicaps abolished. The only result of such an attitude is that a greater handicap is created, because the mind is progressively crippled by such a faith.

We live in an age when men want salvation from a pair of shoes, and a new world from a new statute on the law books. When this hopeless dream betrays them, their reaction is to “smash the system.” It is a revolutionary rage.

The problems in our world are real enough, but most serious problems are in the hearts and minds of men. They will not disappear with a wave of the hand, nor with a new set of laws. Only as these people are regenerated by Jesus Christ can they be freed from their major and central problem, a crippled mind. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Their need is for “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Salvation is both health and victory, and only Christ can give it.

A Life of Great Gain

A few years ago, a very able woman who had been in real estate, had served as a bank trust officer, and had held one or two other responsible positions, called my attention to the irrationality of people's desires. In buying or building a house, people demanded that the same house satisfy very contradictory purposes. For example, a woman would require a kitchen to have a compact construction to save steps and yet be roomy enough to include a variety of things. What one kitchen gave her excluded one or another of her requirements.

What Mrs. W. K. told me has often been in my mind, because she called attention to a common form of irrationality. In politics, economics, marriages, and in every other area, men and women demand that their daydreams, not realistic goals, be realized. One recent editorial called some members of Congress self-deluded, because at one and the same time they sought the advantages of both free trade and mercantilism, a manifest contradiction.

In marriage, men and women live in terms of impossible expectations and then wonder why their marriage does not work. Employees who will not do the work required of them complain that they are not appreciated. Employers expect respect from their employees when they themselves will give others no respect.

To want contradictory things is to imagine that we are God and that reordering the world to suit our imagination rather than God's law is possible for us. We are, however, commanded in such things to "be content with such things as ye have" (Heb. 13:5), for "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Our ideas about "great gain" envision the possession of imagined things, not godliness with contentment.

Our imagination is not governed by reality. In imagination, the world is reordered to man's wishes, and the impossible becomes routinely imagined as real. It becomes easier for people to live in their dream world than in the real world, and they choose that unreal world. But to be alive in God's world, however great its problems, is a privilege and an opportunity, whereas our dream world is closer to sleep and to death.

To live with reality is thus "great gain." David says, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8). The imagined power and prosperity of daydreams mask impotence and retreat.

Rottenness in the Bones

The tenth commandment forbids covetousness, and envy is repeatedly condemned in Scripture. Unfortunately, what the Bible teaches and what today's politicians and preachers teach are two different things.

Men today are being taught to covet and to envy. Are you a worker? Then be envious of what your shop owner or factory owner has, and resent it with all your heart. Are you a farm laborer? Then believe that the farmer holds what he has by defrauding you, and that he is an ugly brute who has made his money at your expense. Are you a member of a minority group? Then demand your "rights" and declare everything in America is evil because you are not in possession of it.

Preachers and politicians seem to believe in a new beatitude of their own making: "Blessed are the envious, for they shall inherit the earth." They are out to make it come true or else destroy the country if they cannot.

But let us take our text from the Bible, not from these preachers and politicians. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones" (Prov. 14:30).

A sound heart means a regenerated heart, a converted man who lives by the word of the Lord, not by envy; and envy is the rottenness, the decay, of the bones.

A man's bones are the structure of his body: he cannot stand without them. Some people, with rare diseases of the bones, are scarcely able to stand or move, because their spinal column may crumble. The bones make possible man's ability to function.

Now a society with rottenness of the bones is a society ready to crumble, ready to collapse; it cannot stand. A society which is dedicated to envy as a way of life, a society whose political and religious leaders promote the evil of envy as the great virtue and cure-all, has about as much future as a man bent on drinking poison to cure his hiccups.

These ungodly men are "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Tim. 6:4). They are only able to create a world in their own evil image, not the paradise they dream of. They can only communicate their own rottenness of bones, and, like walking epidemics, spread their contagion in church and state.

But the godly, laying aside all envying, will look to Christ for new life, not to the evil ones, and they shall never be confounded (1 Pet. 2:1-6).

Is It a Man's World?

One of the things I dislike more than women's lib is the attitude that "It's a man's world." When I hear a man say this, I regard him as both stupid and anti-Christian.

Of course, there are many men who would like it to be, or believe it really is, a man's world, and some women have become brainwashed into believing it is true. Not so. It's God's world, and you had better believe it.

"The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). It is suicidal for any man or woman to believe otherwise. It means living in terms of a lie.

Some men will at once object that the Bible places men in a position of authority over their wives. They are unwilling to add that whatever authority God gives to anyone, to parents, husbands, wives, churches, states, or anyone else, has only one purpose, that God's will be done, not man's. Whatever authority God gives to anyone is always and at all times and places totally subject to and under His authority. No man has any authority in and of himself, or for the purpose of pleasing himself.

Even Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, exercised no independent authority. The governing principle of His life was simply this, "Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was, "[T]hy will be done" (Matt. 26:42). If Jesus Christ could not exercise any authority apart from God's will, then how dare any man do so?

The next time anyone tells you, "It's a man's world," or any kind of world other than God's world, set him straight. Our world's problems are due to such thinking. People are trying to make this into man's world, and they are destroying themselves and others in the process. Such thinking is basic to man's original sin, his desire to make God's creation over into man's world, in which man is his own god.

The world is not your oyster, nor mine. Even more, we are not our own but are ourselves the property, whether regenerate or unregenerate, of the sovereign God. Stop damaging and misusing God's property. Put it to the use, service, and calling He intends for you.

Planting Trees

Recently, my wife Dorothy and I visited an old friend. I had not seen Mrs. N. A. for eighteen or nineteen years. Originally from a Fresno County farm, she now lives in a coastal area, where she and her husband retired some years back, when her husband became ill. She is now nine years a widow, eighty-five years old, and she walks with a crutch under one arm and a cane in her other hand. She lives alone. She has almost an acre of garden and fruit trees and enjoys her garden work. Best of all, she showed us happily six or more young fruit trees which she planted this spring.

Does this sound strange to you, a crippled woman of eighty-five planting for the future? Well, this was once an accepted Christian practice, going back to Old Testament times. The world was not empty when we were born into it, and we are not supposed to leave it poorer because we have been here. Deuteronomy 20:19–20 forbids the destruction of fruit trees even for military purposes “for the tree of the field is man’s life.”

Men rightly saw that, negatively, this law of God forbids the wanton destruction of fruit trees. But, positively, they saw that the implication is that man should plant and protect the producing trees.

Earlier, many Israelites, and later, Christians, planted fruit trees for a future they would not always see. Johnny Appleseed planted apple trees, fenced the seedlings, and made a wide circuit to care for them in the wilderness, so that, by the time settlers began to move in, there was fruit there for them. Mrs. N. A. thus belongs to a long and holy tradition.

What she is doing sounds strange today, because, as a nation, we are destroying our inheritance rather than adding to it. We have created a parasitic civil government which penalizes work and thrift and harms foresight. Therefore we are undergoing judgment.

Virtue

The word “virtue” comes from the Latin and meant originally “strength, courage, and excellence.” In the Old and New Testaments, the words in Hebrew and Greek translated as “virtue” mean in the original languages “force, strength of mind or body, and power.” The meaning of “power” as virtue is clear in Luke 6:19 and 8:46.

In Proverbs 31:10 and 29, the virtuous woman is a strong woman, strong in character and in her abilities. In Proverbs 12:4, we read, “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” Because a virtuous woman is morally and in every other way strong and capable, she adds so greatly to her husband’s calling that she enables him to be a ruler or king in his realm, whereas a morally weak and incompetent wife is a source of shame and weakness, “as rottenness in his bones.” A husband lacking virtue is fully as disastrous as his wife, if not more so.

Virtue thus in its Biblical meaning is strength, moral strength, the wise use of abilities, and a general competence. A boy or girl reared without the discipline of work, self-government, and moral force thus lacks virtue in the Biblical sense. Too many people act as though virtue means not doing certain sinful acts. Its Biblical meaning involves something far more positive. Virtue is the strong and positive faithfulness to every word of God, and a courageous stand for the Lord in every area of life and thought. Virtue in the Bible means power. Today, as always, true virtue is God’s power at work in this world through men. God grant us a virtuous people!

Work as a Privilege

Something I periodically do gives me a small degree of pleasure: I empty our pencil sharpener. When Dorothy and I started school, the great privilege which all the students coveted and strived for was to help the teacher by emptying the pencil sharpener, taking blackboard erasers out to clean them by banging them together, and other like chores. In other words, it was a privilege to work. That dates us, doesn't it? I am sure that, for some children somewhere, this may still be true, but, for all too many, it marks us as queer, or as members of a sucker generation.

St. Paul, however, tells us that it is a blessing to be established in work. He prays, in fact, for his flock in Thessalonica that the Lord “[c]omfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (2 Thess. 2:17). The Bible speaks of godly work as a blessing. The punishment on sinners is that their work is under God's curse (Gen. 3:17–19). The redeemed are established in work as their calling and joy. When people look on work as an unpleasant thing, it tells us something about their relationship to God. Our productivity as a nation is declining steadily, which means that something is wrong with us as a people, religiously and morally. Men work now to avoid work, and they see little pleasure in it in all too many cases.

When we were young, helping the teacher was a treat, because helping our parents was a privilege. From our earliest days, we had a different view of work.

The present dislike for work has no future. It is self-destructive for individuals and nations.

Have you taught your children to regard work as a punishment, or as a pleasure and privilege?

The Resurrection

In an interesting and revealing study, Pinchas Lapidé writes on *The Resurrection of Jesus, A Jewish Perspective* (1983). Lapidé believes that the resurrection actually took place. He makes clear, however, that other Jewish scholars over the centuries have held the same view also, without accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Lapidé declares that Jesus could not have been the Messiah, because a new order and a worldwide kingdom were not at once established. The world continued as before.

The New Testament, however, declares that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah, and by His resurrection He became the firstfruits of those who are dead, and the beginning of the new creation of God (1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Col. 1:18; etc.). “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation [or creature]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The resurrection thus begins the new creation and God’s Kingdom. As each of us becomes a new creation, we have a duty to bring everything around us under the dominion of Christ and into His Kingdom. We live in it, work for it, and bring all things into captivity to it.

Hence the apostolic emphasis on service, on work, on the proclamation of the gospel, on collections for the poor and for suffering saints, and much, much more. All believers are expected to be Kingdom workers, to do the bidding of their risen Lord.

The resurrection is thus not an isolated incident. It is a mandate for action, and if we are not a part of that action, we have not understood our Lord.

The Power of His Resurrection

The fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead tells us something very important: our God is in the resurrection business. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is declared by St. Paul to be the assurance of our own resurrection on God's appointed day (1 Cor. 15:12–20).

The goal of our lives therefore should be to know Christ and “the power of his resurrection” (Phil 3:10). This means that we cannot lead defeated lives, nor can we evade our responsibilities under God to bring every area of life and thought into captivity to Jesus Christ.

The power of His resurrection begins here and now in our lives, in our regeneration, and in our service to Him. It means that we have a duty to exercise godly dominion in the Lord's name. Jesus Christ, in His Great Commission, orders us to disciple all nations, teaching them His total Word and bringing men and nations under His dominion. Christ is to be thought of as a very present king, for Paul says He “is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15, emphasis added).

The King's Word must have priority in our lives, and we must work to advance His realm and rule.

We are too much impressed and governed by the powers of this world. Things will change rapidly when we begin to act in terms of the power of His resurrection.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

The birth of Jesus Christ was the beginning of God's new creation, of the new heavens and earth which will be instituted with all its fullness and glory at His second advent. His resurrection was the beginning of the harvest time of that new creation, and Christ, as the second Adam, is the first fruits of that eternal Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:45–47). As each of us is made regenerate by God's redeeming grace in Christ, we become citizens of that new creation.

The birth of Jesus Christ is thus the most joyful of days, because it celebrates the nullification of sin and its consequences, and it heralds the death of death in the fullness of His Kingdom.

Its message is indeed, "Joy to the world," for if the world accepts its King, its every hope and promise finds fulfillment in Him. Malachi 4:2 had prophesied, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

The Sun of righteousness has come, but all too many men prefer the sickness and death of sin to His healing. The world stops briefly to observe Christ's birth with hypocrisy and empty words, then returns to its perversity and evil.

The wicked are evil because they choose to be. They have no desire to change, and they see sin as an advantage and as the preferred way of life.

Thus, the world in the person of Herod tried to slay the infant Jesus, and, in His manhood, they seized and crucified Him. Things have not changed since then, as far as the world of the fallen man is concerned.

But the infant Christ was not killed by Herod, and the crucified Christ rose from the dead. Rome and the Herods are gone, and Christ's power is only increasing. Isaiah 9:7 prophesies, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

If you are not under His government and in His peace, then, like Rome and the Herods, you shall be judged and set aside. If you stand in His righteousness and under His rule, then you are a part of the universe's greatest purpose and victory.

Christ has come, and He reigns over all creation. The question is, has He come into your life, and does He reign over you?

12

Rest

One interesting word used in the Old Testament is the word “rest,” as in Deuteronomy 3:20. For us, rest means getting away from the normal routine and doing no work. This is a far cry from the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as “rest.” It means in Scripture to be settled in the land, to be free from the threat of enemies, and to be safe from the threat of homelessness. Above all, it means knowing that we have these things because the Lord is blessing our faithfulness and obedience.

Isaiah tells us, in Isaiah 57:20–21, that the wicked cannot rest, nor is there any peace for them. Because they are in rebellion against God, they feel no peace in their possessions, are ever fearful of enemies, and, however rich, are at heart always homeless.

Thus, to “rest” in the Bible means to rest in the Lord, and to trust in His government, to be obedient to Him, and to wait on His judgments. David tells us, “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass” (Ps. 37:7). We are not to fret, David says, nor do evil but to know and believe that God’s judgment will come upon evildoers, and His blessing upon His people.

Vacations are fine in their place, but take all the vacations you want, and, if you fail to rest in the Lord, you will be no better off on your return.

The Sabbath, of course, means, above all else, resting in the Lord. It means the peace and security of a life of trust and obedience. If you are restless, it is time to improve your relationship with the Lord.

Friends

Are you a free man? What does the word “free” mean? Our English word “free” comes from the Old English, *freo* (the German *frei*), meaning “beloved.” The word “friend” is related to “free”; “friend” means “the loving one.” A freeman was once a slave who had been freed because he was beloved; the man who freed him was a friend, the loving one.

We have greatly perverted the meaning of “free” in recent years to make it mean alone and irresponsible. We talk about free love, when we mean unloving and irresponsible sex. I want to be free, and I want to be alone, are equated, but a truly free man is one who is surrounded by loving, concerned, and helpful friends or loving ones.

Our Lord says, “Ye are my friends [my loving ones], if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14). A loving one assumes responsibilities. If I love my children, I care for them. Because God loves me, He saves me, and cares for me. If we love God, we are His friends, caring for and obeying His every Word.

To be friendless is to be unloved, and to refuse to love and care for others.

The old hymn uses the word “friend” in its older meaning when it says,

What a Friend we have in Jesus,

All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry

Everything to God in prayer.

The best of all possible friends is Jesus Christ. To be His friends, we in turn must be loving ones in relationship to Him, doing whatsoever He commands us to do. It is He who alone makes us free from sin and death (John 8:36): we are rescued because He loves us, and gives His life for us.

Why not try freedom?

Guarded

There is a very interesting word in the first verse of Jude's Epistle. Writing to Christians generally, Jude speaks of them as "preserved in Jesus Christ." The word "preserved" in more modern English is "guarded." We are "guarded in Jesus Christ."

The idea is a startling one. In a day when burglar alarms, private police, and neighborhood watches are commonplace, obviously we feel a need for being guarded. We live in an increasingly lawless and brutal society.

How are we guarded in Jesus Christ? Obviously some very heartbreaking things happen to us and to others whom we know. But the word used by Jude refers to preserving or keeping by guarding.

The reference to our guarding is not to our ideas of safety but to God's. Whenever this word is used, it refers usually to our Lord's purposes. The apostles in this sense were guarded by the Lord's purposes. The apostles were guarded by the Lord, although they suffered many things, and some martyrdom, because God guarded them from everything that would separate them from Christ and His calling. Thus, Jude says, we are "preserved in Jesus Christ, and called."

We are therefore guarded by the Lord to do His work, not to be personally free from griefs or problems.

Thus, we need to say to ourselves, "I am guarded by the Lord for a purpose, His purposes." This means too that the Lord guards us to prevent us from deserting Him for our own wants and wishes!

Athletes are sometimes watched and guarded by their trainers to prevent them from foolishly wasting their strength on deleterious activities. So too are we guarded by the Lord, and for His purpose.

“The Fool Hath Said”

Some years ago, I knew someone who was thoroughly insane but, having had a lifetime of scientific experience, was also totally logical. Beginning with a very insane premise, this person then reasoned logically from it: the premise was absurd, but all the thinking based on it was rational and logical.

Scripture tells us, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1, 53:1). The fool may be rich or poor, well educated or poorly schooled, but he is a fool if his starting point is that there is no God. However logical he may be thereafter, his thinking has a false premise.

This is why we are told, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). A man’s thinking, living, and feelings are determined by his heart, his core of faith and commitment. The issues or sources of life are governed and determined by our faith.

The fundamental thing in all life is that God is God, and the universe and man are His creation. If we do not begin with this premise, we are fools, and all our thinking is foolish. We have then bypassed the basic fact in all creation, and our thinking is warped thereby.

The Hebrew word translated as “fool” is “nabal,” meaning stupid, wicked, and a fool. It implies both a moral flaw as well as an intellectual one, and it begins in the heart of man.

Holiness

One of the most frequently repeated requirements in the Bible is this: “[Y]e shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). Again and again, God is described as holy, whereas man is fallen and a sinner. All the same, the commandment is repeatedly made, “[Y]e shall be holy.”

Basic to this requirement is a central premise of Scripture, namely, that sin is abnormal. God made all things “very good” (Gen. 1:31), and sin is a deformation and perversion of God’s creation. As Gordon Wenham has summarized it, “Though sin and disobedience come more easily to men than holiness, Scripture refuses to countenance the idea that holiness is somehow unnatural. It is in fact the essence of normality.”

Because God made us, His way, holiness, comes more naturally to man when he forsakes his perversity. Rebellion against God warps our being, destroys our peace, and leads us into troubles and ruin. To believe and obey God is what we were created to do, and anything else warps our being.

Holiness is thus not reserved for the clergy, nor for a select few, but is God’s required life for all of us. We are called to be a holy people, and the greatest joys of life come with the responsibilities of holiness.

Holiness is not a facade. It must be the character and direction of all our being. It means that we have our priorities in order, our life given to obeying and serving God. The Westminster Catechism begins with a great sentence: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” There is no holiness without that joy.

Horse Sense

Back in the horse-and-buggy days, on any return trip, the horse would readily find his way home, and, at a turn, would begin to take the side road before the driver pulled the reins. When I lived in the high intermountain country, this was true of saddle horses; give them their head, and they headed for home.

This is what Isaiah 1:3 is talking about: “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” Our home is God’s Kingdom, and faithfulness to Him. Because God made us, in all our being, we know that He is the Lord. St. Augustine, echoing Psalm 139, said, “Our hearts are restless, until they rest in Thee.”

Because of sin, however, we refuse to use the horse sense a saddle animal has; we want to stray. St. Paul said that all men know the things which may be known of God, because God has written it in all their being, but they “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18) or, very literally, they hold down or suppress the truth in injustice.

When we are in rebellion against the Lord, our whole being becomes a lie-making and a truth-suppressing force. We will not face the truth about God or about ourselves.

In plain English, we refuse to use horse sense. We will not acknowledge our place under God, and we are determined to have our way, not God’s way. However, anyone who tries to argue with God is a fool. God’s way is clearly spelled out in the Bible. To seek any alternative is to lack horse sense.

Vaccination

When I was a young man, before World War II, an elderly pastor told me sorry days lay ahead for the church. Most people in church wanted as little religion as needed to get by and get to heaven, he said. He described the church members he saw soon predominating as “vaccinated.” He referred to the then-common smallpox vaccination—a small dose of the real thing to immunize one against the reality. Church people wanted and were getting, he said, a small dose of Christianity to immunize themselves against the Lord and His total claims.

He referred me to

2 Timothy 3:5, where St. Paul declares that some people can be described as “[h]aving a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

Our God makes a total claim on our lives, and on our money too; He requires that our children be given to Him also. How do we respond to Him? Are we rich towards ourselves, and poor towards God? Do we have time for everything except His Word? Do we want Him only when we need Him?

If we do not have the power of God in our lives, it is because we are denying it; it may well be that we do not want God to interfere too much with our lifestyle. The mere “form of godliness” will get us no further with the Lord than an imitation airline ticket will get us a flight.

Serve the Lord with all your heart, mind, and being, with your life, your money, and your family. Go for the power!

Departure

Paul, in his two letters to Timothy, uses a Greek word with telling effect. We have the word in English as “apostasy”; it is often translated “departure.” In 1 Timothy 1:20, he tells us of two leaders who left the faith, who apostatized, Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul then declares in 1 Timothy 4:1 that many shall depart, and the word he uses is apostesontai. Then, in 2 Timothy 2:19 Paul declares, “[L]et every one that nameth the name of Christ depart [aposteto] from iniquity.”

What Paul is telling us is that life is growth; it is movement in one direction or another. Our lives are either marked by an apostasy or departure from sin, or they are an apostasy or departure from Christ. We do not stand still. The life of faith is more than words: it is growth.

Time is a constant movement and departure. We can no more stand still in Christ (or against Christ) than we can remain at the age of thirty-nine forever. God has created a world of time and change, and we must therefore be forever growing in terms of His law and Word. The refusal to grow is death.

Faith

Recently, in reading the life of a famous woman novelist of a generation or more ago, I was greatly interested in her religious views. Most of her life, she was somewhat interested in the church; as she grew older, she was more and more ready to see a growing importance for religion in the days ahead. She lived and died, however, with a variety of ideas about Christianity, but without faith.

It is meaningless to believe that much of the Bible is true and worth following: this is not Christianity. It is mere opinion, and of little consequence in times of stress. Christianity is the belief in the person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is more than a set of ideas or opinions. It is faith, i.e., a total reliance on and trust in the incarnate Son of God. It means a personal relationship to Him as our Lord, our law-giver, our friend, our shield and defender, and more.

It makes a difference. Our Lord says of His own, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). To be reborn in Christ is to be born rich, to be born as one of the heirs of creation (Matt. 5:5). It means being members of the King's household and members of the royal family.

In other words, it is something to get excited about, rejoice in, and enter into with a knowledge of victory and power.

We are the people of power, God's power, summoned by our Lord to occupy and possess all things till He come (Luke 19:13). To act as though we are the people of defeat is to dishonor our Lord. We have been called to victory, called to overcome the world (1 John 5:4). Our Lord is not a losing general, and it is a sin to act as though He were.

Have some faith, man, and conquer in Christ's Name!

Being Thankful

In reading the Psalms, one of the most common emphases we find is thanksgiving. As Psalm 100:4 declares, “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.”

A major failing we all have is to take credit for our successes but to blame someone or something else for our failures. We fail because of other people, we say, “the big boys,” the weather, the bad breaks; we rarely blame ourselves. On the other hand, for all our successes we take full credit.

This is why the Scriptures stress giving thanks, gratitude in prayer, and seeing God as the source of our prospering. We then recognize that the world and our lives are in the hands of the Almighty, and our relationship to Him, and our obedience, are all-important.

The precondition of giving thanks with sincerity is always humility. St. Paul tells us, “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

Does a farmer have the right to take credit for the good weather that gives him a prosperous year, and yet blame or reproach God for the bad weather that devastates him? Being thankful means knowing Who is on the throne of the Universe. It means knowing who God is.

Weeds

About forty years ago, in an intermountain state, a man I knew decided to buy a farm in an area newly opening up to irrigation. He asked an old German farmer to go with him to look over a parcel he was interested in. The farmer took one look at the land and said no. "If it won't grow weeds, it won't grow a good crop for you." Later on the return trip, he explained his judgment, saying that weeds thrive best on a good soil.

Life is like that: the worthless ground grows very few weeds, and the same is true of dead churches. There is not enough life in them to make for problems. A strong church, where growth is marked, will also attract weeds. Sinners like an easy spot. They enjoy moving into a church or parish where others have done the work and provided the essential financing.

All this makes some people bitter. They grow weary of seeing the weeds or tares in the church trouble the pastor and the congregation. However, there is no escaping this problem of weeds, not in this lifetime. Jude saw this problem in his day and he counseled two things. First, "ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The Lord requires us to do battle. Second, "[k]eep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). The Lord is in the battle also, and He shall prevail. We need to work in that confidence and always keep in His love, not our bitterness or anger.

First the Blade

A very much neglected and needed verse is our Lord's statement, "[F]irst the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark 4:28).

The meaning is an obvious one to farmers and gardeners. You cannot reap a harvest immediately after planting the seed. You plant, you work, and you wait. Only after the seed is sown is there the first result, the blade or shoot of grain sprouting. Then, in time, the ear develops, and finally, the full and ripened grain.

This seems obvious enough, but it is still a much-needed lesson. As I travel all over the country, I find a common failing: people start a good work, and because it does not succeed in producing the desired result overnight or at least very quickly, they give up, they quit, they turn back after having made a good beginning. Paul twice tells us, "[L]et us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:13).

Our Lord uses stronger language: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

What can we say then about the many who so easily weary in well doing, those who put their hand to the plough and soon turn back? Or the many more who never begin, to whom the very thought of such service is unpleasant or exhausting?

The Lord saves no one for their own sake, but only for His own sake and purpose. We are saved to serve Him, and we must do so with patience. Some seeds we may now sow, and other generations shall reap. The world was not empty when we were born into it, and it should be richer when we leave because we have sowed good seed. Let us therefore work, while it is still day.

Congregation of the Dead

I wrote recently about weathermen on television, and how they regard weather. The weather is good or bad only if it suits these city dwellers and their pleasure. The only time a storm is welcomed is again in terms of pleasure, if it is “good news for skiers!”

This is a deadly attitude. It marks the decline of a civilization. The reduction of life to pleasure is a mark of coming death for a society. In ancient Rome, the Presbyter Salvian wrote of the barbarian invasion, and the total destruction of Treves. The people were too busy watching the games in the arena to defend the city, and after its destruction, petitioned the emperor to rebuild the arena to restore “morale” and pleasure. “Rome,” said Salvian, “is dying, but continues to laugh.” The Roman principle had become, pleasure above all else.

I heard a woman argue, about ten years ago, in favor of abortion, saying, a woman’s enjoyment of life should not be spoiled by an unwanted baby. Pleasure above all.

And so we have our weathermen, who assess the weather in terms of the pleasure of urban fools!

Solomon says it well: “The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain [or find rest, or end up] in the congregation of the dead” (Prov. 21:16). The congregation of the dead is all around us. They refuse to look at life except in terms of their pleasure. The weather must suit their pleasure, not the needs of farmers. Then too, politics must be governed by their wishes, not reality. God too must give them what they want, because what’s the point of believing in God, if He won’t do something for man?

They are all around us, the congregation of the dead. Are you a member of the congregation of the dead, or of the living, of Jesus Christ?

Spiritual Junk Food Junkies

My wife Dorothy and her friend Grayce Flanagan were discussing the problems created in some churches by members who refuse to grow. I wish I could have taped their remarks! Dorothy summed it up by describing such people as spiritual junk food junkies.

Last month, on one of my four trips, some pastors told me of their problems with such people. They refuse to grow, and they are angry with the pastor, sometimes calling him “unspiritual” or “unloving” if he troubles their consciences. Meanwhile, they feel free to trouble him and the church.

Scripture tells us that some people resist growing; they want to stay on milk rather than mature on meat (Heb. 5:12–14).

We have something much worse when people want neither milk nor meat but spiritual junk food. These junkies are hostile to the faithful preaching of the Word. They do not want maturity in Christ; rather, they come to Jesus, not as Lord and Savior, but as a life and fire insurance agent to keep them out of hell. About fifty years ago, one pastor described such people as non-Christians who believed in a spare-tire religion. We all feel safer having a spare tire in the trunk when driving around, and we all hope that we never have to use it. So many people treat the Lord this way: they want Him only as a spare tire, for emergency use and no more. This is not Christian faith; it is paganism. The true believer says to the Lord, “Speak, for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:10).

Definitions

We have become, in the modern age, a dictionary-oriented people. We like handy definitions. I often encounter, in my travels, officious people with whom a conversation is impossible. Almost every statement they make includes the demand, "Define your terms." One man, whose pastor had denied all the essential doctrines of the faith, would object if other members described the pastor as a modernist. Why? "He has never defined himself as one," was the answer.

Definitions have their place, but the only defining the Bible does usually is by calling attention to life and action. Since faith without works is dead, the Bible defines things in terms of life.

This leads to very telling definitions. For example, Peter refers to "holy women," and then tells us who they were and what they did: they "trusted [or, hoped] in God." Here is a practical definition of holiness: it means trusting in God, and acting on that faith.

If we trust in Him, then we do not fret or complain. We do not cry or worry, as though God would get nothing done without our nagging. To trust in God means that we practice what Proverbs 3:5 requires us to do: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." I heard a description of someone who professes to believe the Bible from cover to cover a few years ago: "She's not a Christian. She's a worrier." If this is true of you, it is time to take hands off your life and give it to the Lord. You and I can only make a mess of things. Why not let the Lord take over the controls?

Hearing God

One of the distressing things about much modern spirituality is the great emphasis on getting things from God. Some people think that the mark of a “higher life” is the ability to coax gifts out of the Lord. In some circles, all too much stress is given to getting things from God through prayer. Now, there is no question that we are told to submit our needs (not our hunger for luxuries) to God. St. Paul tells us, “[M]y God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). This, however, is never made central to our faith.

On the contrary, the saints of old, instead of stressing what they could get from God, asked instead, as did Paul, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Even the child Samuel answered God, saying, “Speak; for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:10).

The true emphasis is more on hearing God than being heard by Him. I recently saw a child refuse to hear a single word spoken by his mother. Instead, he screamed and carried on, demanding that she hear him, thereby embarrassing his mother greatly. All too many people pray like that; they will not hear God, but they demand that He hear them. In their praying, they act like a spoiled and selfish child.

Are you ready to hear God? Are your prayers only for yourself and your loved ones? Have you remembered the Christians on trial in Nebraska and elsewhere and the persecuted Christians in Communist countries? Are you mindful of the whole body of Christ in your prayers?

If we refuse to hear God, how long will He hear us? We have an obligation to give heed to God’s every word (Matt. 4:4), and to remember our fellow believers in their need. The Lord supplies our needs, but not our selfishness.

Asking for Wisdom

A verse that often comes to mind is James 1:5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” When was the last time you asked for wisdom? I have been to a great many prayer meetings over the years, but I don’t recall hearing many prayers for wisdom. Either church folk are content to be stupid, or else they assume that they are wise.

The interesting thing is that no strings are attached to praying for wisdom. We are simply to pray in faith. At the same time, we are told how important wisdom is: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (Prov. 4:7). We are also told that wisdom is a blessing (Prov. 3:13); it is better than rubies and everything else (Prov. 8:11); it is the foundation of the good life (Prov. 24:3), and so on and on. Very obviously, God regards wisdom as necessary to the good life, and also promises to give it to all who ask for it.

We must love stupidity greatly, because we do not seek wisdom, as individuals or a nation. Neither church members nor church boards pray for it, and neither do senates, legislators, or judges.

As a people, we stress learning and spend billions of dollars promoting it, but learning means the accumulation of data, of facts, not of wisdom. Our world is full of learned fools who lack wisdom.

One of our worst forms of folly is to assume that it is other people who need wisdom, not us! Our Lord does not ask us to pray that our friends become wise, but that we do. How are you praying?

Mountain-Bottom Life

One of the great moments in the Gospels occurred on the Mount of Transfiguration. In the presence of Peter, James, and John, our Lord was transfigured, so that even His raiment became shining (Mark 9:1–5). Furthermore, Moses and Elijah appeared, to talk with Jesus; as the great representatives of the law and the prophets, they came to be with the greatest prophet and lawgiver.

The reaction of Peter was a natural one: he wanted to build some kind of memorial or monument to the event, and to stay there. To remain with our mountaintop experiences, with the high points of our life, is a temptation for all of us. To get on with the normal business is unpleasant for many. I have encountered young couples whose basic problem has been the failure to realize that marriage cannot be one long honeymoon; it is the daily work of life together.

Paul had a similar problem with the church in Thessalonica. The members, all new converts, wanted to go from conversion to the rapture, with no work in between! Paul ordered them to “study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (1 Thess. 4:11).

In other words, the main concern of the Christian is the responsibility of faithfulness in everyday living, duties, and problems. Those who want excitement in their marriage, their church life, or their daily living are saying that they do not want responsibility, nor do they want maturity.

Paul, speaking against the hunger for continual “higher experiences,” said, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Now, Paul said, I meet life’s responsibilities as a mature man in Christ, with faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:11–13). This is God’s requirement for all of us. Just as the valleys of California are more productive than our mountaintops, so too are the daily duties of the Christian walk more productive than the mountaintop experiences.

Sin

The Bible defines sin thus: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Our Lord makes clear that the source of sin is the heart of man (Matt. 15:19).

This is a very important fact, and very necessary for us to understand. All too many people reduce sin to an act, for example, one of murder, adultery, theft, false witness, or covetousness. Clearly, all these things are examples of sinful acts, but sin is much more than an act. It is first and foremost a condition in the heart and mind of man.

Many people are “good” because they are afraid of trouble with the law, their wife or husband, or their community. Their hearts are all the same, given over to the root of all sin, lawlessness in relationship to God as their Lord and law-giver.

Sin, moreover, is a religious act, because it is revolt against God and His law, and it is a religious faith that the tempter is right, and that every man has the right to be his own god, knowing or deciding what is good and evil for himself (Gen. 3:5). The sinner is thus religiously against God and Christ: his faith is in something or someone other than the Lord; essentially, it is faith in himself.

For the ungodly, sin therefore is life. They hold that a person is not really living unless he is a party to sin, i.e., to the sex revolution, the drug culture, or whatever else his sin may be. Such opinions show the religious nature of sin. For the Christian, life is Jesus Christ and His righteousness. This means that knowledge, holiness, righteousness, and dominion are not only the aspects of God’s image in us, but also life for us. For us then sin is not life but death, and righteousness is our way of life.

If we find sin attractive, it is because we do not find Christ to be attractive to us. It means that an alien faith governs our hearts and dominates our thinking. To believe in Christ means to enjoy, not sin, but righteousness.

Daydreams

There is neither dreaming nor daydreaming in heaven, but only in hell. To dream or to daydream is to imagine what might be, or what might have been, and the redeemed of the Lord live in an eternal day which surpasses all imagination.

On the other hand, our Lord gives us an insight into the mind of a certain rich man in hell. This fool imagined that if one from the dead were to visit his five brothers, they would repent and avoid hell. But the word of Abraham to the rich man was, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31), as our Lord did. This rich man was in effect dreaming that he too would have repented, if a man from the dead had witnessed to him.

It is, however, the essence of the fool and the sinner to prefer dreams and illusions to reality. In their mind's eye, they can always do everything. Years ago, I remember someone saying enviously, of another man's success, "I could have done that," to which someone answered, not with originality but with truth, "Yes, but you didn't!"

Those who live in terms of their daydreams soon despise reality and its opportunities. Possibilities lie not in the dream world, but in reality, in the world around us.

The daydreaming of the sinner is about sin (Gen. 6:5). It is therefore "only evil continually." The Bible, indeed, our Lord Himself, forbids us to spend our time imagining what evils lie ahead: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). We are required to trust and obey the Lord always, to do our duty, and to leave the future then in His hands. Our thinking about what might be or what might have been is needless, and also wrong. It is our obedience to the Lord that best reckons with tomorrow's problems.

Roots and Fruits

It has been said of one of the most famous architects of this century, “He was a great architect, but his roofs usually leaked.” Such a statement is nonsense. If an architect’s roofs leak, he is a very bad architect. But some people will insist otherwise, which is like saying that a man who beats, betrays, and finally murders his wife was a very loving husband.

However, many claim that someone is great or a holy man, despite the obvious evidences otherwise. One famous pastor, adored by his huge congregation and radio audiences, is a terror to his office staff and associates because of his abusive and paranoid ways, and has a continuous turnover of help. Many still excuse him and explain away his manifestly unchristian conduct as a product of “stress.”

Our Lord allows no such excuses: “[B]y their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). Thorn bushes do not produce grapes, nor thistles figs, and neither do fruit trees bear poison berries. Look to their fruit, our Lord demands. To make excuses for people and to attribute their bad manners, immoral dealings, and profane conduct to stress is to say that we are better judges of men than is Jesus Christ Himself. To say so is to sin.

Who suffers most from such dishonesty? A mother told me that her son was really a very good boy and “at heart” a Christian. She did not change her son thereby, and it soon cost her \$3450 she could not afford, to bail him out of his troubles. She paid a high price for her denial of the truth, and will soon pay more. When we go against God’s Word, we do not change that Word, but we pay a price for denying it. God’s Word is truth, and every departure from truth exacts its price.

If a man’s roofs leak, he is a bad architect. If a pastor’s conduct is bad, it is because he is also. If a son is a wastrel and a profligate, it is because he is an evil son. Saying otherwise will not change reality, and not all our soft or kindly words can regenerate ungodly men. Only the Lord can do that. For that, we need to be in prayer always, and, at the same time, to pray for faith to believe in His Word, and to apply it.

Losers

A loser is a man who sees life as hopeless, who insists that the deck is stacked, the dice loaded, and man doesn't have a chance. A loser is an unbeliever: he believes that everything works together for evil, because life is supposedly meaningless, and the world totally irrational. Therefore, get what you can while you can is his idea. As men abandon God, they pick up the faith and philosophy of a loser.

They may be rich or poor, but all men with such a faith are losers. God decrees their future: in Obadiah's words, "[A]s thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head" (Obad. 15). Men reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7), and the losers are busy sowing future disasters.

Now, if you are outside of Christ, you are a loser. You have ruled out the triune God and in effect declared that the universe is a mindless, senseless accident, so that truth and righteousness are not basic to it. It is then you against the universe, all men, and death; and you are the sure loser, even apart from God's judgment.

Those who live in Christ have a faith for victory: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This means simply that God's holy purpose governs all events, including the fact of sin, to make it add up finally for good. Instead of being losers, we are inescapable winners. Ours is a faith for victory. Thus, if you are Christ's, stop talking about defeat. There is a world to be conquered, and we are the people called to do it. We do not bring a percentage or a numerically ranked ration of love to each task or person, but God's appointed way.

John tells us that we love our brethren in Christ because we love the Lord, and if we hate the brethren, it is because we hate the Lord and love darkness (1 John 2:9-11). To love God with all our being means to love the brethren, our wife, husband, children, and others as God requires us to love them. When all our being is given to the love of God, this means also that all our being is also given to loving what God has appointed us to love.

Love is not a quantity, it is a quality, and a way of life. "God is love," and we love one another because God first of all loved us in Christ; and because we are His new creation, we manifest His love and grace to one another (1 John 4:7-19). To be alive in Christ means to manifest in every relationship the grace and love of God in Christ.

Science Says

All my life I have been hearing all kinds of solemn nonsense prefixed by the words, “Science says.” When I was in the seventh grade, our science teacher read predictions by a number of scientists about the future germ-free world when everyone would be living in glass-enclosed cities and farms. Now we know that most germs are beneficial and that life is impossible without them, but our scientists have not learned humility. I have a book by a prize-winning scientist in which he blames the Puritans for our desire for a germ-free world! The Puritans, of course, had nothing to do with what scientists taught a few years back.

Again, in junior and senior high school, and at the university, I was faithfully taught that our coal and oil reserves were small and the world would be without coal and oil in about twenty-five years. Well, twenty-five years have come and gone, and the estimate of the world’s reserves is higher, but we still hear the same talk!

In the early and mid-1960s, a California scientist made all kinds of frightening predictions about world overpopulation by 1975, and two other men predicted worldwide famine by 1975, but none of them are laughed at today, and they are still being quoted solemnly by the faithful followers of the cult of science. The strong faith, in the face of all evidence, which most people have in science is really amazing. When they hear that “Science says” something, they abandon all common sense and listen obediently to the current garbage. Many scientists tell us that a healthy skepticism is basic to science; what we too often see is the blindest of faith.

On the other hand, these same people listen sleepily, if at all, to the proclamations of Scripture. “Thus saith the Lord” does not arouse in them the instant attention or curiosity which “Science says” does, because their faith is not in the Lord, but in Science, one of the modern Baals. A man listens to what he believes in, and a man’s thinking is determined by his faith.

St. Paul speaks of those who have “itching ears” to hear lies and false doctrine, and there will always be people to supply itching ears with the nonsense they are drawn to. The problem lies in us. Will we have itching ears, or hearing ears? Will we say with the Psalmist, “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (Ps. 119:16), or will we be open to the word of every learned fool who claims to be an authority?

Speech

Our speech very commonly dates us. For example, I grew up in California, on a farm, in the kerosene lamp days, and I can spot others who have the same background. It's very easy. If anyone says "Put out the light," they learned to talk when kerosene lamps were still in use. Nowadays, children are told to turn on or flip off the lights.

It is even easier to spot people from the South, or from Scotland. Their accent is a giveaway.

But our language tells more about us than where we were born, and how we grew up. It manifests our faith and character; it reveals our heart.

Proverbs 18:21 declares, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof," i.e., those who love to talk freely must take the consequence thereof. Our words thus are a power and a witness to death or to life, and what they witness to is governed by what we are. "For as he [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7), and so too is his speech.

The question then is what our speech reveals about our heart. Are we governed by life or by death? Do we manifest the life of one redeemed by Christ, or do we reek of death, sourness, stupid self-interest and self-satisfaction whenever we open our mouths?

We are a giveaway whenever we speak. Sooner or later, people will recognize what is in our hearts.

Being guarded in our speech is always important. It is the mark of a fool to speak without thinking, and to be too quick to express himself. But being guarded is not enough. The heart is the problem. An unregenerate heart will manifest its flavor of death in speech, even as a person who is a new creation will be unable to conceal, if he chose, the life which governs him.

One of the highest words of praise in Scripture is spoken with reference to speech. Of the godly wife, whose "price is far above rubies," it is said, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26). If others can say that of us, then we are rich indeed, and we need no higher praise, because our words and our life praise us.

Consequences

I am told by a reliable authority that, on a major urban freeway, the acts of a driver have far-reaching effects. Thus, if at a particular spot on a freeway, drivers in any lane, or all lanes, brake their car at a particular moment, a long chain reaction sets in. For at least an hour, and sometimes as much as two hours, all cars reaching that approximate point during the rush hour will be braking their cars. A single action sets up a chain of consequences and reactions which last long after the braking driver has passed.

This kind of chain of consequences is even more true in the world of ideas. Wherever someone throws out an idea which runs counter to God's purposes, a long chain of reactions and consequences follows. Our Lord had this in mind when He declared, "[W]hoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). We do not live in a world without people. What we are and what we do has an impact on the world around us. We can set up a variety of consequences by our actions. Our unwillingness to make a stand conveys itself to others, and we become a millstone of impediment to them. Again, our false or evil decisions, words, and actions carry an impact on our world which adds to the evil we compromise with.

On the other hand, to be a man of faith and obedience to the Lord sets up a chain of reactions also, a very healthy one. Several years ago, I met a man in my travels who was deeply indebted for his faith and life to a man he had never met. The first man had made an impact on the life of a second man, who had influenced a third, and so on across the country. Quite accidentally, they learned of the start of their new life, and it made them strongly aware of the chain of consequences in every man's actions.

No man can live unto himself. As John Donne long ago observed, no man is an island. Every man is a part of a community of life, and his thoughts, words, and actions have consequences in his life and the lives of others.

The question is this: will your consequences bring you a reward or a millstone around your neck? Remember, our Lord says, "[E]very idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36).

Morality and Life

Dr. Basile Yanovsky, in *The Dark Fields of Venus*, cites a complaint filed against him with respect to his work as a physician in a New York City V.D. clinic. After examining a girl of seventeen, he had told her to return in two weeks for the final results, and then added, “And meanwhile, behave!”

This, he was told, was “a grave error.” It was an intrusion on the privacy of the patient and a confusion of morals and medicine. This, reflected Dr. Yanovsky, is a symbol of our times. New Yorkers (and others) accept crime as a fact of life, and corruption as routine in business and politics, but they will not tolerate having an immoral girl being told to behave.

Apparently, people have a civil right to be immoral, and no doctor has the right even to suggest another way of life to them. No wonder we are in trouble. We make criminals into champions of civil rights, and kidnapers into revolutionary heroes who are publicized and acceded to, and yet to tell an immoral girl to behave is grounds for a rebuke to a doctor.

Morality cannot be separated from life. Our Lord said of the moral law, “[T]his do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28), and He alone provides the power to do it as God intends it. To separate morality from life is to turn life into death. The word in the very beginning concerning disobedience is that it leads to death (Gen. 2:17). The decay of men and nations today is occasioned by their moral decay, and the root of this is their apostasy from God.

We cannot escape the consequences of morality by abolishing moral judgment and moral counsel. No good service was rendered the seventeen-year-old girl by refraining from hurting her feelings further by any moral word.

We have removed the Bible and its faith and morals from our schools, our courts, our medical clinics (and from too many churches), and then we act indignant when we encounter corruption and hypocrisy in high places and low. But we have asked for it, paid for it, and required it by our exclusion of God and His law-word from our lives, and our indignation has a dishonest ring.

Under similar circumstances, Isaiah 8:20 gives us a standard of judgment: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

Cease Ye from Man

A delightful proverb from Charles Haddon Spurgeon's writings reads, "Never stretch your legs further than your blanket will reach, or you will soon be cold." We might put it this way: if you have a poor security blanket, your feet will soon be cold.

In brief, we had better be careful what we trust in. A medieval emperor, to emphasize his confidence, once declared that a thing was as sure as the right hand of a powerful king who was his ally. In the next battle, that king lost his right hand and arm, and the emperor's oath became a joke.

Think back on the people you once trusted in, whom you now remember with distaste, the politicians you felt had the answers who were only another installment of problems, and the loved ones you relied on who failed you. Most men's lives have a long chapter of broken hopes and trusts.

This should not turn us against friend, loved ones, or politicians, but it should remind us that Scripture is right in declaring, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22). It is not in man, Isaiah declares, that our trust is to be placed.

To expect of man what only God can give is a dangerously false hope. It is God who is the Lord, not man. It is God alone who is our sufficiency, not any man, especially ourselves. To put our trust in man is as bad as trusting in ourselves.

Any man who has any length of years with himself knows full well what his limitations, failures, and inabilities are. What reason has he to believe that other men have a sinlessness and infallibility he himself does not have?

It is God the Lord who alone is infallible, omnipotent, and all wise. He alone should command our trust and our faith. The generations of old looked to Him, and they were strengthened and made blessed. God has not grown old since the days of Moses and David, nor has His arm grown short with the years. As far as our feet will stretch, and as far as our feet may carry us, He is there.

Overcoming Evil

The Latin writer Gaius Petronius of the first century A.D. had some telling criticisms to make of the Roman society of his day. He spoke of the “reason why such blank idiots graduate from our colleges” quite eloquently. The educational philosophy was all wrong as well as the methods: “You can no more absorb these methods and remain mentally balanced than you can be a scullion and not get your self smutted with smells.” He added, “What’s the remedy then? Parents need a good talking to. They get restive at the simplest correction of their children. They make everything, every dearest hope, subordinate to a Career ... Nowadays boys play about at school.”

Looking at the political scene, Petronius said, “When money is King, what use having Laws? Justice is auctioned.”

On religion, he wrote, “The gods are only swear words now ... All people do is shut eyes and reckon up incomes.” The purpose of men is “to feed the senses.”

He added, “I hold there’s nothing wrong with the country. It’d be a fine place if it wasn’t for the people in it.”

But Petronius himself was as bad as anything he criticized and satirized. He himself was a degenerate and a man without real convictions. It is easy enough for any man to see the evils of the day. It is another thing entirely to have the faith and character to create a new society.

Thus, if you want a blunt and telling indictment of Roman life, go to the Roman writers. But if you want that which alone made possible new life amid the degeneracy of Rome, go to the Bible.

The world is full of men like Petronius today. In every area of life, they can describe very ably the evils of our time, but, like Petronius, they are at best impotent when it comes to doing anything, or more often, are themselves a part of our humanistic degeneracy.

Our need is for the grace and saving power of God and the authority of His law-word. Men are not saved by knowing how evil the times are but by the sovereign and saving power of God.

We need to say, therefore, good-bye, Petronius. You and your world are dead, and your sons today are equally dead and therefore unable to change our evil times. Then, welcome, Christ, who hast said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26). Evil is overcome, not simply by knowledge, but by godliness.

Salvation by What?

One of the worst ideas begotten by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment was the belief that man can be saved by knowledge. This idea, which had its roots in the ancient Gnostic cults, holds that knowledge will save man and society and usher in a paradise on earth.

But it has not worked that way. The more knowledge people have without faith, the more gullible they are. There are more communists among college professors and intellectuals than among workers. More astrology books, a news distributor once told me, are sold near colleges than in poorer neighborhoods. Confidence men do better usually with intellectuals than with successful men of little schooling.

Something is thus clearly lacking. Knowledge is good, but it is not enough. Knowledge is an accumulation of facts; it is not the ability to use those facts, nor is it the moral judgment to act wisely on those facts.

Our schools and colleges are dedicated to the proposition that the world needs to be saved by knowledge, but perhaps one of the things we most need to be saved from these days is our schools and colleges.

St. Peter, in proclaiming “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” before the Sanhedrin, declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This is the issue: is the world going to be saved by facts, or is it going to be saved by regeneration in and through Jesus Christ?

If salvation is by facts, by knowledge, then we are on the right course as a nation. The more we know about psychology, the moon, the love life of the earthworm, and all the other subjects we appropriate money for, the better off we are. Simply give people enough facts and they will be changed from sinners to saints. But somehow all this is making us worse instead of better.

If salvation is, as Scripture declares, by Jesus Christ, then we had better act on that fact. Our personal and social life must then be conformed to God and His Word. Our institutions—church, state, school, and all others—had better reckon with God as the foundation. We will seek to be faithful to Christ at every point in every sphere of life, or we do not own Him as Lord.

Our choice is clear: salvation by knowledge, or salvation by Christ? Where do you stand? And what are you doing about it?

Fraudulent Morality

Fraudulent morality is morality required of other people so that we can have the kind of world we want without moral effort on our part. The theme of one recent book is the bitter indignation of a major criminal syndicate leader over the supposedly “dirty trick” played on him by the police. He felt no indignation over his own sins.

This, however, is what we can expect when men do not want Christ as their Savior and insist that the state must save us. This means pushing sin and the responsibility for sin away from man onto the state. Then, instead of salvation through Christ, we seek salvation by political law. Instead of personal charity, we demand socialistic charity. Instead of personal love, we want to force institutions to do what only individuals can do. Instead of community, we want forced unity, and so on.

These are fraudulent methods of morality. We require some kind of supposedly moral action by law to evade the necessity of moral action as individuals. We try to get regeneration by politics to avoid regeneration by the sovereign grace of Almighty God through Christ. As a result, we have the politics of our present day, and we blame the politicians for it instead of ourselves.

True morality begins, not with an awareness of the other man’s sin, but of our own sin. It is akin to David’s confession, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51:4). True morality is grounded on a sense of personal responsibility.

All morality, moreover, is an aspect of religious faith, so that every moral system is a branch of a religious system. Biblical morality is a conformity to the law of God by the regenerate man. It rests on and requires a new man in Christ, and it creates a new world in terms of it.

Just as, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [or creation]” (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Gal. 6:15), so he also begins to make a new creation of everything around him in terms of the Word of God. Godly morality is thus a creative and reconstructing morality. It works in the Lord to make all things new. In all this, however, first and foremost the man of godly morality works to renew himself in and to conform himself to God in Christ.

Fraudulent morality works to change the world while leaving one’s self untouched. In godly morality, the world is changed as man is regenerated and then sanctifies himself and the world around him in terms of God’s Word. The difference between the two is the difference between hypocrisy and honesty or between life and death.

Lawlessness in the Nation

I read yesterday a horrifying account of legal injustices; it was written by the top attorney of the nation's largest public interest law firm. Here are some of the cases he cited.

The conviction of a Maryland man was overturned, although the man confessed to throwing a baby down an eleven-story garbage chute. The reason? The police failed to bring him before a court within twenty-four hours of his arrest; they were twelve minutes late, so the man went free!

In New York, a state judge flipped a coin to determine the sentence of a convicted criminal. The same judge had invited a female murderer to spend the night with him!

In Boston, five young men gang-raped a former beauty queen and severely injured her. A supreme court judge in Massachusetts let them go free on probation and a \$500 fine, to be paid at \$5 a week!

More stories, and worse ones, were cited. There is no point in piling up horror stories. The point is simply this, in Solomon's words: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov. 29:18). "Vision" here means a faithful and prophetic ministry. "Perish" can also be translated "run wild" or "become lawless."

In other words, Solomon says that the life of a nation depends on a faithful ministry of God's Word. Those who keep God's law-word, the Scriptures, are happy or blessed.

The lawlessness in our country is a consequence of unbelief in the pulpit and the pew. We have godless judges whose conduct on the bench is often as evil as the offenses of the men before them. We should not be surprised at the results.

Our Just Reward

There are very great differences among races and nations, but the attitude toward this fact varies. Some deny all differences calling it racism, and others affirm them as inherent in races. Both views are false. Micah 4:5 tells us, as it surveys the peoples, “For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.”

Over a century ago, E. W. Hengstenberg summed up the meaning of Micah’s words in a sentence: “The lot of every people corresponds to the nature of their God.” Our faith limits us, or it strengthens us, depending on what and in whom we believe.

Nations rise and fall in terms of their faith and character. Their histories are not written in terms of their religious faith, but the fact remains that they are determined by it.

The Word of the Lord still stands: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

We are laying waste our inheritance of faith and freedom, and the national disintegration and decay is visible on all sides. Political changes are at best superficial in their impact when a people have gone astray. We cannot export freedom to other nations when we are losing it, nor can we propagate a faith we do not hold. Our just reward will be judgment unless we again become a people of faith and character.

The War on Drugs

One of the clearest expressions of anti-Christianity in the United States today is the “war on drugs.” Drugs are indeed a very serious problem; their effect on our country is devastating and evil. Yesterday a man told me of a beautiful house he sold in a choice area; he sold it because it was so depressing for his wife. All the women in the neighboring houses were on drugs; they were well-to-do, young, and able to do as they pleased, but the emptiness in their lives drove them to drugs. Whether in the slums or in the suburbs, empty people are turning to drugs.

The only sure answer for these people is Jesus Christ. Nothing else can change their heart and fill their lives with meaning as can the Lord.

Throwing hundreds of millions or billions of tax dollars at the drug problem has not worked so far, and it will not work now. Dollars will not save drug addicts nor America.

Why have men in Washington not called on churches to address this problem? Why have they not recognized that the true results have been gained by missions to youth and to addicts?

Among skid-row alcoholics, the substantial results have been made by rescue missions, and yet in city after city the authorities work to hamper these missions or to shut them down.

It is still true, as of old, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1). Nothing has changed to make dollars our savior rather than the Lord. The war on drugs is an evidence of political and moral bankruptcy, and a costly bit of evidence.

A Living Sacrifice

Recently, a fellow pastor observed of a major non-Christian movement which has many followers that it was impotent. Its followers, he rightly observed, are neither ready to sacrifice for it or die for it.

Does his comment apply also to church members today? One of America's most prominent pastors has said that although we now have a higher percentage of church members than ever before, with 91 million adults claiming to be "born-again" Christians, never before has the church been less influential in American life. Obviously, the level of commitment by these people is very low.

Paul in Romans 12:1 summons us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God; he calls this our "reasonable service." The term "body" in this verse stands, by synecdoche, "for the complete man" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 1940). It means that we can hold nothing back.

I think of this verse often as pastors tell me of parishioners who are rebellious against God's truth, and whose basic premise is too often, "My will be done." The Lord requires a total commitment, even to death, and calls it our "reasonable service." In other words, God's chief end is not to glorify man and to enjoy him forever! Rather, as the old catechism stated it, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We can only enjoy God if He comes first in our lives and if we realize that whatever He requires of us is our "reasonable service." We can only serve and enjoy God on His terms, not on ours.

When the Lord again has priority over and in us, and His law-word truly governs us, then we will have a very different church and country.

“Tender Mercies”?

According to Proverbs 12:10, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

Our lives are of a piece: we show ourselves in all our being, however much we try to cover up our character. A godly man, we are told, is mindful of the life of his animals. His nature shows through in all his dealings.

On the other hand, “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” Even when he tries to be good and noble, the causes he espouses, and the acts he commits, reveal his essential cruel or evil nature.

I believe this is an important text for farmers, cattlemen, and loggers. They are under attack by a variety of groups who treat them as exploiters of animals, the earth, and the forests. I am constantly appalled by the abusiveness of those groups and their unwillingness to listen to an opposing view, or to treat those whom they oppose with decency or respect. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

Our future as a country is being endangered by these people with their “tender mercies.” They believe that, apart from themselves, no one cares about the earth or our future. They attack the very people who make life possible.

I am reminded of the contemptuous university girl, who, when a reporter asked her how food could be produced, given her premises, remarked haughtily, “Food is!” This is more than ignorance; it is a cruelty that has no respect for the life of those who differ.

The Truth

Our Lord declares in John 14:6 that He is the truth about all things because He is the source of all life. The medieval thinker Gratian gave us one of the greatest commentaries on that statement: “The Lord said, ‘I am the truth,’ not, ‘I am custom or constitution.’” In other words, we cannot define ourselves or the church by what we think, nor by what the church is in our time, but only by Jesus Christ. We begin with Him, not with ourselves.

One of the great fallacies of reform movements is to try to recall the church to what it was when we were young, or a century ago. This means defining the church by history, not by God and His Word. Very often the root of our present problem is in the yesterdays we idealize. Because things may have been better fifty years ago does not necessarily mean they were right. A friend who three years ago was a picture of health and strength was carrying a hidden cancer at that time.

John tells us that “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The world outside of Christ was and is a world of hatred and lies; into this evil realm came our Lord with grace and as the truth, to make all things new.

To make custom, tradition, nationalism, race, or anything else the truth, however good some of these things sometimes may be, is to falsify reality and to replace truth with something else. Gratian was right: “The Lord said, ‘I am the truth,’ not, ‘I am custom or constitution.’”

What is He to you?

Breakdown and Renewal

Forrest McDonald, one of the most prominent historians of American history and the U.S. Constitution, is the author of *A Constitutional History of the United States*. His last chapter is entitled "Breakdown" and is grim reading. The federal government has become so big and unwieldy, he declares that it has "all but lost the ability to function." By the 1980s, the United States had lost its ability to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people; it could not establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, or promote the general welfare.

Behind this failure stands the greater failure, that of the American people. Their character has changed from Christian to pagan. There can be no good character in civil government if there is none in the people. You cannot make a good omelet with bad eggs.

Since the 1950s, missionaries coming home on furlough after six years abroad have been shocked by the change in the country during their absence. One missionary told me he felt like a foreigner in his own hometown. What shocked him most was the indifference of many churches to the growing paganism all around them.

In 1988, the United States will have another election year. No matter who wins the presidency and other offices, nothing much will change until the people change. No election as such can give us freedom. Only if God the Son makes us free are we free indeed (John 8:36).

Community

In 1963, in his lectures at Yale Law School on “The Morality of Law,” L. L. Fuller spoke of Karl Marx’s great dislike for interdependence. Marx’s hatred for interdependence led him to reject capitalism for a social order in which all men would supposedly have the equal capacity to do everything and could thus have no need for one another. Fuller described Marx’s position as one of “fundamental aversion to interdependence.”

This aversion is common to fallen men, whose desire it is to be their own god and to determine good and evil for themselves (Gen. 3:5).

For us as Christians, because we are God’s creatures, we have a creaturely need for one another, and, supremely, we need the Lord. Man was not made to live alone (Gen. 2:18). Loneliness is a form of death, and solitary confinement is a severe form of punishment.

We are, moreover, commanded not only to love one another, but to be “members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). We have a duty to our family, our fellow believers, and to all men to live with them according to God’s law and, as far as possible, in peace and harmony.

This man can only do by faithful living in Christ. To be outside of Christ is to be at war with God and man, as well as oneself. Instead of peace, we then have a human situation that reflects man’s conflict with God and with himself. Marx’s outlook reflected the logic of his anti-Christian faith and life, and that hatred of mankind he manifested has worked only evil ever since.

It is ironic that Marx, who hated communion and community, called his concept of social warfare “communism.” What he had in mind, of course, was a communion of property, not a communion of peoples. We have today many like him; they talk of peace but breathe war; they speak of love and reveal hatred. All men outside of Christ will manifest this contradiction.

Only by a total communion with God in Christ can we have community with one another.

Tenants

In Psalm 147:17–19, we have a passage with an emphasis very common to Scripture. First, we are told of the cold and ice brought in by God’s ordination, as well as the wind, the thaw, and the spring torrents. Second, we read, “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.”

J. A. Alexander, in 1850, called attention to the meaning of these words of the psalm, saying, “The God of Nature is the God of Revelation. He who thus controls the elements and seasons is the God of Israel, and will work spiritual changes corresponding to these natural phenomena, for the benefit of the people whom he has entrusted with the revelation of his will.”

God uses the weather both to bless and to judge the peoples of the earth. Natural events thus reveal God’s dealings with us. This world was made by God, together with all creation, and is controlled and governed absolutely by Him. Men and nations have the use of this earth as a stewardship from God and subject always to His Word and overlordship.

Over the centuries, God has broken and dispossessed many nations for despising Him and His law-word. The same God who gives us the Scriptures is the creator and governor of the natural world around us. We live in God’s creation on God’s terms, and, if not, we are dispossessed as bad tenants.

None of us want to tolerate a bad tenant. Why should God?

The Frontier Still Stays Open

Julie Roy Jeffrey, in her study, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1880*, says: “From the earliest years of this country’s history, Americans turned their backs on their homes and headed for the frontier.” The trip west was far from easy. The hardships en route were many; more than a few travelers died on the way. Many prized possessions were discarded in the wilderness as it became necessary to lighten the wagons. It is important to remember that these pioneers knew that while there would be a better life in time for their children or grandchildren, they themselves had a very difficult life ahead.

In Hebrews 11, we have a similar pioneer trek described, this one by the saints of all history: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” desiring “a better country” in the Lord (Heb. 11:13, 16).

It was this pioneer spirit in the faith that made a pilgrim-pioneer of Abraham and his successors. It was something of this same spirit or power that settled much of the old West.

We are very much in need now of Christian pioneers. This means a people who are zealous to grow and to exercise dominion in Christ.

Some are already doing this. They are establishing Christian schools, Christian homes for the delinquent, Christian medical missions in needy areas, and more. All this is Christian pioneering, and we need more of it.

The New Testament word “pilgrim” means a person sojourning in a strange land, away from his people and his original home. As Christians, heaven is our home, and this world is the place where we do our pioneering, an area we work in for Christ and His Kingdom.

Have you done any pioneering lately?

Barbarians

The papers recently reported on the murder of a California woman, allegedly by her English husband, a wealthy relative of an English lord. The young woman had been beheaded. Some were shocked by the appearance of so barbaric a crime in the higher circles of society.

We should not be amazed at such things. Some years ago, the Spanish thinker Ortega y Gasset wrote on the new barbarians. He located them among the scientists, leaders, and elite of the Western world. The new barbarians, he said, are those who believe that civilization and civilized men are natural historical facts, like air and trees. They fail to see that our culture is a product of twenty centuries of Christianity. Denying the roots, they soon lose the life and the fruits of that tree, and they become barbarians, men without religious and moral foundations. The godly, says the Psalmist, have their roots in the water of life, but “[t]he ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away” (Ps. 1:4).

Have you seen any barbarians lately? They are next door, down the street from you, and even in your own house, wherever there is not “delight in the law of the Lord,” where men’s roots are not in the river of life, the Lord (Ps. 1:23). Barbarism is all around us, and sometimes in our own hearts.

The words “barbarism” and “barbarous” come to us from antiquity; they originally meant “stammering, foreign, ignorant, rude.” By neglecting Christ the Lord, too many families, churches, and schools are producing barbarians.

The Pride of Man

Like millions of others, I watched the television news coverage of the eruption of Mount St. Helens volcano. What amazed me most was the fact that two of the scientists interviewed stated flatly that the eruption would have no effect on the weather. My wife Dorothy and I looked at each other and shook our heads.

Such scientists will tell us that a man in a small plane flying at not too high an altitude to “seed” some clouds with chemicals can make it rain. If you question the validity of various weather modification experiments, you are treated as an ignoramus. How can a man in a light plane affect the weather, whereas a volcano whose eruption clouds many states with ash has no effect on the weather? It amounts to saying man can change the weather, but God and natural forces cannot!

It involves a great presumption and pride. Solomon tells us, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov. 8:13). Evil is here identified with pride, arrogancy, and a froward mouth. I submit that these men who dogmatically denied that the volcano could affect the weather were proud, arrogant, and had a froward mouth. Humility would have led them to say, “I don’t know.” Instead, they closed the door to any consideration of the matter. They may have been learned, but they were not wise.

We are told that a man in a small plane seeding clouds can affect the weather. We read how cities affect and alter the weather and rain patterns. But not a volcano! The sin of man is to believe that he is or can be god (Gen. 3:5). On top of that, some men now seem to believe that no other God can exist, save man only. Such people are in for a surprise.

Honor to Whom Honor Is Due

Lord Acton, the historian, once wrote, “There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.” Acton, as a Christian, was distressed that many prominent men in history gained an undue respect because of their office. While Acton wanted respect for office to be maintained, he felt it was a serious evil to transfer the holiness and importance of an office to the office-holder. Thus, the office of pastor is to be respected, but not every man who holds that office matches in his life the sanctity of his office. A judge has a very important office, one deserving respect, but not every judge is the voice of justice which his office requires him to be.

Our Lord and the apostles warn against false prophets (Matt. 24:24; 2 Pet. 2:1–3). We are told that “[B]y their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). It is our duty to the Lord not to confuse the dignity, authority, and holiness of an office with the man who occupies it. To do so is to work moral confusion. It is the duty of a pastor to strive to fulfill the requirements of his office and to bring fresh grace to it, not to claim that the office confers grace upon him. Men are not made wise by becoming fathers, but they become wise as they grow in the Lord. A husband who claims authority on the mere ground of maleness rather than in the exercise of godly faith and life loses authority instead of gaining it. Many politicians in the past and present have created generals, but such political appointments and promotions give no man ability.

Paul states it thus: “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:7). The one to whom tribute or taxes are due may not be one to whom we should also render honor in his person, although we may honor his office. No man is sanctified by his position.

The Great Commandment

One of the problems many people have with understanding the history of Israel, the northern kingdom, after its separation from Judah in Rehoboam's day, is their failure to understand Israel's sin, syncretism. Syncretism means trying to combine things which are alien, such as Christianity and humanism.

Israel never formally renounced the worship of the Lord. In fact, to the last the nation believed that it was a covenant people worshipping God the Lord. In reality, what they had done was to absorb everything from Baalism that appealed to them, so that, in the name of the Lord, they were worshipping a god who was the creation of their imagination. Their idea of serving God was to absorb every religious idea which to them seemed attractive. Because they forgot that man as a sinner finds attractive things which cater to his sin, they failed to see that they were in fact creating a religion in their own fallen image rather than conforming themselves to the Lord. As a result, God sent them into captivity and destroyed the Kingdom. There was more hope for Judah, because Judah was usually either hot or cold, either strong in the faith or openly apostate. Our Lord makes clear His hatred of lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14ff.), and Israel was always lukewarm.

The churches today are very much like old Israel, syncretistic. Too often, we get, not Christianity from the pulpit, but a smorgasbord of assorted religious ideas. All this adds up to the word of man, not the Word of God. "[T]he word of truth" (Eph. 1:13) cannot be diluted without ceasing to be the truth.

I once met a very pleasant man, whose pleasantness soon began to look suspiciously empty. "What does he stand for?" I asked someone who knew him well. The answer was briefly put: "For everything, and for nothing." That answer sums up what syncretism leads to: it stands for nothing. Our Lord tells us that the first and great commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, with all our being (Matt. 22:36–38). No syncretist can keep that law.

Regulations

A very good friend, a minister, was planning to build a Christian school building. The only way to get all the plans approved in time was to take the papers to the county offices, carry them from one clerk and office to another, and spend day after day for a few weeks pushing through all the necessary permits. By that time, he had spent so much time in the county offices that some officials began to assume that he worked there.

I have heard several like stories from contractors, telling me of the endless regulations, permits, and inspections. Now and then, I use one of those stories, but usually someone objects, “Yes, but we have to have regulations.” Indeed we do, but by whom? Moreover, since our various levels of civil government represent the most incompetent and inefficient operations in the modern world, why should they do the regulating? Is the point of it all to reduce everything to the same level of incompetence as government maintains?

Our founding fathers operated on this principle, which was often quoted: “[M]en will be governed by God, or they will be governed by tyrants.” Even Franklin held to that. Now no man is perfectly governed by God this side of heaven, but, the more men are governed by God, the less they will be governed by other men. Those objectors are right: “We have to have regulations.” If we set aside the regulations of God’s law, we will of necessity be regulated by man’s law. The swarm of new regulations passed daily by one branch of civil government after another is an indication of our loss of our self-regulation by the law of God.

When you stand in line for some kind of permit, or pay higher taxes for various forms of civil service incompetence, remember, we are paying the price for our apostasy. Sin always exacts a high if hidden price.

Moreover, instead of repenting for our sins, we complain rather that the price of sin is too high! We dislike the taxes and regulations and complain about them instead of seeing how seriously wayward we are in departing from the Lord. It is still true that men will either be governed by God, or they will be governed by tyrants. In spite of their complaining, it is clear that most people prefer tyrants. Where do you stand?

The Bible and Property

For Karl Marx, the two great enemies were the Biblical God and the family. He saw these two enemies linked together as the great champions of private property. Private ownership of property was for Marx and Engels the cornerstone of the family, and the family the key institution of Biblical religion. To abolish private ownership of property, Christianity had to be attacked.

Marx and Engels were right in that they knew who their real enemies were. The Bible protects property in two of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house ... nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” But this is not all. The Mosaic law had no property tax: a man, rich or poor, was made secure in his house and land from dispossession or seizure, and the Levitical laws emphasized this heavily. Man’s basic security the Biblical law saw as resting in the private possession of property without the possibility of confiscation. The American colonies deliberately followed the Biblical law and avoided any property tax in any form. In some states, there was no property tax until after the Civil War. Recently, Nebraska abolished both the state property tax and the state income tax. The Liberty Bell carries a verse from the Bible’s law of property: “[P]roclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Lev. 25:10).

Wherever private property disappears, man’s liberty is gone. Man is placed completely at the mercy of the state. Wherever private ownership is weakened, man’s liberty is weakened also. There is an essential relationship between liberty and property. The American colonists saw this. One of the slogans of the War of Independence was “Liberty and Property.” Every attack on the private ownership of property is therefore an attack on liberty. It is an attempt to destroy the independence of man from the state, from the tyranny of civil governments. It is especially important for tyrants to destroy private ownership of farming property, either by direct confiscation or indirectly by controls. In every age, one of the primary targets of dictatorship has been to control the farmer.

The attack on private ownership is also an attack on the family because it destroys the family’s independence and makes its members dependent instead on the state. The state takes the place of the father as the provider.

The attack on private ownership is also an attack on God, because it despises His law and substitutes for it man’s humanistic and socialistic law. The defense of private ownership is both a healthy and a necessary religious step. It is the defense of a way of life ordered by God for the welfare and happiness of mankind. The right to property is a God-given right. Ownership is evidence of work and character. Every attempt to limit the right of ownership is a form of theft, and the Bible says clearly: “Thou shalt not steal.”

The Dictator

Rienzo: ever hear of him, Cola di Rienzo? Look him up in the encyclopedias, and they will probably tell you that he was a great popular hero and a champion of the people and of democracy. His dates were 1313(?)–1345. Wagner wrote an opera celebrating him, called *Rienzi*. Bulwer Lytton wrote a novel making him its hero, *Rienzi, the Last of the Roman Tribunes*. The poet Byron wrote some enthusiastic lines about Rienzo in *Childe Harold*. But Rienzo was a dictator, a vicious, degenerate dictator.

Why then have scholars and poets in the past two or three centuries treated Rienzo as a great hero? The reason is a very simple one: Rienzo was against the church and, for our modern humanists, anyone against the church is a hero. Also, Rienzo, like almost all dictators, said he was “for the people.” Most of the time, we the people want the civil government to leave us alone and to mind its own business, which is the administration of law and order. But the dictators want to save us from ourselves; they feel that they know what is best for us. Rienzo declared himself to be the only true champion “of the people, the orphans, widows and poor.” But all this was talk. What Rienzo did was gain nothing for the people, only more and more power for himself.

Rienzo called himself the people’s Liberator and Savior. He became their tyrant and the murderer of their liberties and of their leaders. Because of his policies, food became costly and taxes increased; “the poor, the widows and orphans whose only consul and defender he had styled himself braggingly, found the simplest spice of their scanty meals, the salt, getting dearer,” wrote Victor Fleischer in *Rienzo*. Finally, the angry mobs murdered him. But the liberals persist in seeing Rienzo as a hero. Why?

Rienzo had all the marks of a modern liberal and of every dictator. First, he felt that he knew what was best for the people; it was not the Word of God which governed Rienzo but his own ideas about what men needed. Second, he encouraged greed in every man’s heart. For Rienzo, the way to wealth and prosperity was not through liberty and hard work, but in taking from those who have and giving to those who have not. Rienzo was thus basically a thief, and his appeal was to all men who also had larceny in their hearts. Third, because Rienzo was the biggest thief of all, and worked to glorify himself, he therefore displeased all the thieves who followed him and expected to get rich because of it.

St. Paul said that the purpose of civil government is to provide godly law and order, to offer safety to good men and to be “a terror ... to the evil” (Rom. 13:3). When a civil government begins to make trouble instead for the hardworking, law-abiding, godly men of the country, it is destroying itself. This is especially true when farming is hindered by regulations. According to the Scripture, “[T]he profit of the earth is for all,” and the whole country is dependent upon and prospers because of the liberty and prosperity of the farmer, for “the king himself is served by the field” (Eccles. 5:9).

From the beginning of time, the rascals who have gained power, the Rienzos and Lenins of history, have all claimed that something other than hard work and good farming could feed men. These dictators have tried to increase food by laws and regulations, and, every time, they have decreased the food and increased the thieves. “[W]hatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7), and if we sow bureaucrats, we shall reap dictators.

It is high time that our civil government met God’s requirement and became a terror to evildoers instead of a headache to honest people.

The New Religion

Recently, a minister who is a professor in one of the most important theological seminaries in the country declared that modern church life and faith would have to be changed radically. Three new “facts” now make possible a “new” life for man: first, drugs make possible a new experience of ecstasy and freedom; second, sexual license can now be enjoyed without guilt or trouble; and third, automation and computers will soon make it possible to have a virtually workless world, so we must prepare for a no-work life. The hippies, who move in this faith, he described as a religious movement; they represent the wave of the future.

About the same time that this minister proclaimed man’s old sin as the new gospel, a problem was fed to a computer at a major university. Each New Year’s Day, a million and a half people and up to 300,000 cars pour into Pasadena for the Tournament of Roses Parade and the Rose Bowl game. The entire Pasadena road and traffic problem, with all its variables, was fed into the computer. The computer answered that it is simply not possible to get that many people and cars in and out of Pasadena in one day. The Pasadena police department, not knowing this, has been doing the job with masterly skill for years! So much for the superior work of computers.

But to return to this minister’s dream, from one perspective it makes sense. Anyone who does not work, and who is sexually immoral and without principle, will need drugs to escape the fact of his guilt, and to hide from himself his own shame. It is not surprising that drugs are so vital a part of this no-work, “free”-sex religion.

This “wave of the future” is really the revival of the old past, of sin and barbarism, and its revival can only mean the destruction of Christian civilization. Anyone who demands a no-work world wants someone as his slave to make such a world possible for him. Anyone who tries to establish a world of sexual license is really trying to destroy the world, to eliminate the family, and to subvert Christian civilization. And anyone who looks to drugs for “experience” is really tired of life and is running away from it.

This “new” religion is doomed to experience the old-fashioned judgment of God. The world is under the government of God, and His government is written into every fiber of man’s being, so that man’s own being witnesses against himself when he sins. God’s government is written in all of history, and in all the universe, so that Deborah could sing triumphantly, as she celebrated the overthrow of Sisera: “They fought from heaven: the stars in their courses fought against Sisera” (Judg. 5:20).

The “new” religion is very prominent and powerful today. It has taken our churches and schools, and it speaks arrogantly and with power. But it has no power to comfort men, to give them peace, or to give them new life. It can only take men captive and destroy them spiritually.

But, concerning these things, our Lord said: “If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Rev. 13:9–10).

Conservation

The San Joaquin Valley is one of the two most fertile agricultural areas in the world. (The other is the Nile Valley.) Its products feed the United States, and are important to its foreign trade and to the world economy. But this is not all. Many areas of the valley are as yet relatively undeveloped and have yet to come into their potential. It can honestly be said that modern American life would be vastly poorer, and its economy weaker, without the San Joaquin Valley.

It is a good thing, however, that pioneer and immigrant farmers developed the Valley before the so-called environmental protection people came around. The Valley was then a beautiful place, with a heavy oak growth. In the spring, the rivers overflowed across the land, and salmon came up to spawn. Indians came out of the mountains to catch the salmon out of shallow ponds and sloughs. Later in the year, the Spaniards ran huge herds of hogs in the Valley, to fatten on the acorns.

Had these so-called conservationists existed then, the Valley would have been barred to any development and retained as a wilderness area. The Indians in those days often starved in California; now, California helps feed America and the world. Which represents the better conservation?

Certainly, some abuses and wastes need correcting, but our present popular environmental policies are not protective: they are reactionary, and they are hostile to man and to society.

Man has a responsibility under God to exercise dominion over the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26–28). Man must use the earth as a wise steward under God, as a trustee. This means neither a wasteful exploitation nor a sterile preservation of things as they are.

The giant forests of America in 1498 were sterile. No sun struck their floor because of their thick growth, and so no grass grew. Game, except in the plains, was usually rare, and the Indians resorted to cannibalism almost every winter. There are more deer now than in Columbus' day, because there is more feed.

Man under God can develop the earth for his own betterment, and for the betterment of the animals thereof. This means sound, godly management, not a hostility to development. The answer is not in a do-nothing policy but in godly character and thinking. True conservation is a religious duty. Too much of what passes for conservation today is a hatred of God and man in the name of nature. Let us remember that we cannot stop change, but, under God, we can guide and direct it.

Truth and Promises

Some years ago, President Herbert Hoover observed, “Civilization moves forward on promises that are kept. It goes backward with every broken promise.”

Because civilization is impossible if there be no community, and because community rests on mutual trust, where there is no truth, and when promises are not kept, civilization goes backward and finally can even collapse.

Many of our problems today rest on this fact. We live in a time of broken promises, when men’s word in politics, churches, schools, marriages, and in business is not to be trusted. Politicians are regarded as crooks, lawyers as liars, capitalists as exploiters, workers as shiftless and incompetent, churchmen as hypocrites, teachers as mis-educators, parents as permissive and indulgent, and children as arrogant and rebellious. There is enough reason to suspect everyone so that we are indeed in trouble. We are going backward because men are too often without truth and because promises are made for advantage’s sake, not to keep.

Very simply, truth is not in man, and whenever civilization rests on man, it is in trouble. Our Lord said of God, “[T]hy word is truth” (John 17:17). Only when man and nations make the Word of God their foundation can they themselves reflect that truth and only then can civilization move forward. “For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth” (Ps. 33:4). This can be said of no man, and every attempt to build on man means building on a foundation of sand.

Hoover was thus right, up to a point. We must go beyond him to declare, with the Psalmist, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

Our choice is between God and man, between truth and broken promises. Are you still trusting in man’s broken promises, or is your faith in the Lord?

Love and Justice

A superior court judge has in his chambers a sign reading, “Dirty Old Men Need Love Too.” This judge, a kindly old man, often tells litigants that, when he first took office, he expected to make 50 percent of the people appearing before him unhappy. Unfortunately, he says, 90 percent are usually unhappy with court decisions.

This judge seems troubled and distressed by this fact and often harps on it. He seems to have overlooked the fact that it is not his calling to be loved but to be just. There is an important difference.

In the Bible, the words “justice” and “righteousness” are essentially the same words, and the word “judgment” is our word “justice.” Justice means bringing all things into conformity with the standard of law and goodness as set forth by God. Justice does involve love, but it is essentially the love of God and His righteousness. The just man or judge is indeed loving in his attitude towards men in their needs and suffering, but his love is first of all governed by the love of God and His righteousness.

Whenever we give the love of man priority, we then neglect the righteousness of God, and we are then prone to perpetrate injustice. Today, in the name of the love of man, we are regularly asked by schools, churches, courts, and people to favor injustice.

People, we are told, are more important than property rights. But there are no property rights apart from people. If I have the right today to trample on the rich man’s property rights, or the middle class man’s or the farmer’s property rights, I have the freedom tomorrow to destroy the poor man’s rights also, because I have set aside justice.

Where love is used as an excuse to set aside justice, love quickly gives way to injustice and hatred. The clergy are not loved more for talking incessantly about love, nor are judges loved more for concerning themselves about love. In fact, both judges and clergymen are objects of increasing disrespect and contempt. Love cannot be separated from justice without destroying both justice and love, and we need them both.

Our Lord established the priority: “[S]eek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Man’s priorities are destroying our society. It is time we looked to God and His righteousness.

Looking Backward

There is a beautiful old Negro spiritual which declares that “Nobody knows the troubles I’ve seen.” The melody is lovely, but the words are all wrong: they look backward, not forward. The man geared for defeat looks backward and remembers his troubles. The Israelites in the desert were unwilling to face the problems of freedom and looked backward to Egypt and wept (Num. 11:4–5).

I have heard many a person complain, “Why do these things happen to me?” as they give a long recital of past and present troubles. Trying to get them to meet their present problems and tomorrow’s responsibilities is next to impossible: they are too intent on looking backward.

I recall vividly one woman who wept endlessly because her husband was continually unhappy with her. And why was he unhappy with her? Well, there were never clean shirts for him to wear to work nor meals when he came home. She became very angry when I suggested that she start ironing, and get meals ready on time. She wanted to recite all her past sorrows!

Looking backward is a sign of spiritual death and an omen of physical death as well. When the elderly begin to fade away, their memory of the past is often sharp, and their memory of the present poor, because they are losing their hold on life.

The Bible gives us an eloquent story of an old man with a forward look. Caleb in Kadesh-barnea was the man who with Joshua was ready to look forward to victory (Num. 13:30). Years later, at eighty-five, Caleb declared his readiness to take on a new task, to conquer an enemy and to pioneer (Josh. 14:6–14). Caleb had a forward look: it meant simply that he believed in God and was therefore confident about his tomorrows.

To hear some people talk, the devil runs the world, not God. They blame God for their own sins and their sorry mismanagement of their lives and of this world. They court misery like a miser clutching his money. They have no real interest in today and tomorrow; they are too involved in reliving and reciting past troubles and griefs. Leave them alone. Let the dead bury the dead. We have a life to live and a work to reclaim for the Lord.

Swelling of the Jordan

The story of the miraculous crossing of the River Jordan is one of the great stories of Old Testament history. Precisely at a time when the runoff waters of the rainy season were at their high, God brought Israel to the Jordan. The Jordan Valley is one of the deepest in the world, and the river ends in the Dead Sea.

According to Joshua 3:1–2, God required Israel to camp on the banks of the Jordan for three days before He stopped the waters and took them across on dry land. Consider that fact. For three days, all Israel had to camp near the banks of the Jordan and look at an impossible crossing. Three days gave them enough time to doubt God, to think of turning back, or to grumble at the absurdity of trusting in God. They did not doubt, and God took them across.

Perhaps you and I are now at our particular Jordan crossing. There seems to be no way through our problem, nor any safe crossing for us. All this may be the Lord's testing of our faith.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God once answered his distresses with these words: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? [A]nd if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5). If the ordinary problems of life are too much for you, Jeremiah, how will you do when the great ones come?

For Israel, the swelling of the Jordan was a step of faith, and the testing which prepared them for victory. The question for us is this: How are we meeting the swelling of our own Jordans?

Soldiers of Christ

One of history's more interesting generals was the Union general George B. McClellan (1826–1885). Lincoln looked hopefully to McClellan's leadership for a military victory, but was disappointed.

McClellan was a very able general when it came to training troops. His weakness was his caution in battle. Having drilled his army so ably, he hesitated to take it into battle and mess it up!

Too many Christians are like McClellan. They drill endlessly for battle, but they are unwilling to get involved. One man I know has, since about 1950, spent at least one hour each morning in prayer, but it is very much like a McClellan drill. When he gets up off his knees, no action follows.

Paul, in Ephesians 6:11–18, tells us to “[p]ut on the whole armour of God,” but his purpose for us is not a drill-ground parade, but to do battle against the powers of darkness in this world.

We are called upon to worship, to pray, and to read the Bible, not to say that we have thereby done our duty, but to be prepared to act for the Lord. The purpose of the church is not to be a hospital or a resting place for the weary, but a training camp and barracks room for Christ's soldiers, to prepare them to occupy the world in His name.

Too many people talk of putting on the whole armor of God, but too few are then ready to be Christ's foot soldiers. The purpose of armor is protection in battle, and the ability to move confidently forward to victory. As a result, going to church, praying, and reading the Bible are simply the necessary and continuing basic training of troops whose calling is action.

Are you a parade soldier, or a battle veteran?

Mirrors

On several occasions in the past year or two, I have been in very modern buildings which have had a hall of mirrors. As you walk down the hallway, your image is mirrored on both sides from something like five to twenty times. About eight years ago, I was in the banquet hall of a beautiful and very large house built by one of the major film producers in 1926; all the walls and doors were paneled from top to bottom with antique mirrors. All of this, in my estimation, is seeing more of myself than I want to see!

Such things are very popular, however, with modern man. We like mirrors if we are madly in love with ourselves!

The Bible, however, requires us to have another focus to our lives. Paul says, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul tells us here that we are to be the mirrors, and, as His mirrors, reflect Jesus Christ our Lord. As we mirror Him in our life, action, and thoughts, we are steadily changed. Instead of reflecting the image of the fallen Adam (Gen. 5:3), we reflect rather the image of the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

If, like Adam, we choose to be our own god, then we want everything to mirror us. We want the whole world, and especially our husband or wife, and children, to mirror our being and to be our shadow.

If we are members of Jesus Christ, then we seek to mirror Him. Then our change is “from glory to glory.” Are you asking your family and church to be your mirror, or are you a mirror for Jesus Christ?

The Fountain Opened

Some of our more beautiful hymns were written by William Cowper. They include “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” (1774); “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood” (1771); “Jesus, Where’er Thy People Meet” (1769); and many, many more.

A man of frail health and serious problems, Cowper clung to such verses as Zechariah 13:1, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened . . . for sin and for uncleanness.” This was the inspiration for “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood.” Read that hymn, and you will see what it meant to Cowper.

Cowper’s long, reflective poems are wrongly neglected in our time. They manifest good poetry with Christian wisdom. Cowper was sickly, very prone to mental depression, and very much a frail person. He knew his frailty. What he clung to, in the face of his weakness, was the strength of the Lord, “The fountain opened . . . for sin and uncleanness.”

This is the great fact of our lives, that we have a source of strength and healing. One greater than ourselves. We have from Him salvation, strength, and refreshing. He gives to us, not in terms of our strength, ability, or merit, but in terms of His grace and power.

He who of old made the lame to walk and the blind to see can heal the weakness of our souls and the blindness of our hearts and give us victory in Him.

The ancient promise still stands, as true as ever: “[T]hey that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

Mary's Song

There was a time in the modern era when it was illegal in much of Europe for churches to include Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:46–55, in church services. The monarchs of Europe regarded it as subversive.

In this song, Mary declares that the birth of her Son means the overturning of the powers of this world. God declares war through His Son against the mighty rulers and peoples of a fallen world, through Jesus Christ to all who fear Him, and who hunger and thirst after God's righteousness. The Magnificat is thus both a declaration of war and of peace.

We therefore who are the redeemed of Christ need to rejoice with Mary, declaring, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

The birth of our Lord is bad news for the mighty ones of a fallen and apostate world. It is the reminder of God's unceasing warfare against all sin and evil, and the certainty of His victory.

For us, Christ's birth is the assurance of salvation and victory, the certainty that our Lord is on the throne. He rules the universe, and He is making all things work together for good for us in Him.

Make Mary's song yours also. It is the song of victory.

Under the Wings

Ever since I was a child, one of the more lovely sights for me has been a mother hen and her chicks. We have several mother hens and their little ones running around the place. At first hint of danger, the mother hen's clucks bring the chicks racing for the protection of her wings. It is a delight to watch them, minutes later, peeking out to see if all is well.

Our Lord uses that image in speaking of His loving care. In Matthew 23:37, He says to Jerusalem, "[H]ow often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Jerusalem professed to be the center of true worship, but it would not place itself under Christ. Any man, woman, family, church, school, or nation, however important, which will not place itself under the protection and care of the Lord faces a judgment like Jerusalem's.

We are not called to "go it alone." We are the Lord's. We must either accept His care and government, or face His judgment.

Living in the foothills as we do, we frequently lose heedless chicks to predators. Living as we do in an evil generation, we see losses at times of heedless youths and adults to the stupidities of sin.

We were not created to live alone, and we are created to serve the Lord with all of our heart, mind, and being. Our place therefore is under the wings of grace and mercy.

The Dayspring

When Zacharias rejoiced over the birth of his son John, known to us as John the Baptist, he spoke of the coming of Christ the Lord, declaring, “[T]he dayspring from on high hath visited us” (Luke 1:78). Moffatt renders these words thus: “God . . . will cause the Dawn to visit us from on high.” Christ is called the dayspring, sunrise, or dawn. Isaiah, centuries before, spoke of Christ’s birth in similar terms, writing of those who would see His coming, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isa. 9:2).

We walk in the light now, because our Light has come. To step back into darkness is for us a sin. Christ is born: God is with us. He is the victory which overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), and to walk in doubt, anxiety, or darkness is to walk without Him.

We live out in the country, in the mountains of Calaveras County. My study, where I write this, is down the hill, detached from the house. At night, it gets very dark here, and, unless I have a light, I stumble easily on my path and must grope to find my way. I have only myself to blame if I do not turn on the outside light before coming down or carry a flashlight. Similarly, I have only myself to blame if I stumble in the darkness of anxiety or fearfulness. The Dayspring from on high has come, and I am in the dark only if I shut my eyes to Him.

All the Christmas carols are joyful ones, but their joy belongs to the whole year. It is “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.” That joy is not for one day or season only. His coming as the Dawn from on high marks the beginning of a new creation of which it is said, “[T]here shall be no night there” (Rev. 22:5).

Therefore, O people of God, rejoice. St. Paul, in the most difficult of situations could say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). We are the children of light, called to live in the sunshine of life. Let your eyes and life be open to His light.

The Water of Life

Blessings that we enjoy in abundance, we tend to take for granted, and to forget their importance. We might feel differently about water, for example, if we passed a sign on our way into the desert, reading, “Next water, 700 miles.”

An American anthropologist who passed such a sign has given us a grim picture of the necessity of water. The average-sized man has about four gallons of water in his body. In the desert, a man must have as an absolute minimum two gallons a day to live. He can lose up to three gallons a day in bad desert conditions, and more than a pint by breathing. There is no life for man, nor growth for vegetation, without water.

Our Lord knew this and had these facts in mind when He declared Himself to be the water of life: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37). A planet without water is a dead planet, and a man without the water of life is spiritually dead.

The Sahara Desert was once, within the span of human records, a fertile area of farms and cattle ranches. Weather changes, dating perhaps to the time of Abraham, began to change the nature of the Sahara. From a rich and productive land, it has become a byword for desolation and emptiness. The difference is water. The most fertile areas of the world today can become new Saharas if they have no water.

The point Scripture makes is that man is like a Sahara Desert, desolate, lonely, and unproductive, when he is without the water of life, Jesus Christ.

The summons of Scripture therefore is a forthright one. “[L]et him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

David declared to God, “[M]y soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land” (Ps. 143:6), because David knew his need. He was also fully aware of the national need. The country, weak in faith, was like a desert: “[M]y flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Ps. 63:1). In a nation where God’s Word was despised, life was like a desert, and David longed to see the power of God manifested in the land.

Like David, we too are thirsty men, longing for the righteousness of God to be manifested in us and in our country. The world around us is becoming like a desert because of men’s contempt for the Water of Life, and we are more and more aware of the growing desolation. In the face of all this, the certain Word of Christ is a sure promise: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

The Author

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians as well as a pastor to two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the Chalcedon Report and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

The Ministry of Chalcedon

CHALCEDON (kal-SEE-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested ministers, scholars, and laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches. Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: “Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man....” This formula directly challenges every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative: Christ alone can announce that, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1). The Chalcedon Foundation publishes books under its own name and that of Ross House Books. It produces a magazine, Faith for All of Life, and a newsletter, The Chalcedon Report, both bimonthly. All gifts to Chalcedon are tax deductible. For complimentary trial subscriptions, or information on other book titles, please contact:

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