

Volume 1

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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the members of Nicene Covenant Church
and Grace Community Schools
in great appreciation
for their generous support of
the work of my father.

Rev. Mark R. Rushdoony
President, Chalcedon Foundation

Table of Contents

1. [The Ultimate Sin](#)
2. [Self-righteousness](#)
3. [Proud Sins](#)
4. [True Blindness](#)
5. [Vision](#)
6. [Entering Life](#)
7. [Excuses](#)
8. [The Right to Sin?](#)
9. [How to Pollute Other People](#)
10. [Contagion](#)
11. [Faith in Injustice](#)
12. [False Cures](#)
13. [Barking](#)
14. [Salvation by Nagging](#)
15. [Tolerance](#)
16. [Tolerance and Intolerance](#)
17. [Moral Standards](#)
18. [A Test of Man](#)
19. [Envy](#)
20. [Fence Breakers](#)
21. [Is Chastity Obsolete?](#)
22. [Hypocrites](#)
23. [Religious Hypochondriacs](#)
24. [Slander](#)
25. [The Love of a Lie](#)
26. [The Unwashed Generation](#)
27. [A Letter to a Sleepy Friend](#)
28. [Solitude](#)
29. [How to Insure Trouble](#)
30. [The Depths of Satan](#)
31. [Irrelevant Preaching](#)
32. [The Return to Barbarism](#)
33. [Charity Begins at Home](#)
34. [Poverty by Choice](#)
35. [Who Owns the Child?](#)
36. [Train Up a Child](#)
37. [The Law of the Pack](#)
38. [How to Produce a Hippie](#)

39. [As a Man Thinketh](#)
40. [Fools](#)
41. [Learning and Wisdom](#)
42. [Can Experience Teach](#)
43. [Pruning](#)
44. [Testing and Purity](#)
45. [Personal Problems](#)
46. [Humility](#)
47. [Happiness](#)
48. [Is God an Insurance Agent?](#)
49. [Is He a Christian?](#)
50. [Fearfulness](#)
51. [What Do You Stand For?](#)
52. [Standards](#)
53. [Murder Mysteries](#)
54. [Shiloh](#)
55. [The Price of Salvation](#)
56. [The First Days of the New Creation](#)
57. [Against Spiritual People](#)
58. [Duty](#)
59. [Problems](#)
60. [Trusting God](#)
61. [The Open Door](#)
62. [Under the Eye of God](#)
63. [I Know People](#)
64. [The Principle of Change](#)
65. [The Right Way](#)

[The Author](#)

[The Ministry of Chalcedon](#)

The Ultimate Sin

Basic to the ultimate sin is the desire to reform others and to conform them to our ideas and hopes. Too often in our day this sin is proclaimed as a virtue.

What it means simply is that we try to play god and to change other people to suit ourselves. People who are having problems getting along with their family, their fellow workers, or their community very often are guilty of this sin, which means they are trying to play god.

You and I are not asked to change other people. Only God can do that. What we can do, by God's grace, is to change ourselves to conform to His Word and calling. This means seeing the need to change in ourselves, rather than in others, and leaving the reformation of others to God through the ministry of His Word.

Today, of course, this is unpopular. The common idea of a noble person, statesman, or religious figure is of a man who, by legislation and police power, with tax funds works day and night to change others, never himself.

The ultimate sin is anti-Christianity to the core. It places the power to change men in the hands of man, not God. It gives to man the supposed right to control his fellow men in terms of his ideas of social and personal reform.

We have no right to ask people to conform to our will and ideas. We do have the responsibility to summon them to conform to God's Word and calling. God Himself conforms us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), and requires us through St. Paul to "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). By His sovereign grace, He makes us "conformable" unto the death of His Son (Phil. 3:10). So that we die to our self-righteousness and our ideas of reforming the world, and are instead alive to the righteousness of God in Christ, and are conformed to His Word.

The next time you hear a man propose to reform you, the state, the world, and everything in sight, look at him for what he is: the ultimate sinner, a would-be god, and a defiler of creation. And be careful, when you see such a man, that you do not spot him in your mirror.

Self-Righteousness

Some years ago, I had as neighbors a young couple with serious problems. The wife was thoroughly irresponsible. She had a lovely home, three fine children, a faithful and devoted husband, and part-time help in housework. The husband and the help did much of the work, and the wife sometimes disappeared over night, especially on weekends, with one or another “boy friend.” When the all too patient husband finally threatened court action and a divorce, the wife said, in some anger, “How can he do this to me, after all I’ve done for him?” Her attitude was that anything she did for him was a favor and he should be grateful!

Not too long ago, a young man showed a similar reaction. His parents had provided him with an excellent education, helped buy him a house equal to theirs, and given him and his wife a vacation to Hawaii, a new car every third year and still more, yet he failed to meet his ordinary responsibilities like a man. When the father demanded some responsible action from the young man and his wife, the son angrily rejected the advice. “What have you ever done for me all these years?” he complained. “You were always too busy working to spend time with me before, and now you want to run my life.” The son had been given a good, disciplined home life, an excellent education, as much time and attention as his father could afford, and more than a little money, but he could still complain!

The root of this moral sickness is self-righteousness. The self-righteous man sees everything wrong with God, the world, and his family, and nothing wrong with himself. The self-righteous man has a revolutionary answer for all problems: everything around him must change, and he must remain the same. By definition, he himself is the ultimate standard and judge. The social order must be overturned, his parents despised, and all authority flouted, but he insists on remaining the same: he is very pleased with his own perfection.

They are wrong, seriously and viciously wrong, these men who tell us that these revolutionists, old and young, in politics or in our schools, are fine young idealists. They are, rather, self-righteous fools, dedicated to the proposition that all evil is in the world around them and all righteousness is in themselves.

This is why Scripture is so emphatic in declaring that no man is saved by self-righteousness, “for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16). No man gains a do-it-yourself salvation or perfection. Salvation is the work of God in man, God’s righteousness, not man’s self-made righteousness. The saved man seeks to conform himself to the Word and will of God; the self-righteous man seeks to conform God and the world to his word and will. The self-righteous man makes his own will his law; he replaces the law of God with man-made traditions of his own devising.

Today, self-righteousness has been made a virtue, old and young busily cultivating it. We are in trouble. The world of self-righteousness is a world of anarchy. The story about the young wife is twenty years old; some, but not too many, sided with her then. The story of the young man

comes from last year; most people sided with the son. After all, they said, the son is not a criminal, and the father should be grateful; who else is he going to leave his money to?

Solomon described these people long ago: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). The destiny of such people is to be washed out of history by God’s judgment.

3

Proud Sins

One of the hardest things to do is to convince women that they snore. One man, whose wife complains about his snoring, admitted to me that his wife snored too. Then why not tell her, I suggested. His answer was quick. He wouldn't dare. She would not believe him and would assume he was being dishonest.

Women regard it as unfeminine to snore and as beneath their dignity, and few will believe that they actually do. Most men, being loving and sometimes indulgent, say nothing.

An old priest once remarked that he had never had anyone confess to being stingy. All other kinds of sins he had heard but not that. It was not for lack of stingy parishioners but because there is no dignity in being stingy. As a result, they saw their stinginess as thrift, providence, good management, and, somehow, a virtue, not a vice.

We are not only sinners, but we are proud sinners. The sins we commit we see as sins of strength, character, and vigor. Some years ago when I did a little prison visitation, I found one of the commonest attitudes to be precisely this kind of Phariseeism. A prisoner might admit to committing certain offenses, but he would point to other offenders, cite their crimes and state, "I've never done anything as low as that." His offenses somehow had status, dignity, and character in his eyes.

We are very tolerant and indulgent about our own sins and shortcomings. As far as we are concerned, there is really something lovable about even our faults. Of course, our husband's, wife's, or friend's faults are annoying to us, and we wonder why they will not change themselves to suit us. Our sins, of course, suit us very nicely.

Not only is pride a part of our sin, but we are proud too often in sin and of our sins. They suit us, and therefore we persist in them. We may think about cleaning house, but not too seriously.

St. Augustine wrote that, when he began to come under conviction, he started to pray to God to change him, but his prayer amounted essentially to this: "Lord, make me pure, but not yet." So it is too often with us. We are proud sinners, and our sins are dear to us if we are honest enough to admit it. They suit us.

This does not change reality, however. Our lives are not intended to suit us but to please God. The catechism is right: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." What are you trying to enjoy, God or your sin?

True Blindness

Truly blind men are men who believe only in what they see, and they deliberately see nothing. They look at the world around them, and they refuse to see order, direction, or meaning. They deny God and the supernatural, and they insist that the magnificent and intricate design in the natural world is not planned and ordered but accidental. This is not only a deliberate self-blinding but an amazing faith in mindless miracles. To believe that the created universe, with all its order, law, and design, is an accident requires a greater faith in miracles than the Bible ever requires.

The Psalmist tells us, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Ps. 19:1). St. Paul declares that “the invisible things of him [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen [i.e., all nature reveals God], being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). The evidence is so compelling that only a willful self-blinding man can suppress it.

Men are blind to God because they choose to be so. They would rather deny their sight than confess their sin, for to see God’s hand, power, and lordship means also to recognize our sin against Him, our lawless declaration of independence from God. Men choose to be blind rather than saved. They prefer to be their own god rather than to confess the true God.

Man the sinner is thus a self-blinded, self-deluded, would-be god. Blind men cannot govern a world they refuse to see, and, as a result, their attempts at ruling the world without God go from disaster to disaster. Our times are a witness to this.

But we are told that, when men cried unto the Lord in their troubles and distress, “He sent his word, and healed them” (Ps. 107:20). To hear God’s Word means to confess Him and His Word to be sovereign and therefore redemptive. It means acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior. It means to confess that there is more to the world than what we see: there is always God’s hand and government, in the world and in us. Do you see that?

Vision

She was a very modern, attractive young woman in her twenties. While in bed with her lover, her husband came home unexpectedly, thrashed the adulterer soundly, and threw him out. Meanwhile, the young woman called the police, and, when they arrived, demanded that they arrest her husband. Why? Because, she said, he had violated her privacy and her “rights”! She was outraged when the police refused to do anything, and she wondered what the world was coming to.

Surprised? You should not be. Proverbs 29:18, in the Berkeley Version, reads, “Where there is no vision the people run wild; but happy is he who keeps the law.” The meaning of “vision” is prophetic ministry which faithfully preaches the Word of God, so that the people, by means of God’s law, have a lamp and a light for their way, and therefore vision. That vision is now gone with countless people, and, like this young adulteress, their ideas of “rights” are governed by sin rather than the law of God.

The young woman became very angry and bitter about what she regarded as the failure of the police. To her, something was wrong with a social order which failed to protect the “freedom” of someone like herself. The social order was “repressive” and hostile to freedom, she felt.

She is not alone. Millions agree with her. As a result, people are running wild, and the social order is perishing, because there is no vision. And there can only be vision if the Word of God is faithfully preached, and faithfully heeded.

There are many voices speaking today, and many things to listen to. Are you listening to the Word of God? Or are you, like that young woman, without vision, deliberately blinding yourself by neglecting the Word of God?

Entering Life

In Proverbs 30:20, we have a very important statement concerning sin. We are told, “Such is the way of an adulteress woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.” We can see plainly that adultery is condemned, but what does the reference to eating and wiping one’s mouth have to do with adultery? The meaning is this: a ship leaves no track in the seas after passing through, nor does an eagle leave a track in the sky to mark its flight. Similarly, when we eat, we may leave slight evidences of the food around our mouth, but a quick wiping of our mouth removes them.

The sinner treats sin as though it leaves no mark. The adulterer or adulteress regard past sins as easily wiped out as a bit of food on the corner of their mouths. What is past is past, they hold, and they see no wickedness in their attitude.

Thus Agur, in this proverb, is doing more than condemning adultery. Our sins are compounded when we treat them as something past and therefore nothing. Our sins are indeed forgiven when we are under Christ’s atonement, but the consequences of our sins remain. If, through my sin, I lose an arm, my arm does not grow back when I am converted. I remain a one-armed man. So too all our sins leave their mark. To deny this is to fail, like the adulterous woman, to treat sin seriously. Forgiveness gives us peace with the Lord, but the crippling of sin is a fact which remains. This is what our Lord meant when He declared that we should cut sin out of our lives even though it meant entering “life halt or maimed” (Matt. 18:8), because sin is death, and grace is life.

Excuses

One of the many things people fail to understand about God is that the Lord is no respecter of excuses. In Genesis 3:9–19, God makes it clear that He regards all excuses as only ground for condemnation and judgment.

Man can never approach God with anything other than perfect faith and obedience. This Jesus Christ has done in our stead, and, in addition to this, has given us grace to obey Him. We are thus required to give Him the obedience of faith, to recognize that we have been called, not to disobey God's law, but to obey it and to serve Him in every area of life.

But man prefers the way of excuses to the way of obedience. Our Lord ridiculed and condemned excuses in His parable of the unwilling guests, who made excuses to avoid the invitation. One man said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused." Another man said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused." And another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:16–20). Christ was emphatic that excuses not only have no standing with God but excite instead His anger.

Be sure of this, then, that God accepts no excuses for lack of faith and obedience, for failure to tithe, for failure to serve Him in all our ways, or for failure to know His Word. The Lord is no respecter of excuses.

A world which is governed by excuses is a dangerous one. It means that, if you feel that your sin has value to you, then you have an excuse for sin. It means that a worker is free to destroy or harm an employer's property if he dislikes his wages. It means that we excuse our children's delinquencies because we feel sorry for them, or love them.

In brief, excuses serve as a means of justifying sin, something God will not permit. God will, however, justify, by His sovereign grace, the repentant sinner. The world of excuses is the realm of sin justified. The world of grace is the realm of sinners justified and made a new creation in order "[t]hat the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4).

Choose your world, a world of irresponsibility and excuses, or the world of responsibility and righteousness. Your life depends on your choice.

The Right to Sin?

Is there a right to sin? The obvious answer, of course, is an emphatic no. The more important question, however, is this: do you act as though you had a right to sin?

Let me illustrate. A man who was a church officer, tithed faithfully, was always ready to do some extra work for the church and to help wherever needed, did something clearly in violation of God's law. Confronted with his deliberate sin, he excused himself to his pastor, saying, "I know it's wrong, but, when you figure how much I do for the Lord, I think I'm entitled to a little exemption now and then."

Another example: a devout woman, violating God's law also, gave a similar excuse. "I'm always serving the Lord in one way or another and always putting myself out for my family and my church. One sin shouldn't matter so much against all that!"

What both were saying was this: their good works had built up so much credit for them with God that they were entitled to chalk up a sin now and then. Their thinking was a good example of Phariseeism and a works religion, although they denied that they believed in salvation by works. All the same, in terms of their bookkeeping, they had supposedly earned the right to sin now and then.

Such thinking despises God and His law. It assumes that God owes us something for our good works, whereas it is we who owe God everything and can never put God in our debt. Our Lord taught us, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). Whatever God gives us is always an act of grace. He is the Lord and maker of all things. So we rightly sing, at the offertory, "We give thee but thine own, whatever gifts we bring."

Moreover, sin is not a right nor a privilege, but an offense, a way of death, whereas righteousness is not only a duty but the privileged way of life. To treat righteousness as a chore, and something to escape from, is to reveal very clearly that one's faith, at the very least, is seriously weak or defective.

How to Pollute Other People

I recall some years ago hearing of a man who had worked some years to solve an engineering problem, without success. Then, when he felt the solution was near and in a particular direction, he learned that someone else had just come up with the same invention, and patented it, having learned the answer almost by accident.

It would be easy for a man like that to be bitter. The broader view would be to say that all men are better off because a problem was solved faster, but not many of us are that thoughtful. However, we should be.

The Bible tells us that there is an easy way to pollute and distress many people, and to infect them with a sour view of life. In Hebrews 12:1–16, we are warned to look diligently at some areas of life where much trouble begins for individuals, churches, and communities. We should not fall back from the grace of God. It should be our constant strength and confidence. We should avoid fornication, and the profaneness of Esau, i.e., living outside of God and His Word, and thereby forfeiting our Christian birthright. Another warning is especially telling: we must beware of “any root of bitterness” which, growing up in us, will not only trouble us, but also defile and pollute those around us.

Bitterness is something we often nurse. We see the problems around us, the defeats we suffer, or our cause suffers, and we resent it. Bitterness is an intensely personal thing. We compare our hopes with our realities, and we feel our strong frustration with an intensity we cannot fully express.

Another man’s work thrives, while ours founders. Another woman’s child is a joy to see, and ours shames us and grieves us. We can make a long catalog of our problems and their unfairness. We may keep them to ourselves, but Scripture says that they still pollute or defile many.

Bitterness is like cancer. It grows unchecked, and after a point, it kills. At all times, it is destructive of life. Bitterness is also like a plague. It infects other people.

The answer is not “positive thinking” or psychological self-help. To avoid the root of bitterness, we must look diligently lest we “fail of the grace of God.” Instead of a defiling or polluting bitterness, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

However, if you want to pollute the people around you, justify, nurse, and coddle your bitterness. It will soon infect many people around you and make them as sour and hopeless as you are. Others will soon hold that cynicism is knowledge and faith is stupidity, and you will have become an effective missionary agent for pollution.

Your root of bitterness will put a killing blight on everything you work with, and it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. In brief, bitterness is an effective way of polluting and destroying the lives and hopes of those around you. Of course, your first victim will be yourself.

Contagion

You can catch a cold from your friends, but can you catch good health? The answer is very obviously, no. As God made clear to the prophet Haggai long ago, holiness is not contagious, but uncleanness and sin are (Hag. 2:10–14).

The fact is almost too obvious to be stated. Yet it must be repeated, because our generation has apparently forgotten that good apples can't change bad apples, but bad apples can affect the good ones. Parents often allow their children to move in very unclean circles, morally derelict groups. Then they justify it, saying, "My child can be a real influence for good there."

Can anyone be an influence for good when he is morally compromised to begin with? The degenerate philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau once accompanied a prostitute to her room, undressed, got in bed with her, and then tried to lecture her on the evil of her ways. He was in the wrong place and the wrong position for any such preaching.

Evil is contagious. Man as a fallen creature has, at his best, enough sin in him to respond to evil if he allows himself too much contact with it. Righteousness, however, is not contagious. It is a product of saving faith and a steady growth in holiness, in a process known as sanctification. Righteousness is a product of faith, discipline, and work.

A beautiful house can burn down in an hour. It takes weeks to build or rebuild it. The ease of evil's power is precisely in its destructiveness, and destruction is an easier process than construction.

It is for this reason that Scripture emphasizes godly discipline and, also, separation. We need discipline to school us in righteousness, and separation to avoid the contagion of evil.

There is no substitute for discipline. It is discipline which provides the muscles and power of moral character. Professional and amateur athletes alike require a disciplined training period in order to be able to compete successfully. We cannot expect less in the realm of morality. Spiritual exercises are as valuable in their area as physical exercises are to the athlete.

The idea, therefore, that contagion can produce health or character is nonsense. The Bible compares the discipline of faith and character to sowing a field. It takes time for the harvest to come, "but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward" (Prov. 11:18).

Faith in Injustice

There is a marked tendency on the part of modern man to be an injustice collector. Every occurrence of injustice is noted with triumph by such people, and they are always ready to give anyone a long list of the injustices around them.

They believe that life is a loaded deck, a raw deal, a sure defeat, or a senseless mess, because such a faith is their vindication. Roger Price has observed of such a person that he “believes in injustice, because in an unjust world he cannot be held responsible for his own failure as a person.”

Scripture makes clear, in Deuteronomy 28 and elsewhere, that justice governs the world, that, basic to all history, is God’s justice and grace. In any age, our problems are a result of sin, and the solution is faith and obedience. Because man is a sinner, he continually finds himself in the midst of crises and judgments which are the results of his sin.

This, man the sinner will not accept. Rather than believing in God, he prefers to believe that injustice rules the universe. To accept the government of God means for man to acknowledge that he is a sinner, and that he must submit to Almighty God as his only way of salvation. It means acknowledging his own injustice and sin and God’s justice and righteousness. This the sinner will not do.

He prefers to believe in injustice rather than God, because by this perverse faith he justifies himself. The universe, he holds, is evil, and this is why he suffers.

And so he becomes an injustice collector. He will with religious fervor and passion, recite the sins of the whole world, but not his own sins. His catalog of injustices is his way of self-justification. It excuses his irresponsibility and his sin. If the world is so evil, he holds, no one has a right to demand anything better of him than he gives them.

Remember, the injustice collector is not upset over the injustices of the world. He believes in injustice in preference to God. He has fallen so low in his self-righteousness that he has no justification except by means of injustice.

Beware lest he infect you. Not injustice but the omnipotent and sovereign God alone rules the universe, and all His ways are righteousness.

False Cures

It is possible to cure a headache by blowing out your brains, but I would not recommend it to anyone. On the other hand, some relief can be had, but no cure at all, for some kinds of cancer with salves or ointments, but such remedies solve nothing.

False and inappropriate cures are what Jeremiah talked about in 6:14 and 8:11 (and repeatedly elsewhere), declaring, “For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

The basic problem of the nation was sin, apostasy from God, but on all sides the answers given were either suicidal or trifling. Instead of facing up to the religious and moral roots of their problem, the people sought suicidal military or cheap political answers. Against this Jeremiah protested.

Our world is like Jeremiah’s. Few want to face up to the real problem. Politics was important to Jeremiah, and it should be to us, but politics cannot save us. If the people are apostate and immoral, they will elect men in their own image. My cousin’s wife was recently a member of a delegation of farm women meeting with a nationally prominent elected official. She found quickly that his every word and act was governed, not by justice or truth, but self-promotion and an eye on votes. Such men, being bad trees, can only give us bad fruit, as our Lord made clear (Matt. 7:15–20).

Moreover, the cures proposed by such men are the same as those Jeremiah condemned in his day. They are either suicidal or useless. Scripture tells us that men outside of Christ, men in rebellion against God, are spiritually dead, and they are judicially condemned or dead in God’s sight. Dead men cannot produce life or salvation but only corruption. The corruption of the body politic will thus continue until there is a change in the people, conversion. Until then, all the cures will be false ones, suicidal, trifling, and corrupting.

Barking

An old Russian proverb makes a good point with a touch of humor: “A dog is wiser than a woman: he won’t bark at his master.” The point is well taken. A dog has better sense than to bark at the man who feeds and cares for him; too many women fail to show as much sense in dealing with their husbands. The same is true of all too many men, who bark at the one person most loyal to them, their wife.

The Bible takes words seriously: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). Thoughtless words can hurt “like the piercings of a sword” (Prov. 12:18), where “[p]leasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Prov. 16:24). Life with a sharp-tongued person is almost unbearable. As Solomon said, “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling [or argumentative] woman in a wide house” (Prov. 21:9). Of the virtuous woman, King Lemuel said, “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Prov. 31:26).

All this is familiar to most of us, but few things are less heeded in our day than the advice of Solomon, “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccles. 5:2). Talk is cheap nowadays, perhaps because men themselves are cheap. International treaties are regularly negotiated which are broken almost before the ink is dry. Men and women take marriage vows and then treat them as worthless if their desires return contrary to their vows. Because the hearts of men are corrupt, their words and actions reflect their inner corruption.

The purpose of words is communication, but when words are used thoughtlessly and heartlessly, they destroy communication. Instead of bringing people closer together, words then divide men.

Let us look again at that Russian proverb: “A dog is wiser than a woman: he won’t bark at his master.” If all dogs started barking at and attacking their masters, dogs would soon be worthless, because their whole purpose would be violated and destroyed. When women bark at their husbands, and husbands at their wives, the same destruction occurs. Social order is destroyed, and the basic relationship of life is wiped out by stupid and senseless words.

Done any barking lately?

A word to wise husbands: Don’t go quoting this Russian proverb to your wife, or you may end up very sorry. Watch your own tongue!

Salvation by Nagging

My barber was telling me this morning of his first return to his homeland after becoming an American citizen. He had migrated here when seventeen years old. Seven years later, he returned to Italy, to Naples, to see his mother.

While there, a state official tried to order Frank around, assuming him to be a local boy. With more than a little pleasure, Frank told him off in no uncertain terms, refused to obey him, and, after a mutual shouting match, declared that neither he, nor Mussolini, nor King Victor Emmanuel could make him do it. At this point, the official guessed the truth. Frank was an American citizen, a free man who could not be pushed around by any bureaucrat. It's getting harder to be free like that even in America now, Frank felt.

Well, there are still many who speak their piece, and who are not afraid to stand up to petty tyrants and bureaucrats. The loss of freedom we are witnessing is not for lack of speaking. The books, articles, speeches, and sermons on what is wrong, or warning us against evil, can fill libraries, and they have done us little good.

Men are not saved by talking, nor by warnings, nor by endless fact-finding investigations. Many women believe that they can save their husbands by nagging them. Salvation by nagging is a modern article of faith, and more than women believe in it. On all sides of the political fences, in Congress, through the pulpit, school, and press, the basic presupposition seems to be a very simple one: people can be saved if they are nagged enough.

Few ideas are more ridiculous and yet more popular. What nagging involves is a faith in ourselves, in the power of our arguments to save. Therefore, we talk on and on, hoping we will eventually be heard and salvation brought forth.

The Bible makes clear that salvation is the act of God and His sovereign grace. Our response to God's grace cannot be a wind of words but active obedience. "[F]aith without works is dead" (James 2:26). As our Lord expressed it, "[E]very good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17).

Our problem today is not a lack of people speaking out, but a lack of people with faith, bringing forth the fruit of faith.

Examine yourself. Do you by your actions show that your trust is in salvation by nagging? Or do you show that you, as a Christian, know that only changed men can change the world?

Tolerance

When I moved some years ago into a major urban area, it took me a while to get used to street noises and night sounds. Because they were unfamiliar sounds, I heard them all. In a year's time, I was so accustomed to them that I heard none of them.

Then, when I moved into this mountain area out in the country, I heard the coyotes howling night after night. Very soon, I ceased to hear them. Last summer, when our daughter-in-law remarked about the nightly serenade by coyotes, I realized that I had not heard them for a few years: it was too familiar a night noise for me to be conscious of, in the slightest degree.

Now this illustrates why we cannot use our feelings and experience as a test or standard. We readily develop a tolerance for many things. Our tolerance for pornography, national corruption, profanity, and sin in general has greatly increased in the past generation. Things once held to be intolerable are now hardly noticed. What was once shocking on television, for example, is now tame fare, and what once destroyed a politician's career is today no problem.

In brief, our level of tolerance is a false standard. This is why Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). We cannot use our thoughts and feelings as a standard: only God's Word is the test. We ourselves readily develop a tolerance towards sin and evil: God's Word remains the unceasingly clear and uncompromising Word.

The result of becoming tolerant towards sin is that we become intolerant towards God and His Word.

Tolerance and Intolerance

A friend was accused of intolerance by an associate because he expressed his opposition to various sexual offenses. He was briefly troubled by this charge until he suddenly realized that this accuser was himself savagely intolerant, intolerant in his case of Christianity.

Intolerance is inescapable. If we are Christians and abide by Scripture, we will be intolerant towards murder, theft, adultery, false witness, and other offenses against God's order. They will be to us a violation of our freedom and order under God, and an oppression of godly men.

If, on the other hand, we are sinners and lawbreakers by nature, we will be intolerant of God and His people, intolerant of godly laws and restraints precisely because we tolerate and love sin.

Our Lord stated the issues clearly: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24). It is necessary for us to love God and His Word, and, if we are regenerate, it is our nature to do so. This means that we therefore hate sin and regard it as an offense against God and man and an intolerable violation of godly order which must be eliminated.

Similarly, those who hate God want to eliminate Him, and us, and everything which is an aspect of God's law and order and Word from their universe. They are savagely and bitterly intolerant.

In other words, what you tolerate says a great deal about you. It identifies your loyalties and your love, and it classifies your nature clearly. Men are known, not only by their fruits, but also by their love and hate, their tolerance and intolerance.

Moral Standards

Almost daily someone reports to me that they heard someone argue that abortions, homosexuality, mercy killings, and much, much more are perfectly all right, and that Christians have no right to force their moral standards on other people.

Recently I encountered the same argument in another area, in *New York Magazine*. A prominent advertising executive has condemned people who feel some things are more important than others. For example, he insisted that colored toilet seats are a very important matter. He declared, in an interview, “I say that it matters that toilet seats are colored. Those people who say that these are only marginal differentiations are full of s—; they are legislating their moral systems on other people.”

In other words, there are no standards. If I say that the color of a new shirt is more important than a man’s life, then no man has a right to disagree, for to do so is to legislate “their moral systems on other people.” But it isn’t a question of my moral system, or yours, but God’s. There is an objective standard of right and wrong established by God’s Word, and I cannot be judge over it: it judges me and all men. There is a hierarchy of values in God’s universe: I cannot place my interests, whether they be important to me or not, above those things which God declares to be important. God by right of creation legislates for all men.

That advertising executive was guilty of trying to legislate his moral system, a very bad one, on other people, and to overthrow God’s law. Of course, all he has done is to make a fool of himself.

Scripture declares: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). The kindest thing you can say for that advertising man is that there is no light in him, nor much sense either.

A Test of Man

According to Proverbs 27:21, “As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.” The Berkeley Version translates it, “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by what he praises.”

A man recently told me that hippies represent the most alert and intelligent element in our population; he also held that our universities are doing an excellent job in educating youth into better knowledge and fewer concepts of liberty. He then went on to maintain that the Biblical faith represents one of the main obstacles for human progress. This man believed that he was passing intelligent judgments on the nature of things, but, instead, he was judging himself, for “a man is tested by what he praises.”

The praise of folly has become a mark of “wisdom” in this age of fools. This is not surprising. As guilty men, and as fools, they must justify their course of action by calling folly wisdom. As Solomon noted, in Proverbs 14:9, “The bond between foolish men is guilt, but between the upright it is good-will” (Berkeley Version). As a result, these guilty fools praise foolish art, perverse literature, satanic politics, and every evil course.

But it is not only the evil who are tested by what they praise: it is the godly also. How often have we been ready to praise that which deserves praise? Some will say that this is too obvious a point, but it still remains true that most of us are more ready to criticize than to praise. How often do we commend or praise our husband, wife, parents, children, friends, leaders, and others deserving praise?

A musician, who once refused, when questioned, to praise another musician, said privately to a friend, “That would be admitting that he is better than I am.” We criticize because we feel superior, rather than judging right judgment, criticizing in terms of God’s law. We refuse to praise, because we dare not admit superiority, *quale*, or gratitude. But “a man is tested by what he praises,” and all of us are daily indebted to those around us for their help and their readiness to stand with us in terms of our faith. To deny to others their due praise and gratitude is not to rob them, for God will be their reward, but it is a judgment on ourselves. Never forget, “a man is tested by what he praises.”

Envy

Two years ago I met a rookie professional basketball player; for sitting on the bench, he was being paid \$104,000 a year. Everyone thought it was wonderful that a young man, from a minority group, was doing so well. Some friends took me to dinner in a Los Angeles restaurant; at the next table there sat a very popular man in the world of entertainment who usually makes several hundred thousand dollars a year at a minimum. He is very widely admired. All well and good. If these men render services worth that much to people, then they have earned their pay.

What bothers me is this: if a small farmer makes \$15 to \$30,000 a year with hard and steady work, he is called an exploiter of farm workers, an enemy of social progress, and some other things less polite. Again, if a very able businessman makes \$25 to \$75,000 a year, he is a capitalistic leech and an enemy of mankind. Why the difference in attitudes?

Why this hatred of the real producers in our society? Why is it right for one man to do well, but not for another? Our politicians have very good incomes. Why do they regard it as criminal for others to have a good return on their work?

Scripture tells us that “[a] sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones” (Prov. 14:30). A sound heart here means a life based clearly on the Lord and His Word; it means a relaxed and trusting heart. To live in such a faith means life and health. An envious heart destroys a man’s “bones,” the structure of his life, and he turns with hatred against all who have structure in their lives. The envious seek to destroy what they cannot tolerate and do not have the faith and character to develop.

The envious thus can indulge and tolerate the athlete’s and entertainer’s wealth. They cannot tolerate the success of good and honest working men, because such success points to the need for patience, work, and discipline in themselves. Our Lord put His finger on the cause: “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (Matt. 20:15). He made clear to the Pharisees that, indeed, their reaction to Him was evil precisely because He was good. The immoral hate the moral; the ungodly hate the godly; the unproductive hate the productive; and those who want the world to give them a living hate those whose lives make clear that their way is false.

Our problems begin in sin. Their answers begin with regeneration. Today we are trying to solve too many problems by encouraging envy. We solve nothing thereby, and we destroy much.

Fence Breakers

One of the very distressing things which I so often encounter is the large number of people these days who are demanding justice when they should be asking for mercy. Again and again, people who are themselves guilty of wrongdoing can only think of the wrongs, often very real and fearful wrongs, done them. But the old saying remains true: he who lies down with dogs will rise up with fleas. We cannot associate with thieves without being robbed; we cannot break laws without being broken ourselves finally.

Solomon stated it clearly: “[W]hoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him” (Eccles. 10:8). Let us examine its meaning. In ancient Israel, fences were usually hedge fences: a man surrounded his field, vineyard, or orchard with a thick, impenetrable living fence. This hedge-fence then became a nesting place for small game, for birds, animals, and, of course, snakes. Poisonous snakes found the hedge-fence a wonderful place to live: cool, shady, and full of food.

Now and then a bad neighbor would try to let his cattle or livestock into a neighbor’s field for some free feed. The only way to do this was by breaking or chopping through the hedge-fence in the darkness of night to give his livestock a chance for a good feed in a grain field before morning’s light. There was one serious drawback to this dishonesty: the likelihood of snakebite in the dark, while breaking through the hedge-fence, was very, very great. No one could try such a trick more than a time or two without getting bit.

Now Solomon made a telling point by means of this fact: “[W]hoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.” Every kind of fence, especially and particularly God’s law, which is a fence to protect godly society, has within it a judgment on its fence breakers. Those who break God’s law will find that out of that law will come a judgment against them. In other words, there is a hidden, lurking penalty in every act of lawbreaking. The very nature of God’s world of law is that every law has a hidden penalty for its violation, a hidden serpent which strikes at the trespasser.

Have you broken any of God’s fences lately?

A lot of fences, God’s laws, are being broken, and a lot of people are too feverishly busy breaking down the law to see that serpent of divine judgment striking at them with death in its fangs. The wages of sin are still death; the gift of God’s mercy is eternal life.

Is Chastity Obsolete?

A recent article on sexual morality declared that we are in the midst of a sexual revolution which is calling into question moral standards which a generation ago most Americans were in agreement about. Now something new has supposedly appeared—a contempt for virginity, premarital sexual intercourse, babies born out of wedlock and the mothers brazen about it, and so on. The article has one major defect. It is rubbish.

I have lived a few decades, enough to have seen the same things advocated in every one of them. I have read enough books to know that powerful movements in the United States championed all those things in the last century and in Europe back through the centuries. I refuse to believe that suddenly the sky is falling and that our moral standards are changing. I recall reading books and articles saying the same thing many years ago. I also recall that, as a student, I heard the same story all the way through school.

In my opinion, in some areas we have greatly improved, and in other areas, we have declined somewhat. The basic problem, however, which all these writers forget is that in every age, sin has always been popular with sinners. In every age, sinners act as though they newly discovered sin and that it is some kind of gold mine to make mankind free and happy.

Adam and Eve thought that they had stumbled onto a great new thing when they first sinned, but it was far from original even with them. The devil had discovered it first. Adam and Eve also thought that it was a great cure-all which would make them gods and enable them to determine right and wrong for themselves (Gen. 3:5).

Adam and Eve found that their new freedom was in reality slavery, and the sinners of every generation find that their supposedly new and exciting sin is simply the old slavery.

In 1922, when men were talking about the new freedom to sin, that delightful cynic H. L. Mencken expressed his doubts about the whole matter. He regarded the matter as more talk than reality. In his later years, when the Kinsey Report was published, he added, “I see nothing in the Kinsey Report to change my conclusions here. All that humorless document really proves is: (a) that all men lie when they are asked about their adventures in amour, and (b) that pedagogues are singularly naïve and credulous creatures.”

The matter is more serious than that, of course. But the truth is that sin is always popular with sinners, whether they sin in thought or deed. It has always had its press agents to promote it and to spread the idea that sin is the new way of life. In reality, the God-ordained family has prospered in every generation, and it is doing so today. I do not see virginity, chastity, or marriage as things which will disappear but rather that they will endure and triumph. Sinners since Adam and Eve have thought that their way means a new world. They find instead that it destroys the only real world there is, and it destroys them also.

Hypocrites

The word hypocrite comes from the classical Greek and meant one who played a part on the stage. A hypocrite was an actor who wore a mask to represent a character; the feelings and ideas he expressed were not his own, because he was simply acting.

The meaning of hypocrite has not really changed since then. A hypocrite is a man who pretends to be something he is not; he is an actor, playing a part.

The modern hypocrite plays a part and pretends to be something he is not in order to mislead other people. He believes himself to be superior to other people and able to fool them. He claims, for example, to be a champion of equality; all men are equal, only some men, as Orwell noted, are more “equal” than others, and he is one of these superior ones. He believes in charity, but with other people’s money and tax funds. He bleeds for the poor and hungry when it will bring votes, not because he cares. He pretends to be a Christian, but only because it is respectable to be one. Our Lord said of such men, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:27–28).

As in our Lord’s day, the church and especially the clergy is full of hypocrites. They profess to be Christians, but in their hearts they despise the faith and in their actions they reveal their dedication to revolution. They preach alien gospels and subvert the Scriptures and piously claim to be the real Christians and the true church.

In politics also we are overwhelmed with hypocrites. They profess to be for capital, labor, or the farmer, but the state and federal governments grow richer and more powerful, and the people’s properties grow more uncertain steadily. The more these politicians work to “save” us, the deeper we are in trouble.

How shall we be rid of hypocrites? By refusing to be hypocrites ourselves. The woman who is impressed by a clotheshorse is a woman who is trying to be one herself. The “con man” never ends up with any money; he himself is an easy target for get-rich-quick schemes. The hypocrite is a salesman selling an idea, a false front, or himself, and so he is most impressed by more professional false fronts. Hypocrisy feeds on hypocrisy. Hypocrites get into the pulpit easily, when there are many hypocrites in the pew, and hypocrites gain votes readily for public office when they have millions of hypocrites to vote for them. St. James summoned believers to be “full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality [i.e., without wrangling], and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). Help stamp out hypocrisy: live honestly before God and man, in faith and in obedience to God’s law.

Religious Hypochondriacs

At some time or other, you have probably known a hypochondriac who spent all his time worrying about his health. If the hypochondriac hears about someone's sickness, or a new disease, he begins to imagine that he has all the symptoms himself.

I heard once of one man who carried a medical thermometer and regularly took his temperature, always fearful of some germ or other. This is an extreme case, of course, but, in one form or another, the hypochondriac is familiar to most of us.

There are, however, religious hypochondriacs as well. They spend their time endlessly taking their spiritual temperature, worrying about imagined sins and persistently fretting about real ones. Such religious hypochondriacs are so absorbed with their spiritual condition that they accomplish next to nothing in applying the faith.

One Catholic, who wearied all his confessors with his endless use of the confessional, was indignant on being told by a priest that sin would be less a problem if obedience were as great a concern to him as sinning was. A Protestant woman, who neglected her ordinary household duties to fret over her sins, became a deadly and vicious enemy to her pastor when he suggested that growth as a Christian would come more readily by doing her daily duties than by fretting over her spiritual "problems."

Just as some hypochondriacs, to see perhaps whether they are alive or not, are given to taking their own pulse, so the religious hypochondriacs are always taking their spiritual pulse.

The hypochondriac who worries over his health has "mental" problems. So, too, the religious hypochondriac is also "sick." In both cases, there is a preference for anything other than health. There is an absorption with what is wrong rather than a concern for what true health requires.

Our Lord declared, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Matt. 6:27). And who, by fretting, can overcome poor health or overcome sins?

Moreover, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). A man who through Christ has redemption has peace with God. He enjoys good spiritual health and brings forth fruit or results in terms of it. He does not fret. He acts and produces.

The religious hypochondriac acts as though he is more sensitive and hence more superior. In reality, he reveals that they lack "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11) which is a product of God's redeeming and chastening work in our lives.

Slander

My daughter telephoned home one noon, very much upset. A girl had told her that George Washington was a scoundrel who had fathered fourteen illegitimate children and had died of venereal diseases. Was this true? I assured her that it absolutely was not. Tell the girl, I said, that your father has Washington's collected works and has read them as well as many works about him, and there is not only no truth in such a vicious lie but Washington was a man of remarkably disciplined character and great moral integrity; ask her for evidence. Of course, she had none.

I spoke in one city on Washington's Birthday, and the history supervisor in the public schools refused to attend, saying, "Why listen to a lot of sugarcoating for one of our worst scoundrels?" When asked for evidence for her statement, she walked away.

How, my daughter asked, do all these foul stories about great and good men get started? These people, I said, being themselves depraved, like to drag godly people down to their own level by their slanders. ("That fits this girl," she replied.) Remember, I reminded her, what Solomon said, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Prov. 26:11; 2 Pet. 2:22). These people love dirt, and they dirty everything they touch.

Solomon also said, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Prov. 18:21), or, as the Moffatt freely translates the latter part of the verse, "the talkative must take the consequences." Our Lord was even more blunt, "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36).

Remember, therefore, before you repeat slander, or before you become party to idle words, that they have serious consequences. Talk may be cheap, but the payoff is costly. Are you prepared to pay the price?

The Love of a Lie

When I was a very young boy, I heard a story of a country pastor who, on a warm summer morning while preaching, noticed that many parishioners were either asleep or inattentive. He therefore began to say, “To illustrate my point, let me tell you of something I saw while coming home from the county seat by a back road. There was a big sow in a pasture with a litter of green pigs. The farmer was working near the fence, and I stopped to ask him about these unusual pigs. He said he could not explain it, but that this sow always gave birth to green pigs, and they stayed green for quite a while before changing color.”

At this point, the old pastor stopped and looked around. Every man was wide awake, and all eyes were attentively fixed on him. “My point is this,” he said, “while I was declaring to you the Word of God, the word of life, you were inattentive or asleep. Now that I have been telling you a silly and whopping lie, you are all ears, all awake. Such is the heart of man more open to lies than to the truth of God.”

The point was a good one. Too often, the best of Christians responds more readily to malicious gossip, to lies, and to nonsense than to the truth of God. A diet of bad or poor food will make us physically sick, and a diet of lies and rubbish will make us mentally sick, and it indeed has.

In Revelation 22:15, we are told that those outside God’s eternal Kingdom, those who are denied access to the tree of life, are “whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” A preference for the lie is a mark of reprobation and of it at the very least a strong disposition to evil.

In one community, a lie was spread rapidly about a person of prominence and character. It was obviously false, and everyone knew it, but it spread all the same. People would say, “Did you hear what they say about Mr. Blank? Of course, I know it isn’t true, but isn’t it interesting!” Such people were as guilty of lying as the person who invented the story. They delighted in a lie, and they delighted in seeing a godly man besmirched.

Scripture, however, summons us to see things differently and to be different. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10). We as the people of God are given to a different idea of pleasure. David said, “Delight thyself also in the LORD,” whose grace is such that “he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

Every time you hear a lie, and every time you hear the truth, you yourself are tested. Is it the lie or the truth which commands your attention?

The Unwashed Generation

We all have our frustrating conversations, trying to talk to someone who will not hear a word we say. I talked recently with a young man who did not hear a word I had to say: he was too busy thinking up new charges to hurl against his parents. According to him, they were the most stupid, reactionary, vicious, and thoughtless of people. I knew his parents: unusually capable and loving people, whose real fault was supporting this son, twenty-five years old, out of school, refusing to work, and endlessly demanding money. He had left home (with money) for a while to live in a “hippy pad,” but he contracted several diseases and ran home to get medical care, better food, and a better hangout for himself and his narcotic-consuming friends. There was something wrong with the parents: they should have thrown the boy out. But who was the boy to criticize them? The boy, really a man by age, was full of ideas on how the whole world and his parents should be reformed, but at any suggestion of reforming himself, getting a job, taking a bath, or the like, he screamed obscene insults at his parents.

I had another such conversation, if you can call it that, with a minister. He quivered with hatred while professing to believe in love. The whole world had to be remade to suit him. The people who, in disgust, had left the church he served were in his eyes an ugly breed of hatemongers: it was their duty, he felt, to sit and listen to his attacks on them. But his answer to any criticism, or a suggestion that he might be wrong, was a stream of abuse.

Solomon described such people long ago: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). The word “filthiness” is a polite translation; another polite translation is “dung.” In the previous verse, Solomon described the people as “a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother” (Prov. 30:11); it has no respect for its inheritance.

Thus, a perverse generation despises its parents and past, is self-righteous, criticizes all save itself, and refuses to conform itself to the Word of God. Such a generation is characterized by haughtiness and pride, Solomon went on to say, but it is also a generation only able to “devour” and destroy (Prov. 30:13–14).

Such a generation is with us. All the more therefore must we, who love the Lord, be a generation cleansed by Christ’s atonement, faithful to His Word, and given to meeting our responsibilities under God. Where there is destruction, there must be reconstruction.

A Letter to a Sleepy Friend

Some letters I never answer. With hundreds of letters to answer every month, it is impossible to answer them all. Moreover, writing to some people is like trying to talk to a sleepy friend: he listens out of politeness, but he is more asleep than awake.

Some people are too sleepy to talk to. I was amazed last night to hear a farmer say that Chavezⁱ was no problem, and that everybody is always exaggerating everything. Let the farm workers be organized by Chavez; the government won't let them ruin the farmers, he maintained.

Back to this friend: as far as he is concerned, everything is wonderful. So we have hippies, well, his children are not going to go that way. Crime on the street and growing lawlessness? He hasn't been bothered, so why worry? Do we have bombings and riots? The world always has crackpots.

Nothing bothers him much, unless it is that tire that blew out on a back road. Changing it, he lost his temper, dirtied his suit, and was late. To hear him talk, the tire manufacturers were plotting against him. You see, nothing much bothers him unless it affects him. Then he blows his stack. There is an old-fashioned word for his frame of mind, and it is sin. Everything is fine, until his ox is gored. Such people are asleep to everything except their own selfish interests. Let them sleep.

The best letter to a sleepy friend, who wants nothing except sleep, is no letter at all. None are so blind as they who will not see. Our Lord advised us against wasting our time with such people: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matt. 7:6).

In a world with so many ready to hear, why waste words on the willfully deaf? Christ's words are against such a waste of words: "And where no one welcomes you or listens to your message, leave that house or town and shake the dust off your feet" (Matt. 10:14, Berkeley Version).

Do you get the message? Our Lord said, in effect, work where it counts, where you are likely to get results. Christ, as "Lord of the harvest," wants results. We had better think realistically then about "redeeming the time," using it wisely unto the Lord. There will be a strict accounting before the Lord.

Solitude

Back in the 1930s, a famous actress was well-known for her insistence on avoiding people. “I want to be alone” was her motto. Not surprisingly, this same actress, then and until her death, was known also as an unhappy woman.

Being in a crowd or in a group does not ensure happiness any more than being alone can give it to us. Happiness is not a product of either people or the absence of people. We cannot find happiness either by avoiding people or by mingling endlessly with people or by following the crowd.

All the same, happiness is not a product of being alone, and it is in some sense related to a life shared with others. An old French saying sums up the matter tellingly: “All things can be learned in solitude except character.” Knowledge, wisdom, skills, and much else can be gained from solitude, but not character. While character is not a social product, its testing and growth require society.

Our character is given its direction by our faith or lack of faith in the triune God. Our faith in Christ sets the direction of our growth. The extent of our growth then depends on our continuing relationship with God and man.

The Bible, from cover to cover, gives us commandments which govern our relationship to God and to man, and our sanctification, our growth in grace, holiness, peace, strength, and happiness, depend on our growth in our relationships with God and with man. There can be no sanctification in isolation from either God or man.

Not surprisingly, people who avoid God and man, who want to be “free” from religion and parental and social obligations, are also very unhappy people. They are rebelling against the very context of happiness and growth. There is a very high suicide rate among these so-called “free people” and with good reason.

There is neither growth, nor peace, nor happiness in solitude. By trying to escape from responsibility to God and to man, they are also escaping from life itself, because life is responsibility. It is a community of God and men. It is growth, and it is problems. In hell there is no community. It is the totality of solitude.

Attempts therefore to “get away from it all” are quests for death. Life is not solitude. We may die alone if we choose, but we cannot be born alone or live alone. We are a part of God’s world and the community He created.

How to Insure Trouble

The Rev. T. Robert Ingram tells an amusing story of his World War II experiences in the Navy in the Pacific. As they moved into action, the ship's commander, about to experience his first battle, addressed the crew grandly, like a Lord Nelson, over the public address system. Then came the great movement, and with solemnity the order was given: "Fire one, fire two," and so on.

Then there came a wild burst of profanity over the public address system, followed by the commander's plaintive shout, "The dirty so and so is shooting back at me!" War becomes a little less grand and operatic when that happens!

That man clearly has a great many spiritual brothers and sisters. I recall one woman, whose sharp, acid tongue made any gathering or meeting she attended a potentially trying and painful experience, fall apart in tears and rage when she heard herself criticized. It was well and good for her to shoot down everyone else, but it suddenly became nasty and unchristian when one person spoke up to her.

She was not and is not alone. The world is full of people who are bent on making trouble but who want no part of it themselves. They will talk sharply of one and all, but they cannot bear to be criticized.

Solomon characterized such people as fools: "He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears" (Prov. 26:17). To catch a passing dog by the ears is to ask for a dog bite and to deserve it.

Have you been bitten lately? Don't blame the dog. Maybe you asked for it. If you take a poke at a man, don't be surprised if he takes it unkindly and hits back. The meddler asks for trouble; he deserves to get it. The person who gossips will be gossiped about. To pick a fight is a good way of getting one. To be surprised at the consequences is to be a fool.

As Spurgeon observed, "In any business, never wade into water where you cannot see the bottom ... Beware of no man more than yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us."

The Depths of Satan

In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, our Lord sharply condemned those in Thyatira who felt that to be a Christian, it was necessary to know “the depths of Satan” (Rev. 2:24), or the deep things of Satan. It is very important for us to know what He meant by this.

Many church members felt that it was their duty to study and document endlessly all the activities of Satan and of evil men. They became experts on evil, on conspiracies, on corruption, and on every movement against God and His Son. Christ had ordered His followers to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19–20). The task of the believer is to teach and to rebuild as God in Christ converts him and others through him.

Tragically, too many church members, like those condemned by our Lord at Thyatira, neglect their calling in order to study and document evil. In the early church, such people soon withdrew from church into the Gnostic movement, a pretended Christian, but actually radically humanistic, movement. These Gnostics held that, in order to protect themselves against Satan and his hosts, it was important to know the names of the demons. As a result, they memorized the names, or supposed names, of many demons as a means of protection. They also investigated various kinds of sins to arm themselves with knowledge against them. According to Dr. Robert M. Grant, in a study on Gnosticism, some Gnostics argued “that ‘perfect knowledge’ was simply to do ‘everything’ without fear.” Thus they became practitioners of the evil they were supposedly against.

I submit that we have a similar problem today. Many misguided people spend time and money studying evil, documenting conspiracies, endlessly probing “the depths of Satan.” They cease to become useful members of society: they are simply experts on evil. They often believe more in the power of evil than in the power of God.

In Thyatira, our Lord tells us that such people ended up as followers of “that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess” and who was seducing the people from Christ and the law (Rev. 2:20). Christ’s promise to all such people was and is judgment and death (Rev. 2:22–23).

Now, what about you? Are you majoring in evil, or are you doing the Lord’s work? Are you a force for righteousness, or merely a person with a nose for dirt and evil? Will yours be a life misspent in studying evil, or a life spent in knowing and applying God’s Word, so that when you die, men and women will arise to call you blessed, and Christ will say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21).

Irrelevant Preaching

Some years ago, during the middle of a winter night, a farmhouse caught fire. The family barely escaped with their lives. The housewife, a very neat and precise woman who always wanted everything just right, paused for a second as they dashed with their children through the hot, smoke-filled living room to the safety of the out-of-doors. To her husband's amazement, she automatically reached out and straightened a picture that was hanging crooked on the wall, and then dashed through the door to safety. Their house and all their belongings were lost, but at least her picture was hanging straight when it burned up!

I am reminded of that story when I listen to some preachers. The flames of destruction are licking at their world, and the walls of discipline, which are the mainstay of any civilization, are crashing down around them, and they are busy straightening pictures on a burning wall. One minister spent a morning recently preaching against the rise of "gosh" and "darn." Another spent the evening hour preaching against the miniskirt and dress.

Is this what men are called by God to do? Is this the gospel, or the great commission given to all Christians? Are we to preach on trifles, or do we truly have a great commission?

In the Great Commission, Jesus declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18-20). This is the joyful news the church must proclaim: all power and authority is given to Christ the King, who rules absolutely over heaven and earth. Christians are members of a victorious and conquering army.

Next, Jesus ordered His followers to go and teach all nations, and to baptize them in the name of the triune God. The commission calls for bringing "all nations" under the authority of Christ, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The law of God must be taught and required of all men and nations. Men and nations must be converted to Christ and brought under His dominion.

As the church assumes this calling, Christ assures the church of His presence: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Will Christ's conquering power and presence be with those who spend their time preaching trifles, or will He not rather protect, prosper, and lead into victory those who march in terms of the Great Commission?

A derailed train is useless: so is a derailed church.

The Return to Barbarism

Her home is a lovely one, in a superior neighborhood. She prides herself on being a good parent, and she insists that her two teenage children bring in every kind of schoolmate, especially the ones who are regarded as socially unacceptable, more or less delinquent, and wild. As a good liberal, this woman holds that she can help people by being good to them.

Recently, she returned home to find her place burglarized. Police said the thieves obviously knew what was in the house and where to get it. Neighbors reported that some of the usual teenagers had been around the place, but the neighbors did not know that Mrs. B—— was gone.

The woman was not angry. In fact, she was more than a little thrilled and excited by it all. She was definitely not angry at whichever teenagers were guilty. Instead, she kept saying, What drove them to it? How terrible, she maintained, that our culture drives its greatest resource, youth, to such delinquency. We are all guilty, she held, and we must all somehow make it up to our underprivileged youth. If the thieves were caught, she would not prosecute. As each day passed, she developed a progressively more self-righteous glow over submitting to evil and then calling evil good.

The sad fact is that this is not an isolated case. I have run across three like situations recently. Worse than a thief is someone who justifies a thief and calls evil good. The teenage thieves took some valuable property. The woman struck at the moral foundations of society by denying personal responsibility.

To deny personal responsibility is to turn to paganism and barbarism. The savage witch doctor, in diagnosing a sick man's problem, held that someone had cast an evil spell on him, and whomever he named was killed. In this country, the Iroquois Indians killed many innocent Indians whenever a medicine man accused some tribal member of causing the illness of another. When liberals and sociologists blame society and our culture instead of the individual, they are turning the clock back to barbarism.

Our politicians are doing the same. They tell us society is to blame, or the parents, or our supposedly animal past, and so on. The language is supposedly scientific, but the meaning is the old barbarism of the witch doctor, of the days when a father was put to death for the crime of his son, and a child for the crime of his father. Sometimes a city was sentenced to death for the offense of one or two citizens.

As against this, the Bible declares emphatically, as law for men and nations, "every man shall be put to death [that is, suffer punishment] for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16); "every one shall die for his own iniquity" (Jer. 31:30); "[t]he fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers" (Deut. 24:16). To deny personal responsibility is to turn to paganism and barbarism.

Mrs. B—— feels that she is very enlightened and progressive. In reality, she might as well run around naked with a piece of bone through her nose. Her thinking is on the level of the savages.

Charity Begins at Home

Twice lately, friends have asked me about charitable causes their women's guild and church group have become involved in. Let us call these charities the Friends of the Whoopee Indians and the Christian Mission to Ivy League Hopheads. What did I think of them? Not much, I had to admit. Why? First, I said, I have a low opinion of both groups, and second, true charity begins at home.

What did I mean by that? Simply this: if a group wants to be charitable, look around first of all. How many elderly people are there who could use help? I have rarely seen a church in which some elderly couple could not use friendly help. In many cases, the wife is ill, and housework and shopping are a problem. Or the wife has a very sick husband and needs help and relief from time to time.

Again, there usually are mothers who have a deserting husband and many children, who could use more than a little help with the children, and with gifts of clothing and food, from time to time.

The friends who asked the questions would be happy to see their church groups active in such areas, but it is not likely to happen. If you send food, clothing, or money off to another city, state, or continent, you are not personally involved. However, if you help old Mr. Smith with the housework, and the care of his bedridden wife, you are personally and continuously involved. Mr. Smith needs help week in and week out. You know then that you and your friends are always needed, and this spells responsibility and a burden.

To get involved with the poor and needy in your own church, and in your community, means that you have assumed a burden directly and personally. Instead of the glow you get when you send off money or food elsewhere, you get a continuous job, and maybe a backache, and who wants that? Not many church members, you can be sure.

But real charity begins at home with direct and personal involvement. Then you have responsible, not sentimental, charity. Then too when you extend your charity beyond your own community, you are going to be responsibly Christian, not sentimental. The charity of Phariseism is against involvement.

Are you and your church Pharisees?

Poverty by Choice

I have before me a book I highly prize. It was first published in 1875. My copy is an edition of 1928. The author was one of the great educators and Christians of the United States, a very superior man.

Recently, when I lectured at a law school in the East, the young man who led me to the assembly hall bore the same last name. As my host, the Rev. Robert L. Thoburn, and I chatted with the young man, we learned that this student was of the same family, a great-grandson of the author whose book I prize. However, the student said, when he and his brother went to one of the most famous Ivy League universities, where his great-grandfather had long been president, they concealed the fact of their relationship by various devices.

Mr. Thoburn and I were both startled to realize that a youth of such a great heritage would want no part of it, as was obviously the case. His great-grandfather had been famous for his Christian orthodoxy and his strong, old-fashioned American conservatism. He had trained a few generations of American leaders. The young man, dressed like a semi-hippie, pleasant and likeable, had cut himself off from his past. He was poor by choice.

This is our real problem with old and young in our age. So many, heirs of Christian cultures and traditions, descendants of martyrs and heroes, choose to ignore that heritage of faith and to deny it. They are poor by choice.

It is like a great and good king's son choosing a thief for his father. Such a choice sounds ridiculous, but it is all too often the choice of modern men and nations. They have left their Father's house of faith, disavowed His name, beggared themselves religiously, and now wonder why they have problems!

The worst kind of poverty is of the spirit, and it is the deadliest, because it is poverty by choice. If the young man at that law school was foolish, how much more so are you, if you, having denied your Heavenly Father, have become poor deliberately?

Who Owns the Child?

A century ago, John Swett, fourth state superintendent of schools in California (1863–1868) and the real founder of the state's public school system, made some amazing claims. In his First Biennial Report, for the school years 1864 and 1865, Swett denied that parents had any rights in the public schools. "In private schools . . . the parents there, in legal effect, are the employers of the teacher, and consequently his masters; but in the common and public schools they are neither his employers nor his masters." Moreover, Swett stated, "Parents have no remedy as against the teacher." The public school is a state institution and basically and essentially controlled by the legal agencies of the state and its counties. Public schools therefore are not extensions of parental authority but are "wards of the State," and children, on entering these schools, become wards of the school, except, as Swett noted, when the school is a private one. In 1874, during Henry N. Bolander's terms as state superintendent, an attempt was made legally to prevent parents from sending their children to Christian, parochial, or private schools without permission from local state school trustees. The governing principle of this first attempt by the state to strike at non-statist schools was that the children belong to the state. John Swett spoke of school age children as "the children of the State," i.e., they belonged to the state, although the parents still had some limited status. However, Swett added in his *Elementary Schools of California*, "children arrived at the age of maturity belong, not to the parents, but to the State, to society, to the country." This, of course, is the fundamental thesis of socialism and communism: instead of a government of, by, and for the people, belonging to the people under God, the people belong to the state, both as children and as adults.

But man was created, not by the state, but by God, and man belongs, therefore, not to the state but to God. Children are a gift and an inheritance from God, given by God and to be committed to God by faith and godly nurture and education. No man owns his child, even though the child is committed to him by God. For a man to claim ownership of his children is not only morally wrong but also especially offensive. How much more wrong it is for the state to claim ownership of both child and man!

But this is again, and more than ever, being asserted. It has even reached the point where some educators, with their eyes on many Negro homes in particular, have gone so far as to say, as one state superintendent in a Western state has, that we should consider "removing some children from the influences of their environment [parents] for 24 hour a day schooling." Is the answer to one evil a greater evil? Only a few slave owners of the Old South separated mothers from their babies; are our modern educators planning to make an occasional ancient evil a new way of life?

The basic answer to this socialism is that children belong to God, and all men, as God's creatures, are God's property. We had better then, place ourselves under God's law and liberty, and enjoy the prosperity of His blessing and grace, or we shall find ourselves and our children groaning under the slavery of socialism.

Train Up a Child

When Ben-hadad, King of Syria, invaded Israel with a great army, he surrounded and besieged the capital, Samaria. King Ahab was cooped up within the walls with only 7,000 fighting men.

Ben-hadad then laid down the terms of surrender: the gold, silver, wives, and children of Ahab had to be delivered to him. The purpose of this demand was this: the surrender of wealth would leave Israel helpless in terms of future resistance. The surrender of the wives would humiliate Ahab before his people and break his power. But the final and greatest demand was for the surrender of his children. This was common in antiquity and into modern times. The children would be taken for re-education in terms of an alien faith and morality. When they were returned to succeed to the throne or authority, they often served an alien power.

When Prussia established state-controlled education, its purpose was similar. The modern mood was leading the common man to question the powers that be, and man was becoming a problem to the state. How to control the people was thus the greatest question. One solution was to build straight streets over which cavalry could readily charge, and which cannons could sweep, in order to prevent popular resistance. Another solution was to take over schools from the churches and use them to brainwash future generations. James G. Carter, Horace Mann's associate, openly stated that the goal of state control of education is people-control.

Children thus become alienated from their families and the faith. Conflict between teenagers and parents is a very modern phenomena, unknown previously except in rare cases. It is a product of anti-family education.

One of the reactions to this has been the rapid growth of Christian schools. Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is a God-ordained responsibility. Our children belong to the Lord, and they must be reared and educated in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Law of the Pack

A heartsick mother went to school to see her son's teacher. She had received a note asking her to come in for a visit with respect to her son. "I was afraid," she told me, "that Eddie was in serious trouble. It is not easy to be both mother and father to children, and I was sick with fear that I had failed."

"Has Eddie done something wrong?" she asked anxiously. It goes a little deeper than that, she was told. Were his grades bad? No, he was still an "A" student. What was the trouble then? Eddie did not "relate" to his "peer group." What did this mean? It meant that Eddie spent his spare time reading and studying instead of mixing with his classmates; Eddie did not respond to the things which were popular with his fellow students. He was, in brief, an "isolate," a social deviant.

The mother's fears turned to anger. Her son was a mature, responsible boy. Of junior high age, he was already a very great help to her in the house and in earning money to provide for his clothing. She was proud of his maturity. What was wrong with being too mature for his irresponsible and spoiled classmates?

A great deal, she was told. A person must "relate" to reality, and Eddie's "peer group," his classmates, was the reality he had to relate to for mental health.

That teacher was right only at one point: a person must indeed "relate" to reality. The question is, what is that reality? Is it our "peer group," the pack, mob, or crowd around us, or is it God?

Eddie had been taught to "relate" to God, and he had been taught also that the Bible teaches that "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod. 23:2). He knew that his classmates, when not interested in evil, were only interested in nonsense. He felt a responsibility to God and to his mother to follow another course.

But if men do not believe in God, they can then only "relate" to other men, to the law of the pack rather than the law of God. An educational system which does not affirm the sovereignty of God will affirm the sovereignty of man. It will then seek to "relate" its students to the reality it upholds, the law of the pack.

How to Produce a Hippie

If you are interested in rearing up a generation of hippies and super-hippies, there are a few simple directions to follow.

First of all, abolish all teaching about God, the Bible, and God's moral law from the schools. The child will then grow up believing that these things are really not important and that religion is really a private matter and a question of taste.

Second, emphasize the individual and his rights, not the claims of God and His law. Make sure that the child has a strong and intense passion for his rights, and no concern about his moral responsibilities. Then you can be sure that he will be irresponsible and yet very demanding.

Third, make sure that the child feels entitled to the best of everything and feels cheated if he is denied instant paradise. Then the child will be sure to demand everything and riot if denied it.

Fourth, convince the child that man's real problem is not his sin but a bad environment. Teach him that his problems are due to the evils of big business, warmongers, big labor, profiteering farmers, politicians, and the like. Never let him suspect that all men are sinners, including, and, maybe, especially himself, and that their real need is for regeneration in Jesus Christ. Then the child will grow up with a revolutionary rage at everybody instead of looking to God for regeneration.

Add all this up, and what do you have? Our public schools are an amazingly efficient and economical machine for producing hippies. Then too our indulgent homes are wonderful breeding places for hippies, and our churches are clearly in favor of the whole business.

The world today must love hippies: it does such a good job of producing them. We are getting what we asked and paid for; if you want to complain to the management, look in the mirror. If you want better management, look to God, before it is too late. Meanwhile, remember, we are getting what we paid for, and if we want something else, we are going to have to pay for it, in work, sweat, and sacrifice.

As a Man Thinketh

Remember the old movies of the 30s and 40s? The brave, long-haired frontiersman faced down enemies and overcame all dangers. The revolutionary mobs, dirty and ragged, heroically screamed their rage at kings and shook their fists at the troops who tried to hold them back with guns and bayonets. The reruns have been on television for almost twenty years.

For a while now, we have been having the reruns in our schools and streets as silly youth masquerade as frontiersmen and frontierswomen, or as revolutionary peasants, and demonstrate against the Establishment. Do movies influence people? An empty-headed faithless man is wide open to any hypnotic suggestion. How much more so our empty-headed youth, reared often without either discipline or faith.

It is easy to bridge the communication gap if you remember the old movies. The youth are talking their language, although they feel “original” and “creative” when they echo the stale lines of old movies.

We have for a long time been feeding on the bread of envy or jealousy. Our movies, advertising, literature, and talk have been saturated with envy and jealousy for those who have more than we do. We have allowed men whose gospel is envy to provide our entertainment, to write our film scripts, and to guide our religion and politics.

Our children are acting out the sins of their fathers. What was stupid entertainment for us has become a gospel for them. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he, and our hearts have long been empty, except for a few minutes perhaps on Sunday, of God’s law-word. Instead, we have been dominated in our hearts and minds by the politics and gospel of envy and hatred.

Solomon tells us the conclusion of the matter: “The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words” (Prov. 23:8). The man who feeds us on envy feeds us a poison which cannot be stomached. It will sour a man’s life and sicken his days.

There is no health in any man, old or young, who feeds on envy and jealousy, whose life is dominated by hatred and rage. Solomon saw this clearly, “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith” (Prov. 15:17). A vegetarian meal with love is better than a banquet of hate with a fatted steer.

There is good beef on your table, but is there also envy and hatred? “[W]here the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17), and there is also peace and love. Who is the unseen guest and power at your table?

Fools

I once heard a minister speak whose sermon was basically three things: blasphemy, a complaint against the way his parents reared him, and a complaint against the way God made all things.

The trouble with his parents, he said, was that their basic idea of childrearing could be summed up in three words: baptize, catechize, and chastise. He had been baptized, that is, given to God by faith by his parents as a covenant child. His parents had solemnly vowed to rear him in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. To this end he had been catechized; he had been taught the Confession and the catechism of the church and sent to good schools and universities in two countries at great expense, in order to grow into godly manhood. He had been chastised, but obviously not enough, in order to discipline him and teach him respect, obedience, and sound habits of work and living.

To me, the whole thing sounded wonderful. His complaint made as much sense as saying, “My parents were terrible because they provided me with a million dollars as my inheritance.” This man’s parents had made him wealthy in his training, and he despised it. Solomon made it clear long ago: give a fool, or a simpleminded person, as much as you can, but he will still acquire or inherit only folly: “The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge” (Prov. 14:18). According to Solomon, the fools, or the “simple,” are not halfwits; they are those who refuse to accept discipline in the school of wisdom (Prov. 1:22–32).

The root of the fool’s trouble is spiritual, not mental. The fool loves his folly, and he keeps returning to it, no matter what one does to keep him away from it. “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly” (Prov. 26:11). Fellowship with fools is destructive: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20).

The essence of the fool’s life is his rejection of God: “[T]hey hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD” (Prov. 1:29). The prevalence of fools in our day is an outcome of this rejection of the Lord and of godly knowledge.

The prevalence of fools, in high places and low, is a central fact of our life today. We are governed by fools who believe that our enemies are really anxious to love us, that debt is the road to wealth, and that God can be left out of civil government, the school, and the church. The fools believe that learning is the same as wisdom, and that a college degree makes a man wise. The fools believe that the world must be remade in terms of their dreams, and they proceed to create chaos out of everything they touch.

The only remedy for fools is regeneration, to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, to know that “[t]he fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7).

Learning and Wisdom

A very wise distinction, which is at least as old as Solomon, is that made between learning and wisdom.

Learning is the accumulation of facts and information. It is schooling and education. A very great amount of learning is commonplace in our day. On all sides, men of learning abound, and the world is quite largely controlled by experts, men of specialized learning and abilities.

Learning is very important and has a necessary place in the world. Learning has made possible our technological culture and the tremendous growth of the various sciences. We are annually graduating great numbers of learned men who are rapidly expanding the information reservoirs of our society.

But learning alone is not enough, and learning alone can make a man simply a learned fool. And a learned fool is simply a more dangerous man than a simple, ignorant fool.

Learning must be linked with wisdom. Some of the wisest men I have known had relatively little schooling and book-learning, but this did not prevent them from being wise. The wise man will always seek to expand the range of his learning, because wisdom does not despise learning, although learning often despises wisdom.

Solomon said, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (Prov. 1:5).

Unfortunately, the emphasis in our age is upon learning as such, as though learning in itself gives wisdom. Learned men increasingly feel that the rule of experts is the only answer to various problems; they assume that wisdom is the natural prerogative of the expert.

As a result, we have had a steady growth of rule by experts, "brain-trusters," college professors, learned men who, like Job's friends, believe that they are all "the people," and that wisdom was born with them and will die with them (Job 12:2). And the more these learned men govern us, the worse our problems become.

Learning in its place is good, but it must be linked with wisdom or it becomes dangerous. Without faith in God, learned men become arrogant and act as little gods. Without the humility of faith, learned men despise all those who lack their learning and assume that their collection of information has given them a natural passport to power.

The world is desperately in need of wisdom. It needs to know that "the LORD giveth wisdom" (Prov. 2:6), and it needs to seek it by faith. God promises wisdom to all who ask Him for it: "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" (James 1:5).

The reason then that we have so many learned and unlearned fools is that they do not want wisdom: they will not ask for it. “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Prov. 3:7).

Can Experience Teach?

In 1959, a traveler in Europe left the cities to visit the countrysides. He found, as he spent a little time in one village, that the farm population had declined steadily. The local pastor told him, "If our community continues to decrease at the present rate, this valley will be completely uninhabited by the next generation." The city population in that country had grown rapidly; the farm population had declined steadily. Why? The problem was the ancient customs and laws of inheritance, which were steadily destroying ownership. Some farmers owned only one-eighth or one-sixteenth of their farms. Three married sisters in the valley each owned one-third of their father's kitchen, although they no longer lived there. Another woman slept in one house, had inherited the right to meals in a second, and the right to warm herself on the bench near the stove in a third house. The net result of these laws was that private ownership of land was virtually destroyed; young men were leaving the valley; and it was destined to be uninhabited!

The problem was not the soil; it was as rich as ever. There was no lack of young men who would have enjoyed owning a farm. The problem was simply this: bad customs and laws had made ownership and farming increasingly impossible. The situation was obvious: but men were neither learning nor changing by their experience.

In 1914, the historian Guglielmo Ferrero, in *Ancient Rome and Modern America*, wrote that "The disease which killed the Roman Empire was, in fact, excessive urbanization." Rome sacrificed the farmer to the city dweller. It made farming less and less successful by more and more controls. The small farmer, the backbone of the Roman people, steadily disappeared, and huge farms, owned by politicians, took his place. Progressively higher taxes made it easier for the farmer to live on welfare in the city than to try to survive on the farm.

But this is an old story, older than Rome and as new as today's tax bills and federal programs. Why is it that men and nations have not learned by past experiences?

The answer is that men do not learn by experience: they learn by faith. I have known gamblers who have lost regularly, one who lost \$50,000 on a single weekend, but none of them learned by experience. They only returned to lose more. They lacked the faith and the character to profit by experience. Only men of character can be taught by experience, because they are first of all taught by faith.

Inability to learn: this is our national problem. We are destroying everything that made us great. We are undermining the farmer and pushing him towards ruin. We are pursuing immoral courses as though they were godly ones. And, like a gambler, the more foolish we become, the more we persuade ourselves that our course of action will make us a winner.

That valley in Europe, with its lush green meadows and rich farms will, in not too many years, be without people. Beautiful old homes, some many generations old, will stand empty, if a

change is not made. And, if a change is not made, they will deserve the death and decay which the countryside and nation will experience.

In America, too, dangerous signs are apparent. Moral decay is everywhere in evidence. The cities grow in terms of easy credit, and the farms are steadily facing troubles. Men will not change without faith, and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The Word of God must be proclaimed, and it must be studied. Then men can learn by experience.

Pruning

One of the most talented men in English history was William Blake (1757–1827), poet and painter. He had the ability to be one of the greatest of poets and painters, but, instead of great, his works were too often somewhat peculiar. The fault was in Blake's beliefs. He abandoned Biblical faith for the revolutionary ideas which came to focus in the French Revolution. Blake championed freedom and equality; he believed passionately in free expression, free growth, and the absence of compulsion and discipline.

At least Blake was a consistent man. When he moved into the country, he insisted on putting his ideas into practice even with the grape vines in his garden. He strongly opposed all pruning. If man was entitled to free expression and free growth, then the vines were too. If man should live without compulsion or discipline, then no nasty farmer should cripple his vines by pruning and tying them.

The results are easy to guess. In no time at all, Blake's grape vines overran his garden and gave him no grapes! Blake liked grapes, but, like a true-blue radical, he stuck to his guns: no pruning. Something else no doubt was responsible for the lack of grapes!

It is easy to see why William Blake is so greatly admired by many liberals, radicals, and hippies today. He was one of their spiritual fathers. The rejection of all discipline and compulsion, the anarchistic emphasis on freedom and equality, all these things Blake gave romantic expression to. For Blake, pruning and discipline were the works of the devil. For him, God meant this spirit of total equality and total liberty, which would bring back paradise.

Child psychologists have also held to similar ideas, but, instead of producing angels, they have produced hell-raisers and hippies.

The impulses and whims of both child and man need discipline and pruning, the discipline of parental care, civil law, and social disapproval and approval. As Solomon observed, "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15).

One thing must be said for Blake: he was consistent and true to his convictions. What was good enough for man was good enough for the grape vines: no pruning in either case.

But we prune our vines and not our children. We discipline our vines, but we let our preachers, teachers, and politicians tell us that people must have no pruning, no limitations on their free expression, free growth, and free speech. The only crop we are getting from them is anarchy and filthy speech.

It is high time we had some discipline, some pruning. If we don't administer it, God will—to all of us.

Testing and Purity

The life of Olympia Fulvia Morata (1526–1555) is very remote to us now. The brilliant daughter of a great Italian scholar, she herself became famous as a writer and a philosopher. But, for a girl brought up in very good circumstances, her life was especially stormy. Her early years were in the luxury and gayety of court life. When she moved to Germany with her husband, Andrew Grunthler, they were trapped in the siege of Schweinfurt, in Franconia for nine months. There was death outside the walls, and within, the plague, which killed half the population. Andrew himself came close to death from it. The city was seized, and they lost all their cherished possessions in the fire and pillage and fled for their lives. As they fled, her husband was taken prisoner. Reunited, they went to Heidelberg in 1554, where Andrew was to be professor of medicine, but within two years, Olympia was dead, and shortly thereafter, her husband and brother died; their health had been broken by the siege, famine, and plague experiences. All three were buried in the Chapel of St. Peter at Heidelberg.

It was a short and hard life for a remarkable and brilliant girl who had been brought up in association with royalty, nobility, and scholars. But Olympia, a devout Christian, declared, “The prize of life comes not from learning, but from conflict and trial.” Well, there can be too much conflict and trial, and certainly Olympia had more than her share of it, but she never complained. On the contrary, she felt that it was the making of her.

Today we shy from conflict and trial. We want to spare ourselves and our children from all problems and trials. But, as one biologist has observed, “Man is a bad weather animal,” that is, man thrives and progresses in terms of troubles and testing.

The problem today is that too many people, young and old, are untried and untested, and they are, moreover, rebelling against the very principle of testing. Some claim that even school tests are wrong. In all this, they are not only foolish, but very wrong. The Biblical word for “purity” means tested, refined by fire. We tend to think of purity as something fresh, virginal, untouched, cellophane wrapped, but the Biblical word has the meaning of old and tested, refined, experienced, and purged of dross by fire.

Olympia was grateful for her testing. We can pray and trust that we and our loved ones be spared the extremities of her trials, but we cannot pray that we be spared from testing by the fires of conflict and trial. It is God’s means of refining man: “and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13).

Personal Problems

Faithful and hardworking pastors rarely find that their time is taken up with the basic issues of the faith. Instead, their days are overburdened with what can be classed as personal problems. There is a reason for this: sinful man is more interested in himself than he is in God.

Personal problems very commonly have their roots in two basic facts: first, we tend to forget that people are sinners, and second, we are especially ready to forget that we too are sinners. The fact of our salvation does not entirely eliminate sin from our lives in this world.

If we expect perfection from man instead of God, we are indeed in trouble, and our personal problems, with others and with ourselves, are many. Our lives will then be easily soured.

Take, for example, a common situation: wedding invitations. More than a few people are annoyed when they get one, because it means a gift, and they “feel cheap” sending just a card, even though only casual friends. However, if they do not get an invitation, they are then hurt or offended. In brief, sinful man will always milk trouble out of any situation.

What then do you do? “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (Ps. 118:9), that is, men at their highest and best are still not to be trusted, for they are sinners. Our trust or dependence must be in the Lord.

Thus remember, people are sinners. If they hurt and disappoint you, it is because there is first of all something wrong with you: you have put your trust in the creature rather than the Creator. We can enjoy people, be good friends and neighbors, and live best with them if we know ourselves and them as alike sinners, either saved or lost, but even as saved, still very capable of thoughtlessness and sin. Our trust must be in the Lord.

Virtually all emphasis today on pastoral psychology is thus in error, in that it too commonly fails to recognize that many of our personal problems are products of sin, and the sinful trust in man, ourselves, and others, rather than the Lord. Remember this too: if you are having personal problems, you are very likely to have some problems also with God, whom you have neglected.

Humility

The farmer and his wife made a face when their neighbor was mentioned, saying, “We don’t see too much of them. They feel they’re too good for us.” Now this farmer came from a fine family. His father had been one of the wealthiest men of the county and a big landowner. But the farmer, now nearing retirement age, was only a renter, and a poor one at that. Apart from his car and some furniture, he had nothing to show for a lifetime of work.

His neighbor? Here was a man of very poor background who had worked for years at two jobs, and whose wife had worked also, in order to buy and pay for a very fine and large acreage. It was and is a showpiece in his area. Every child had been put through college, given a good start in life, and, while not in all ways pleasing to their parents, were and still are all good, hardworking people.

The first farmer was right. His neighbors are too good to associate with him. After forty years he is still making the same mistakes, still bullheaded and unwilling to learn, a very difficult man to get along with. But he doesn’t think so. He has often said and still says, “This is a democracy, and every man is as good as the next one.”

This was his problem, no humility, and therefore no ability to learn. Solomon twice declares, “before honour is humility” (Prov. 15:33; 18:12), that is, before a man can gain honor, there must be humility. A man cannot learn if he always justifies himself. Bernard Baruch, as a young man, tried again and again to make a fortune speculating on the market. He postponed marrying, worked hard, saved his money, and invested it, hoping to strike it rich, and only to be cleaned out each time. Not until he stopped blaming the market, or “the big boys,” and asked himself, “I did wrong; now, where was I wrong, and how can I correct it?” did he begin to accumulate his great fortune.

Before honor, progress, or learning, there must be humility. And, in these days, we can certainly use a little more humility on all sides. Some men are better than others, and there are none of us who cannot afford to learn a little and grow much in wisdom and understanding.

Happiness

Not too many years ago, a very common complaint heard by pastors in counseling distressed and disturbed people was this: “I’m not needed.” The great desire on people’s part was to be needed by someone, to be needed in terms of their work and calling, or to be needed by the church or the community.

It suddenly occurred to me recently that it has been rare for someone to make that statement in recent years. Instead, from old and young, there is a new complaint: “I’m not happy.”

Once the great tragedy was to be unneeded and useless. Now, it seems to be a social attainment to be useless, retired, or sufficiently rich to live without working. To be useless is now a happy luxury. The Puritans used to preach regularly on the great sin of idleness. Now, idleness is a popular goal, and something many long for. The evil is to be unhappy.

The fact is that nothing evades men more, when they search for it, than happiness. Happiness cannot be a goal in itself. It is a byproduct of other things. When we do our work well and find it rewarding, we are happy. When we are godly and honorable in our relationships with our loved ones and others, it adds to our happiness. Happiness is not a goal but a payoff for work well done towards a worthy goal.

The word in the Beatitudes which is translated blessed is makarios, which can be translated as either blessed or, as in Acts 26:2 and Romans 14:22, as happy. True happiness and true blessedness are very much akin.

This tells us why people are so unhappy nowadays. True happiness is sought apart from God, apart from work, family, responsibility, and law. The result is massive unhappiness and discontent. But as David said, “[H]appy is that people, whose God is the LORD” (Ps. 114:15). Solomon declared, “[W]hoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he” (Prov. 16:20).

I know very many people whose lives have been repeatedly marked by disaster, and who were yet happy. I recall vividly a marvelous old widow, whose only son was a great disappointment and who worked to support herself into her 70s. Then she went partially blind, had a stroke, could only get around in a walker, but still lived alone. She enjoyed her talking books, and was a delight to visit, and her joyful faith is something to remember, now that she is gone. She never complained that she was unhappy. She thanked God for a good life and for what she still had. “My ears are as young as ever,” she said, “and I can listen to my talking books.”

She was happy, because she had found blessedness in the Lord, and she was in all things grateful. What are you unhappy about?

Is God an Insurance Agent?

I believe my insurance agent when he talks about insurance. He is competent, helpful, and accurate. But I do not believe in my insurance agent. When he talks economics, religion, or almost any subject other than insurance, I can only shake my head with dismay at his departure from the faith of his fathers.

Many church members treat God as an insurance agent. They believe Him when He talks about Heaven and hell, death and salvation, and other such things, but they do not believe in Him. Moreover they do not believe Him when He talks about Himself, His sovereignty, justice and predestination, His requirement of the death penalty, of faithfulness, and much more.

They will calmly tell you that they are Bible-believing Christians, and that it is not necessary to believe in predestination and like things. In fact, earlier this year, when I was a guest invited to speak for four Sunday evenings at a church which prides itself on being true to the Bible, I was “asked” not to return after the second Sunday because I mentioned capital punishment favorably. We are under grace and love, I was told, not under law.

Indeed, I said, we are dead to the law as a death penalty against us, a handwriting of ordinances indicting us, but it is we, the old man in us, who are dead, not the law. Jesus Christ declared, “[I]t is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17).

The mistake people make is to treat God like an insurance agent. I can pick and choose what I want from my agent. I cannot pick and choose with the Lord. I cannot buy life insurance or fire insurance from Him. He will not sell it. Anyone who thinks he can pick and choose from what God has to offer, to believe or not to believe, does not believe in God. He simply believes God on certain insurance concerns and matters. He has confused insurance with grace and mercy with lawlessness.

I only need my insurance agent when it suits me. At all other times, I want no part of him. I cannot deal so with God. I do not buy Him or His protection. He has bought me with the price of His only begotten Son, and I am totally His. I cannot use Him at my convenience, but He requires me to be used at His every word. He does not need to hear me, but in His grace He does. I must, however, hear and obey Him, because it is I who am His agent, not He mine.

To treat God as an insurance agent is to despise Him and to deny Him. The Lord can only be approached and known as God.

Is He a Christian?

Recently, some people in one congregation had a serious problem with a fellow member, whose

conduct again and again was morally offensive. The patience of all concerned was amazing, and a great deal of insult, disruptive activity, and dishonesty was tolerated by them without any action.

Finally, an outsider asked in amazement, “Why do you put up with all this? Do you want your church to be ruined?” The answer was, “Maybe he really is a Christian, in spite of his behavior. If he is truly a Christian, then we should be patient with him.”

The questioner asked in amazement: “Is he a Christian? What has that to do with the matter? Do you mean that sin is more tolerable in a believer than an unbeliever? Does the Bible teach you to have lower standards for believers? By almost any sinner’s standards, your man is still no good.”

The point was well made. First of all, while no man can judge the heart, every man can assess the actions, and a man’s actions reveal his heart. Our Lord said plainly: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit ... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:16–18, 20). These church members had no moral right to assume that a man was a Christian on his say—when his every action denied it. They were clearly guilty of false judgment.

Second, the questioner was right: we cannot have a double standard. Being a Christian (or a church member) is no excuse for sinning! On the contrary, we have every right to expect church members to meet the standards of Christian faith and morality. The attitude of the members could only lead to an undisciplined church with lower standards of membership than a club or society at large.

Fearfulness

Who are the reprobates? This is a question we need to ask, because the Bible tells us who they are in Revelation 21:8. You will find some obviously bad characters on the list, “the abominable,” murderers, whoremongers, and others who obviously belong there, but the first two, who head the list, are very important. They are “the fearful, and unbelieving,” and they are essentially one and the same.

To be fearful means to distrust God’s promises and to put more stock in what the world promises and threatens than what God promises and threatens us with. To be fearful means to believe in man and his power and to disbelieve in God and His power.

We are a fearful and unbelieving generation. We are always fearful where we should not be, and indifferent to God and His power and Word. We are summoned by all of Scripture to believe in the Lord. To believe means to say Amen to, to put our whole life on the line in terms of God’s Word. To believe means that our waking and sleeping, our eating and drinking, our work, rest, worship, and play, the whole of our lives, in brief, is governed by the Lord and His Word.

If we disbelieve God, we believe in man and this world, and our lives are governed by man and the fear of man.

Every man has a faith, in himself, in the state, in other men, but in something. If a man’s faith is in anything other than the Lord, he will be fearful and unbelieving in the eyes of God, fearful of men because he does not believe in the Lord.

To be fearless in the Lord does not require us to be great and powerful men, but only to believe in the great and powerful God. He is our shield and our defender (Ps. 33:20). God therefore allows no excuses for fearfulness. Beware lest you make excuses.

What Do You Stand For?

A lovely friend took a copy of my book of California Farmer columns, Bread upon the Waters, turned to a friend, and asked her to read "Love and Hate." The woman did not read too far. I wrote, "If we love that which is good, we will hate that which is evil." She handed the book back, saying, "I love everyone and hate nothing." Ruth Sandie answered quietly and firmly, "You don't stand for anything, do you?" Wonderfully stated. If you hate nothing, you really love nothing either, and you stand for nothing.

Some years ago, a woman I had never met called on me for help. Her story was an ugly one: her husband beat her frequently; she had a tooth missing from a recent beating, plus an old scar on her face. He was regularly unfaithful, and he was beginning to molest their daughter. I found her story to be true when I checked with a police officer; no action had been taken yet because of insufficient evidence, since the woman and girl would not cooperate. The worst part of that was the woman's insistent remark, "I don't hate him at all; I really love him and just want him to behave." I knew then that nothing could be done. The woman was worse than her husband. He was evil and did evil secretly; she loved evil openly. She resented having her lovely face marked up, but she had no indignation against evil. Almost eight years later, I had the opportunity to ask someone about that case. The report I received was this: "If anything, it is worse, and she's putting up with everything."

To hate evil and to stand up and fight for righteousness, we must truly love righteousness. Without that, we lack the moral indignation to make a stand. This is the problem of our generation. It talks much about love, but it truly loves nothing. If it did, it would fight for what it loves, and it would hate everything evil which threatens it.

But most people today stand for nothing and hate nothing and as a result fight for nothing. The worst part of it all is that they then say, very proudly, "I have no hate in my heart; I love everybody."

God's answer to these people will be very much like Ruth Sandie's: "You don't stand for anything, do you?"

Standards

A printer told me last Saturday of the problem his profession faces: 98 percent of the students who begin studying printing drop out before too long. As a result, there may be problems ahead for printing.

The reason for this high dropout rate is the nature of the work. Printing is exacting, painstaking work. The printer has an accuracy requirement such as few other men must meet. His copy must be correct, and he must go back over his mistakes to correct his copy. Even with newspapers, where the work is on a rush basis continually, the errors which creep in are surprisingly few.

Not only does the printer have a requirement of accuracy, but his work is open to inspection more than that of most men. Every reader “inspects” a printer’s work, and blunders stay open to inspection continuously.

All this is very exacting. It requires a care for detail and a conscientiousness which is foreign to all too many young men. As a result, various lines of work other than printing are also showing a decline in the number of apprentices, and some lines of skilled work now require foreign contracts if they are to be filled at all.

The roots of this problem go deep into our times. Remember when your grade school teacher made you write a paper all over again, because your copy was not neat or clean, or you did not leave the right size margin? Standards like that are disappearing now, and it is a shock to see the kinds of papers turned in by university students today. Your grade school teacher would not have tolerated it.

The roots of this problem have their source in our relationship to God. If we can be, as we are today, casual about our duties to God, worship, obedience, tithing, and so on, we will be even more casual about our relationships and duties to men. If we treat God with disrespect, we are not likely to respect man.

In such a society, the only one we treat with respect is ourselves. From a world of “Thy will be done,” we descend to the anarchy of “My will be done.” What we do for other people does not matter. Let them take it or leave it. What we do for ourselves is then all-important.

Are you unhappy about such a world? Then change it, by beginning with yourself, and your relationship to Almighty God.

Murder Mysteries

From the 1920s through the '40s, one of the most popular kinds of books was the detective story novel or murder mystery. Since then, although some of the older writers like Agatha Christie continue to sell well, it has been declining in popularity.

The reason for this is not hard to find. When the modern novel, with its denial of God and morality, began to command the world of fiction, people turned to the murder mystery. It had an obvious merit. It still reflected a world where right is right and wrong is wrong. The fact of murder was evil, and the hunt for the murderer represented justice. During those same years, the Western or cowboy movie was popular for the same reason.

Since then, however, the murder mystery has become sophisticated, and so have many Westerns. Instead of a clear-cut line between right and wrong, we find murder excused or "understood." Psychological quackery is used to explain why evil is somehow not really evil but hurt innocence. In short, everything is done by writers to blur the moral boundaries, and the reader is left irritated and dissatisfied. Instead of a solution, the problem is aggravated by the perspective of the writer.

As a result, a new kind of television show is gaining in popularity, a good policeman or private detective against evil forces. The clearer the division between good and evil, the more intense the response becomes.

People want a sharp line of division between good and evil, or, at least, a great many people do. Politicians prosper by promising us reform.

Then why don't we get it? Why does the line keep blurring? Why is there no national demand, in life, not in fiction, for a clear-cut stand in terms of truth and righteousness?

The problem is that in life we must begin making the distinction between good and evil in our own lives. Most men want it everywhere except in themselves. They are afraid of and dislike one who promises to begin with them.

In Christ alone is the difference clear-cut and absolute, and He alone can create that difference in us, regenerate us in terms of His righteousness, and ground us in the truth, Himself.

But people now prefer to keep the distinctions between good and evil in the world of fiction and television and out of their lives. The result is obvious: they live blurred and decaying lives. Is your love of righteousness limited to fiction?

Shiloh

When old Jacob lay dying, he prophesied concerning the coming of the Messiah, and declared that to Him would belong kingship, the scepter, and that He would be the great lawgiver to all nations. “[U]nto him shall the gathering of the people [that is, all nations] be” (Gen. 49:10). The title of the Messiah Jacob declared to be Shiloh, which means, “To whom it belongs,” or “He whose (right) it is.”

Here we have in brief and capsule form a great declaration of Christ’s office. He is the world ruler and lawgiver to whom by right all things, all power and authority, belong, so that no area of life is outside His government nor free to make its own laws. This means that church, state, school, the family, all people, and every area of life must be governed by Christ and His law as their rightful Lord.

Our Lord declared Himself to be Shiloh by virtue of His Resurrection when He said, before His ascension, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:18–20). Here He spoke as Shiloh, ordering the gathering of all nations to Himself as their Lord and lawgiver. He is the only true redeemer and Lord, their Shiloh.

But humanistic man declares himself to be his own lord, his own Shiloh. He separates church, state, school, family, and all things else from Christ and puts them under man’s word and man’s law, under man’s government. This means declaring war on the true Shiloh and affirming man’s lordship against God’s.

This is the basic warfare of our time, the false Shiloh, humanistic man, as against the true Shiloh, Jesus Christ. Psalm 2 describes that warfare and its outcome, the victory of the Son. Of that fact, there can be no room for doubt.

The question then is us. Which Shiloh do we serve and obey, the false or the true? Do we see Shiloh in the mirror, or do we see him only in Jesus Christ? If man is our Shiloh, then we will work for humanism in every area of life. Then we had better not complain as we look at our world, at what we are getting. But if Christ is our Shiloh, we had better bring all people, things, and areas of life under His government and lordship. He is Shiloh, He whose right it is to govern all things.

The Price of Salvation

There is a story about a young prince who became king and then tried earnestly to understand his duties. He had trouble, however, in making sense of economics. The more his experts explained it to him, the more confused he became. Finally, in disgust, he ordered their silence and demanded a ten-word explanation of economics. At this point, a courtier spoke up saying, “Your Majesty, I can explain economics in nine words. It is simply this: there is no such thing as a free lunch.” Exactly so. Many of our world problems today stem from a failure to understand that there is no such thing as a free lunch: somebody always pays for it by his work, money, or taxes. We will not solve our educational and welfare problems until we recognize this fact.

But the same is true in religion: there is no such thing as free salvation. When the Bible speaks about freedom, it does not mean “without cost”; rather, its meaning is usually “without restraint or obligation,” or else “freed from slavery.” Thus, when we are told in Galatians 5:1 that “with freedom did Christ set us free,” it means that, without any obligation compelling Him to do so, Christ of His grace freed us from the slavery of sin and death.

It is a falsification of Scripture to say that it was “free” in the modern sense, that is, without cost or price. We are emphatically told that we “are bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23); this price was the “blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19). It was not a costless salvation but rather the most costly one imaginable, requiring the death of the only begotten Son of God. It was a gift to us, and a very costly gift.

Moreover, because we have been “bought with a price,” we must therefore glorify God in our body and spirit, because they have been bought by God at a fearful price and therefore belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:20). For this reason the Lord, both as our Creator and our Redeemer, can command us to take up the cross of self-denial and follow Him (Matt. 10:38; 16:24).

There is thus no such thing as a free or costless salvation. Moreover, there can be no free or costless response to God’s gift of salvation to us. We are required to thank and serve God with all our heart, mind, and being, and to give Him our tithes and offerings. In our relations with other men, the principle is to give without coercion or pressure: “[F]reely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8).

Freedom in the Biblical sense is always at a price; it is a costly gift, and it requires great things of us. When men seek salvation without a cost, they find damnation, and when they seek freedom without a price, they quickly become slaves.

The First Days of the New Creation

A great deal of nonsense has been written in recent years about the so-called last days of California, and the supposed last days of planet Earth. We are expected to react with fear to these coming events and therefore accept whatever ideas the writer is promoting. Our Lord, however, made clear that no man knows the day of His coming and the world's end (Matt. 24:36), although one writer very recently has actually dared to set a date.

There is no secrecy in the Bible about the new creation, however. It began when Jesus Christ arose from the dead as the "firstfruits" of the new creation (1 Cor. 15:20). We enter the new creation with our rebirth in Christ: "[I]f any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," or, more accurately, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17a).

The first days of the new creation are thus behind us. Christ has come. He has broken the power of sin and death and begun the work of making all things new, a task He shall bring to completion at the end of the old world.

The old world around us is therefore a dying world. We are required to live and act in terms of the power of the new creation. For this reason, St. Paul, whose life was not always an easy one, could declare emphatically, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

Now, take a hard look at yourself. In terms of which world, and whose power, are you living? We certainly must live in this old sinful world as a citizen of two kingdoms, but need we surrender to it? Is it not a denial of our faith if we act as though the power of a dying world is greater than the power of God?

Leave it to fools to wonder and imagine about the earth's last days. Serve God with joy and thanksgiving in these young days of His new creation. If St. Paul as a prisoner could speak with rejoicing in his new citizenship and in the power of Christ, you and I have much to be ashamed of for all our grumbling and fearfulness.

We are citizens of the new creation, and all things are moving toward their great renewal around us. Men are reborn every day into this great new order, and we are disciplined in terms of it. The world is ours in Christ, for we are heirs of all things, and we had better claim all things for Christ. We are the blessed meek, the tamed, harnessed, and disciplined people of God, and we shall inherit the earth and delight ourselves in the abundance of peace (Matt. 5:5; Ps. 37:11).

Against Spiritual People

One of the great heresies of our time is the emphasis on “being spiritual,” as though this means being Christian. Scripture calls us to be filled with the Holy Ghost, which is something very different. It was a belief of Greek philosophy and religion that man should be spiritual rather than materialistic, and one of the objections of Greek philosophers to Biblical faith was that it was too materialistic.

There is no merit as such in being spiritual. The devil, after all, is entirely spiritual, but this does not make him godly. Over and over again, the command given in Scripture is “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 20:7). To be holy, or to be sanctified, and to be spiritual are not necessarily the same. The Scriptures make clear that holiness means obedience from the heart to the law-word of God.

When St. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–12, declares, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,” he then goes on to tell us some of the things which make for sanctification. We should abstain from fornication and be faithful to our marriage vows. We should be honest and avoid all fraudulent business dealings with our fellow believers and all men. We should not despise other people but be marked rather by brotherly love. Moreover, Paul said, ye should “study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.”

Our attitude towards “them that are without,” that is, who are not in the church, should be one of strict honesty and integrity. In brief, St. Paul held, holiness means being a practical, self-supporting, law-abiding, and godly man. We are sanctified, not by emotionalism or by a façade of spirituality, but by being God-fearing, God-obeying, God-worshipping people.

Whenever men have placed a false emphasis on spirituality, the result has been a rise of occultism, Satanism, and mental disorders. Remember, Satan as a purely spiritual being is very happy to have people emphasize the spiritual rather than the holy, because he is then able to take advantage of them.

The glory of our faith is that it is so practical. It is concerned with the whole man, body and soul, and the way of sanctification is mindful of the whole man. Man’s whole being was involved in the Fall, not merely his body, and man’s whole being is redeemed by Christ, not merely his spirit. It is the whole man who is destined for the general resurrection and the new creation, and it is therefore to the whole man that all of Scripture speaks. The devil is more spiritual than any of us, but he is not holy. Our calling is to “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Duty

One of the problems of history is the persistence of false ideas. Thomas Jefferson and the Jeffersonians strayed badly in seeing evil as a product of the environment, as “just another bodily disease.” As Daniel J. Boorstin, in *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, observes: “To reproach a man because his moral sense was corruptible was like blaming him for susceptibility to yellow fever—like reproaching a wagon for its broken wheel” (p. 148f).

The heart of Scripture is that man is morally responsible for all his acts, and no law order can long survive if this fact is denied. Our problem today is that our culture does see evil as a product of the environment, whereas Scripture tells us it originates in man. Our Lord says, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). Hence, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

For our society to regain its strength means to become again a responsible people in the Lord; it means that we stop making excuses for ourselves and for others. Such excuses carry no weight with God, and they should carry none with us.

The Jeffersonians had many worthy causes, but they did much harm in shelving the concept of duty for rights. Boorstin says, “Jeffersonian political science . . . was not concerned with duties” (p. 197). Today, most politicians, schools, and too many churches share this failing. When did you last hear a sermon on our duty to God, to our neighbor, to our family, or to our land? Isn't it time we stressed duty and responsibility, beginning with ourselves?

Problems

“Problems, problems,” a man remarked recently. “How I would like to be rid of them.” At times, all of us have echoed this feeling. We struggle along, year after year, hoping that our problems will soon be over, but they do not disappear. They merely change.

The problems can be in our family, our neighborhood, our church, our country, or in ourselves. The problems can be a drought drying up our crops, or a flood, a killing frost, or a burning, scorching sun. “The good old days” sound good only because we have forgotten what the problems of those times were. Childhood, youth, middle age, and old age all have their problems, as does every era of history.

Problems are a part of life in a fallen world, and they are a necessary part of it, necessary to our testing and to our growth. Be sure of this: when you solve one problem, you create a new situation which has problems of its own. Problems are in part a product of sin and in part a condition of growth.

Before the Fall, no doubt Adam had decisions to make in Eden, as he farmed that paradise, and problems connected with developing and tending it. There was yet no curse, and hence no perversity to the situation, but there were problems to be resolved.

We need to accept problems and testing as a condition of life. Even in Eden, apart from the problems of farming, Adam and Eve were every day put to the test. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil could be bypassed or not. God presented them always with the problem of faith and obedience.

Solve one problem, and you will have another. This is life, and to be sick of problems is to be sick of life. Because this is God’s world, every problem has its answer, and with every answer we graduate to another problem, until we finally pass on into God’s eternal Kingdom and our reward.

Problems are thus not only aspects of a fallen world, as well as aspects of a growing world, but they are also opportunities sent from God, to test us, to enable us to grow, and to further us in the fulfillment of our calling.

No man can avoid problems. The man who tries to avoid problems only creates greater ones. If we regard them as opportunities, we are the stronger for it.

Trusting God

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in “John Ploughman’s Talk,” wrote, “Let it never be forgotten that when a man is down, he has a grand opportunity for trusting in God. A false faith can only float in smooth water, but true faith, like a life-boat, is at home in storms. If our religion does not bear us up in time of trial, what is the use of it? If we cannot believe God when our circumstances appear to be against us, we do not believe Him at all. We trust a thief as far as we can see him. Shall we dare to treat our God in that fashion?”

Spurgeon brings us to the heart of the problem. I have heard so many people say, “I cannot believe in a God who allows anyone to suffer.” Such people usually practice what they preach. They rear their children on the principle that they must be denied nothing, and that no unhappiness or suffering ever come their way. Then, when their children grow up, they fail to understand why their children are such vicious characters and cause everyone, including themselves, such grief. “But I gave them everything!” they say in bewilderment.

God does allow us to suffer. He does lead us through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4), and more saints than one have had the Psalmist’s experience of troubles so great that they threatened to “swallow me up.” Adversity and the fire of affliction are the means whereby God purges and purifies His people and prepares them for His service both in this world and in the world to come. The “school of adversity” does have an award for its graduates.

Troubles should drive us closer to God, and like David, we should say, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee” (Ps. 56:3). None of us enjoy our troubles, but in looking back, we can recognize that, without those troubles, we would never have gained the wisdom and growth we have. This is only possible, and troubles can only work together for good for us, Romans 8:28 makes clear, if we love and trust God.

In a sinful world, we must expect troubles. In such a world, troubles are necessary and inescapable. The real problem, however, is ourselves. How will we deal with them? Moreover, will the troubles draw us closer to God our strength, or will they make clear that we never really believed in Him?

The Open Door

Last night we had dinner with a friend who had experienced a deep sorrow and loss not too long ago. She had met it, as all her problems, with faith and with trust in God. I believe, she said, that whenever God closes a door, He also opens another door for us. What we must do is to look for His open door.

Virginia Koerper is now finding that open door as, with her faith, she always will.

We cannot tie the hands of God, nor can we order our destinies from Him. None can stay His hand nor govern His doings. We can, however, recognize the wisdom and the grace of His ways, and the perfection of His government. As St. Paul declared, “[W]e 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 is far more than we could ever dream of asking: God makes everything add up for good to His own, so that in all things they are ultimately the gainers.

By faith then we must in every situation look for God’s open door. People who stand wailing before a closed door are blinding themselves to any future. I was not surprised recently at the radical moral failure of a friend who has spent about fifteen years living in the past, talking endlessly about a closed door. That closed door was a bad experience, but no worse than most of us have experienced, sometimes more than once.

If we remain glued to that closed door, we cut ourselves off from life and growth. We live in the past and become a bore to the living. We refuse to accept God’s reality and to profit by it. We are then the living dead, and inescapably we falter and fall by the wayside.

We then forget that the door of God’s grace and His prospering hand is always open to His people: “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Rev. 3:8).

Look for the open door.

Under the Eye of God

A few years ago, I was driving with a foreigner late at night, and we stopped for a red light. He shook his head in amazement. It happens every time, he said. An American comes to a red light at 2:00 a.m., with no other car in sight, and he sits and waits for it to change. Nowhere else in the world would this happen: men in other countries would drive through the light if no one were in sight. You Americans are Puritans still, he said.

He was right, of course. America's Puritan founders moved always with the knowledge that man is forever and entirely under the eye of God. This means unfailing detection when we sin; at 2:00 a.m., God is still watching us, even if no man is in sight. There is no escaping God. Similarly, whatever good we do, and whatever need we have, however undetected by those around us, our Heavenly Father sees and cares for us. We are always under the eye of God. This knowledge was the strength of the early Americans.

The habits of that faith are still with us as this foreigner observed. Americans, unlike almost all other peoples, do feel that they must obey the traffic laws at 2:00 a.m. They feel watched. They may no longer believe in God, but the habits of their past bring them to act as though God's eye is upon them. They hear echoes of old hymns from their youth which say, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me."

But habits do not long survive without a faith, any more than a tree survives without roots. Today because we have become rootless religiously, we are losing the habits of godliness which long made us great.

By blinding ourselves to God, we have not ceased to be under the eye of God; we are simply blind men. We are, moreover, led by blind men in church and state, "blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:14). As blind men, we are ripe for judgment. As men who see by the grace of God, we are under the eye of God, under His protecting care and blessing.

“I Know People”

I cringe nowadays when someone tells me, “I know people.” I used to say that, but I very early found out how wrong I was about many, many persons. Usually, the person who tells me he knows people is in the process of making a bad mistake about someone.

How can we know people? Solomon said, “Man’s goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov. 20:24). No man fully knows himself, because man is not a finished product. He changes, and he grows. I have seen men of seventy and eighty change and grow, and men of twenty refuse to grow. As the years pass, we see various people we depended on sometimes falter and fail, because they refused to grow under pressure. Sometimes we also see very weak men become surprisingly strong. If we are honest about it, we will admit that many people have disappointed us or surprised us over the years.

We cannot say, “I know people.” God alone knows the heart of man, and He alone knows the beginning and end of all things. We do know people to a degree, and we can rely on people to a degree, but our knowledge is limited and partial. We change, as do all men.

What we can say is this:

“I know the Lord.” He is “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). God says, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6).

This is our security, the salvation, care, and protection of an unchanging God. In the face of this fact, the troubles of our world, and the weaknesses of our friends, are small facts.

We can and do know God, not exhaustively, but truly. God reveals Himself in His Word, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is true to Himself and does not change. Here, at the most important point in our lives, there can be no disappointment.

J. Wilbur Chapman’s hymn “Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners” has these happy lines: “Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Saviour, makes me whole.”

Knowing Christ is to know salvation, strength, and victory. Knowing man is not knowing much!

The Principle of Change

An old French saying declares, “The more things change, the more they are the same.” This observation reflects the disillusionment of the people with their politics. No matter who is elected and what their promises are, their actions are the same basically as those of the men voted out of office. All the hard work of people to elect new officials in the hopes of a new order end in the same old political corruption, higher taxes, and more problems. As things go from bad to worse, yesterday’s rascals sometimes look better than today’s reformers, but on reflection it becomes obvious that nothing has changed really, it is the old corruption still. Thus, the more things change, the more they are the same.

Many Americans express their growing sense of hopelessness with the state of things. Again and again, the bright hopes of a pre-election promise become the bitter disappointment of a long term of office.

Why so, and need it be so? To cite an old American saying, “You can’t make a good omelet with rotten eggs.” You can spend a lot of time trying to do so, but the results are always predictably bad. But isn’t this exactly what we so often try to do, to take people without faith and character and somehow add them up to a good society?

Solomon said, “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (Prov. 25:19). A man with a foot out of joint will not travel far, nor will a country progress who places confidence in unfaithful men.

The need therefore is for faithful men, regenerate men who move in the fear of God rather than the fear of men. It takes good men to make a good society, not another election. This, of course, has been a part of the church’s work, to bring men into conformity to God and His Word, to bring forth by God’s grace a generation of strong, godly men. This most churches have ceased to do: instead of seeing Christ’s mission in terms of changed men, they too often see it as a calling to change society, to generate social revolution. They are giving us bad eggs and bad omelets. Is it any wonder that, the more things change, the more they are the same?

God declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). The world’s destiny is not sameness, not continual corruption, but the regeneration of all things by Jesus Christ. But that regeneration cannot take place apart from Him.

The Right Way

It was a complicated mess, and I am not sure I can recall more than a few high points. This man, with a good family and a good position, gambled and lost heavily. He took company money to pay the gambling debts when he was threatened. When it was necessary to replace the money to avoid trouble, he stole an heirloom item of jewelry from his wife and sold it. By this time, he had lost more money gambling, and he again took company money. Much later, when it was over, he had ruined his family, destroyed his career, hurt his company, and involved several good friends by borrowing heavily from them.

His excuse was that, all along, he had hoped for a “lucky break” to right everything. However, as the sociologist P. J. Bouman once wrote of history, “A bad business can never have a good ending.”

Men, of course, keep hoping that it will. Let us be good to the communists and overlook their evils, and maybe good will come of it, they hope. Or let us be kind to criminals and perhaps it will influence them for good. St. Paul summed up this ugly philosophy: “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom. 3:8; 6:1). Let us sin, say these men, and somehow good will result from it.

I stole, claimed a man once, so I could afford to go straight. But only those men are “straight” who are honest, trustworthy, and godly at all times. Our character is revealed under pressure. To believe that theft can prepare the way for honesty is to believe in a morally upside down world. It is to insist that, if we sin, grace can abound. And yet, in our time, all too many men in the church as well as in politics believe that such moral confusion represents “reality.” Of such persons St. Paul said that their “damnation is just” (Rom. 3:8).

The last I heard, the gambler’s bad business was showing signs of a good ending only because his wife had made a good beginning. She promised restitution to everyone and went to work to repay them. Her inheritance came through the courts, and she applied every penny to repay all persons. When it was over, she no longer had her home, but she had, with her children also working, repaid everyone. Her children had developed a strong character and a real sense of responsibility towards her, and she was a proud mother whose successful and married son was now helping her and the other children.

A godly beginning was giving her godly results. When her husband was sentenced to prison, many felt that he was “paying his debt to society.” As a Christian she believed that restitution was God’s law, and she proceeded on that basis. What her relationship to her husband will be on his release will depend on many factors. In any case, she is sure of God’s blessing because she is proceeding in terms of God’s law.

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

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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ⁱ Editor's note: Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers. For more, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesar_Chavez.