

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 10

Dearest Grandchild,

In today's letter I want to talk about the proof of Christianity as seen through the eyes of the Apostle Peter. Again, I am trying to remember that the things that interest an old man like me, may not be of interest to you. I can only beg your indulgence as I try to focus your attention on things that are eternal.

Granny and I both graduated from Tulsa Central High School in 1954. A few days ago we went to Tulsa to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our graduation. There were 822 in our graduating class, only about 120 were present for the celebration. One of the most sobering aspects of the reunion was a slide presentation of more than 200 of our classmates who are dead. Sixty years ago they were young like you are. Sixty years ago they were energetic and healthy and filled with dreams. Now they are dead. Now it really doesn't matter whether our deceased classmates were rich or poor, famous or unknown. The only thing that matters now is their relationship with God. If the Lord should tarry, some day you too will grow old and die. While it may be difficult, please place your relationship with God at a top priority. Wise King Solomon said: **“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (Eccl. 12:1)**. With this in mind please prayerfully consider these inspired words of Peter from the Holy Bible:

**“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:16-19)**

The Apostle Peter, as you know, was with Jesus from the very first of His earthly ministry. He personally witnessed virtually every miracle Jesus did. All of these many miracles proved the “power and coming” of our Lord Jesus Christ, but the only miracle Peter cited, in this text, was what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was this miracle of transformation, more than any other, upon which he relied to confirm the validity of his faith!

The story of the “transformation” of Jesus is found 3 times in the Bible (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). The Greek word used to describe what happened to Jesus is “metamorphosis” (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2). This word, as you know, is also used in our English vocabulary. It literally means to change into another form. This is what happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. Interestingly, this same Greek word is also used to describe what happens to someone who becomes a Christian. Paul wrote to the Romans that believers are

“transformed” by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). To the Corinthians he conveyed the same message, using the same word. He reminded them that believers are in the process of being “transformed” into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Every convert to Christ goes through a “transformation” or “metamorphosis”! This is the essence of “conversion” or the “new birth”.

**AGAIN, REMEMBER THAT OBSERVING THIS METAMORPHOSIS CONVINCED PETER THAT HE WAS NOT FOLLOWING CLEVERLY INVENTED STORIES! PLEASE PONDER THE RELEVANCE OF THESE WORDS FOR OUR OWN GENERATION!**

Grandpa has had the privilege of preaching in many foreign countries. It is not easy to present historical or technical information to primitive people, especially through an interpreter. For example, while preaching in Ghana, I had 3 different translators at the same time. What I said in English was immediately repeated by 3 different translators into 3 different tribal dialects. Many, if not most, of those listening could not read or write. While technical information was not easily understood by them, they could easily see the reality of Christ by means of “transformed” people. This miracle of transformation does not rely on translators or dust covered documents. It is not dependent on understanding the technical meaning of Greek and Hebrew words. Transformed lives are like living letters that are easily understood, even by illiterate people (2 Cor. 3:1 - 3). The witness of transformed people is like fresh manna, for new people are being converted to Christ every day. This may not be all that Peter was talking about in our text, but certainly ought to be considered in seeking to understand the “proof” about which he was speaking. This “evidence” is not hidden or rare, but shines like abundant light wherever the Gospel is preached. Obviously, transformed lives can also help you to understand that we are not following cleverly invented stories.

Jesse Yangmi, a long time friend of our family, is a native of southeast Asia and has worked for many years among the Lisu tribe. He even translated the Bible into their language. Jesse noted that the power of a transformed life meant more to these tribal people than technical teaching and historical manuscripts. Even illiterate people can witness the change of a destructive caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly. These same people cannot help but also notice the difference Christ makes when sinners are transformed by the Gospel. When a notoriously bad man stops smoking opium, stops beating his wife, stops lying and stealing, and starts living like Jesus, his life is like a shining light that cannot be hidden.

Any convert, even illiterate ones, can provide a powerful witness for Christ by simply sharing their testimony. The late Frank Buchman discovered the truth in our text, and used it to evangelize thousands. As long as Christ continues to transform sinners, personal testimony will continue to be a powerful tool for evangelism. The movement Buchman began, started on the campus of Penn State University many years ago. As it gained momentum and spread around the world, it became known as the “Oxford Group”.

Way back then, in the 1890s, William "Bill Pickle" Gilliland was working as a janitor at Penn State. He was a colorful character with an outrageous walrus moustache that made him look like a pirate. He was the illegitimate son of a Civil War Colonel. He was also an outlaw who bootlegged

whisky to the 1,400 students on campus. One historian called Penn State "the most godless university in the country" and Bill Pickle was one major reason for their ungodliness.

When preacher Buchman showed up on campus the rebellious bootlegger vowed to stick a knife in his ribs. Instead, they became fast friends and ultimately Bill Pickle gave his heart to Christ. When he did so, he was "transformed" by the power of the Gospel. The dramatic change in his life could not be hidden.

The book of Revelation credits victory over Satan to three things. **"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."** (Rev 12:11) Testimony has always been an integral part of evangelism. Paul's testimony is found three times in the book of Acts (see chapters 9, 22, and 26).

We should not be surprised, therefore, that the "testimony" of a converted bootlegger could be used by God. This "transformed" man was not highly educated and even had to have help writing a letter of apology to his wife. Even though he was not highly educated, however, he was still the world's greatest authority on what Christ had done in his own life. He could not argue theology or debate technical points of doctrine, but he could and did testify about the transforming power of Jesus.

The testimony of this transformed sinner was contagious. Over the 7 years Buchman spent on campus, hundreds were converted to Christ. These included the well known, like Dick Harlow, who later became the football coach at Harvard, but it also included hundreds of names known only in heaven. The wave of evangelism spilled over from the Penn State campus to the community. Then it spread to other campuses across America and around the world. The name "Oxford Group" was given when a group from Oxford University went on a mission trip to Africa. Someone in Africa referred to them as the "Oxford Group" and the label stuck. Soon it was applied to other Christian students regardless of what college they attended.

The testimony of a blind man healed by Jesus is instructive. This wise man refused to be drawn into social or theological arguments about which he knew nothing. He chose rather to make reference to the one thing he did know. He said to his critics: **"One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see"** (John 9:25). He then asked if they wanted to be disciples of Jesus too! How simple! How profound!

This was Buchman's advice to all converts. Simple tell your story. Tell others how Christ has transformed your life. It doesn't matter whether you were witnessing to an illiterate peasant, or a highly educated member of the royal family, just tell them what Jesus means to you. Stick with what you know! Tell them of the transformation that has taken place in your own life. Tell them how you used to be, and then tell them how you are now! Yes! We need the blood of Jesus! We cannot be saved without it! Yes! We need faith! We cannot be saved without it. And Yes! We also need to be ready to give our testimony. We are commanded in Scripture to always be ready to give an answer to any man for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Our personal "testimony" should

always be on the tip of our tongue. As a matter of trivia, the word translated as “answer” in 1 Pet. 3:15 is the Greek word “apologia”, from which we get our English word “apologetics”. Apologetics refers to a rational and reasoned argument for our Christian faith.

Buchman followed his own advice and shared his testimony with people all over the world. He shared his testimony, not only with common men, but also with some of the most powerful people on earth. The list includes: Mao Tse-tung, Ghandi, Nehru, Princess Sophie of Greece, Mussolini, Himmler, Eric Liddell, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Henry Ford, Solzhenitsyn, Kipling, Edison, and many others too numerous to mention. He had a tremendous influence on his own generation. Ultimately seven nations, including France, Germany, Greece, Japan, and the Philippines decorated this preacher for the positive effect he had on their relations with other countries in the world. Certainly there is power in personal testimony!

But Peter did not merely mention what happened to Jesus on the sacred mountain. He continued with inspired advice for you and for me. **“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)**

What the prophets wrote was made more certain by what Peter experienced! He therefore advises everyone to pay attention to the Bible like you would to a light shining in a dark place. At first the Bible message may seem irrelevant. But at some point in time the “day will dawn” and the “morning star” will arise in our own hearts. This means that we will have an awakening. The Scripture that once only shed only a little light will burst upon us like the dawning of a new day. How beautiful! It is hard to see something on a dark night with a little light, but it is easy to see the same thing when the day dawns and the sun shines brightly.

I don’t know where God is leading you. Each of us are different. We are like different members of the same Body. We all have different gifts given to us by God. Just as different members of the Body have different functions, we too will have different jobs to do and different roles in life to perform. The good news is that we need godly men and women everywhere. So, if you continue to take heed unto the Scriptures, like you would to a light shining in a dark place, someday the day will dawn and you will see clearly what God wants you to do. When this happens, the “day star” will arise in your heart and you will be a beacon of light to others. One Bible word for “gift” is “charisma”. The root of this word is “chara” which means “joy”. True joy and fulfillment will come to you when you are using your own special gift for God.

If God allows you to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your graduation, I pray that your personal relationship with Christ will provide a beacon of guidance and hope to everyone you know.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce