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These Two Commandments.. .

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DEDICATION

To the late Mike Pratt,
whose confidence in me has
been a constant source
of encouragement.

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As His Spirit leads

And for God's glory

You are encouraged to use this material

For the building up of His Body

And the for the evangelization of the world

Preface

In the summer of 1973 I began an earnest study of church government. There were many questions which I felt had to be answered. Chief among these was the question of my own identity in the church. After nearly twenty years of preaching, a large question mark seemed to rest upon my role in the local congregation. Our by-laws described me as the “located evangelist” but the people expected me to be a pastor. I felt that the elders of the church should be its pastors and I resented shouldering the responsibility of an entire eldership. It seemed that our tradition gave to the elders a lot of authority and virtually no responsibility, and to the “located evangelist” a lot of responsibility and virtually no authority. The importance of answering these questions was augmented in my mind by the graduation of our eldest son from high school. Should he decide to “enter the ministry” I wanted him to be spared the agony and confusion which I felt. I had read the Bible through many times, but I read it through again. This time I was seeking for scriptures related to the government of the church. When I came across the name of a Christian worker, I paused to study how they related to apostolic Christianity. With the aid of an exhaustive concordance, I checked each usage of their name and sought to understand what role they played. In addition to the study of Scripture, I also read a variety of books on church government and studied the writings of the early church fathers.

After a year of research I began to grow discouraged. I had hoped to discover a divine pattern for the church with a neat package of titles and job descriptions. If it was there I did not find it.

At this point I began to think of the millions of Christians who had lived and died without the benefit of an exhaustive concordance or a commentary. If it was “all that hard” for me, what chance did these people have?

From this perspective I took another look at Christianity. I tried to put aside my sectarian glasses and preconceptions and tried to sit like a little child at the feet of Jesus with no theological ax to grind. Suddenly His words seemed to assume a new significance. It was a breath of fresh air to the musty chambers of my mind. Like new wine, it demanded a totally new mentality to contain it.

I still have a burden for the structure of the church, but from an entirely different point of view. It was the priorities of Jesus that made the difference in my life - I pray that they will in your life also.

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LESSON ONE

The Priorities of Jesus

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

Well . . . There they are!

And after nearly 2,000 years it seems that hardly anyone has taken them seriously.

The author of the Bible summarizes the totality of its message in only two simple commandments, but most of us are determined to make Christianity something complicated and technical.

Jesus reduced the essence of pure religion to a lifestyle so utterly simple that as Isaiah predicted “fools and wayfaring men cannot err therein” (Is. 35:8), but such simplicity is hidden from the “wise and prudent” (Matt. 11:25).

The Master of one-syllable words has stated the total purpose of God for man in two cardinal commandments, but His well-intentioned followers have inserted enough fine print to divide the Christian world into hundreds of warring factions.

In a single paragraph Jesus proposed a philosophy of life broad enough to encompass all of humanity, yet narrow enough to be eternally unique. Why do we persist in compounding these simple commandments into complicated creeds?

Sweeping away the clutter and confusion of tradition and interpretation, Jesus informs us that love is all! Through the inspiration of His Spirit we know that tongues and prophecy will vanish into oblivion, but love abides forever. Faith will become sight and hope will become reality, but the essence of love transcends the element of time.

In spite of the unequivocal statement of Jesus about the supremacy of love, most of us are hell-bent to establish our own priorities. We approach the scriptures with a predetermined theological bias so that having eyes - we see not. And having ears - we do not hear. Such a problem is nothing new. It is the same mentality that precipitated Calvary as we will later seek to prove.

Controversy Over Priorities

Jesus taught these two commandments in a context of controversy. The Jewish Nation at the time of Christ was divided into various “sects” or “denominations.” Three of these are mentioned in connection with the event before us. Each sect was distinguished from the others by its priorities in religion. The first sect mentioned in this context was the Pharisees (Matt. 22:15). The Scriptures teach that they took counsel how they might entangle Jesus in His talk. The name “Pharisee” means “separated.” Their historical roots reached back to the period of the Maccabees when certain leaders of their nation began to fraternize with the heathen. In righteous indignation these pious Jews “separated” themselves and became the strictest and most numerous of the Jewish denominations.

The second group mentioned was the Herodians (Matt. 22:16). Very little is known of them but their name implies political priorities. They are thrice mentioned in the Scriptures, each time in league with the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus (see also Mk. 3:6; 12:13).

The third group was the Sadducees, distinguished by their denial of the resurrection (Matt. 22:23). All three groups did have one thing in common; they were opposed to Jesus. Each sought to trap Him with its favorite theological questions.

The Herodians asked, “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” The question was designed to divide Jesus from His followers, or the Government of Rome, or both.

The Sadducees proposed the hypothetical situation of a woman who had been married and widowed seven times. Then they asked triumphantly, “Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?” Both questions were designed to embarrass Jesus and to precipitate some damaging controversy. Much to the chagrin of the theologians, however, Jesus answered both questions with authority and simplicity. When the Pharisees heard that the Sadducees had been put to silence, one of them who was a lawyer asked Him another question to tempt Him. “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

The answer to this question was intended to polarize and divide the disciples of Jesus. The lawyer assumed that no matter how Jesus answered the question He would be alienated from many of His followers. Jesus, however, established priorities which boldly transcended denominationalism. He said that to love God in the right way was the number one priority in life. He continued that to love your neighbor in the right way was priority number two. Please observe that there was no third priority. The two great commandments encompassed everything.

But those who seek to justify themselves will want to ask . . . “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus once told a story to answer this question. He spoke of a man who fell among thieves and was left by the roadside wounded and half dead. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side. Their religious priorities were such that they did not want to get involved. Perhaps they wanted nothing to interfere with their holy duties in the Temple. If these men touched a dead body or any form of uncleanness they could not minister before God.

Then along came a Samaritan - an irreligious man by their standards. The conduct of the Samaritan was not regulated by religious rules . . . but by love. He did not have to search the Scriptures for an answer to the wounded man’s dilemma; he simply did for that man what he would have wanted that man to do for him if their situations had been reversed.

Jesus said, “Go thou and do likewise.”

While the actions of the good Samaritan may seem disrespectful of God’s Law, they were, in fact, representative of a greater law than that of Moses. Micah, for example, reasoned that if a little blood and a little oil pleased God, why not offer thousands of rams and pour out rivers of oil? Such thinking, of course, is ridiculous. It does not take into account the nature and purpose of God. Micah knew that and assured us that what God really wanted was not blood and oil, but “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:6 - 8).

The inspired prophet Hosea said much the same: “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6). This was the verse quoted by Jesus when He was criticized for fraternizing with publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:13). Mercy and sacrifice are theological opposites. The focus of the sacrifice is inward, the focus of mercy is outward. The priest and the Levite made sacrifices to obtain personal forgiveness. The Samaritan forgot about himself in service to another.

Jesus told His critics to study this passage and learn what it means. Perhaps we need to also study the passage and learn what it means.

Priorities Today

The plight of Christendom in the 20th century makes Jewish legalism look watered down and weak. They had a handful of denominations . . . we have hundreds. They had a handful of differing priorities . . . we have hundreds of different priorities.

Virtually every denomination has its own rationale for existence, and new factions are

being formed every year. As long as we insist upon establishing our own priorities this horrendous problem will continue. Every denomination is convinced that the “main thing” is something different; and if Jesus should suddenly appear in the flesh, we would badger Him with questions like the ancient Pharisees just to show our “brethren in error” that we were right all the time.

In reality none of us is right. There is none righteous . . . no, not one. Those who insist upon justifying themselves cannot avail themselves of the righteousness of God. The very idea that our salvation depends upon grasping some theological technicality is utterly absurd . . . yet everywhere believed. Christendom is fortunate indeed that the Author and Finisher of our Faith has established a set of priorities for us. He insisted that the “main thing” was love. This is not to say that matters of Christian doctrine are not important; it is only to say that they are not the most important.

All truths are equally true, but all truths are not equally important. Your car, for example, may have a scratch on the door and no oil in the crankcase. These statements may be equally true, but they are not equally important. Establishing priorities is a real priority! It is a key to successful living in every area of life. It is especially important in the realm of religion. Faith is essential to salvation. It can move mountains. It is, however, not as important as love. “Now abideth faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Love is not only important in the vertical relationship between God and man, it is also important in the horizontal relation between one person and another. Christian unity does not come because we agree with one another, but because we love one another. Love precedes agreement, not vice versa.. We do not come to love because we agree, but we come to agree because we love.

The church of the First Century was composed of every race, kindred, people, and tongue. The unity they experienced included Jews and gentiles, masters and slaves, rich and poor, men and women. In Christ every racial, religious, and social barrier is broken down and we all become one.

Accepting the priorities of Jesus is not a triviality; it is the most revolutionary concept in the world. Those committed to the priority of love will find themselves like strangers and pilgrims in a strange land. They will be frequently called upon to suffer affliction and to endure the loneliness of seeking someone who will understand.

People with strong convictions do not change easily. Jesus died upon a cross trying to convince the world that God is love. Paradoxically, persecution sometimes comes at the hands of deeply religious people who destroy others under the illusion of doing God a service (John 16:2).

Albert Einstein ushered in the age of nuclear power by writing a simple formula ($E=mc^2$). There is a vast difference, however, between writing a formula upon a blackboard and exploding an atomic bomb. Someone had to transform the equation into reality . . . and it was not an easy project.

In similar fashion the words of Jesus about love will have little relevance to our generation until they find expression in human lives. . . and the project will not be easy. The ultimate expression of love is seen at Calvary. God so loved that He gave. . . and the gift which He gave was Himself. The Scriptures affirm, “Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us,” and then it adds, “and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (I Jn. 3: 16).

Crosses are not just to sing about, they are to die upon. Those who would know the power of His resurrection must share in the fellowship of His suffering. Not all will be called

upon for a literal martyrdom, but each of us must be spiritually crucified with Christ in order that His resurrection power may operate in our lives. We cannot experiment with humanity like rats in a maze or ingredients in a test tube. We cannot flip some spiritual switch and remain uninvolved with people. By love we become enslaved to one another. Those who do not deny themselves and take up a cross cannot be His disciples.

o You may speak with the tongues of men and angels, but if you have not love you are like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

o You may have the gift of prophecy and you may understand all mysteries and all knowledge. You may have all faith so that you can remove mountains, but if you have not love, you are nothing.

o You may bestow all your goods to feed the poor, and you may even give your body to be burned, but if you have not love it will profit you nothing.

The “Main Thing” in Christianity is to Love . . .

*If You Miss Love,
You Have Missed It All!*

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 1

1. Name several major denominations and list their points of emphasis which immediately come to mind.
2. What would an outsider see as a major emphasis in your church?
3. Do you know of a group known primarily for loving one another?
4. Could Jesus have been wrong in establishing the priority of love?
5. Is it possible that Jesus would change this priority if He was preaching to our generation?
6. Why has an emphasis on love been so consistently avoided?
7. Can you think of anything in Christianity more important than love?
8. Can you think of a third commandment which Jesus should have listed?
9. Which word better describes the ministry of Jesus, “mercy” or “sacrifice”?
10. How could an emphasis on love help answer Christ’s prayer for unity (John 17:21)?

LESSON TWO

Facing Reality

Just suppose that you were God! Suppose that more than anything else you wanted your creation to love you and to love one another. Just suppose that everything you tried to teach them they turned into rituals which totally missed the goal. Just suppose you decided to divest yourself of majesty and become a man because you wanted to show them in person what you had been trying to tell them all along. Just suppose you gathered about you a little group of peasant folk who didn't have the strong prejudices of the highly programmed theologians. Suppose you taught them a way of life that transcended legal obedience to a written code. Just suppose you died on a cross so that men could see what love was really like. Just suppose that even then many people would never understand. Just suppose . . .

A Look in the Mirror

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was . . . (James 1:23-24).

There is an old story about the woman who came to her minister deeply troubled by the sin of vanity. "My beauty is the problem," she declared. "Everywhere I go men stare at me with lust and women glare at me with envy."

"I have good news for you," replied her minister, "you're not vain . . . you're crazy!"

Most of us are suffering from a certain degree of the same problem, No matter how ugly we are we still possess the capacity to look in the mirror and then forget what manner of person we saw. A woman at her "vanity" mirror probably will not have the super self image she will later experience while resting on a pillow or strutting down the street. She may have the beauty and charm of a mare moose and still be able to straitway forget what manner of person she really is. In her dreams she may become the "belle of the ball" or a beautiful princess with eager suitors clamoring for her attention.

Men too may pause to flex their muscles and admire their own reflection. Though he may be shaped like a kangaroo when he goes away he is apt to forget the flab and the paunch, and in the fantasy of his mind become some Mr, Muscle who is worthy of admiring glances from all who are privileged to pass his way.

The church is called the "Bride of Christ," and unfortunately we are not immune to irrational behaviour relative to the mirror syndrome, After nearly 2,000 years of earnestly endeavoring to evangelize the world, we are further from completing our task than when we started. Yet many of us are so obsessed with our own "beauty" and "cleverness" that we strongly resent any suggestions of change. Perhaps we are not vain . . . but crazy!

Reality

Jesus came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19: 10). He was manifested that He might "destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). Before ascending into heaven He gave to His disciples what is generally know as the "Great Commission." It is found in one form or another in all four Gospels, and also in the book of Acts.

Jesus said: **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: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the**

world, Amen (Matt. 28 : 19-20),

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature . . . (Mark 16:15-16).

. . . and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things . . . (Luke 24:47-48).

. . . as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you . . . (John 20:21).

But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Here is a little chart that will provide you with an overview of the population of our world since Jesus gave the Great Commission:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population in Billions</i>	<i>Number of Years to Double</i>
1	.25?	1650
1650	.50	200
1850	1.1	80
1930	2.0	45
1975	4.0	35
2010	8.0	?
1,650		

Note the accelerating population of our world. At present time we must face the painful reality that the world is not Christian. We live in a world beset by hunger and war and crime and the vast majority of people alive today have never even heard the name of Jesus. Certainly we cannot blame the Apostles. History testifies with a unanimous voice that they did precisely what Jesus commanded them to do. All of the original Apostles except Judas and John, died as martyrs for their faith. Judas, as you know, betrayed Jesus and died a suicide. Though John did not die a martyr, he did suffer numerous persecutions for his faith, and was a prisoner on the Island of Patinos when he received those visions in the book of Revelation.

Someone has said that everybody makes mistakes, but not everybody makes excuses. Let us not make the mistake of making excuses, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Let's remember these words as we face the reality of the world around us.

Admitting Our Mistakes

At this juncture it is extremely important that we do not get "up tight" and defensive. Jesus didn't come to minister to those who were "whole" but to those who were "sick." It is much easier for Jesus to help those who admit their problems than those who endeavor to camouflage them with clever arrangements of fig leaves. Wouldn't it be a lot better to come to Jesus like little children and admit that we have made a mess? Wouldn't it be better to own up to it like the Prodigal Son than to grow resentful like the elder brother?

There is an old saying, "When all else fails, read the instructions." But this has been one

of our problems, Most of us think we have already read the instructions, but in practice we have galloped off in different directions. Why not let Jesus tell us what it is all about? The K.J.V. of the Bible contains:

3,566,480 letters

773,746 words

3 1,102 verses

1,189 chapters

66 books

But Jesus, the Author of the Bible, has reduced its message to only two commandments. Jesus said:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Is it remotely possible that a large part of our present problems might be directly associated with our failure to believe and practice the priorities of Jesus?

A New Covenant

What we are about to consider is both simple and profound. The first mention of created life in the Bible is in Gen. 1:11. Here we are told that on the third day God created herbs and trees that had seeds. Each form of life was able to reproduce by means of these seeds. Each seed contained the genetic code of the parent plant and reproduced “after its own kind”

The same principle applies to people. Every person has a genetic marker, or DNA code that began with Adam. Jesus said the obvious to Nicodemus: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6). If Nicodemus wanted spiritual life he had to get it from a spiritual seed.

The first mention of Jesus in the Bible calls Him a “seed” (Gen. 3:15) When we receive Jesus into our hearts we are “born again”. We become a new creation. This new life does not come from a corruptible seed, but from an incorruptible one, even the Word of God that lives and abides forever (1 Pet. 1:23) Jesus, as you know, is not only the “seed” God promised, He is also the “Word of God” (John 1:1). When we are born again we get a new DNA code or identity. Our whole nature is changed for now we are children of God and His seed abides in us (1 John 3: 6 - 9).

Paul references this in 1 Cor. 15:47: **“The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly”**

Just as we have the “image” or DNA of the human race, we can also have the “image” of our Heavenly Father.

The Old Covenant was written in stone. It was cold, rigid, and inflexible. That code had to be taught to each child born in Israel. They had to try and “conform” their lives to this external covenant. God Himself found fault with this:

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” (Heb. 8:7 - 9).

This Old Covenant was allegorized by Hagar and Ishmael. Ishmael was a fleshly son, born of a fleshly relationship. That system brought bondage (Gal. 4:22 - 25).

Note the “new covenant” would be totally different from the old. Like new wine and

old skins, or new cloth and old garments, these two systems could not be combined.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” (Heb. 8:10, 11).

The love necessary to please God cannot be learned from laws in stone, it comes from within. It is the “fruit” produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). In the flesh we cannot love men who drive nails into our hands and feet. In the Spirit Jesus loves them through us.

Questions for discussion - Lesson 3

1. Are we really winning the world for Christ?
2. What is someone like who hears the Word but does not do it? (Ja. 1:23, 24)
3. Why is the church reluctant to admit mistakes?
4. Did Jesus really expect His disciples to evangelize the world?
5. Do the Christian Epistles emphasize evangelism? If so list the Scriptures. If not, why not?
6. Is it possible to be completely honest and objective about ourselves?
7. Can you think of anywhere that Christianity has taken over a country?
8. If God found fault with the Old Covenant, why did He make it? (See Gal. 3:24)
9. How can we tell if someone is born again?
10. In what way is the Christian a “new creation”? (2 Cor. 5:17)

LESSON THREE

Love - God's Eternal Strategy

When Jesus plainly revealed to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things of the elders, the chief priest, and the scribes, and to be killed . . . and raised again, Peter began to rebuke Him, saying "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee . . ." (Matt. 16:22).

Isn't that interesting? Peter thought that he knew more about Christianity than Jesus did and was attempting to "save" the kingdom by avoiding the cross. It is indeed fortunate for the world that Peter did not succeed. Peter was thinking like a human and human strategy against a superhuman opponent is suicide.

Our only chance for victory against Satan involves the cross. A few days later to help Peter understand, Jesus took him to the Mount of Transfiguration. There, with Moses and Elijah, Jesus spoke about his impending death (Lk. 9:31).

What happened on that mountain is significant beyond words. Peter never forgot it. Years later, as an old man, he referenced that experience as proof that he was not following cunningly devised fables.

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:" 2 Pet 1:16-19

What happened to Jesus on that mountain is described by the Greek word "metamorphoo" from which we get our English word "metamorphosis". It literally means to change into another form. It is what happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. It is also what happens when someone is born again. This concept will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13. Suffice it to say at this time that the proof of Christianity is seen in what it produces. As Jesus said: "By their fruits you shall know them". When someone is born again and starts producing the fruit of the Spirit, their lives are like a city set upon a hill that cannot be hidden. The power of the seed to produce that fruit comes when the seed falls into the ground and dies (John 12:24).

Peter had been a disciple of Jesus from the very beginning. He had witnessed virtually all of the physical miracles Jesus performed. Most of those miracles, however, had only temporary results. Those who were healed of various illnesses ultimately got sick again. Ultimately they died. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, also died. The miracle of conversion, however, is an eternal miracle. The transformation of a sinner into a saint is a miracle of eternal significance. Perhaps this is Peter used the Mount of Transfiguration as a primary reason for believing that he was not following cunningly devised fables.

When Jesus announced to His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die, Peter began to rebuke Him (Matt. 16:21, 22). Once Peter grasped that Calvary was an essential ingredient in the over-all strategy of God, however, his attitude toward the death of Christ experienced a dramatic change. He came to understand that we are **not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Jesus, as of a lamb without blemish . . . foreordained before the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1:19-20).**

In a similar fashion our objections to the preeminence of love may also disappear when illuminated by the light of God's eternal purpose. Whether they do or not, it is still imperative

that we avoid the fatal blunder of “correcting Jesus,” When we endeavor to overcome evil with evil, we have destroyed our chance of victory, Our only hope is in Christ who overcame evil with good. Love is God’s eternal strategy for victory!

Please Consider!

Fact #1. *God does not change.*

. . . I am the Lord, I change not . . . (Mal. 3:6).

God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it: or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Nu. 23:19).

The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, .. (I Sam. 15:29),

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed:But *thou nrt the same*, and thy years shall nor fail (Heb. 1:10-12).

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is *no* variableness, neither shadow of turning (Ja 1 : 17).

Nothing is more obvious or consistent with the Christian concept of Deity. God does not vacillate or cast a shadow by turning. He is the Eternal and unchangeable standard by which all the variables of creation are to be judged. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever,

Fact #2. *God’s strategy has not changed.*

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of the mystery, *which has been kept secret since the world began* But now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25-26).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, *which God ordained before the world* unto our glory” (I Cor.2:7).

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, *which from the beginning Of the world* hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the *Eternal Purpose* which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:9 - 11).

***Even the mysteiyy which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints* (Col. 1:26).**

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, *which was given us zn Christ Jesus before the world began* . . .(II Tim. 1:9).

In hope of eternal life, which God, *That cannot lie* promised before the world began (Tit. 1:2).

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (I Pet. 1:18-20).

Barabbas

The word “Barabbas” is a compound of two words which are familiar to most students of Scripture. The word “bar” means “son of”. We read of “Bar-Jesus, “Bar- Jonah ,’ ’ “Bar-timaeus, ’ ’ etc. The book of Acts explains that “Barnabas” means “son of exhortation” (Acts 4:36). The word “Abba” means “Father.” This word is explained in Galatians 4:6 where we are informed that the Holy Spirit enables us to cry out “Abba, Father.”

The word “Barabbas” therefore literally signifies “Son of the Father.” The Scriptures teach us that Barabbas was:

A notable prisoner - Matthew 27:16

Was bound with them that had made insurrection with him - Mark 15:7

Had committed murder in insurrection - Mark 127

Made sedition in the city - Luke 23:19

Was a robber - John 18:40

Now there was a custom that as a gesture of good will a prisoner would be released unto the Jews at Passover time. Pilate gave the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Both claimed to be the “Son of the Father” and both had designs on establishing a kingdom. Barabbas, however, tried to establish the kingdom by force, Jesus preached the non-violence of love. The multitudes, as you know, chose Barabbas. It was an understandable decision, but it was wrong!

There is an old saying that Alexander the Great conquered the world at the age of 33 and it killed him. Jesus was killed by the world at the age of 33 and He conquered it.

What choice would you have made between Jesus and Barabbas?

Commandment Number One

When Jesus was asked: “. . . which is the greatest commandment in the law?” He responded that it was to: “. . . Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . .

Mark and Luke in reference to this thought also add “strength.” (see Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27).

These are overlapping and redundant expressions which say essentially the same thing in four different ways.

The Bible word for “heart,” for example, refers to man’s intellect, emotion and will. Proverb 23:7 states: “. . . as he THINKETH in his heart, so is he . . .” Jesus said: “Let not your heart be TROUBLED . . .” (John 14:1). Paul wrote: “Every man as he PURPOSETH in his heart, so let him give . . .” (I Cor. 9:7).

The Bible word “heart” therefore refers to man in his entirety. The same is true with reference to each of the other words used in this verse. It is impossible to separate and to segregate “heart, mind, soul, and strength” from the very essence of man. Each of these

attributes, or characteristics, is inter-related with the very identity of man.

The first and great commandment is therefore to love God with your entire being. Every thought, and every emotion, and every desire, and every ability must be surrendered to the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

There is a sense in which it is easier to love God than it is to love our neighbor. Since God is a "Spirit" he doesn't interfere with our self will in the same way that fleshly people do. Therefore, we shall focus our attention in this book primarily on loving our neighbor. If we do not learn to love our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? (I John 4:20).

Conclusion

Since God does not change . .

since God's strategy has not changed . . .

God has always wanted the same thing.

Jesus informs us that the thing which God wants is love!

The commandment to love is not uniquely Christian. It is the same message which God has espoused since the beginning of creation, and it will be much in vogue when faith has become sight and hope disappears into reality.

For this is the message ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one . . . (I J n . 3:11-12).

Things created by God not only can bear up under careful scrutiny, but actually become more beautiful and intricate the more carefully they are examined. A snowflake, for example, is beautiful on the landscape but even more so when magnified a thousand times. The works of men, by contrast, become more ragged and imperfect when carefully scrutinized or examined. A painting, for example, which appears flawless from across the room will reveal many brush marks and human imperfections when seen more closely.

God is love! Those who come to love somehow share in the very nature of Deity and the more carefully love is examined, the more wonderful it becomes. When placed under the microscope of Paul's inspired intellect, love is: Longsuffering - Kind - Without Envy - Not Self Exalting - Not Puffed Up - Well Behaved - Doesn't Insist On Having Its Own Way - Isn't Easily Provoked - Takes Not Account Of Evil - Doesn't Rejoice In Iniquity - Rejoices With Truth - Bears All Things - Believes All Things - Endures All Things - Never Fails. These are the ingredients which God desired in the lives of Cain and Abel,

Moses and Joshua,

Peter and Paul,

You and Me!

This is the message ye heard from the beginning. . . prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, *But Love Abides Forever!*

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 3

- 1, What would have happened to Christianity if Jesus had taken the advice of Peter and avoided the cross?
2. Why was the Mount of Transfiguration a greater proof to Peter than other miracles, like the raising of Lazarus from the dead?

3. What would be the impact if the meanest person in your community became a Christian and was transformed into manifesting the love of Christ?
4. Did Jesus practice what He preached about love?
5. Does love mean no warnings or punishment?
6. List any ways that you feel God has changed.
7. List any ways you feel that God's plans have changed.
8. If love is the ultimate goal, why did God command so many different things?
9. I Corinthians 13 lists many attributes of love. Select three and tell how these would revolutionize your church if they were applied.
10. When did God decide to place such an emphasis on love?

LESSON FOUR

Love - God's Many Sided Wisdom

The third chapter of Ephesians teaches that God's wisdom is "manifold" or "many-sided." The Spirit world is greatly concerned with the activities of earth and they observe our actions with great interest (I Pet. 1 : 12; Matt. 18: 10; I Cor. 11 : 10, etc.). Ephesians 3:10 explains that the principalities and powers in heavenly places (the world of spirit beings) see God's many sided wisdom through the church. Christians are 'on stage' before eternal witnesses. We run in the arena before a great crowd of spectators (Heb. 12:1ff.). The way we behave is intended to display God's many sided wisdom and love has an integral part to play in our behavior.

The Selection of the Apostles

Jesus is all knowing and wise. Then why did He select unlearned and ignorant peasants to be His apostles (see Acts 4:13)? It certainly was not done by accident. Jesus prayed all night long before selecting His twelve apostles (Lk. 6:12 - 16). He could have selected men adept at rhetoric and debate. He could have selected men of prestige and influence. He could have selected men of wealth and power. Instead He selected peasant people. They were not theologians by any stretch of the imagination. They were not priests in the family of Aaron nor Levites in the service of God. They were totally unprepared to debate the issues with the scholars of the day - but they were taught not to debate, but to love, The disciples of Jesus were not to be distinguished by "having all the answers" but by love, Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one toward another" (Jn, 13:35), The selection of such men ought to say something to us about our priorities in evangelism.

Pure Religion is to Love!

Sin accomplishes two things:

1. It separates man from God:

. . . your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear (Is. 59:2).

2. It separates men from one another: Sin not only drove man from the presence of God in Eden, but it was directly responsible for the murderous animosity between Cain and Abel and the myriad of untold woes thence arising.

The word "religion" literally means to "bind back." Pure religion will:

1. Bind man back to God.

2. Bind men back to one another.

We cannot have a proper love for God if we become corrupted by the world, and we cannot have a proper love for humanity if we are insensitive to those in need. Thus the Scriptures teach:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (Ja. 1:27).

This concept is in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose for man.

Some may say, "If this is God's idea of pure religion, then He must have changed His mind," Not so! On the surface it may seem that God has changed but in reality His plan has

always been the same. He dealt with the patriarchs differently for a reason, but His plan was the same. In the age of Moses He implemented another phase of His plan but His ultimate goal remained unchanged. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved by remembering that God's commandments are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end, and the "end of the commandment is love" (I Tim. 1:5).

For example, Leviticus 6: 1-7 describes the law of the trespass offering. A soul that sinned against the Lord by defrauding his brother was penalized in two ways: (1) He was to make restitution to his brother adding the fifth part thereto. (2) He was to bring a trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish. Now we might ask ourselves, why did God command these things? Does God enjoy seeing people deprived of money? Does He take sadistic delight in blood running down an altar? Preposterous!

The truth of the matter is that the sacrifice was not an end in itself; it was a means to an end. The sacrificial system was not for God's benefit but for ours. God wanted people to love Him in the right way and also to love their neighbors. To go through a ritual without love was to miss the point totally. This was Jesus' meaning when He said:

If you bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

The genius of the sacrificial system is that when properly implemented it would not only promote a reverence for Deity, but also a reconciliation with an offended brother. Similarly, the commandments of Christianity are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. The ordinances of Christianity are: (1) Baptism, (2) The Lord's Supper.

You may be interested to note that the commandment to be baptized is the only commandment in all of the Bible given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28: 18-20). There is no cause and effect reasoning associated with baptism. It is not something that was arrived at by a group of logicians at some ecclesiastical conference. It is simply a commandment from Heaven and we obey seeking for a good conscience toward God (I Pet. 3:21). When the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the baptism of John they rejected the counsel of God against themselves (Lk. 7:30). The same must also be true with reference to Christian baptism. Those who refuse the authority of Heaven have missed the most important commandment of all. For additional Scriptures regarding baptism see Acts 2:38, 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27-29; etc.

The "communion" is described in I Corinthians as a "communion of the body of Christ" (I Cor. 10: 16). The "Body of Christ" is made up of Christians, People from every race and social strata have become one body by means of Jesus, If we break bread without discerning the body we eat and drink damnation to ourselves (I Cor, 1 I :29), This was the very problem at Corinth, Their meetings displayed discrimination, not unity, Therefore they came together, not for the better, but for the worse (I Cor. 1. 1:17. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the ordinances of Christianity, are in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose for mankind. The first reflects our love for God, and the second displays our love for one another.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not ends in themselves, but means to an end, and the "end of the commandment is love" (I Tim, 1:5).

Love Fulfills The Law

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly

comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law, (Rom. 13:8-10).*

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Gal. 5: 13-14).*

If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ye do well (J a 2:8).

The law was not given to save:

.. . for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, (Gal.2: 16).

The law is not opposed to God's promises:

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid (Gal. 3:2 1).

The law was to prepare for and point to Jesus Christ:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith . . . (Gal. 3:24).

The law is fulfilled by love:

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, . . . love . . . (Gal. 5: 14).

The Christian is not under the law:

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law (Gal. 5: 18).

The "law of Christ" is to love:

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

The royal law of love is also the law of liberty:

"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment, (Ja. 2:8-13).

Love Fulfilled the Prophets

Jesus said:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .

Love thy neighbour as thyself. . .

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37 - 40).

Therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:12)!

When the contemporaries of Jesus challenged His behavior on the Sabbath day or His willingness to fraternize with publicans and sinners, He would sometimes respond by urging

them to study the message of the prophets. “Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice” (Matt. 9: 13). The passage quoted is from Hosea 6:6. “For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”

Micah 6:6-8 is quite similar:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

The scribes and Pharisees were students of the prophets, but they had missed the point of prophetic teaching. Jesus correctly looked beyond the various rites and rituals of Judaism to the ultimate aim of God, God was not just interested in seeing blood on an altar or rivers of oil flow from a priestly sacrifice, He was interested in producing love.

It is both interesting and frightening to remember that all of the prophets were persecuted and that Jesus died on a cross. For some reason the religious world is determined to pervert the will of God and make “sacrifice” more important than “mercy.”

The prophet Isaiah dealt sternly with this perversion of truth.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to treat my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood . . . Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (Is. 1:10-15, 23).

The divine cure for the problem is in the following verses:

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Is. 1:16-18).

The essence of pure religion has never changed. Pure religion is still to “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Ja. 1:27).

God does not depend upon us for sustenance:

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? (Ps. 50:12-13).

The Psalmist was not pleading for more sacrifices for all the beasts of the forest belonged to God and the cattle upon a thousand hills. He was pleading for a change of heart that would cause men to be right with God, vs. 14, and at the same time reconciled to their brothers, vs. 20.

The message of the prophets is in perfect harmony with the eternal purpose of God. A scribe once put it this way in a conversation with Jesus:

Well Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God: and there is none else but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt Offerings and sacrifices.

Jesus responded: *“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God”* (Mk. 12 : 32-34).

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 4

1. What kind of men do we select when we try to get something done for God?
2. Do we differ from Jesus in this regard? If so, how?
3. Why are rich people often put on church boards?
4. Were any of the original 12 apostles rich?
5. Where did the Apostles receive their ability to love?
6. Is baptism associated with love? If so, how?
7. How is the Lord's Supper associated with love?
8. How does love fulfill the law?
9. How does love fulfill the prophets?
10. How was the message of the prophets received by their contemporaries?

LESSON FIVE

More of God's Wisdom

The Narrow Way is to Love

Matt. 7:13, 14 was one of the first passages of Scripture I committed to memory. I had just left a large and liberal denomination and started worshiping a small Bible believing congregation. In my youthful ignorance I assumed that large liberal churches were the broad way, and that small conservative congregations were the narrow way.

Some time later I memorized the Golden Rule.

It was years later when I realized that God had put these verses together. What God has put together man should not put asunder. Now I have a growing awareness that the way of love is the narrow way that Jesus spoke of. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is constantly contrasting legalism with love.

- The law said don't kill but Jesus demands that we not even be angry.
- The law said don't commit adultery, but Jesus does not want us to even look with lust.
- The law regulated making oaths, Jesus does not want us to swear at all.
- The law said: "An eye for an eye" but Jesus demands that we love our enemies.

In each instance the teachings of Jesus are far more demanding than the Law of Moses. Now consider the teachings of Jesus and note that His teachings about the "narrow way" are immediately preceded by the "golden rule."

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the straight gate for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:12-14).

The narrow way of which Jesus spoke was the confining philosophy and lifestyle of loving your fellow men in the same way you love yourself. The word "narrow" is from *thlibo* which comes from the word for pressing or pressure and relates to that which presses or burdens the spirit. The word "strait" is from *stenaō* which means to groan. The narrow way and the strait gate is the way of compassionate concern for others which presses down upon us and causes us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Operating under a philosophy of legalism, the priest and the Levite could go about their religious obligations oblivious to the pain and suffering of a man who had fallen among thieves. The way of the Samaritan, however, was not so broad. His life was not regulated by legal documents and decrees of jurisprudence. It was regulated by love. Compelled by love and compassion, he bound up the wounds of the injured man, transported him to an inn and paid for his expenses.

Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the presence of the Pharisees "who were covetous." From the legalistic standpoint the rich man seemed to have an impeccable record. Our Lord does not impugn the manner by which his money was obtained nor cite one Scripture which he violated in the course of his daily conduct. He simply observed that a lowly beggar was at the rich man's gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table - and the dogs of the street came and licked his wounds.

To neglect such a beggar may be defensible in a legal court where loopholes and technicalities sometimes obscure the condition of the heart. *But it is not defensible in a judgment based upon love!*

. . . Whoso hath of this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion upon him, *How dwelleth the love of God in him?* (I Jn. 3: 17).

A person who is calloused and insensitive to human need is out of step with the army of King Jesus. A philosophy which demands of us that we consider someone else's needs on a par with our own is narrow by any standards. It is a code of conduct so restrictive that it probes into every aspect of being. "By love" we become enslaved one to another (Gal. 5: 13).

To be Perfect is to Love!

Remember that Job was called: "a perfect and upright man." He feared God and turned away from evil. The religion of Job involved loving God.

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually (Job. 1:5).

But note that the religion of Job also involved loving his fellow men.

. . . I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy, I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked and plucked the spoil out of his teeth . . . (Job. 29:12-17).

The word for "perfect" in Hebrews is *tawn* and in Greek is *teleios*. Both of these words refer not to a person who is sinless, but one who is complete! God intended for man to love Deity with all his heart and his neighbor as himself - Job was complete!

Notice how beautifully the life of Job harmonizes with the teachings of Jesus.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!* (Matt. 5:43-48).

To be perfect is not to be sinless. *It is to love as God loves.* If we only love our friends, we are imperfect or incomplete. Those who have the Spirit of Christ must love everybody. Once suggested, this concept of the "total" Christian lends insight into a number of passages throughout the Scriptures. Take, for example, the story of the Rich Young Ruler. He had lived an exemplary life in striving to please God, but he had neglected his humanitarian responsibilities. He was "incomplete" or "imperfect" because he had attempted to love God without due concern for people. Jesus therefore instructed him ". . . If thou wilt be perfect, go and

sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come and follow me” (Matt. 19:21).

The book of Colossians contains many commandments regarding Christian conduct. We are to put off such things as anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, etc. and we are to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, etc. On top of all these things we are to put on *Love, which is the bond of perfectness* (Col. 3:14).

The book of James likewise places a strong emphasis upon inter-personal relationships. Our faith in God is dead unless it is accompanied by works for one another. In this context love is designated as “the perfect law” or the “law of liberty” (Ja. 1 :25).

The conclusion to the Corinthian correspondence contains a final appeal for maturity.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be Perfect . . . be of one mind, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you (II Cor. 13: 11).

To be perfect is to love!

To “Walk In the Light” is to Love!

Serious students of the Scriptures will be interested in this expression “walking in the light” for it bears a direct relationship with our cleansing in the blood of Christ (see I Jn. 1:7). But what does it mean to “Walk in the light as He is in the light”? Perhaps our understanding will be illuminated by a brief review of the term “light” as it is employed by John. It is found 23 times in his Gospel, 5 times in his first epistle, and 7 times in the book of Revelation.

John’s first usage of “light” associates it with the nature of God (Jn. 1:4). It is therefore also naturally applied to Jesus (Jn 1:9 etc.), and ultimately to the Christian. We are commanded to “walk in the light” in the same way that Jesus “walked in the light.” Fortunately John explains what he means by this expression:

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes (I Jn. 2:9-11).

John employs the expression “love” so often that he is sometimes known as the “Apostle of Love.” Such a title is quite interesting in view of the fact that earlier in his life Jesus had designated him as a “Son of Thunder” (Mk. 3: 17). How beautiful! Love that “forbears all things” and “endures all things” replaced that violent nature which once erupted like thunder on a hot summer day. Feelings of animosity and violence came to be deemed by John as so utterly out of character with the Jesus kind of life that he branded them as “darkness” which blinded the eyes.

The Epistle of I John has only five chapters and 105 verses, yet the word love occurs 33 times. It is woven into the fabric of everything expressed in the letter. It is said to be the nature of God, the nature of Christ and the nature of the Christian. To be without love is to be without eternal life (I Jn, 3:15).

Howard Marshall in the New International Commentary makes this interesting observation on page 2 of the volume on the Epistles of John:

The student of the Greek New Testament is also well advised to begin his reading with these Epistles. Their Greek is the easiest to read in the whole of the New Testament. The total vocabulary of the New Testament is 5437 words; the number of different words used in 1 - 3 John is 303, and the majority of these are common words.

The message of John, as well as the message of the whole Bible, is not something technical that can only be understood by the intellectual and the elite. The main message of the Bible is love. This can be experienced by little children as well brilliant adults and distinguished professors.

Love is the Key to the Kingdom

Mark 12:32-34 relates a story quite similar to the one surrounding the text of our book, It differs in at least one important respect. The scribe in Mark's story had come to his own conclusion about the importance of love, When he affirmed that "The Two Commandments" were more important than "all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," Jesus responded by saying, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mk, 12:34).

In other words, this man was on the right track. The Kingdom of God was not an earthly kingdom ruled by the enforcement of law; it was a spiritual kingdom controlled by the power of love.

For some reason men feel insecure in the absence of law, We sometimes endeavor to insure a holiness on the part of believers by passing laws of our own. The commandments "touch not, taste not and handle not" do have an appearance of wisdom but the Scriptures categorically affirm that they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Col, 2:23). You cannot make men holy by passing laws!

The brethren in Rome also had some legal hang-ups. The Roman letter reflects their controversy regarding the merits of certain "holy days" and "kosher foods." Such arguments, however, are totally beside the point in a Kingdom based upon love, Romans 14:1 forbids argumentation about the weak brother's opinions and Romans 14: 17 reminds that the nature of the Kingdom is not regulations about eating and drinking but "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Colossians 1:13 teaches that the Christian has been transformed out of the power of darkness and into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, For further study into this process on conversion as it relates to love see: John 14:15,21; 15:10; I Corinthians 8:3; I John 4:7,12,16, etc.

Love and the Holy Spirit

The process of conversion involves the mystery of life which somehow eludes the finite mind. A little grain of wheat possesses the germ of life. Synthetic seeds do not! The seed which is alive can wrest that intangible something from the dust, press its way through the crust of the earth and twist toward the sun that life may continue. It not only has the power to grow but also to reproduce. The process is so simple that even little children can plant a garden. It is so profound that the world's greatest scientists do not grasp its full significance.

Human procreation is similar but even more complex. The writer of Ecclesiastes reflected upon the development of the human fetus and wrote:

As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all (Eccl. 11:5).

Since we do not understand the mysteries of being born the first time, it is logical that we will be unable to comprehend completely the mysteries of being born again. Living seeds can grow, even when planted by accident, but the process which makes them grow is beyond the finite

mind.

Those who are born of the spirit experience a remarkable transformation. They become “new creations” in Christ Jesus. They no longer view their surroundings from a human point of view but have a tendency to see all things through the eyes of Jesus. It is His Spirit which reproduces His likeness in the believer.

Human birth results from a corruptible seed but the believer is born from an incorruptible seed -the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Though heaven and earth shall pass away, the Word of God shall not.

Every living seed is programmed by God to produce something. Locked up in one seed may be the characteristics of a towering tree, in another the sweetness of a melon or the fragrance of a flower. But locked up in the Word of God are the characteristics of Jesus. When we receive that seed, we bear that likeness. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22).

There is no way we can allow that seed to grow without love, and there is no way that we can achieve that love without allowing that seed to grow. *It is impossible to achieve the love of which the Bible speaks without the power of the Holy Spirit!* We are justified by faith . . . we rejoice in hope. . . we glory in tribulation . . . but the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1 - 5).

The fruit of the Spirit is love, and it is delicious beyond the ability of man to experience adequately. To know the love of Christ is to deal in a matter so profound that it passes knowledge (Eph. 3: 19). It is a many-sided wonder which manifests itself in a profusion of joy and peace. It tempers our conduct with longsuffering, gentleness and goodness. It enhances our personality with fidelity, meekness and self-control. It is the work of the Holy Spirit and cannot be replicated without His power. It is beyond the reach of mere humanitarianism and philanthropy. It is beyond the grasp of unregenerate men, To suggest that the summation of our eternal responsibility is to love God and our fellow men must not induce us to avoid or evade the miracle of conversion.

Jesus said it best - ***Ye must be born again!*** Our physical birth gave to us the genes and chromosomes of our earthly father so that we share his likeness, When we are born from above and become children of our Father which is in heaven, we also bear His likeness.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another . . (I Jn. 3:9-11).

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another (I Thess. 4:9).

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God . . . (II Thess. 3:5).

For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7).

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us (II Tim. 13-14).

. . . and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us . (Rom. 5:5).

Love is of God (I Jn, 4:7).

Bearing Fruit and Love

At the risk of being redundant please permit a brief word about bearing fruit.” Many have felt coerced into an evangelistic fervor because Jesus said that branches which did not bear fruit would be cast into the fire. The context of John 15 does not support such an emphasis.

Please read again the entire section (Jn, 13:31-16:33). Remember that Jesus was taking an old commandment about love and giving it such significance that it became virtually a “new commandment” (Jn. 13:34). This was to be the primary mark of His disciples for “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:35).

In the first 58 verses of the discourse there are 24 references to love. Because the Apostles would be incapable of achieving this love on their own Jesus instructed them to “abide” in Him like a branch abides in the vine. In this way they would draw that supernatural something through His Spirit that would enable them to love. This love is the “fruit” referred to in John 15 (see in particular Jn. 15: -17). The fruit of the Spirit is Love . . . (Gal. 5:22).

God is Love

God is love! He created a universe with the intention of reproducing spiritual entities who bear His likeness. Since He wanted them to be like Him, it was essential that His creation have the power of choice. Just as physical life results from seeds which are planted, spiritual life in God’s likeness is the result of His incorruptible seed which takes root in the human heart. I John 3:9 teaches that the conduct of the Christian is transformed because we have the “seed” or “sperm” of God within us!

If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, he is Anathema, Maranatha (I Cor. 16:22). That is to say that anyone who is not attracted to the story of a compassionate God who heals the sick and cares for little children is so utterly perverse that like a brute beast he needs to be taken and destroyed.

An intellectual and emotional appreciation of good is essential to our salvation. Even good seed cannot grow on solid rock.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath 1to us . God is love and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (I Jn, 4:7-16).

Questions for Discussion Lesson 5

1. Which is more demanding, law or love?
2. If your child hits you on one cheek, should you turn the other? If not, why not?
3. Who is our neighbor today?

4. If we saw someone in need on our way to church, what should we do to please God?
5. Is it possible for us to be perfect as commanded in Matthew 5:48?
6. What changed John the apostle from a “Son of Thunder” to an Apostle of love?
7. Can a person be saved without love?
8. How does the Holy Spirit produce love?
9. How did Jesus differ from God?
10. Does having a high IQ make it easier for us to love?

LESSON SIX

The Mentality of Murder

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (I Jn. 3:15). The world's first murder grew out of a religious controversy. The basic facts of the story are so familiar that we need not recount them in detail. Suffice it to say that:

1. Cain loved God.
2. Cain did not love his brother.

This simple observation provides us with insight into one of the most serious problems ever dealt with upon the pages of human history. Cain tried to please God without the benefit of humanitarian concern. He built his altar and went through the rituals of his religion, but he did not love his brother. He was deeply disturbed when God did not respect his offering, and he apparently blamed Abel more than himself for his difficulty.

The Scriptures remark, "And Cain talked with Abel . . ." The fact that this conversation was a prelude to murder lends weight to the assumption that it was a heated religious controversy. On this point Adam Clarke remarks in his commentary on Genesis:

It is here supposed that the first murder committed in the world was the consequence of a religious dispute; however, this may have been, millions since have been sacrificed to prejudice, bigotry and intolerance. Here, certainly, originated the many-headed monster, religious persecution; the spirit of the wicked one in his followers impels them to afflict and destroy all those who are partakers of the Spirit of God. Every persecutor is a legitimate son of the old murderer. This is the first triumph of Satan; it is not merely a death that he has introduced, but a violent one, as the first-fruits of sin. It is not the death of an ordinary person, but of the most holy man then in being; it is not brought about by the providence of God, or by a gradual failure and destruction of the earthly fabric, but by a violent separation of body and soul; it is not done by a common enemy, from whom nothing better could be expected, but by the hand of a brother, and for no other reason but because the object of his envy was more righteous than himself. (p. 60).

There are many aspects of this story that are too elusive to warrant dogmatism. Did Cain feel destined to be the "seed of woman" who would crush the serpent's head? Did his bloodless offering indicate that he had no awareness of sin? Did he murder his brother in a fit of carnal jealousy or in a "righteous" attempt to preserve his sacred prerogatives as *the* firstborn in the family? I presume that even the statement in Hebrews 11:4 regarding the faith of Abel will be subjected by some to various interpretations. *But there can be no misunderstanding about the necessity of love!*

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning that we should love one another, Not as Cain who was of that wicked one and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous (I Jn. 3:11-12).

Jesus seemed to make an association between the death of Abel and the religious martyrdom of other righteous men.

Wherefore, behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things will come upon this generation (Matt. 23:34-36).

It is sobering to realize that religious men can have a mentality of murder. Jesus Himself was crucified by religious men. Jesus was crucified by students of the Scriptures, and even more significant - the death of Jesus was directly attributable to strong religious convictions.

The Jews said to Pilate: **“We have *alaw*, and by our law he ought to die . . .”** (Jn. 19:7).

The High Priest said: **“. . . it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not”** (Jn. 11:50).

The murderers of Jesus were undeniably religious. They paid their tithes, they uttered their prayers - they were diligent in their duties at the temple - *but they did not love humanity!* They devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers. They ignored their parents under the ruse of being super-religious. They placed more value upon a regulation than upon a person. *Like Cain of old they made the fatal mistake of trying to love God without loving humanity!*

Jesus once predicted that His disciples would be put to death in a fervor of religious devotion. He said:

They shall put you out of the synagogue: Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service (Jn. 16:2).

Someone has observed that there is but a short step between being willing to die for a cause and being willing to kill for it. How aptly this principle is illustrated in the life of Paul. Note these remarks by Paul and consider their direct association with his zeal for God:

I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished (Acts 22:3-5).

The disciples of Jesus had little to fear from the publicans, the harlots - but much to fear from an overly religious man like Paul.

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities . . . (Acts 26:9).

Lest you think this course of action inconsistent with his religious convictions, let me remind you that in spite of the blood letting and torture Paul declared: “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23: 1).

The cure for this murderous mentality came with the process of conversion when the Love of Christ constrained him so that he could no longer look at a man from a human point of view (11 Cor, 5: 14-21), The Spirit of Jesus does not incite us to murder our fellow men.

The mentality of murder is not the exclusive property of any particular religious party or sect. It is a commodity within the grasp of anyone who is capable of hate, It is not something uncommon or rare, but it is everywhere around us . . . , and perhaps even within us, One of its most hellish characteristics is that it frequently rears its ugly head under the guise of “doing God a service.” However, no matter how it appears *it is always wrong! It is diametrically opposed to the*

teachings of Jesus!

The sermon on the Mount pronounces a blessing upon the meek,
the merciful,
and the pure in heart.

“Blessed are the peacemakers . . .” said the Prince of Peace, “for they shall be called the children of God.” Away with hatred and the desire to retaliate –

“turn the other cheek”

“go the second mile”

“love your enemies”

“bless them that curse you”

“do good to them that hate you”

“pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you.”

There is no argument against love! And this was to be the cardinal characteristic of the Christian.
"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another!"

Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that nomurderer hath eternal life abiding in him (I Jn. 3:15).

Lest anyone should think that the followers of Jesus are somehow immune to the mentality of murder, allow me to briefly review the first century or so following the Protestant Reformation.

Reading these next few pages will require a measure of discipline. No attempt has been made to embellish what happened with a veneer of respectability or reason. What happened was not reasonable. Those who struggle through the unvarnished truth about “Christian Wars” will find themselves beset by a mixture of incredulity and nausea. In reality the situation was worse than words are able to convey.

Someone has said, “Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.” Perhaps the shocking truth about “Christian hate” will play some positive role in preventing the “mentality of murder” from dominating your heart.

The majority of the following has been condensed from *A Manual of Church History* by Albert Henry Newman, Vol. 11, Philadelphia, The American Baptist Publication Society.

Read . . . and weep!

Peasants War 1524-1525

Hans Muller, experienced warrior and orator, led 1200 peasants to Waldshut on August 24. Here under the great reformer, Balthasar Hubmaier, an “Evangelical Brotherhood” was formed. Believing that the clergy would only perpetuate taxation and oppression, they vowed to destroy all castles, monasteries and everything ecclesiastical. A fanatical peasant leader named Munzer claimed that the sword of Gideon was in his hand and was said to have hysterically shrieked to his followers:

On, on, on, never mind the wail of the godless. Though they beg in friendly tones, though they cry and whimper like children, pity not. Was it not thus that God commanded his people to slay the Canaanites? On, on, while the fire is hot. Down with the castles and their inmates. God is with you, on, on.

Luther wrote against these murderous and pillaging bands of peasants in language as beserk as that of Munzer: He urged that they be:

crushed, strangled, and stabbed, privately and publicly, by whomsoever can do it, just as one would beat to death a mad dog. The magistracy that falters, commits sin; since it does not satisfy the peasants to belong to the devil themselves, but they constrain many pious people to their wickedness and damnation. Therefore, dear sirs, fire here, save here, stab, smite, strangle them, whoever can. If your death results, very well, you can never attain to a more blessed death.

It is shocking to realize that such words could come from anyone, but especially a man who had just completed a translation of the Bible. Luther had discovered the great doctrinal truth of justification by faith, but reading his words helps us to understand why the Scriptures teach that love is more important than faith or hope.

Leonard Fries, secretary of the City of Wurzburg, compiled a documentary history describing the deluge of blood. He said:

In the German nation alone more than 100,000 men were overwhelmed and perished in this deluge in less than ten weeks.

Sacking of Rome and imprisonment of the Pope, 1527

Approximately 11,000 desperate and adventurous Lutherans under Frundsberg crossed the Alps and joined a somewhat smaller Spanish army under the Duke of Bourbon. The army forced its way into the city losing scarcely a hundred men while slaying from four to six thousand. The Pope escaped for a time to the castle of St. Angelo. Some of the cardinals were seized and dragged through the city, Church leaders payed some 15 million ducats ransom to be spared. Churches, including St. Peters, were turned into stables and the Pope became the instrument of the Emperor.

Second War Between the Emperor and the King of France 1527-1529

As Rome was being sacked Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France were forming a military coalition against the Emperor. Henry sought to enlist the good favor of the Pope for he had wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine, who was the Emperor's aunt. The war terminated in 1529 with the Treaty of Cambrai, and Henry had secured favorable promises from the Pope regarding his divorce from Catherine, promises which the Pope was unable to keep.

Origin of Protestantism

After the peace of Cambrai the Emperor, the Pope and the King of France united their efforts at the Diet of Speier (1529), determined to use drastic measures to restore the strength of the Catholic Church. Thus it was enacted that:

rebaptizers and rebaptized, all and each, male and female, of intelligent age, be judged and brought from natural life to death, without antecedent inquisition of the spiritual judges.

The reformers responded that "Christ was again in the hands of Caiaphas and Pilate." On April 25, 1529, a protestation was made against this decree and Protestantism became a formal reality.

Invasion of the Turks

Immediately after the Diet of Speier and the declaration of war between the Catholics and

the Protestants, the followers of Mohammed mustered 150,000 troops, conquered the Hungarian army of Ferdinand and arrived at Vienna on September 26. It was an imposing army with 22,000 camels, oriental pomp and the unmistakable air of religious fanaticism. The invasion of the Mohammedans had a unifying effect on "Christendom" and thousands rallied to defeat the Turks who disbanded on October 14.

Strong Disagreement Among the Protestants

On April 22, 1529 the Protestants vowed a united resistance to all opposition on the basis of the divine word. Unity plans, however, were thwarted by Luther who attributed the teachings of Zwingli to the devil. He denounced the followers of Zwingli as "devils, knaves, heretics, rioters, dissemblers, hypocrites, etc." Chief among the areas of disagreement was the Lord's Supper. Luther insisted that the expression, "This is my body," be taken literally; Zwingli interpreted it symbolically. Luther considered that to unite with people who strive against the sacrament would be "to meet damnation with body and soul." He concluded that the whole of God's army would be destroyed for the sake of one Achan.

First Cappel War 1529

The Cappel wars in Switzerland were distinctly religious and were fought between the Roman Catholics and the followers of Zwingli. Zwingli was more militant than Luther. The burning of a Zwinglian preacher at Schwyz precipitated the confrontation. Conflict was averted through the entreaties of a weeping mediary who pleaded for delay and negotiations.

Second Cappel War 1531

The evangelical zeal of the Zwinglians was seen by the Catholics as a violation of earlier agreements. Evangelical preachers were denounced as cup thieves and soul murderers. The smouldering flames of hatred erupted in October, 1531 and 8,000 Catholics took the offensive. Zwingli could only muster 1500 soldiers. His pitiful army was destroyed and Zwingli was killed. His body was cut to pieces and burned, and his ashes were mingled with those of swine and scattered to the wind.

The Schmalkald War and the Peace of Augsburg 1546-1 555

During the years 1532-1546 Lutheranism flourished as never before. The first indication of serious trouble came in 1542 when war broke out between two Saxon houses over the collection of taxes for the Turkish War. At about the same time Duke Henry of Braunschweig sought to punish the city of Goslar for anti-Catholic measures and was himself attacked by troops led by the Landgrave of Hesse. The Duke was defeated, and Catholic altars and other sacred objects were stolen or destroyed, It was now evident to Catholic leaders that Protestantism would have to be stopped, and after several years of preparation Duke Henry was again back in the field with an army of 13,500 men (Sept., 1545). A conference in January, 1546 at Regensburg demonstrated again the irreconcilable differences between Protestants and Catholics of that age and by July, 1546 a formal declaration of war was made. The emperor wished the war to be political, but the Pope proclaimed a crusade against the heretics and offered indulgences to all who would participate. The Protestants were summarily defeated, and the Pope was faced with the

problem of how to deal with elements of Christendom which denied many aspects of the Catholic faith. While wrestling with this problem storm clouds again appeared upon the horizon, but this time the Pope was at odds with the Emperor. In November, 1551 war again broke out and continued intermittently until the Augsburg Treaty on September 25, 1555. While the treaty offered some hope of peace between Catholics and Lutherans, both still remained adamant against Zwinglians, Calvinists and Anabaptists.

Murders at Geneva

Thus far we have spoken of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism. Now it is time to deal with the teachings of Calvin which had a tendency to draw strength from the followers of both Luther and Zwingli. Calvin began his works at Geneva in 1536. He became so dogmatic and intolerant that he exterminated opposition by force.

No mercy was shown to enemies of the theocracy. New methods of torture were introduced, and the obstinate were given to understand that unless they yielded 'they would end their days in torment'. A system of espionage was introduced to prevent secret transgression, informers shared in the fines imposed, and the testimony of children against parents was freely received. During the years 1542-1546, 58 executions occurred and 76 were banished. During the pestilence of 1545, 34 women were burned or quartered on suspicion of spreading the plague by magical means. . . (p. 220).

Calvin's most famous execution was that of a Roman Catholic named Michael Servetus. From 1546-1553 Servetus carried on a correspondence with Calvin wherein he greatly irritated the great theologian by harshly criticizing his religious views and by raising difficult questions. At last Calvin sent him a copy of his "Institutes" indicating that they contained a full statement of his views. When Servetus returned this sacred work, he had made many notations of disagreement. Calvin stormed, "There is hardly a page that is not defiled by his vomit."

Though Servetus believed that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, and though he had unbounded reverence for the Scriptures, he was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake on October 27, 1553. With rare courage he refused to withdraw his objectionable teachings, and after writhing in the flames for half an hour, cried aloud, "Jesus, thou Son of the eternal God, have compassion upon me," and then gave up the ghost.

The leading reformers of Germany and Switzerland heartily commended Calvin and the Genevan Council for ridding the world of one who was regarded as an arch enemy of the truth.

Huguenot Wars 1560 and Onward

Indicative of the bloodshed in this period is the infamous St. Bartholomew's massacre on the night of August 24, 1572 when 70,000 Protestants were murdered in a single night. There was great rejoicing in Rome, and the Pope sent congratulations to the King and Queen and struck a medal in commemoration of the event. Halley's Bible Handbook indicates that there were 200,000 martyrs before the Edict of Nantes brought the conflict to an end in 1598.

War of Independence in the Netherlands

Since 1536 strong measures were used to stop heresy. These measures were intensified in 1567 by the arrival of the Duke of Alva. Opposition to heresy escalated until Alva called a council and declared that heresy was high treason. This council is also called "The Council of Blood." Eighteen thousand were executed. The conflict continued intermittently until 1648 when the

complete independence of the Protestant Netherlands was recognized.

Thirty Years War 1618-1648

It is obvious from even a brief overview of history that there never was a time of real peace among the “Christian” people of Europe for many generations, By 1618 the assassinations, executions and intrigue again escalated into full scale conflict. The Thirty Years War has been described as one of the most destructive wars in history. Newman observes:

The extent of the destruction of life through the Thirty Years War cannot be estimated. If we take into account the multitudes who died of starvation and exposure, the hundreds of thousands of women and children who were slain in the sacking and destroying of towns and cities, the fearful waste of life that must have been involved in camp-following, the deaths caused by the war would amount to many millions. In Bohemia at the beginning of the war there was a population of two million of whom about eight-tenths were Protestant; at the close of the war there were about 800,000 Catholics and no Protestants, Taking Germany and Austria together, we may safely say that the population was reduced by one half if not by two thirds . . . (p. 410).

An army of 40,000 was said to have had a loathsome camp-following of 140,000. As this miserable coalition moved across the countryside, it destroyed everything within its path. Business and agriculture were virtually non-existent and desolation was everywhere. Many of those who did not die in war were doomed by starvation and disease.

The Peace of Westphalia 1648

With this brief background the Peace of Westphalia can be seen in its proper perspective. Peace had become an expedient. Survival demanded that religious antagonists be willing to live and let live. The desire to proselyte became all but extinct for a blessed interval of time. Europe could no longer afford the luxury of intolerance. It had destroyed nations, made desolate the countryside and decimated humanity. For the survival of civilization there was no alternative but peace. Religious convictions, strong though they were, were overshadowed by the realization that continued conflict was suicide.

Application for Us

One cannot help but wonder if dire circumstances do not again warrant a change in our mentality. The Christian world is rent and torn by incredible strife yet, “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes” (Prov. 16:2) . There is not one faction within the framework of Christendom that is immune to the toxins of suspicion and fear. We have been so preoccupied by internal conflict that we have had little energy left for world evangelism. Thus our planet is crawling with billions of souls who have no saving knowledge of Jesus. We are plagued by starvation, disease, hatred and war. The nations of our world march onward toward a nuclear Armageddon and the church can no longer indulge itself in the luxury of hate.

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (I Jn. 3: 15).

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 6

1. Is it possible that Cain thought he was doing something right when he killed his brother Abel?

2. Is it possible that the Jews thought they were doing something right when they killed Jesus?
3. Is there any association between the murder of Abel by Cain and the murder of Jesus by the Jews?
4. How could Paul think he was doing God a service by putting Christians to death?
5. Which side was right in the Peasants' War?
6. What does it mean to be a Protestant?
7. Is there a difference between killing a Mohammedan and killing someone who claims to be a Christian?
8. How is someone who hates his brother a murderer?
9. What do you see in modern Christendom that is like hate?
10. Is it ever right for Christians to take up arms and fight?

LESSON SEVEN

The Mentality of Peace

“ . . . God is not the author of confusion, but of peace . . . ” (I Cor. 14:33). When all the activities of earth are reduced to their lowest common denominator, we find that only two forces have been at work, One force for good and the other for evil. Sometimes evil appears to be good for a time and vice versa; but in the final analysis the simple dichotomy, God and Satan, is a valid explanation for life as we know it.

Important Contrasts

The book of James was directed to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion. It is a matter of record that Jewish converts were involved in a serious and long-standing dispute which threatened to destroy the primitive church. The controversy over legalism manifested itself in Antioch (Acts 15: 1ff), Jerusalem (Acts 21:20ff), Crete (Titus 1: 10), Rome (Rom. 14: 1ff), and in virtually every other part of the Mediterranean world. It formed the basis for Paul’s letter to the Galatians. It is the background for understanding the opposition to Paul at Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. To grasp this issue properly is to take a giant stride toward a proper understanding of a large segment of New Testament Scripture.

The Jewish teachers who traveled the earth attempting to destroy the work of Paul undoubtedly felt that they were doing God a service. The “debates, envyings, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, and tumults” (I I Cor. 12:20) which usually accompanied their efforts, however, indicate a different type of wisdom than God employs.

This truth is brought graphically to our attention. After emphasizing the power of a teacher’s influence and, therefore, the strict judgment which all teachers must face, these words are utilized to delineate and describe two types of wisdom:

James 3:13-18

Earthly Wisdom	Wisdom From Above
bitter envying	pure
earthly	peaceable
sensual	gentle
devilish	easy to be entreated
confusion	mercy
evil work	good fruits
	no partiality
	no hypocrisy

The Galatian letter contains the same type of dichotomy:

Galatians 5: 19-23

Works of Flesh	Fruit of spirit
adultery	love
fornication	joy
uncleanness	peace
lasciviousness	longsuffering
idolatry	gentleness
witchcraft	goodness

hatred
variance
emulations
wrath
strife
seditions
heresies
envyings
murders
drunkenness
revellings, and such like

faith
meekness
temperance

The Colossian letter teaches:

Colossians 3: 8 - 14

Put Off
anger
wrath
malice
blasphemy
filthy communication
lying

Put On
compassion
kindness
humbleness
meekness
longsuffering
forbearance
forgiveness
love

Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7: 16). He spoke these words about false prophets immediately following His teaching about the “Golden Rule.” The basic character of religious leaders can be determined by their fruits. Some bushes are noted for their thorns, others for their luscious fruit. Some teachers are known for their bitter anger, others for being easy to be entreated and long-suffering. By their fruits ye shall know them!

God is not the author of confusion; He is the Author of peace. When God created Eden it was a model of peace and tranquility. There was no carnage or confusion, for even the animals ate vegetation (Gen. 1:30). Once the Author of Confusion had done his evil work all of nature was thrown into the agony of turmoil and fear. It is increasingly obvious that the Author of Confusion has been at work in Christendom.

Prayer of Jesus for Peace

The longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible was spoken the night before Calvary. In the agony of that hour He lifted up His voice for Himself and in behalf of His Apostles. Then He said:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me . . . I (Jn. 17:20-23).

The importance of this prayer is significant beyond words! When Jesus prayed for us the one thing and the only thing that the Scriptures record is that He wanted us to get along with one another. Those who have the Spirit of Jesus cannot be indifferent to Christian unity! A careful analysis of this prayer indicates a direct association between peace in Christendom and the evangelization of the world. Conversely there is also an undeniable relationship between our division and an unbelieving world, If our love for one another proves that we are disciples of Jesus, our lack of love must prove the opposite!

Threats to Peace

The unity and harmony of believers is so vital to the very nature of Christianity that anyone who threatens this unity is to be marked and avoided.

Let us consider the Roman letter by way of illustration. As Rome was the political hub of the ancient world it was a melting pot of races, creeds and nationalities. It is not difficult to imagine many tensions in such a city. The Roman, obsessed by his overpowering desire for world domination, was offensive to the philosophical Greek. Thousands of oppressed slaves were on the verge of revolution against their impious masters. The Jews were incensed and highly offended by the idolatry of the pagans. Society was in a seething turmoil with all of the problems of class struggle, discrimination and poverty which have also plagued our modern world.

The church in Rome would naturally have converts from all social and ethnic backgrounds for Christianity is a faith for *all nations* (Rom. 1 :5). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to *everyone* that believeth (Rom. 1 : 16). Because the fellowship of believers included “all nations,” misunderstandings and tensions would naturally arise even within the church. In order to preserve unity and peace the believers were admonished:

- Rom. 12:4-5 Though we have many members with differing gifts there is only one body.
- Rom. 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love: in honor preferring one another.
- Rom. 12:14 Bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not.
- Rom. 12:16 Be of the same mind one toward another.
- Rom. 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.
- Rom. 13:8 Owe no man anything but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.
- Rom. 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
- Rom. 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations (that is, not to argue about his opinions).
- Rom. 14:19 Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another.
- Rom. 15:1,2 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves, Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.
- Rom. 15:5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another. . .

The very idea that someone would divide the one body was so utterly out of character with the genius and spirit of a faith for all nations that Paul continued:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned: and avoid them, For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple . . . , (Rom, 16:17-18).

Heresy

Let's just be optimistic and assume that you really want to know what this world is all about. You've read enough history to know that thousands of people have been put to death as "heretics," but you are not certain just who or what a heretic is. If this describes you, shift down into second gear because we are going to slow down and show you what the Bible teaches about heresy.

Our word "heresy" comes from the Greek word *haireisis*, meaning "choosing" or "choice." It is used only nine times in the New Testament Scriptures. The Scriptures are listed here for your convenience and the italicized word represents the Greek word for "heresy,"

- Acts 5:17 "... which is the *sect* of the Sadducees . . ."
- Acts 15:5 "... certain of the *sect* of the Pharisees which believed . . ."
- Acts 24:5 "... ringleader of the *sect* of the Nazarenes"
- Acts 24:14 "...after the way which they call *heresy* so worship I . . ."
- Acts 26:5 "... after the most straitest *sect of our religion* I lived a Pharisee . . ."
- Acts 28:22 "... concerning this *sect* we know that it is everywhere spoken against "
- Gal. 5:20 "... strife, seditions, *heresies*. . . "
- 1 Cor. 11:19 "... for there must be also *heresies* among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you . . ."
- 11 Pet. 2:1 "... even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable *heresies*, even denying the Lord that bought them . . ."

You will note that the translators have not been consistent. Five times they have used the word "sect" and four times "heresy" or "heresies" to translate the same Greek word. The word is not evil in itself for it simply refers to a party, sect or division. It becomes evil, however, when associated with Christianity for the Body of Christian believers must be "one" in order for the world to believe in Jesus. Christians are a "sect" or "heresy" as the word is used in the Book of Acts for we have "chosen" Jesus and are thereby 'separated' from unbelieving Jews, pagans, etc. Within the framework of His Body, however, any "heresy" or "sect" is condemned as satanic. Though we have already made reference to the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, it will be profitable to review this scripture in greater detail for it provides insight into the way that "heresy" can find its way into the Body of Christ. The road to heresy is ". . . hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies" (Gal. 5:20).

Step one on the road to heresy is "hatred." This is the Greek word *echthru*, also translated as "enmities" in the Bible. This word is used to describe the enmity between Pilate and Herod (Lk. 23:12). It is used to portray the explosive hatred between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16). Vine in his *Word studies* describes it as the "opposite of love." Note: The road to heresy begins with the lack of love!

Step two on the road to heresy is "variance," This is the Greek word, *eris*, which is also translated as "strive." It is defined by Thayer (p. 249) as "contention, strife, wrangling." It is

translated as “debates” in II Corinthians 12:20. When you do not love someone, it is not too difficult to get into a wrangle or a debate with them over almost anything,

Step three on the road to heresy is “emulations.” This is the Greek word *zelos* which is also translated as ‘jealousies,’ Thayer (p. 271) defines the word in two ways. First of all it is used in a good sense of “zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything.” All zeal, however, is not good so the word also means “an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy.” When people who do not love one another have had a wrangle or a debate, it is not unusual to find “an envious and contentious rivalry” between them.

Step four on the road to heresy is “wrath.” It is the Greek word *thumos* which is defined by Thayer (p. 293) as “passion, angry heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again.” This word emphasizes a “sudden burst of anger” as opposed to the word “orga” which means indignation which arises gradually. It is translated in Revelation as “glow” or “ardor.” When people who do not love one another have fallen into debates and contentious rivalries, it is not unusual to find someone blowing up in a glowing, passionate burst of anger.

Step five on the road to heresy is “strife.” This is the Greek word *erithiu* which is also translated as “factions.” This is a very picturesque word which is only used eight times in the New Covenant Scriptures. Aristotle used the word to represent those “who electioneer for office, courting popular applause by trickery and low arts.” The word is derived from “erithos” which means “working for hire, a hireling.” Thayer (p. 249) states that the word is used in the New Testament as a “courting distinction, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts,” When people who do not love one another have been through a contentious battle, and when someone has erupted in a glowing and passionate burst of anger, it is not unusual to find them seeking to further their views through a low and dirty campaign. Dirty politics in the church is only one step removed from heresy.

Step six on the road to heresy is “seditions.” This is the Greek word *dichostasia* which is also translated as “divisions.” It is defined by Thayer (p. 153) “to stand apart, dissension, division.” After a church gets involved in dirty politics, divisions soon appear. At last we have arrived at *heresy, which means “choosing” or “choice.”* Once divisions start to appear many people feel compelled to “choose up sides” and that is what heresy is all about. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ‘For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you,’ Is it possible that heresies can be healthy for the Body of Christ? This seems to be exactly what the Scriptures teach. God has provided a way for poison to be extracted from the human body, and He has also provided a way for poison to work its way out of the Body of Christ. The “approved” will always cling to Christ. No amount of pressure can force them into a faction or divide their loyalty to Jesus. Those who do not possess such love for the Master will find it natural to express their carnal nature in support of some tangent. Perhaps some of you who read these words are already well on your way down the road to heresy. Your lack of love has led to several clashes already, and your pride has all but hidden Christ from view. Remember that those who engineer divisions are sensual and void of the Spirit (‘Jude 19). Do not forget that the Lord hates the one who sows discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19). Forget all of your allegiance to friends and factions and cling only to Jesus. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 7

1. List areas of confusion in our modern church and in the world and analyze what caused these.
2. What threatened to destroy the unity of the First Century Church?
3. What threatens to destroy the unity of our own?

4. Was it easy to identify those who caused divisions in the First Century?
5. Is it easy to identify those who cause divisions today?
- 6.. Does Jesus want His Church divided into denominations?
- 7.. How would Paul's inspired advice to the Romans help your church?
8. Is all heresy bad?
9. What was the main thing Jesus prayed for with reference to believers (Jn. 17:21)
10. Is there any association between Christian unity and world evangelism?

Rejecting the Heretic

“A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3: 10).

Sometime ago a well dressed ex-prize fighter walked into a swank hotel in downtown Seattle. As he cruised into the dining area he was petrified by the sight of a young hippie displaying his contempt for the establishment. The hippie was attired in the traditional uniform of dirty, disheveled clothing and scraggly hair. The nausea was intensified by the way he was sprawled over the seat with one putrified foot protruding obnoxiously over the back of the booth. In the meanwhile, “Mr. Fist” was frozen in his tracks and delirious with rage. Somehow he managed to contain himself but later confided to me

I felt like walking over to that hippie and ripp’n a few punches into ’em just to teach ’em how he ought to behave in a nice restaurant.

It does not take much imagination to realize that the manager of the restaurant was probably quite grateful that the proposed lesson in etiquette did not take place. It probably would never have occurred to the average bystander to teach manners by such a straightforward approach. Usually we think of a fist-throwing melee as a little incongruous with the teaching of charm, to say nothing of the decorum and dignity of a plush dining room. With a little reflection most of us would conclude that though the provocation was extreme and unjustified, the prescription proposed would have been more bizarre and inflammatory than the problem itself.

The strange humor of this incident is analagous to many situations which we face within the framework of modern Christianity. Too often we seek to solve our problems by “ripping a few punches” into the brethren who are “unChristlike.” By the time we “show ’em how they ought to behave,” we have ignited a wide variety of carnal reflexes and strewn about a good many splinters. Almost every community is plagued with a posse of self-appointed vigilantes who “protest” the truth by “lynching” heretics and who “preserve the peace” by slinging a few verbal punches at the “troublemakers.” Perhaps it is time that we scrape aside some of the wreckage and debris created by the “peace patrol” and sit down for a junta with Paul.

The divine instructions about rejecting a heretic are found in the Book of Titus. Perhaps a background of information regarding this young evangelist would enhance our understanding of his instructions. I once thought that “rejecting a heretic” demanded sharp and semi-belligerent behavior. I felt that to be loyal was to be mean and vice versa. Now I am not so sure. The epistle to Titus was written around A.D. 65 or shortly thereafter. By this time Titus was a veteran with many years’ experience in the cause of Christ. Much of this experience was related to the promotion of Christian unity. His debut upon the stage of divine history came in Jerusalem in conjunction with the Jerusalem Council and the controversy which raged over the subject of circumcision. Perhaps no issue in the history of Christianity was ever more vigorously contested or hotly debated, and perhaps none was ever more significant.

At this juncture the eyes of the Council were focused upon Titus who was made conspicuous as an exemplary convert from the Grecian world. The fact that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised was used as proof that no one had to be. The dissension was aggravated by false brethren who crept in like spies to destroy Christian liberty. Titus could not give place to these false brethren, but neither could he overcome them with evil. The only weapons at his disposal were characterized by goodness and truth. We may never grasp the full emotional impact of this controversy, but we can at least discern that Titus was developing a temperament that was forged in the furnace of affliction. He was learning the hard way that “the

servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient . . .” (II Tim, 2:24).

A few years later we find Titus at Corinth dealing with the difficult and delicate problems of a divided church. The reference to him in I Corinthians 12:20 is particularly interesting for it reveals some indication of the severe problems which he encountered. A congregation that is characterized by “debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbiting, whisperings, swellings and tumults” presents a quagmire of complex and complicated problems. Paul’s personal attitude and strategy is reflected in his first letter.

Up to this very hour we are hungry and thirsty, ill-clad, knocked about and practically homeless. We still have to work for our living by manual labor. Men curse us, but we return a blessing: they make our lives miserable, but we take it patiently. They ruin our reputations, but we go on trying to win them for God . . . (I Cor. 4: 11-13, Phillip’s).

The fact that Titus was sent to Corinth as Paul’s personal representative indicates that he shared Paul’s philosophy on how to deal with troublemakers (I Cor. 12: 18).

With this brief background behind us, let us focus upon the particular situation which Titus faced in Crete. Crete is a large island in the Mediterranean between Syria and Malta. It is about 160 miles long and 35 miles wide at its broadest point. In ancient times the island was inhabited by a diversity of races, and it has always been characterized by tribal warfare and internal strife.

It is probable that Christianity came to Crete as the result of its citizens who were present at Pentecost. It was some thirty years later when Titus arrived to “set in order the things that were wanting and ordain elders in every city” (Tit. 1:5). It isn’t hard to imagine a great deal of ignorance and hide-bound tradition on the part of people who have existed within the framework of Christianity for three decades without pastors to superintend the flock and probably with little instruction in the Word.

These problems were compounded by the presence of false teachers who subverted whole houses for “filthy lucre’s sake.” These deceivers were predominantly “of the circumcision.” They may have been some of the same “false brethren” whom Titus met in Jerusalem many years before. At any rate, Titus was well qualified to exhort and convict the gainsayers and to sharply rebuke as the occasion demanded. He was by precept and example to demonstrate how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God.

The Cretans were not necessarily an affable and charming audience. One of their own poets had pictured them as “liars, evil beasts and idle gluttons.” These outrageous characteristics contributed to an already alarming picture. By the time you start with a nation characterized by strife . . . then stir in a generous amount of false teaching and let it simmer unsupervised for thirty years, you have already got plenty of trouble. But when you add lying, slothful gluttony and the temperament of wild beasts to an already explosive concoction, you have what might be described in the vernacular of modern youth as “something else.”

Is it fair to ask what Jesus would do with such a miserable situation? The prophet Isaiah depicted the ministry of our Savior in these words, “A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench” Careless and indifferent people would break and abandon the reed that was bending low, but Jesus would not. Lesser men would snuff out and leave the smouldering wick, but Jesus would not. The ministry of Jesus was to bind up and heal the bruised and broken lives that others would destroy. He came to bring light and hope to the smoking ashes of a dying faith. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Those who were whole had no need of a physician. It would have been easy for Titus to

shake the dust from his sandals and search for greener pastures. He could have “ripped a few punches” into the heretics and washed his hands of the whole affair, but true men of God do not behave like hirelings. Titus could not abandon the sheep of the Lord to ravenous wolves. The good shepherd should be willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Like a nurse who cherished her children, he was to be gentle and concerned. Rivers are crooked because they take the easy way around every obstacle, and Titus could have become crooked in essentially the same way.

But now let us again narrow our vision and focus upon the particular word which is translated as “reject” in the King James Version. W. E. Vine in his *Word Studies* lists four separate words which are all translated as ‘reject in the authorized version. Each of these words possessed its own unique personality and is explicit in its descriptive character. One word, for example, is the Greek word *ekptuo* which literally means “to spit out” To pronounce it sounds like what it is. If I were guessing, I would have imagined that this is what God wanted Titus to do to the heretics.

The word, however, which the Holy Spirit directed to Titus is unbelievably mild, It is the Greek word “*paraitomai*” which means “to beg off” or “ask to be excused.” It is the same word used in Luke 14: 18-19 regarding the great supper to which the invited guests would not come. They with one consent began to “make excuse,” Thayer states that the word basically means “to ask alongside” and lists such meanings as: “supplicate,” “shun,” “avoid,” “beg pardon,” etc.

Here is God’s way to handle the factional. First of all you avoid foolish questions and anything that would tend to stir up strife; but if someone persists in trying to divide the brethren, they are to be warned twice and then shunned. When they dog your steps, you are to politely “beg off” and ‘supplicate.” The Revised Version puts it this way:

. . . avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned (Tit. 3:9-11).

How wise and practical is the admonition of the Spirit and how wonderful is the restraining power of love. When we became the “children of God,” we became “peacemakers” at the same time. We buried our pride and our desire for revenge in the grave of Christian baptism. The gaze of the world is transfixed upon us in wonder because we love one another. We pray even for our enemies and are content to surrender our cloak and go the second mile. Gone is the desire to slug it out with the enemies of tranquility, We talk to the factious a time or two and turn them over to Jesus. If all the brethren behave in like manner, the danger to the community of Christians is greatly diminished. A one-man faction is seldom a serious threat.

The presence of heresy presents an interesting medium by which the approved of God are made manifest (I Cor. 11 : 19). Heresies appeal to men who are void of the Spirit (Jd. 19). Factions remove the carnal from the body of Christ in much the same way that boils remove poison from the human body. Those who are not approved seek out schism like vultures flock to the rotting carcass of a dead animal. In the meantime the approved are clinging only to Jesus and thus are made manifest. After the factious have been warned, they are to courteously be consigned to God who is perfectly capable of delivering the godly out of temptation and of reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment ‘to be punished. We do not presume to punish sinners personally for “vengeance is mine . . . saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).

Michael, for example, would not even give the devil a railing accusation but said, “The Lord rebuke thee” (Jd. 9). How dare we speak so harshly to any man for whom Christ died? Consider again these inspired words of Timothy:

. . . have nothing to do with silly and ill-informed controversies which lead inevitably, as you know, to strife. And the Lord's servant must not be a man of strife: he must be kind to all, ready and able to teach; he must have patience and the ability gently to correct those who oppose his message. He must always bear in mind the possibility that God will give them a different outlook, and that they may come to know the truth . . (11 Tim. 2:23-25, Phillips).

Paul - The Peacemaker

Paul said, “. . . Be ye imitators of me even as I also am of Christ . . . “1 Cor. 11:1)

Damascus

. . . the Jews took counsel to kill him, (Acts 9:23).

Jerusalem

And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecian Jews: but they went about to slay him (Acts 9:29).

Antioch

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts (Acts 13:50).

Iconium

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles . . . and when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were aware of it and fled (Acts 14:2-6).

Lystra

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city supposing he had been dead (Acts 14:19).

Thessalonica

But the Jews which believed not moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort and gathered a company and set all the city in an uproar and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people (Acts 17:5).

Berea

But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also and stirred up the people (Acts 17:13).

Corinth

, , , the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat (Acts 18:12).

In the Temple

. . . . they went about to kill him (Acts 21:31).

Caesarea

Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed against Paul and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. (Acts 25:2, 3).

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. . . (11 Cor. 11:24).

What was Paul's response? How did the Spirit of Jesus motivate him to act? Are you ready?

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises (Rom. 9:1-4).

There is no argument against love! Though Paul was in a sense free from all men, in another sense he, like Christ, became a slave to all men. To the Jew he became like a Jew, to the

Greek he became a Greek, to the weak he became weak. He became “**all things to all men**” in order to save some (see I Cor. 9: 19ff). He gave his life to Jesus who had smashed down the barriers which segregated humanity “. . . **so making peace, . .**” (Eph. 2:13-15).

We must not forget, however, that Paul himself was once a persecutor of Christians. His misdirected zeal for God caused him to imprison the followers of Jesus and compel them to blaspheme. *The fact that Saul Of Tarsus could be transformed into Paul the Apostle is used to argue that virtually any legalist can be saved!*

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (I Tim. 1:12-16).

Thank you Jesus for giving us the story of Saul’s conversion as a pattern of your longsuffering! Paul wrote: “Be ye followers (or imitators) of me even as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11 : 1).

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 8

1. What is a heretic?
2. Describe your own mental image of the heretics on Crete.
3. Do we have such “heretics” in our modern world?
4. What application on Titus 3: 10 should be made in our own day?
5. Can you think of an instance where patience and love would have prevented a division between Christians?
6. Why did the Jews hate Paul?
7. In what way is Paul an encouraging example?
8. Why did Paul love the Jews?
9. Is it possible for us to love our enemies?
10. How is the Holy Spirit associated with love?

LESSON NINE

Apostolic Priorities

Corinthians

The Church at Corinth was plagued with almost every conceivable problem. Note this brief outline of difficulties in I Corinthians:

- Division (Chs. 1-4).
- Immorality (Ch. 5).
- Lawsuits (Ch. 6).
- Marriage problems (Ch. 7).
- Idolatry and weak brethren (Ch. 8).
- Relationship to preachers (Ch. 9).
- Danger of falling away (Ch. 10).
- Position of women and Lord's Supper (Ch. 11).
- Spiritual gifts (Chs. 12-14).
- Resurrection (Ch. 15).

To simply name a serious problem does not do justice to the hailstorm of difficulty experienced by those who have it. In this brief outline we have touched upon a variety of issues so sensitive and so emotional that Paul feared complete rebellion when the letter was read to those who were directly involved in the difficulty.

His fears are revealed in the Second Corinthian letter:

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you . . . (II Cor. 2:4).

. . . we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life (II COF. 1:8).

He had no rest in his spirit until Titus returned from delivering the First Corinthian Letter with the happy news that it had been well received (II Cor. 2: 13ff.).

But now let us address ourselves to the matter of apostolic priority. Their example is extremely important, for the Apostles were men whom Jesus guided into all truth (Jn. 16:13) and their emphasis upon love is in complete agreement with the priorities of Jesus. Please read again the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. After innumerable a variety of spiritual gifts, love is set forth as a "more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:3 1). The emphasis is less than subtle! Love is more important than tongues, prophecy, faith or knowledge. It is more important than anything and it is more important than everything. It is indispensable, invincible and eternal.

The Pastoral Epistles

When Paul uttered his tearful farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus, he predicted that grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock. He further warned that from their own number some would arise to speak perverse things (Acts 20:29-30).

By the time the pastoral epistles of I and II Timothy and Titus were written, these dire predictions had evidently come to pass. Timothy was left at Ephesus to charge some that they teach no other doctrine. He was to remember that the ultimate aim of all God's commandments was love. He was warned against futile and useless arguments and was by precept and example to

show men how they ought to behave in the house of God.

The purpose of these letters was to preclude arguments, not generate them. Yet our approach to the Scriptures causes us, of all things, to have some of our hottest disputes over these very letters which teach against disputing.

Christianity regards attitudes as more important than issues. The matter of mercy, for example, was considered by Jesus to be a weightier part of the law (Matt. 23:23). We may never agree on every aspect of such issues as elders, deacons, deaconesses and evangelists, but we can concur on love. It is doubtful that everyone will ever hold an identical position regarding the work of women in the church, but we can all establish the same identical priority of love. It may not be necessary for certain women in modern times to take a vow never to marry as instructed in I Timothy 5, but it is absolutely essential that we love, for if we fail to love we have rendered futile and vain our every Christian endeavor.

As strange as it may seem the problem of argumentation which we face in our modern evangelical world seems to be the very problem faced in Ephesus. Regardless of the problems, however, the apostolic priorities remained the same. *The end (or goal) of the commandment is love out of a pure heart and faith unfeigned* (I Tim. 1:5), If we miss this we have missed it all; if we miss this, it would do no good to give our body to be burned or even bestow all our goods to feed the poor (I Cor. 13:1). Charles Schwab, financial wizard of the 1920's, was supposed to have paid \$25,000 for eight words of advice, They were: "DO things in the order of their importance." The significance of these words in Christianity cannot be overestimated, The quagmire of theological controversy in our modern world is to a large extent a result of differing priorities. Virtually everyone believes in the Holy Spirit, but some assign to Him a greater priority. One denomination gives priority to "holiness" and another to "grace," One exalts the "Lord's Supper" and another "baptism." There are literally hundreds of priorities in the Christian world. But Jesus placed His priority upon love and His Apostles did the same. Timothy was given inspired instructions on a wide variety of issues, all of which were important to the progress of the church, but love had to come first. Other issues would of necessity be secondary and subservient.

Now from this perspective, read the pastoral epistles and note the emphasis against argumentation. I Timothy 1:3-7, for example:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling: desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

Those addicted to argumentation and debate have little time or energy left for anything else. Their priority is not to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick or to engage in the pure religion of caring for those in need. They want to argue.

To give you some idea of the magnitude of this problem at Ephesus note that the men were commanded to not argue in their prayers:

I will therefore that men pray everywhere . . . without wrath and doubting . . . (I Tim. 2:8).

The word translated "doubting" in the King James Version is *dialogismou* which is rendered by some as "disputing." These men apparently felt so strongly about certain issues that they carried on their disputes even during their prayers. They found it so important to prove themselves right that they would weave their strongest arguments into the fabric of their

supplications to the heavenly Father. This is identically the mentality which perpetuates division today and it is specifically forbidden in the Word of God.

The priority of love is further seen in the qualifications of church leaders as they are recorded in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Those who are leaders in the church of God must be men who promote unity and peace. They must not be self-willed

- Not soon angry No brawler
- No striker
- Orderly
- Gentle
- Not contentious.

In addition to these they were to have demonstrated their ability to maintain order and prevent division by the rearing of children who were not accused of riot or unruly. The whole tenor of the pastoral letters revolves around the spirit of unity. Jesus prayed that those who believed in Him would be united and the Apostles were faithful in their endeavor to help answer that prayer. Slaves were to submit to their masters, children to their parents, wives to their husbands. Those who rebelled were in danger of blaspheming the doctrine of God (I Tim. 6:1).

Men who “doted over questions” and strove about words were perverse and corrupt (I Tim, 6:5). Their divisive spirit was in direct opposition to the desire of Jesus for unity among believers. I Timothy 6:20 makes reference to “profane and vain babblings and the oppositions of science falsely so called,” This is not a diatribe against atheists who taught the theory of evolution, it was a warning against religious “know it alls.” There were men, both then and now, who have a predetermined answer for every theological question. The smug, self-satisfaction of such men makes it wiser to avoid, rather than confront them.

Ephesians

Remember that Timothy was at Ephesus when he received Paul’s letter (I Tim. 1:3), therefore our observations from the pastoral epistles will be strengthened and enhanced by an analysis of the Ephesian letter. The theme of this letter is unity! Jesus came to earth for the avowed purpose of uniting all of the divergent factions of heaven and earth, and love was an indispensable ingredient to His work (Eph. 1:10).

Note these many references to love in the book of Ephesians:

- Eph. 1:4 We are to be holy and without blame before Him in *love*.
- Eph. 1:15 Paul heard of their *love* toward all saints.
- Eph. 2:4 God’s *love* is great toward us.
- Eph. 3:17 They were rooted and grounded in *love*.
- Eph. 3:19 They needed to know the *love* of Christ which passeth knowledge.
- Eph. 4:2 They were to forbear one another in *love*.
- Eph. 4:15 They were to speak the truth in *love*.
- Eph. 4:16 The church was to build up itself in *love*.
- Eph. 5:2 They were to walk in *love* as Christ *loved* us.
- Eph. 5:25 Husbands *love* your wives as Christ *loved* the church.
- Eph. 5:28 Men are to *love* their wives as they *love* their own bodies.
- Eph. 5:33 Everyone to *love* his wife as he *loves* himself.
- Eph. 6:23 Peace, , and *love* from God and the Lord Jesus.
- Eph. 6:24 Grace to them that *love* the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

It is both interesting and significant to remember that some thirty years after the Ephesian

letter was written, the Lord condemned the congregation at Ephesus because they had departed from their first love (Rev. 2:4).

The main priority in Corinthians, the pastoral epistles and Ephesians was the main priority of the law and the prophets, and the main priority of everyone, everywhere, who conforms to the will of God - love!

As we seek to establish priorities of our own, it might be well to ask:

If priority number one is to love God,

If priority number two is to love our neighbor,

What is priority number three?

For those of us who desire to speak the oracles of God, it is best to refrain from "editing" or "improving upon" the words of Jesus. There is no priority number three.

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 9

1. List the problems at Corinth which are present in our own day.
2. Explain how love can solve all of these problems.
3. What was the nature of the false teaching which Timothy was to oppose at Ephesus?
4. How did the elders at Ephesus relate to the problem there? (see also Acts 20:17 - 38)
5. Where did Timothy get his authority?
6. Is the same authority available to us?
7. How is Christianity like a marriage?
8. Is the Law of Moses like a marriage?
9. What happens when a church abandons its first love?
10. True or false? - "All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important".

LESSON TEN

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

While Timothy is fresh on our minds, it would be a good time to consider this divine admonition regarding our use of the Scriptures:

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

The word “study” is from “spoudazo” which means to hasten to do something, to be eager and diligent. The words “rightly dividing” are from “orthotomeo” which literally means “to cut straight.”

Timothy was to hasten and be diligent in his use of scriptures so that he might be approved of God. He was not to swerve aside on tangents but was to “cut straight” ahead in doing God’s will.

Those whom Timothy was to rebuke used the Scriptures, but they used them in the wrong way. We must be careful to avoid their error and “rightly divide” the Word of God. Consider the following: *the Scriptures are inspired!* Technically the word “scriptures” simply refers to something which is written. In the Christian context, however, we refer to those writings which are accepted as inspired of God. When God communicates to man, it matters not whether His voice is thundered from Mt. Sinai, spoken through a mediator named Moses or written down on tablets of stone or pieces of paper -it is an inspired message. The people of God are to be scrupulously diligent in differentiating between those messages which are inspired and those which are not. Thus from the earliest of times we have had a collection of sacred or inspired documents.

It is not within our scope at this time to discuss the means by which the Scriptures were accepted, or deemed as canonical, but simply to reaffirm that:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16-17).

While these words apply specifically to the Canon of Old Testament Scriptures which Timothy had known from a child, they apply in principle to the New Testament Scriptures as well.

As inspired documents we are obliged to read, study and obey the Scriptures as though our God were communicating with us audibly, visibly and personally. *Yet*, we must carefully distinguish between God Himself and the vehicle by which He communicates to man.

The Bible is not to be worshipped! Peter was an inspired Apostle. Special privileges and responsibilities were conferred upon Peter and the others (See Matt. 16 and 18; Jn. 14 and 16, etc.). *But Peter was not to be worshipped.* When Cornelius attempted to do so, he was rebuked, “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). In similar fashion we must remember that the Bible is not God. It is the vehicle by which God communicates to man but not God Himself. We are to worship God not the Bible.

These remarks about the Scriptures are written with considerable reluctance. Many people may misunderstand. Some are like little children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Their lack of study renders them vulnerable to many erroneous views and extreme positions. They may read these words and conclude that the Bible is not an accurate guide. God forbid! The Bible

is an accurate guide. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). It should be studied with diligence and its truths should be incorporated into our lives so that they become an inseparable part of our thoughts, words and actions.

The thesis which we propose is that it is wrong to use the Sword of the Spirit to mutilate and divide the Body of Christ, Or if you prefer the terminology of light, it is wrong to cover the Lamp of the Gospel under the “bushel” of sectarian creeds and dogmas. Why do men write creeds? To protect the truth. Every creed is someone’s attempt to preserve the purity of the faith. But every time we endeavor to protect the light we produce darkness.

Our use of the Scriptures should be in harmony with God’s eternal plan. To support my thesis, let us consider the following facts regarding the use of the Scriptures by the early Christians.

Septuagint Version

The early Christians primarily used the Septuagint Version, not the Hebrew. With reference to the Septuagint Version the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states:

It was the Bible of most writers of the New Testament. Not only are the majority of their express citations from scripture borrowed from it, but their writings contain numerous reminiscences of its language. Its words are household words to them. It laid for them the foundations of a new religious terminology. It was a potent weapon for missionary work, and when VSS of the Scriptures into other languages became necessary it was in most cases the LXX and not the Hebrew from which they were made (p. 2722).

At the same time it is an undeniable fact that the LXX was not as reliable as the Hebrew as regarding technical accuracy.

Still quoting from the I.S.B.E. regarding the Septuagint:

. . .The Greek text has had a long and complex history of its own, Used for centuries by both Jews and Christians it underwent corruption and interpolation, and notwithstanding the multitude of materials for its restoration, the original text has yet to be recovered . . . the Gr. Pent. E.G., has survived in a relatively pure form. But everywhere we have to be on our guard against interpolations, sometimes extending to whole paragraphs. Not a verse is without its array of variant readings. An indication of the amount of ‘mixture’ which has taken place is afforded by the numerous ‘doublets’ or alternative renderings of a single Hebrew word or phrase which appear side by side in the transmitted text. *Textual corruption began early, before the Christian era.* . .

The use of the Septuagint Version by the early Christians is quite significant. Though it did not possess the minute accuracy of the Hebrew text, it was completely adequate for use by inspired apostles and the early disciples who labored under their instructions.

Formation of the Canon

The early Church existed, evangelized and thrived for approximately three quarters of a century without the whole Bible in written form. The revelation of truth to the Apostles of our Lord came gradually. The first words of Christian scripture may have been written within a decade or so of the Great Commission, but the last words were probably not recorded until near the close of the first century. This simple fact would have precluded any legalistic use of the Christian Scriptures by the early church as a whole.

Accepting the Canon

Though the Christian Canon was complete by the end of the first century it does not seem to have been universally accepted at that time. Many spurious and apocryphal works have survived even unto this present age, and the early Christians were some time establishing an accepted canon. As a matter of fact, the first extant list of canonical books that agrees with our own dates back only to the fourth century. We have discovered ten different catalogues produced in the fourth century. Six of them agree with our own, three omitted the book of Revelation and the last omitted both Hebrews and Revelation. Based upon this information we must conclude that the application of Revelation 22:18-19 by the early Christians must have been done with considerable charity.

As amazing as it sounds, the Church was able to thrive during those difficult centuries before a rigid canon was universally accepted. Perhaps those years were the most productive years the church has ever known, and it was accomplished by soul winners who had the New Testament in their hearts and minds instead of their vest pockets.

Chapters and Verses

It should be remembered that the books of our Bible were not written in chapters and verses. The division of the Scriptures into chapters did not occur until the 13th century. It is ascribed by some to Cardinal Hugo de St. Caro (1248) and by others to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (1227). The division of these chapters into verses first appears in 1551 in Robert Stephens' edition of the Greek Testament.

Whatever your own personal view might be about proving your point by book, chapter and verse, it is a bit sobering to realize that Christianity existed some 1500 years without being able to do so.

Koine Greek

The language of the New Testament Scriptures is the language of the common people. It is not the literary Attic or some special sacred or scientific language used exclusively for a revelation from Jehovah; it is the everyday language used by people everywhere at the time of Christ. This discovery, said A.T. Robertson, has "revolutionized the study of the Greek New Testament." The language used by the inspired Apostles to communicate the message of God to man was the Koine Greek. It was the vernacular used in the transaction of everyday business, Love letters, deeds, marriage contracts and random notes all contain the very language incorporated into our Bible.

It might also be well to be reminded at this juncture that we do not have in our possession a single autographed copy of any book of our Bible. We are to worship God, not the vehicle by which He communicates to man.

Study Helps

The Bible has never been available in quantity to all of God's people. Even in this enlightened age there are some 1500 languages and dialects into which the Bible is yet to be translated. There are literally thousands of Christians who have no Bible at all, and many others who do not even have a written language.

English-speaking people have many versions from which to choose, but only nine percent of the people in our world are English-speaking people. We also have at our disposal a wide assortment of commentaries and concordances to help us dissect the Scriptures and structure our theology. This privilege has never been available to the vast majority of God's people, and it has only been available to us within the past couple of centuries. This is not to deny the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, Nor is it to minimize the tireless efforts of Christians down through the centuries who committed vast portions of Scripture to memory and who diligently taught them to their children. It is only to attempt to place our present preoccupation with legalistic proof-texting in a proper perspective.

The whole tenor of the pastoral epistles, as well as the verses immediately before and immediately after I Timothy 2: 15, deals with avoiding fruitless controversy and argumentation. What a tragedy that we have used the Sword of the Spirit to destroy the Body of Jesus, not defend it!

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker . . . (I Tim. 2:14-17).

Aren't We Governed by the Scriptures?

The answer to this question is no! Technically we are not governed by the Scriptures, but rather by our *understanding of the Scriptures*. While this may seem to some like "straining on a gnat" or "splitting a theological hair," it is so germane to the nature of Christianity that we must pursue it a bit further.

Written documents must always be interpreted. That which is "clear" to one interpreter may not at all be clear to someone else. Let us take, for example, the written command, "Thou shalt not kill." To simplistically say that this command says what it means and means what it says is to beg the question. Is a man who swats a mosquito or plucks a flower in violation of this command? In both instances he has brought death to something which was alive. No, we correctly respond - the commandment "means" thou shalt not kill a fellow human being.

The problem of interpreting this commandment is far from being over at this point. Next we must face up to the issue of capital punishment. Immediately someone will respond, "Capital Punishment is ordained of God, and the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill' actually 'means' thou shalt do no murder."

Assuming that you are willing to admit the validity of capital punishment, we are still a long way from solving all of our problems relative to the interpretation of these four simple words. Next we must render a judgment upon what actually constitutes a "murder" or a "capital offense." A man is not guilty of murder, we say, when an axe head slips off accidentally and slays a bystander (Deut. 19:5). But now the issue of murder is made even more complex, for if murder is defined by the intentions of the heart, then it can never be determined by human tribunals with complete accuracy. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the Spirit of man which is in him? . . ." (I Cor. 2: 11). Premeditated murder may sometimes appear to be accidental, and accidental murder may sometimes appear to be premeditated.

But even the issue of capital punishment is but a small matter when compared to the issues of international war. Does the command, "Thou shalt not kill," mean that a man should not bear arms in combat? If your answer to this question depends upon any mitigating circumstances, you are again adrift upon a shoreless sea, for circumstances invariably change. Thus the simple

command, “Thou shalt not kill,” is not so simple after all. Our understanding of these words will vary depending upon our background, maturity and individual point of view. For example, millions in India do not want to kill any living creature. It is also highly probable that at some point in the process of our maturity we will even disagree with ourselves.

Every written document must be interpreted. In the days of the theocracy, Moses was God’s Mediator who pronounced judgment upon those who violated the Law. For example, Leviticus 24 tells of a man who blasphemed the Lord, and Leviticus 15 tells of one who gathered sticks upon the Sabbath Day. In each instance the offending party was placed in ward until the mind of Jehovah was revealed to Moses, Death by stoning was the verdict in both cases; but it is significant to note that the Ten Commandments had to be interpreted, and that as long as an inspired man like Moses was around to do this, the nation was unified. It is both interesting and important to remember that those who disagreed with Moses were destroyed (see Numbers 16).

Jesus is a prophet like Moses. His appearance was predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, and the fulfillment by Jesus of this prediction is stated emphatically in Acts 3:22ff. He is the one Mediator between God and man, and those who disagree with Jesus will be destroyed from among the people. But Jesus is the Mediator of a better covenant than Moses. The New Covenant is as distinct from the Old as Isaac was from Ishmael. It is significant to remember that the New Covenant does not have to be interpreted like the Old, for it is not written with ink, neither engraven upon tablets of stone. It is written only upon the fleshly tablets of the human heart (I Cor. 3:3). God has put His laws upon our minds and within our hearts (Heb. 8: 10).

At this juncture I must state emphatically that the New Covenant or New Testament is not the 27 books which we so frequently designate as such. Neither is the Old Covenant the 39 books which we call the Old Testament.

The Old Covenant consisted only of ten commandments. They were written upon tablets of stone at Mt. Sinai in Arabia when God took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. The tablets were placed in a receptacle which was appropriately designated the “Ark of the Covenant,” and the Old Covenant was broken before many books of Hebrew Scripture were even written. These commandments were never intended to save men, they were rather a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

The New Covenant is also called the “Royal Law,” the “Law of Liberty” and the “Law of Christ.” It is not written down in human words so some spiritual Supreme Court can hand down rulings on what it means. It is written upon the hearts of those who have been born again. The law of Christ is to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). The Royal Law is to love your neighbor as yourself (Ja 2:8). The Law of Liberty is to show mercy (Ja. 2"12. 13).

If the Scriptures are not the covenant, then what are they? They are instructions written to a covenant people! They are inspired of God; they are to be read, believed and obeyed, but *they can never be made binding upon a person further than he is capable of perceiving them.* The fact that no two Christians are at the same level of maturity and understanding will mean that their grasp of the Scriptures will never be identical.

Every written document must be interpreted. When the Supreme Court renders a decision upon what the Constitution actually means, it is rarely a unanimous decision and frequently is diametrically opposed to the mainstream of American thought. The Christian Covenant rises above this difficulty through the Divine imperative of love.

Alexander Campbell spoke to this point in the “Parable of the Iron Bedstead,” which was recorded in a Nineteenth Century publication called *The Christian Baptist*.

In the days of the Abecedarian popes it was decreed that a good Christian just measured three feet, and for the peace and happiness of the church it was ordained that an iron bedstead with a wheel at

one end and a knife at the other, should be placed at the threshold of the church, on which the Christians should all be laid. This bedstead was just three feet in the casement on the exactest French scales. Every Christian in those days was laid on this bedstead; if less than the standard, the wheel and a rope were applied to him to stretch him to it; if he was too tall, the knife was applied to his extremities. In this way they kept the good Christians, for nearly a thousand years, all of one stature. Those to whom the knife or the wheel were applied either died in the preparation or were brought to the saving standard.

One sturdy fellow, called Martin Luther, was born in those days who grew to the enormous height of four feet; he of course feared the bedstead and the knife and kept off at a considerable distance deliberating how he might escape. At length he proclaimed that there was a great mistake committed by his ancestors in fixing upon three feet as the proper standard of the stature of a good Christian, He made proselytes to his opinions; for many who had been tried on the three foot bedstead, who were actually four feet, had found a way of contracting themselves to the popular standard. These began to stretch themselves to their natural stature, and Luther had in a few years an iron bedstead four feet long fashioned and fixed in his churches, with the usual appendages. The wheel and the knife soon found something to do in Luther's church; and it became as irksome to flesh and blood to be stretched by a wheel and rope to four feet, or to be cut down to that stature, as it was to be forced either up or down to the good and sacred three foot stature. Moreover, men grew much larger after Luther's time than before, and a considerable proportion of them advanced above his perfect man; insomuch that John Calvin found it expedient to order his iron bedstead to be made six inches longer, with the usual regulating appendages. The next generation found even Calvin's measure as unaccommodating as Luther's; and the Independents, in their greater wisdom and humanity, fixed their perfect Christian at the enormous stature of five feet. The Baptists at this time began to think of constructing an iron bedstead to be in fashion with their neighbors, but kindly made it six inches longer than the Congregationalists' and dispensed with the knife, thinking that there was likely to be more need for two wheels than one knife, which they accordingly affixed to their apparatus. It was always found that in the same proportion as the standard was lengthened, Christians grew; and the bedstead now is actually proved to be at least six inches too short. It is now expected that six inches will be humanely added, but this will only be following up an evil precedent; for experience has proved that as soon as the iron bedstead is lengthened, the people will grow apace, and it will be found too short even when extended to six feet. Why not, then dispense with this piece of popish furniture in the church, and allow Christians of every stature to meet at the same fireside and eat at the same table?

It is important to remember that all who belong to Jesus are members of the same family. Fraternity is based upon paternity. This is why Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren (Heb. 2:11). But in a family we have various levels of maturity and understanding, When the father speaks, not all members of the family comprehend his words in identically the same way. *Every member of the family has a right to hear the Father and to search for meaning in the Father's words, but he does not have the right to bind his understanding of that message upon his brethren further than they are capable of perceiving it.*

It was six men of Indostan To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the elephant (Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation Might satisfy his mind.

The first approached the elephant, And, happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side At once began to bawl,
"God bless me! but the elephant Is very like a wall!"

The second, feeling of the tusk Cried: "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp? To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an elephant Is very like a spear!"

The third approached the animal, And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands, Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "The elephant, Is very like a snake!"

The fourth reached out his eager hand, And felt about the knee;

“What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain,” quoth he;
‘Tis clear enough the elephant
Is very like a tree.”

The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, “E’en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most. Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an elephant
Is very like a fan!”

The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
“I see,” quoth he, “the elephant
Is very like a rope!”

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

So, oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an elephant
Not one of them has seen!

The Blind Men and the Elephant by John G. Saxe

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 10

1. What Scriptures were available for Timothy to study?
2. How had the trouble makers at Ephesus used the Scriptures?
3. How would handling the Scriptures aright correct this problem?
4. If Jesus and His apostles were preaching to our generation, what version would they use?
5. Is it necessary to have concordances and commentaries to correctly study the Bible?
6. Is it wrong to use study helps and commentaries?
6. Is there an infallible interpretation of the Scripture?
7. If so, who will give us this infallible interpretation?
8. How do we draw the line regarding Christian fellowship?
9. What should we do with retarded people in our families?
10. What should we do with retarded Christians?

LESSON ELEVEN

The Jolt of Judgment

Lord, I received you as my Saviour!
Lord, I confessed you before men!
Lord, I was buried with you in Christian baptism!
Lord, I attended all the services of the church!
Lord, I paid tithes of all that I possessed!
Lord, I read my Bible daily!
Lord, I prayed before every meal!
Lord, I got my neighbor to go to church with me!
Lord, I spoke in tongues . . . cast out demons . . .
and in Thy name did many wonderful works!

But Jesus Will Say . . .

I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and yet took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not (Matt. 25:42-44).

What a jolt! Many of us have become so involved with the rituals of Christianity that we have little time, and virtually no interest in doing the very things that meant the most to Jesus.

Twelve thousand people a day are dying from starvation and malnutrition, but we hassle about the Lord's Supper. Transubstantiation? Consubstantiation? Fermented or unfermented? Leavened or unleavened? One cup or many? Weekly? Monthly? Quarterly? etc. etc. etc. Large sections of our globe are parched, arid and shackled by drought, but we debate the subject of baptism, Pouring? Sprinkling? Immersion? For the remission of sins or otherwise?

Millions are homeless, but we sacrificially spend hundreds of millions of dollars not to build homes for the homeless, but to build cathedrals in which to worship Jesus.

While a billion souls are shivering in the cold, we lambast the liberals and steer clear of the social gospel - "Passing by on the other side" (Lk. 10:31).

We feel little or no compunction or regret for not ministering to the sick or rectifying some discrepancy in our penal system - we are servants of Jesus! We will preach to the lost! We will sing songs *to* the starving. We will pass out literature to the cold, pray for the sick and vote for tough law enforcement.

But judgment will be based on the way we have loved our fellow men!

Please be assured, dear reader, that this type of judgment was not the result of some last minute change of plans on the part of God. *It has always been His intention for men to love one another. This is the message that God has been trying to get across from the beginning!*

The book of Job is thought by some to be the oldest book in the Bible. Be that as it may it is without question a very ancient document but observe that it reflects a philosophy of life in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose. Please consider:

*Judgment involves our
treatment of:*

the hungry
the thirsty
strangers
naked

Job cared for:

poor
fatherless
dying
widows

prisoners
the sick
(Matt. 25:3 1-46)

blind
lame
oppressed
Jb. 29:12-17)

When God decided to judge His people during the days of Isaiah, He used the same standard of humanitarian concern that had been in vogue since Eden and would be enforced in the end of the world. Isaiah 58:1-7 is very much to the point:

- They sought God daily (came to church every day).
- They delighted to know His ways (loved to study the Bible).
- They forsook not the ordinance of God (kept the letter of the law).
- They asked for the ordinance of justice (wanted religious instructions).
- They took delight in approaching God (loved to pray).
- *But their whole approach to religion had missed the matter of love!*

Therefore, Isaiah wrote:

Is this the fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

In other words, the ultimate aim of God was not just to see men bow down like a bullrush or wear certain garments; the ultimate aim of God was to get people to love. Therefore, Isaiah continues:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break not every yoke? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him: and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh (Is. 58:6-8).

This passage from Isaiah is representative of the Judgment of God as revealed through all of the prophets (see Jer. 22:3; Mic. 6:6-8; Hos. 6:6; Am. 5:21-24; Zech. 7:9-10, 8:16-17; etc., etc.).

Jesus

With the coming of Jesus the plan of God did not change; it became even more intense. Jesus was the personification of what God had been trying to communicate all along. A word is a vehicle of communication and Jesus is the “Word” of God. He is the express image of His person. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body.

He began His public ministry by cleansing the temple of those who had no regard for the needs of others. He gathered around Him a band of peasants and went about doing good. He healed the sick and showed compassion on those in need. He challenged the religious establishment of the day by placing the needs of humanity above the traditions of the elders. His life-style was a radical departure from the tightly structured theology of His contemporaries. He placed a premium upon the needs of people. He insisted that the Sabbath Day was made for man and not vice versa. For this reason He did not hesitate to heal on the Sabbath or to use that holy day in meeting human needs. In similar fashion He was free to fraternize with social outcasts, and His propensity to enjoy life caused His enemies to denounce Him as a “gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”

The Early Church

Jesus gave to His disciples an example that they should follow in His steps. For this reason we are not surprised to see the early church placing a priority upon humanitarian concern. The Scriptures affirm, “neither was there among them any that lacked . . .” (Acts 4:34). Those possessed by the Spirit of Jesus could not be possessed by things, They, therefore, sold their possessions and goods and distributed them as every man had need.

It is significant to remember that the first men chosen by the early church to function in an official capacity were selected to deal with the problems of starvation and discrimination (Acts 6: 1-8). Some would consider these men the first “deacons” of the church.

The first use of the word “elders” with reference to Christianity is again associated with relief for the poor. In Acts 11:30 the disciples at Antioch sent relief unto the brethren in Judea conveying it to the “elders” of the church in Jerusalem at the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The first person to be raised from the dead after the establishment of the church was a woman named Dorcas who was “full of good works and almsdeeds” (Acts 9:36). Her generosity to the poor was evident by the presence of widows who stood weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. The association of this woman with “widows” adds weight to the supposition that Dorcas was one of the widows above 60 years of age who vowed never to marry (see I Tim. 5).

The first Gentile to become a Christian without first becoming a Jew was Cornelius, a devout centurion who gave much alms to the people (Acts 10:2).

The book of James maintains a strong and unmistakable emphasis upon helping the poor and this is possibly the first New Testament book to be written. In chapter one he describes pure religion as overseeing the fatherless and widows. In chapter two he denounced discrimination against the poor in their assemblies and discusses faith and works in a context dealing with those who are “naked and destitute of daily food.” He describes love as the “royal law” and the “law of liberty.” In chapter three church leaders are encouraged not to curse their brethren but to use the tongue in the promotion of peace. In chapter four we are reminded that friendship with the world makes us an enemy of God and promotes war and fighting in the brotherhood. Those who speak evil of a brother are said to speak evil of the law. Chapter five presents a scathing denunciation to the rich who lived in pleasure and defrauded the poor. How can we read such a letter as this without directly relating it to the social issues of our day?

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders, he called to their attention that for three years he had worked in their midst supporting himself as well as those who were with him. He had done this as an example so that they too would “*so labor*” and support the weak. Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus who taught that it was more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:31-35). He later wrote in the Ephesian letter:

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (Eph. 4:28).

Those who refuse to work were not to be encouraged in their laziness and lethargy.

. . . for even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. . . (II Thes. 3: 10).

Let us, however, not use such thoughts to blind us to the eternal purpose of God regarding our love. Toward the close of the apostolic age the message “from the beginning” had never

changed and John wrote:

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (I Jn. 3:10-18).

Conclusion

This simplistic overview of human history reveals that during every dispensation God has manifested a dramatic concern over interpersonal relationships. For Christians to share in this concern is not some irrelevant issue or tangent; it is the ultimate aim of the Christian Gospel and will be emphasized as a central aspect of Judgment.

There is certainly a danger that some brethren will abandon the love of God and devote themselves to a purely humanistic philosophy of life. An ultimate extreme of atheistic humanism is illustrated for us by Communism. Under the guise of attempting to serve humanity without the benefit of God, they have created a police state where society is held in check by force, The machine gun and the barbed wire fence are standard equipment in a Communistic "utopia."

There is a far greater danger, however, that religiously oriented people will try to serve God without the benefit of humanitarian concern. Those who possess the Spirit of Jesus cannot help but be concerned about their fellow men. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, we also manifest the presence of Jesus in our lives by the way we treat one another, What Jesus began to do in the body, the body continues to do in Jesus. *By love we are to be enslaved to one another* (Gal. 5: 13).

It is appointed unto everyone once to die and then to appear in Judgment (Heb, 9:27). Please do not disregard what Jesus had to say for it is His word which will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48).

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 11

1. Should the statements of Jesus about feeding the hungry, thirsty, etc. be taken figuratively?
2. Does your church have any active ministry for the poor?
3. Should it?
4. Do we as Christians have any responsibility for non-Christians who are poor?
5. Which is easier - to love God or to love your neighbor?
6. Who is our neighbor today?
7. Did the Jerusalem church care for the poor?
8. How did they care for the poor?
9. Does a church have to de-emphasize evangelism in order to care for the poor?
10. What was Jesus teaching by telling the story of the Rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19 - 31)?

LESSON TWELVE

What About the Pattern?

Doesn't God give us a divine pattern for the church by which we will all be judged? The answer is no!

There are billions of people but no two people are absolutely alike - each has his own unique fingerprints, voice print and physiognomy. There are billions of stars; but no two stars are exactly alike, for every star differs from every other star in glory (I Cor. 15:41). Every snowflake has its own unique design. Every grain of sand has its own special size and shape.

The God whom we serve is a God of infinite variety! In the light of His nature it would be strange indeed, if not unnatural, for all churches and all Christians to function in identically the same way.

The early disciples were said to have continued steadfastly in:

- (1) The Apostles teaching,
- (2) Fellowship,
- (3) The breaking of bread and
- (4) Prayers (Acts 2:42).

This, however, is far from being a tightly structured "pattern" which would preclude diversity. As a matter of fact, within the framework of these four functions, there could be an infinite variety of expression.

A wide divergence in creation can result from only a few basic components, For example, we have only five senses: We can see, hear, smell, taste and feel -but these basic components provide us with unlimited sensations.

There are only four tastes which the human tongue can discern, They are sweet, sour, bitter and salt, Yet we enjoy an infinite variety of flavors.

All the colors of our world spring from only three primary colors. They are red, yellow and blue, Black and white are technically not colors but serve only to shade and tint. To print a picture in full color on a white piece of paper, it needs to go through a printing press only four times.

All the harmony in the world is formed from only seven notes on the scale. The musician, the artist and the cook can express their creativity from a few basic ingredients in an infinite variety of ways, and so can the Christian.

When Moses met with God upon the mountain, he was given specific instructions regarding the building of the Tabernacle. He was divinely commissioned to "make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5). The entire system was rigid and inflexible. It is important to remember that the Tabernacle was a copy or shadow of things in the heavens. It was not at all to teach that the Christian system was to be rigid and inflexible.

As a matter of fact, under such a view of things Jesus could not even be a priest for He came from the wrong tribe. The priesthood of Jesus, however, transcends and takes precedence over legalism. His ministry is like that of Melchisedek. It somehow eludes human explanations and reasoning.

Christianity differs from Judaism like Isaac differed from Ishmael. Those who are born of the Spirit operate upon a different level from those who are born after the flesh. Among those that are born of women there was no greater prophet than John the Baptist - but even the least in the Kingdom of Jesus takes precedence over John (Matt. 11: 11).

Patterns

Let us consider the various Greek words which are translated as “pattern” in the New Covenant Scriptures. *Please observe that not one time does the word pattern ever refer to the governmental structure of a local congregation!*

Tupos comes from the word which means “to strike.” It means “an impression or mark of a blow,” “a seal, stamp or die,” “form, mold, pattern.” It is used 16 times and is variously translated as: ensample 5, example 2, fashion 1, figure 1, form 1, manner 1, pattern 2, print 2.

Hupodeigma. This is from the Greek word *hupo*, under, and the word *deiknumi*, to show. It is used six times and is translated as ensample 1, example 4, pattern 1.

Hukotuposis means to “outline, sketch.” Thayer associates it with a pattern to be held up and copied. It is used two times and is translated as form once and pattern once. *Hupogrammos* is used only once (I Pet. 2:21) but is so similar to the words for pattern that it should be included here. It literally means “underwriting” and refers to letters which were traced or copied. *Deignza* is also similar and is used one time in Jude 7.

Here is the way these words are used in the Scriptures:

1. Adam was a “figure” or “pattern” of Jesus (Rom. 5:14).
2. The tabernacle, etc. were “patterns” of spiritual realities in the heavens (Acts 7:44, Heb. 8:5, 9:23).
3. Old Testament prophets were “patterns” or “examples” for those suffering or in need of patience (Jms. 5:10).
4. Jesus gave a “pattern” or “example” by washing the disciples’ feet (Jn. 13:15). When He was persecuted, He also gave us an “example” that we should follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:21).
5. Paul became a “pattern” or “example” by means of his conversion (I Tim. 1:16), his personal conduct (Phil. 3:17) and his willingness to work (II Thes. 3:9).
6. Timothy was to be a “pattern” or “example” in “word, manner of life, love, spirit, faith, % in purity” (I Tim. 4:12).
7. Titus was to be a “pattern” in good works, uncorrupt teaching, gravity and sincerity (Tit. 2:7).
8. Elders are not to be lords over God’s people but “patterns” or “examples” to the flock (I Pet. 5:3).
9. Timothy was to hold fast a “form” or “pattern” of sound words (II Tim. 1: 13). The word “sound” means “healthy” and refers not to the governmental structure of a local assembly but to the moral conduct of one’s personal life. (See I Tim. 1:9-10, II Tim. 4:3, Tit. 1:9, 13; 2 : 1 .)

Negative Patterns

1. Israel is a “pattern” or “example” to us that we should not “lust after evil things” (I Cor. 10:6), ‘murmur’ and ‘be destroyed’ (I Cor. 10: 1 1), or fall after their “pattern” or “example” of unbelief (Heb. 4: 11).
2. Sodom and Gomorrah are “patterns or examples” for those who want to live ungodly lives (II Pet, 2:6, Jd, 7).

Jesus’ Pattern

The “pattern” which Jesus left for His disciples was a “pattern” of love, They were to love God and they were to love humanity, and they could not do one without the other, He did not bind upon them one “standard operational procedure,” but encouraged them to trust in God and

improvise. Upon one occasion, for example, He sent them out like sheep in the midst of wolves. They were to take no wallet, no money, no shoes and no extra clothing. Their journeys from city to city would naturally place them in a wide variety of different circumstances. It is not difficult to imagine that such a program would necessitate a great degree of flexibility. Upon another occasion when circumstances were different, He reminded them of a previous commission and then gave them new instructions:

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, nothing, Then said he unto them, But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one (Lk. 22:35-36).

It is not necessary that we understand all of the circumstances involved in **His** change of instructions, but it is important that we see the necessity of remaining flexible.

The genius of the Christian System is that it is based upon love. Love, you remember, doesn't insist upon having its own way. It is not rigid and inflexible but has a way of adapting to unusual circumstances.

The story of the Good Samaritan provides an interesting case in point, The priest and the Levite looked at the victim of a crime through the eyes of legalism and preferred not to get involved. Perhaps they gave serious thought to their official responsibilities and considered Leviticus 21: Iff regarding defilement by the dead. Should the victim have died while they were ministering to him, they would have been ceremonially unclean. Or perhaps they thought of Leviticus 22:5 which prohibited the touching of a man who had any form of uncleanness. At any rate the result of their legalistic approach was zero. They passed by on the other side.

Then came the Samaritan, He did not whip out a copy of the law to determine his course of action. He did not send off to Jerusalem for authority or permission to digress from standard operational procedure. *His love enabled him to adapt to the situation.* He had compassion upon the man - that's why he poured oil and wine into his wounds. He felt sorry for his suffering; that's why he set him on the beast and transported him to a place of refuge. He had mercy upon him at the hour of his need; that's why he paid his bill and even returned to compensate for any further expense. In short, he did for that man what he would have wanted someone to do for him and under the same or similar circumstances. That's what love is all about!

If there is a pattern for the New Testament Church, it is the pattern of love. It is the one thing that can safely be superimposed upon every situation with no fear of doing violence to the purpose of God.

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 12

- 1 . Since the word "church" simply means "assembly," what is it that distinguishes a Christian assembly from one that is not Christian?
2. Can a church exist and function without elders?
3. How much structure is essential for Christians to constitute a church?
4. Can you prove your answer?
5. Contrast the tightly structured religion of the Pharisees with the teaching of Jesus.
6. Does a church have to have deacons?
- 7 . Did Jesus ever do anything unscriptural?
8. Can you think of a church problem which a proper kind of love will not solve?
9. Why could not Jesus serve as a priest in the pattern established by Moses (Heb. 8:4)?

10. Where is the sanctuary and true Tabernacle? (Heb. 8:2)?

LESSON THIRTEEN

Motives and Metamorphosis

Jesus not only stressed the importance of “doing” the right thing. He also stressed the importance of the right motives. It is possible for a person to give alms, to pray and to fast with the wrong motives. If we do these things to be seen of men, we have our reward. Similarly, we can bestow all our goods to feed the poor and even give our bodies to be burned, but if we do so from the wrong motives, it will profit us nothing.

The question, therefore, logically arises how can we be assured that we are motivated by a proper love? Or perhaps we should ask, “What is love?” There is no need to be technical in defining this word, for Jesus explained it quite clearly in the manner of His death. The Scriptures teach: “Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us” (I Jn. 3: 16), Please note that the same passage teaches that we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren. As we reflect upon the death of Jesus, we are forced to the conclusion that there is a very real sense in which He did not want to die , , . but died anyhow. This is what love is all about.

When Jesus came to his ultimate expression of love, He began to be sorrowful and very heavy (Matt. 26:37). He sought the help of human friends and said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt. 26:38). The night was cold and the soldiers were warming themselves before a fire, but in the agony of Gethsemane Jesus was sweating; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Lk. 22:44). It is significant to note that in this hour of supreme need an angel came unto Jesus from heaven and strengthened Him (Lk. 22:43).

There is a very real sense in which Jesus did not want to die. He prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me” (Mk. 14:36) . But please observe that He died anyhow whether He wanted to or not, for His every petition was surrounded by an aura of submission to the Father.

He said, “*Nevertheless not what as I will, but what You will*” (Mk. 14:36). This is God’s illustration to us about the nature of love. Love is surrendering our will to do the will of the Father, whether we want to do it or not. Love is saying, “Not my will but thine be done.”

Love is, therefore, an intellectual more than it is an emotional thing. As a matter of fact, an emotion cannot be commanded at all. If someone commanded you to be happy, how would you do it? But love is not an emotion. It is an intellectual response to do the will of God. It is the denial of our own will and the accepting of His design for our lives.

You cannot force yourself to “like” anyone, especially your enemies, but God commands us to “love” our enemies, not “like” them. When you are surrendered to do the will of God, you can pass through a Gethsemane and come out doing good to them that hate you and praying for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. This is the way we become the children of our Father which is in heaven. We do not have to like our enemies, but we do have to love them in the same capacity that Jesus loved His enemies. We are members of His Body and what Jesus began to do in the Body, the Body continues to do in Jesus.

Paradoxically, the thing which Jesus seemed to dread so much was the very thing which brought Him joy.

Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

In similar fashion when we surrender our will and submit to the Father, the Holy Spirit

dwells in our hearts and produces love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

The surrender which seems so painful is the secret to ultimate joy.

Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but in death it brings forth much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

As long as we cling to our own selfish will there is no power in our lives. It is only when we are crucified with Christ that we can experience the reality of being “born again.”

Unfortunately we do not want to die. When we die physically, we will do so struggling for another breath of air. Similarly we will make the ultimate surrender to God with great reluctance, “Gethsemane” is not an easy experience.

Paul wrote, “*For the love of Christ constraineth us . . .*” (2 Cor. 5:14) The word translated as “constraineth” is *suncho* which means “to hold fast” or “constrain.” Interestingly enough, it is the same word used to describe the way that cruel men “held” Jesus and tortured Him the night before His crucifixion (Lk. 22:63). In retrospect we know that human power is not sufficient to constrain Omnipotence. No man took the life of Jesus; He laid it down. And the power which “constrained” Him to do so was love. At first we are tempted to despise the power of love as inadequate. We endeavor to augment and strengthen love with a wide variety of external pressures. Walls and barbed wire fences give to some a feeling of security. Even a cursory review of history, however, reveals that every kingdom dependent upon external force has crumbled into oblivion, The Kingdom of Jesus was founded upon love and it will abide forever. Even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

Recognizing true believers

The Apostle John lists six criteria by which the true believer can be recognized. In the physical world a paternity test can confirm the identity of a child with its father. The same is true in the spiritual world. If we are “begotten” by God we have His likeness. Some versions may use the word “begotten” and others the word “born”. In 1 John, however, it is the same Greek word: “*gennao*”.

1. Everyone that does righteousness is born of God (1 John 2:29).
2. Whoever is begotten of God does not abide in sin (1 John 3:9).
3. Everyone that loves is begotten of God (1 John 4:7).
4. Everyone that loves Him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of Him (1 John 5:1)
5. Whoever is begotten of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).
6. Whoever is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not (1 John 5:18).

Metamorphosis

The process by which an ugly caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful butterfly is known as “metamorphosis.” It is actually a Greek word which means to change into another form. The word occurs four times in the New Testament Scriptures. Two times it is used of Jesus with reference to His experience upon the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2, Mk. 9:2) and two times it is used of Christians who are being transformed into the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2, I Cor. 3:18). The scriptures regarding the “metamorphosis” of Christians are both interesting and practical. The first scripture is:

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And 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. 12:1, 2).

“Conformation” comes from external pressure but “transformation” is from within. As a matter of fact, J.B. Phillips translates this passage: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within.”

Butterflies are not produced by legislation or conformation, but by transformation. Attempting to compress a caterpillar into the form of a butterfly would make things a bit messy, to say nothing of the fatal effect it would have upon the caterpillar.

Likewise, Christians are not produced by legalistic pressure from without. Such rules as "touch not, taste not and handle not" do not transform the believer. Such regulations may have an appearance of wisdom but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. The only way that someone can experience the Christian metamorphosis is by transformation from within. This occurs from the renewal of the mind. Fantastic! The word for Christian repentance is *metanoeo* which literally signifies “to change the mind.” Living sacrifices are “constrained” not by external pressure but by chains of love.

It all takes time. The problem is that “metamorphosis” is a process which takes time. Conversion is instantaneous - transformation is not.

John, the Son of Thunder, became a follower of Jesus in an instant of time. The process by which he was transformed into an Apostle of Love was not *so* quick. Transformation is a life-time procedure which begins at the time of our conversion and continues until we are delivered by death from the body of this humiliation.

Most of us are reluctant to wait. We jokingly say to our local repair man, “Of course I want it fixed today; if I had wanted it fixed tomorrow, I would have brought it in tomorrow.” But in a way it isn't too funny, for we probably mean it more than we are willing to admit. Perhaps no people upon the earth have ever been as aggressive and impatient as the citizens of the United States of America.. Our very speech betrays us. In Mexico if a watch is working or a car is moving they say *Esta anadando*, This means “it is walking,” In English we say “the care is running” If a Mexican is going for a walk, he will say, *Voy a dar una caminada*, which means, “I am going to give a walk.” In English we ‘take’ it! They live in the land of “Mañana” but we are a part of the “now” generation. We have an almost endless assortment of “instant” products to accelerate the pace of our lives.

Christ is called the “Bread of Life.” Unfortunately we cannot assimilate Him and be transformed into His image in an instant of time, There is no spiritual “micro-wave” or “pressure cooker” to accelerate the process of metamorphosis. We are not transformed by the flip of a switch, but by a lifetime of pressing for the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

This brings us to the second Scripture which deals with the Christian “metamorphosis.” It is found in II Corinthians 3:18.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The word translated as “changed” is the word for “metamorphosis.” It is a word which describes action in progress. As we behold Jesus, we are in the process of being transformed into His likeness.

Nathanael Hawthorne offers a critical insight into this process in his story of “The Great

Stone Face.” Here is a brief condensation of that story.

High in the White Hills of New Hampshire a Great Stone Face was formed by nature on the perpendicular side of a mountain. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, an hundred feet in height; the nose with its long bridge; and the vast lips which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the quaint valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage and could only discern a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

Beneath the shadow of the mountain lived a small boy named Ernest. As a toddling child he listened to his mother relate the strange prophecy passed down from generation to generation by the inhabitants of the valley. They believed that some kind and benevolent person would someday appear who bore the exact likeness of the visage which nature had formed on the mountainside. Little Ernest would clap his hands in childish delight at the thought that someday he might live to see the man of the Great Stone Face.

The days and the years rolled by. Ernest never forgot the message of hope in those prophetic stories. Each day he would stand at sunset and meditate and pray as he gazed into the Great Stone Face. Soon it was noised abroad that one of the inhabitants of that very valley had marched out into the world to seek his fortune. He was now the world's most wealthy individual. Ships and caravans and countless servants brought him wealth from every part of the then known world. Now it was told that this very man was returning to the valley of his birth. A majestic mansion was being prepared as his residence. Those who knew him as a boy insisted that he looked just like the kind and benevolent face that smiled down from the mountainside. The valley tingled with excitement at the prospects of seeing at last the realization of their dreams. When the man at last appeared, the hopes of the valley were only short lived. There was a resemblance sure enough, but it was only a shallow and a superficial one. Ernest had been watching the Great Stone Face every day of his life, and immediately he discerned that the Great Stone Face was not this man of wealth. Soon the people too came to realize that the object of their prophetic hope was yet to come.

When the man of wealth was dead, another rumor spread through every home throughout the countryside. This time the hope of the valley was the illustrious commander of a great army. He too had been born in the valley, he had gone out to seek his fortune, and he was now returning the decorated and battle scarred veteran of many foreign wars. His school mates and friends all testified that he resembled the Great Stone Face to a hair. Thousands lined the road as his carriage drew near. Tables were arranged at a clearing in the woods so that the celebrated guest could be welcomed with speeches and toasts. Once again Ernest was there standing on tiptoe . . . once again he was disappointed. Again the people had been misled by only a shallow and superficial resemblance to the face on the mountainside. The Great Stone Face was neither the man of wealth nor the man of war.

The years rolled swiftly by. Others came and went, exciting momentarily the hopes of the villagers. Politicians, poets and others passed their way, but still the prophecies were yet to be fulfilled.

Ernest was advancing in years. His hair was gray. His dedicated and humble life was highly revered all throughout the valley. He was recognized as a paragon of wisdom and humility. The people came to gather with him at sunset for his time of prayer. They would ask him questions and share the beauty of his life. The withering hand of time gave certain frustrations now to Ernest. The man of the Great Stone Face would have to appear soon or death would rob him of the all-consuming passion of his life.

The hour of sunset came. Ernest made his way out into the woods as his custom was. The people followed to a small nook among the hills with a gray precipice behind. The stern front was relieved by the pleasant foliage of many creeping plants that made a tapestry for the naked rock. At a small elevation above the ground, set in a rich framework of verdure, there appeared a niche, spacious enough to admit a human figure with freedom for such gestures as spontaneously accompany earnest thought and genuine emotion.

Ernest ascended to this natural pulpit and began to speak. The countenance of this venerable man radiated love. All of his life had been devoted to others and to meditations about the Great Stone Face. The glory of his white hair was diffused about his face. At a distance, but distinctly to be seen, high up in the golden light of the setting sun, appeared the Great Stone Face with hoary mists around it like the white hairs around the brow of Ernest. Its look of grand beneficence seemed to embrace the world.

At that very moment, in sympathy with a thought which he was about to utter, the face of Ernest assumed a grandeur of expression so imbued with benevolence that one of the people, by an irresistible impulse, threw up his arms and shouted, *'Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face.'*

Now read again the words of II Corinthians 3: 18. It means that we Christians have a new relationship with God. We do not approach Him with veiled face as in the days of Moses, but openly we behold His beauty as in a mirror, and while we are beholding Him we are in the process of being transformed into His likeness, from one degree of glory to another, and all of this is possible through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Questions for Discussion - Lesson 13

1. Since the heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” can we ever be sure of our motives?
2. What does it mean in Ez. 36:26 that God will give us a new heart?
3. What is the difference between the love commanded in the Scripture and the way we generally use the word “love” today?
4. Which is the more powerful emotion - love or fear?
5. What causes the Christians to be “transformed” into the likeness of Jesus?
6. How long does the process of transformation take?
7. In what way do the commandments “touch not, taste not, and handle not” have only an appearance of wisdom but remain powerless in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Colossians 2:20 - 23)?
8. Should the Christian be able to measure any progress in the transformation process?
9. What did Jesus mean “by their fruits ye shall know them?” (Matt. 7:20)
10. What indications do we have that a person is truly born again?

Epilogue

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1788. He came as a short, fat, strunched old man in plain Quaker dress, bald pate - short white socks - an eighty-two-year-old body and brilliant mental energies of a twenty-five-year-old youth.

During these dark days following the war, the threat of anarchy was a constant reality, and the formation of a constitution had, therefore, become a national imperative. During seventeen days of heated debate Mr. Franklin maintained a virtual silence, but on June 28th he arose to suggest that each session be initiated with prayer. He deemed their lack of progress to that point as “proof of the imperfection of human understanding.” He then reviewed their fruitless search through history and their frustration with the constitutions of contemporary Europe; then turning to Washington he stated, “How has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understanding? I lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? . I , I , , , believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interest; our projects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and byword down to future ages. And, what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

Three political theories were particularly dear to Franklin. The first involved the danger of paying high salaries to government officials. The second advocated a plural executive body with little power, His philosophy was “The least government possible is the greatest possible

good.” The third dealt with the justice of state representation which Franklin felt needed improvement. He was beaten on all three points.

Monday, September 17, was the final day of the convention. Here are a few of Franklin’s words which stand as a classic example of conciliatory love.

I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them; for, having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information or fuller consideration to change opinions even on important subjects which I once thought right but found to be otherwise. It is, therefore, that the older I grow the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment and to pay attention to the judgment of others. Most men, indeed, as well as most sects in religion think themselves in possession of all truth. But though many private persons think almost as highly of their infallibility as that of their sect, few express it so naturally as a certain French lady who in a dispute with her sister said: ‘I don’t know how it happens, sister, but I meet with nobody but myself that’s always in the right.’

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults if they are such; because I think a general government necessary for us, and there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered; and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years and can only end in despotism as other forms have done before it when the people shall become so corrupt as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views, from such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It, therefore, astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does, Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution because I expect no better and because I am not sure that it is not the best, The opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good, I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad, Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die, On the whole, Sir, I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the convention who may still have objections to it would with me on this occasion doubt a little of his infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.

The hour has come in the history of the Christian cause for each of us to doubt a little of his own infallibility, After nineteen long centuries the doctrinal disputes are not resolved and never will be. The solution to our division is not to be discovered in renewed rounds of debate but in the awesome power of love. There is no argument against love.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt, 22:37-40).

Quotes of Benjamin Franklin have been adapted from the book *Benjamin Franklin* by Carl VanDoren, N.Y., the Viking Press. (1938)

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