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INTRODUCTION

*The following Lectures were delivered by Pastor Elmo Parker (Victory Baptist Temple, Piedmont, MO) for the BEREAN BIBLE COLLEGE course entitled, **CHRISTIAN CHARACTER** during the Fall 2001 Semester.*

BEREAN BIBLE COLLEGE AND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, a ministry and integral part of Victory Baptist Temple, is a full-fledged Bible Institute that offers up to a four-year degree (Bachelors in Bible) in the classroom.

BEREAN BIBLE COLLEGE also conducts a full CORRESPONDENCE DIVISION, including Theological Seminary, for those wishing to pursue their Christian education at home and at their own pace. The Institute is also opening Satellite Divisions this year in various locations around the country.

*NOTE: IN THE COURSE OF THIS COURSE, PASTOR PARKER LECTURED FROM MATERIAL OBTAINED MAINLY FROM **ELEMENTS OF GODLY CHARACTER** BY DR. DENNIS CORLE (Revival Fires Publishers).*

It has been our desire in transcribing these Lectures to leave the teacher's personality and style in tact while providing for smooth and easy reading.

May the Lord richly bless your life as you read, study, and apply the important Biblical principles contained herein.

*Dr. Andy Tully, Evangelist
President, Berean Bible College & Theological Seminary*

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LECTURE #1

EXERCISE THAT BUILDS GODLY CHARACTER

Hebrews chapter twelve deals with an exhortation to follow Christ to holiness. Let's read verses 5-11, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Paul wrote to Timothy in his first letter (I Timothy 4:7) and said, "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness."

Then, in Romans 8:29 he said, "For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren."

Now this verse does not teach that some people are born, or predestinated, to Heaven and some to Hell. But rather, God has predetermined that saved people are going to be like His Son. God wants all of His redeemed children to be like His Son. Saved people are predestined or foreordained by God, not only to escape Hell, but to be like His Son, Jesus Christ. That's not just referring to eternity when we get our glorified bodies and we cannot sin. God intends to make us and shape us into the image of His Son NOW, in this world. That is His design.

*Now, folks, if the God who spoke the universe into existence has already decided and determined to make us like His Son, then we have only two options: **(1) We can cooperate with Him and make it easy on ourselves.** We are not going to out-will or over-power God. If He is determined to shape us into the image of His Son, then that is the direction that things are going to go in our lives. That is already decided: It is going to happen, or some bad things are going to happen.*

God has determined that. That is what He has saved us for. We are "His workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). Do you want to do it the easy way, or the hard way?

I got to thinking, this ought to be in a new converts' lesson. There is no doubt in my mind. And I'll tell you what: the next New Converts lesson that I teach, it is going to be there, because it needs to be there.

You might say, "Preacher, exactly what do you mean?"

In the same way that physical exercise strengthens and builds our bodies, spiritual exercise will strengthen, mature, and build us up spiritually. I can willingly choose spiritual exercise, and that is the easy way. Every person, after they get saved, ought to choose spiritual exercise. That is where the character comes in, because God doesn't force us to have Christian character. He speaks to us and instructs us and gives us the decision whether we want to choose the spiritual exercise. Otherwise, the Lord will arrange the spiritual exercise or therapy that is needed even against our own will.

If we took the time, we could all give testimony how God had to move in, give us a good spanking, and get us going. And if we are going to exercise ourselves unto godliness, it means that we exercise ourselves into submission to the Spirit of God and the Word of God. And we need to remember that.

*I am talking tonight to born again Christians. And God says to us that we have two options: we can exercise ourselves, as Paul told Timothy, or else **(2) God will legislate exercise for us in the form of chastisement.***

Verse 7 of our text says, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" He is asking the question, but what He is really saying is that He does not have a son whom He has not chastened. God is a good Father, and He loves His children, and He wants to correct them -- because He has great plans for their lives. He doesn't have a child that He doesn't chastise.

Verse 11 says, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

I don't know how much you have thought about chastisement, but we ought to think a lot about it. When I was growing up, I thought quite a bit about it! I had a dad who knew how to correct. I didn't like it then -- it was grievous -- but, looking back I appreciate his correction because I needed it. I didn't know I needed it then, but I know now that I really needed it.

Chastisement is not primarily punishment; it is a form of therapy. Have you ever had therapy after an accident or surgery? Mrs. Tully came back from a meeting in North Carolina. I remember that her shoulder was frozen up from an accident. She had to go to Doc Brown (chiropractor in the church). Finally he got it broken loose through several therapy sessions. I grant you that she didn't look forward to the next painful appointment saying, "I can't wait to get there!" It hurts! It is painful!

Listen folks, the object of therapy is not pain, but to get an arm, a leg, or a hand that is going to be useful, functional again. It needs help. And we as God's children need help in our character. It just so happens that even though pain is not the object of therapy, pain is still a part of it.

However, you don't need therapy every time you bump your elbow or bruise your knee. God is not sitting up in Heaven just waiting until we do a little something wrong so He can spank us. You say, "Preacher, when do you need therapy?" You need it when you get stiffened up! When you get stiffened up with pride you need therapy. When the knee won't bow before God you need therapy. When you have pride in your life and you are selfish, you need therapy. God doesn't administer chastisement over every little mistake His children make.

Let me say this: If we are pliable to God, and we have a tender heart toward God, He is not going to spank us every time. The Bible says, "The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." If we realize our failure immediately and say, "Oh, God, I'm sorry! I have failed. I don't want to fail you; please help me not to fail." We let Him know that we are making an effort to correct what is wrong. If we have a

repentant heart.....

Parents know that. I know that as a parent. I'll be honest with you: when one of the kids were honest, had a repentant heart, and didn't try to lie their way out of a spanking, acting like nothing is wrong..... If they came and said, "Dad, I'm sorry! I won't do it any more!" If I could tell that they were sorry there was no need to spank them. Now, if they were just trying to deceive me, that was a different story. It is when we boil up and stiffen up against God, then we leave Him no option. He will never be satisfied with us being something other than what He created us to be.

God is determined that His children be something. We as parents can understand that. A good parent will have a dream for their children, and have plans for them, and be as determined as we can to make them what they ought to be. We don't hardly want to give up on them. If we are that way, God in Heaven is a thousand times more that way with us. He will never be satisfied with His children until He makes out of us what He created us to be.

By the way, we will never know the satisfaction we ought to know if we are not what He made us to be. The only time a child of God is really satisfied with peace and fulfillment is when we know in our heart, with the confirmation of God on our life, that we are becoming what He wants us to be. We are not saying that we are perfect; but when we know that we have a heart after God, a heart that yearns to please Him, we want His smile on our lives more than we want the smile of the world, even the smile of the family if they are out of tune with God.

God will never be content and satisfied to let us have wasted lives. God will deal with us if we are His children.

We need spiritual exercise to grow into the Christians God wants us to be, and we can exercise ourselves unto godliness. To be strong physically we have to exercise. It is not just a matter of sitting at the table and eating three square meals a day. That is needful, but if you just sit at the table and eat, and you don't exercise, you know what will happen. You will get big and fat, and lazy, and sloppy. You have to exercise!

The same thing is true spiritually. We need to feed on the Word of God, and we need to delight in the Word of God, and we need to be at the house of God at the appointed times -- but we also need to exercise ourselves unto godliness. If we don't, and that's obedience, then God will have to legislate therapy for us, and that is chastisement.

Verse 5 says, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."

Notice, first of all, that He said, "My son.." That is saved people. God does punish sin, but He does not chastise lost people with therapy. God does not chasten the Devil's children; He doesn't spank the devil's children. He will judge sin, but He does not chasten lost people. Why? For the same reason the doctor doesn't give therapy to a dead person. It wouldn't do any good to move a corpse into the therapy room to get help. A lost person is "dead in trespasses and sin." They don't need therapy; they need resurrection. You have to have life to work with.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." It is God's love, not His anger, that prompts Him to want to see us corrected and our lives salvaged. We need to remember that.

As we visit with others and witness to them and they say, "Yes, I am saved," if we find that they are not serving God, we need to keep in mind that if they are not serving the Lord, and they haven't

been in church for ten years -- if they say that things are going great, we ought to say, "I am afraid of that." Then when they ask, "Why?" bring them to this Scripture. If a person is disobedient to God and they are not being chastised, then they are not God's child. They are illegitimate.

Did He say, "Whom the Lord HATETH He chasteneth? Whom the Lord is ANGRY with He chasteneth?" No. He said, "Whom the Lord LOVETH He chasteneth."

If you spanked your child for disobeying your instructions and running out into the street, you wouldn't be prompted to spank because you hated him; you would do it out of love. You wouldn't want them to get hurt.

Then He said in verse 7, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

What kind of father-son relationship is it if the father doesn't love the son enough to correct him when he is wrong. Real love will try to correct and protect. Then the text goes on to say, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

How many? "All are partakers," it says. The word, "bastard," is not a curse word. It means, "illegitimate; not in the family, fatherless"

I'll be honest with you, I cannot tell whether someone is saved or lost. And I don't think you can either. I don't think you can tell by observation. If I would have been observing Simon Peter when he cursed and denied the Lord, I would have said that he was as lost as a blind goose in a hail storm. If I had been observing Judas, who kept the money and seemed to be conservative and take care of it, I would have probably thought, "Old Judas is probably saved." But the Bible says that he had a "devil" from the beginning.

However, I might get an idea from what God does in the response of a person's life as to whether he is saved or not. David belonged to God, yet did some awful things. He was a man after God's own heart, but he did an awful thing. And God put chastisement on his life. And you hear him say over and over, "I have sinned." He repented; he had remorse; he had a broken heart. And the Bible teaches that if you can live a long time in sin and God doesn't do anything about it, then you are not in the family. We need to get that together. If a person can live long term in sin, and God doesn't overtake them and whip them, you just mark it down that that person is not in the family of God.

Dr. Dennis Corle says that he was in North Carolina out soul winning. He knocked on a door, and a woman in her mid forties opened the door. He started talking to her about salvation and she said, "Preacher, I am already saved."

He said to her, "Well, that's wonderful. Tell me when you got saved." She gave him the time and place, and it all sounded pretty good.

Then he said, "I am holding a revival in _____ church, and I would like to have you come and hear me preach tonight."

She said, "I don't go to church."

He said, "You don't EVER go to church?"

She said, "No."

He said, "How long has it been since you have been in church?"

She said, "About twenty years."

He said, "Wow! Twenty years! How are things going?"

She said, "Wonderful! Everything is great!"

He said, "Bad sign!"

She said, "What do you mean, 'bad sign'?"

He then took her to Hebrews chapter twelve and read verse eight, "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Did she get mad? No. She got saved, and she came to church that night and followed the Lord in believer's baptism.

This town is full of people who say that they are saved. They have made a profession of faith, but they are not serving God and haven't been for years. If they are saved, God is going to chasten them. In fact, if they were really saved and not serving God for twenty or thirty years, they would probably have already been taken home! We'll get to that a little later.

*God loves us too much to let us as His children waste our lives without Him giving us some therapy, without Him chastening us; doing what we desperately need to be done in our lives to tender our hearts and get us right with Him. His chastening will do one of two things. **It will either tender our hearts, or it will make us worse, depending on our response.***

If a child doesn't yield after he gets spanked, he won't stay the same. He will either get harder, or he will get helped.

In verse eight we are told that if we can live long term in sin and God doesn't do anything about it, then we are not saved. I can't tell whether someone is saved by what they do, but I sure can tell by how God responds to what they do -- if quite a bit of time passes, that is. God has declared that He will not let it go on without Him dealing with it. I can testify to that. I have been saved a long time. I am 66; I got saved when I was 9 -- that's 57 years if my arithmetic is right. That's a long time. And I guarantee you God has worked on my life all those years. He just keeps working.

I like that song, "He's still working on me...To make me what I ought to be." You know something: the songwriter had in mind when he wrote that song that it didn't take God long to make the sun and the earth, but it takes Him a long time to work on us. I'll guarantee you that if we could have testimonies in the class this evening that you would confirm the same thing in your lives.

In verse nine He continues, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence..." and we should have because the Bible says, "Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right; honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-2). God commanded me to obey and honor my parents, and there is a difference between obeying and honoring. Obedience is doing what we are told to do. Honoring is doing it with respect and a good attitude. I honor them as my parents, and respect them in their God-given position, because of who they are. There ought to be some gratitude for all that they have done.

We need to be reminded as children of God that we ought to honor God for who He is and what He has done in our lives as our Father. He continues, "...shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

We are commanded of God to obey people that are less than perfect. Parents do not do right all the time, by principle even. And sometimes parents are wrong, and even chasten their children wrongfully. Sometimes we even chasten our children for our own pleasure. But God does it to make us "partakers of His holiness."

If we are going to obey our earthly parents -- and we are commanded to do that -- whose judgment is less than perfect (and we have all made wrong calls), how much more should we obey the Father of spirits, whose judgment is always perfect. He is never too easy; and He is never too hard. God has never whipped anyone too much or too little! He does it just right! We need to know that.

God has determined to make us holy, even if we are as sorry as dirt. He is determined! It doesn't matter what we are. We are His children, and He is determined to make us holy!

He goes on in verse eleven to say, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The word "exercised" ought to be underlined in your Bible.

All of us, no doubt, got some whippings when we were children growing up. Did we say, "Oh, boy! This is going to help me. I am glad Mom and Dad are giving me a whipping because I sure need it and it is going to help me"? How many said that? No, no!

I never got one whipping that I looked forward to and appreciated. It was "grievous" every time. But in hindsight I can honestly look back and say, "Thank God my dad loved me enough to whip me, because it did yield some peaceable fruit in my life. It even brought some peace in my heart -- after the war was over." You will someday thrill over having the use of that part of your life back.

God said to us that we could make it easy on ourselves, but since we did not cooperate we needed some therapy. It would be painful, but we like the outcome.

Then He said that it "yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." If I understand that statement, then He is telling us that not everybody is exercised by chastisement. Some people get chastised, but they don't benefit or profit from it. They just invite more whippings.

There are some kids that, when they get a whipping, it doesn't do them much good. A good parent will just keep laying it on. I had a cousin who was a pretty good boy, but he sure was bull headed. My uncle didn't have to whip him much, but this time he just wouldn't yield. My uncle whipped him good -- and I felt sorry for him. You talk about getting a whipping -- I felt sorry for him. What else could you do? But he finally broke -- he just stiffened up; he blew up and tried to let his dad think he wasn't going to cry. Finally he broke.

THREE BASIC RESPONSES TO CHASTISEMENT

There are three basic responses to chastisement.

1. DESPISE IT

Verse 5 says, “**Despise not** thou the chastening of the Lord.” That means that when we are chastised of God, there is a danger of us despising it, and not even acknowledging that it is God working, His chastisement.

You say, “Why wouldn’t a person admit that it is God dealing with them? When we know in our lives God is whipping us, why wouldn’t we admit it and then say that we are wrong?”

The hardest thing in the world is for us to say, “I am wrong.” That is a part of the old nature. If we could just get to the place where we admit that we are wrong: “Oh, God, I am wrong and you are right. Your Word is right. I have missed the mark. I am wrong.” In many cases when God deals with someone and trouble comes, it is just called an accident or a problem, and they don’t want to acknowledge that it is the hand of God trying to get our attention and soften the heart....

When things happen in our lives, we need to stop and ask God, “Lord, are you trying to get my attention? I haven’t been a very good listener lately. I admit it. Are you trying to get my attention?”

Brother Foster (Missouri State Senator who is a Christian) gave a testimony at dinner the other day. It blessed my heart. He has a tender heart toward God. He said, “I go out to that tree where I talk to God...,” and he just kind of rehearsed a little bit how he talked to God.

I didn’t say anything, but I thought, “God likes that.” He was being honest with God.

2. FAINT

The second response to chastisement is fainting. “...And **not faint** when thou art rebuked of Him.”

Look at the word, “faint.” If you walk out the back door and someone hits you in the head with a baseball bat and you were knocked out, that is not fainting. However, if you are going down the road and you come across an accident and you see blood, and a dead body lying there. When you see something you don’t want to see and don’t want to face, you faint. You go unconscious because you don’t want to deal with it.

Sometimes people put themselves in a miserable situation: they put themselves in a condition where God has to chasten them to get their attention. Then when the trouble and the pain comes, instead of consciously dealing with it they just give up; they faint. Many people, when God is dealing with them, end up dropping out on God.

There are more drop-outs on God than you can shake a stick at. When they drop out on God, they drop out on the church; they give up on Bible reading. Then they say, “I can’t believe that God is treating me like this!” It never seems to dawn on them that they were the ones who caused it. “I just can’t believe that God let this happen to me!”

If they had been cooperating and submissive, it wouldn’t have happened; if they had exercised themselves unto godliness. God would not have had to legislate chastisement.

3. BE EXERCISED

The right response to chastisement is to be exercised by it. David said in Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.”

In verse 71 he said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." He didn't say that it was fun. "Oh, I really enjoyed it!" No, he didn't say that. But he did say, "It was good for me."

That is what I was saying a moment ago: In my life, it was good for me many times that God worked on me. When I got called into the ministry, and I was bucking up against Him, Cheryl (daughter) was about two or three years old. I was out fishing with my brother-in-law on a Saturday, and Cheryl got a hold of some kerosene, and they had to rush her to the Poplar Bluff hospital in an ambulance.

When I came home and found that out, I immediately drove to the hospital. I guarantee that I had a meeting with God. I prayed, "God, are you trying to say something to me? If you are trying to get my attention, you got through." I guarantee you I got the message! "I am willing to do what you want me to do, whatever it is." I felt like He was chastening me.

Now, God's dealings are: He first speaks to His wayward child. He speaks to us through His Word, and through His Holy Spirit. If we will respond when He speaks, He won't have to spank. But then, when we don't respond, He spans; and it is painful, but the pain of a spanking is not permanent. And then He scourges us: "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

The judgments of God on a Christian are: God speaks -- God spans -- then He calls us home.

You say, "What is a 'sin unto death'?" The sin unto death is, saying "no" to God once too often. Do you realize how arrogant it is for any child of God to say "no" to a God in whose hands we are, who gives us the next breath? How foolish, how wicked, it is to say "no" to God -- who gave us life, who gives us life eternal, who does all things for us!

This might sound pretty harsh, but God is more concerned about people getting saved than He is about US living to be ninety or one hundred years old -- or even forty or fifty years old, for that matter. The thing that keeps the lost from getting saved is when God's children don't do right. If all of His children had character, loved Him and served Him, there would be much more conviction and more people getting saved.

Have you ever seen a condemned building? Why do they condemn a building? A building is condemned when it becomes dangerous to the occupants; and then it is dangerous to the passers by. Bricks might fall off and hurt someone.

Why was it condemned? Because it is beyond repair. If I convince God that I am not going to submit to His will -- I am not going to exercise myself unto godliness -- I am not going to respond to His dealing with me, then what else can He do but tear me down? A condemned building is torn down. When they condemn the building they get the occupants out; they move them. Then they destroy the building.

When my life gets dangerous to me -- and this is Biblical -- and it is dangerous to everyone around me, God is going to take care of the old building. He will destroy the body, that the soul might be saved. If I refuse to be repaired, refuse to respond to God's chastisement, then He will have to put the red sign on me: CONDEMNED. He will destroy the body, and move me out. I'll face Him in shame.

People get the idea, "Well, as long as I am saved, that's all that matters!" Nobody is going to think like that at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That shows how little we really know about God. His purpose is to develop us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is determined. I can cooperate, or I can stiffen my neck and resist, but the only way it works out is when I yield to Him.

LECTURE #2

CHARACTER IS BUILT, NOT BORN

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 1:5-11).

Character is built, not born. There is a difference between character in general and Christian character. There are some people of character, yet they do not know Christ as their savior. They are people of character. They have character and integrity as far as the world is concerned, but they don't have Christianity engrained in their character.

*Neither character in general, nor Christian character, is something that you are born with. In other words, **CHARACTER IS BUILT NOT BORN**. It is not like some people are just born with character, and others don't have it. It is not a gift that one is born with and another is born without. Everybody is born without character. No baby has character; that is why they must be trained and disciplined. That is why you have to work with them to instill in them what is right.*

*Let me go a step farther: **EVERYONE WHO IS SAVED IS BORN AGAIN WITHOUT CHRISTIAN CHARACTER**. This part helped me as I was studying this subject. We have a tendency to think that when a person gets saved that they are saved all over, and they are full-grown and have character. But character has to be built. It is not something that you have automatically just because you are saved. And by the way, it is pretty hard to develop Christian character in someone who doesn't have character at all -- even if they are saved. Some people are genuinely saved, but if they don't have character it is hard to disciple them, because it takes some discipline to become more like Christ. If I don't have any discipline in my life to start with -- that is, self control -- it is going to be awful hard for me to develop Christian character.*

Notice verse 5, “add to your faith.” Everything begins with faith for a child of God. Faith is, dependency upon God. Faith is expectancy from God. It points to the Word of God, and that is enough. The Word of God is enough because it tells us about God -- it introduces us to God, and it tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is how we got saved. We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of the living God (I Peter. 1:23). I found out through the Word of God that I was a sinner and I deserved Hell (that is what I earned by the wages of my sin -- Romans 6:23). If I got paid off by what I earned, my pay check would be Hell. The Bible tells me that.

The Bible also tells me about Jesus coming into the world, and why He came. He came and lived a sinless life; He went to Calvary, and died in my place. He paid the full penalty of my sin. He was buried, He arose, and He ascended up on high at the right hand of the Father.

The Bible also tells me that he is willing and anxious to save. Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." That's good news, isn't it? When I heard that message, it was enough. I didn't need to hear anything else. I didn't need to know anything else. That was enough.

When I turned to Jesus Christ, and made a commitment to Him, it was based on the Word of God alone. That is all we have; that is why God preserved His Word. It is not based on my feelings. I'll be honest with you: I have a lot more feelings since I have been saved than I had the night I got saved. If you want to feel good in the Lord, just be obedient, have good fellowship with Him, and have the fullness of the Spirit of God.

Some people are like wasps. They tell me that they are bigger when they are first born than they are at any other time in their lives. Some Christians seem to be that way.

Our salvation is based strictly on what the Word of God says. If we can't trust this Book, we don't know whether we are saved. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). And for the Christian, everything starts with faith because "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6); and without faith it is impossible to get saved (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 10:13). You cannot be saved without faith. All the works that we do, all the good deeds and the church attendance, and so forth -- they won't accomplish anything towards salvation.

Now, we are instructed in our text to "add to your faith." He didn't say "replace" your faith with something else. He said, "Add to your faith VIRTUE." He said to keep your faith in tact. Hold on to that faith, but you add to it, VIRTUE.

The word, "virtue," means "moral excellence." He is talking about being holy, separated unto God. He is talking about sanctification, being set apart. He is talking about being clean and pure. Boy, I'll tell you what: that needs to be added today, doesn't it. I've never seen a day when it needs more to be added to our faith. All these things ideas are included in this thing of virtue.

A lot of folks get saved, but they never add to their faith. God said, 'Don't put away faith. Don't abandon faith; continue to trust God, and do it virtuously. Do it separated unto God. Do it clean, and do it right.'

Then he goes on and lists some things that need to be added after we receive Christ. Now remember that neither character in general nor Christian character are automatic at birth. And it is not automatic at the second birth, either.

Character must be built step by step in our lives. How do we get character? How do we get character in general? The best place to get it -- where the Bible tells us to get it -- is when our parents train us.

The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). He is talking about me training and developing character in my children.

If you are going to pour concrete, the first thing you must do is set the form. Once the form is in place, then you pour that pliable, moldable concrete into the form. If you keep the concrete inside the form long enough it will set up in the shape you intended it to take. You built the form, and that is the shape you want the concrete to take.

Parents have to make rules; and that is the form they build around their children's lives. Then they have to enforce those rules to have pressure. They must have restraints, and they must discipline

their children. All of that is to keep them in form until they set up and harden according to the mold. When you see that they are beginning to set up, you can tear the form down.

At what age can you tear the form down? You have to wait until they are 'set up.' Some set up quicker than others. Some concrete sets up quicker, and some sets up slower.

Now, some people who didn't get the child training, when they get saved they need to let the preacher (or someone) do the training that parents did not do, and they need to discipline themselves. And to do that, we must do things that we don't feel like doing. Character is not doing things you feel like doing. Mostly, character is doing things you don't feel like doing.

*II Timothy 2:2 says, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." Why "faithful men?" Because you cannot disciple an unfaithful person. If a person won't come to church and hear preaching at scheduled services he won't grow, even if you go to his house. You can go to his house three times a week, and preach to him, but if he is unfaithful to church he won't grow. I guarantee you -- I have been around for a long time -- **he will not grow!***

*The foundational thing about character is **FAITHFULNESS**. And then with that comes honesty and integrity. You cannot make a good Christian out of a fellow who won't brush his teeth and bathe. Those things have to do with character. You just can't do it. Nobody wants to smell bad, but a fellow who won't bathe isn't going to keep it from happening -- he is going to smell bad. It doesn't matter what he says. He might be sincere, but if he doesn't bathe he is going to stink.*

Nobody wants to have green or rotten teeth, or bad breath, but some folks won't do what is necessary to keep from having them. And it is going to happen. Now, if they don't have enough self discipline to do some of these things, we are going to have a hard time getting them to be faithful to reading their Bible, faithful to church, faithful to pray.

By the way, I am not against people who need it getting aid from the government; but I am against any program that doesn't build any character, but it even adds to the lack of character. In Matthew 13:6 we are told about the sower who sent forth to sow, and sowed on different soils -- different types of ground. "And when the sun was up (he is talking about one type of ground), they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." Because of the type of soil, this particular seed didn't have much root and the sun came out and scorched it. It withered. Then the thorns came up and choked it out.

There are many people who don't have any root in them -- and I'm talking about stability. A tree that doesn't have much root, when the storm comes by, will fall. You take a Christian who doesn't have root, when the storms of life come he will fall -- you must have root downward, or you won't bear fruit upward.

I learned some things on the farm and in the garden. We need to be more concerned about the root than anything else. You don't have to water the flower part of the garden; you just need to make sure you get water down where the root is. If you have good root structure, you will have a good garden.

So we must be established in the local church, we must have roots in the Word of God, and we must have some things in our character. We have to know faithfulness. Faithfulness is absolutely essential. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2).

If I am going to grow in the grace of God and live a decent life, I must be faithful. Would-be

employers are looking for that quality in potential employees, too: faithfulness. Faithful to their jobs, faithful to their spouses, faithful to their friends, etc..

I cannot decide if I have friends, I can only decide if I am a friend. I can decide that part. And I can be a friend, and more than likely if I am a friend I will have friends. There is a loyalty attached to friendship, and that has to do with character. To have a friend that has character -- you have somebody! But I find in this day of lack of character that friendship is so shallow. It doesn't take anything anymore for someone whom you thought was your friend to drop you like a hot potato.

The Bible says, "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not" (Proverbs 27:10). I like to do business with friends, if I can. And I'll be honest with you: I won't let a little price difference keep me from doing business with a friend. I like to have friends. (You're probably saying, "You don't preach like that! You ought to be kinder in your preaching!")

To do that, we must not just think of what is good for self. We will get in trouble through life if we think of only what is good for number one. Many people compromise because someone comes along who promises to help them in one area of their lives, and they think that it will be good for them -- and they are taken in. They find out later that it wasn't near as good for them as they thought.

In passing, we must be faithful to our obligations, financial and otherwise. That is a part of character. One of the most outstanding things about character, and about the character of God, is found in Psalm 138:2, "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name."

God has magnified His word even above His name. We could spend the rest of the time just discussing that. Why did God say that? His name is above every name -- that is true! But your word IS your name. If a man's word is no good, how about his name? His name is no good. And if God's word is no good, His name is no good.

Do you know why His name is so great? It is because His word is great. God holds His word above His name, and you and I would do well to hold our word above our name, because our word is our name.

Be faithful to principles. If you live by the whims of society, and by circumstances, you are an uncharactered person, because everything else dictates what you do. You must learn to be faithful to principles. I hope you make a note of that.

To do that you must establish some principles in your life; some principles to live by and to be faithful to. And when you do that, you don't have to make nearly as many decisions in life. If you will live by principles, it will take care of most of the decisions in your life. You won't have to say, "What am I going to do about this?" because what you will do is already predetermined by the principles you have set for your life.

That is why children grow up to be unruly teenagers. They haven't set any principles for their lives, so they have to wrestle with them. They want to do something just because other teenagers are doing it. If they would establish principles they wouldn't want to do many of those things, because the principles would control their thinking and their decisions.

You make life complicated when you don't live by principles because now you have to figure out what to do. But if you live by principles it is already set for you! Isn't that great? The course is already set. Why? Because principles remain consistent. But if you live without principles, you will make decisions this way one time and another way the next time. More parents fail with their children

because they don't teach principles, and therefore they have no consistency. There is no substitute for principles and consistency.

Children ought to know before they ever come and ask Mom and Dad what the answer is going to be; because we have principles laid down. To tell you the truth about it, a pastor ought to have some principles as well -- anyone in leadership ought to have principles -- then those who follow us will know exactly what their leader is going to do because they live by principles.

*If I live by principles I will be **SINGLE MINDED**. "A double- minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).*

In Job 2:3 God said that in the midst of his adversity Job still held fast his integrity. He was a man of integrity. And integrity is built upon principles.

There is more Bible built into our society than many of the heathen world would like to admit. The law of the land was built on the Bible. Better than 80% of the Constitution was built on the Bible. That is why these 'dumb-dumbs' can't understand the Constitution. It takes a saved person to understand the Constitution. If they don't understand it, they interpret it wrong. And the natural man doesn't receive the things of the Spirit of God; therefore they don't understand it.

One of the best descriptions of integrity and character in the Bible is Psalm 15:2-3, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." He doesn't just believe right; he does right. He is honest and loyal to truth, on the inside as well as on the outside.

Verse three says, "He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor." Evil is a form of a particular kind of sin. It is sin with an intent to hurt or damage someone.

There are too many people who claim to be saved, yet are quick to practice this kind of evil. They want to hurt someone. We need to have the character not to want to hurt others. That is not the character of Christ; there is nothing Christ-like about that kind of spirit and activity.

In verse 4 it says, "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned." That word means, despised. Here is someone who doesn't look kindly on those who are wicked and evil. We are not to look kindly on the evil. We shouldn't hurt others, but we shouldn't look kindly on those who are wicked and vile and evil.

"But he honors them that fear the Lord."

In Isaiah 5:20 talks about those who call evil good and good evil. God says that I am not supposed to look kindly or favorably on that crowd. I am not talking about hatred. I'm just not to look kindly on those who won't deal with the truth. It takes some character.

Do you know why just about anything goes now? Because there is not much character left. I'm talking about taking a stand, not consorting with the enemy. Why? Because we think of our children. A person of character will want to be able to hand something down to the next generation.

I'll tell you why our generation doesn't have the character to take a stand. It is because we don't care much about the following generation. I'm talking about our society now. If we did, we would want to preserve some things that would protect them.

Psalm 15:5 says, "He that doeth these things shall never be moved." He is talking about being established, being rooted. And why will he not be moved? Because these are character qualities that

have to do with Bible principles.

If we are going to keep from being moved, we must live by Biblical principles. I kid sometimes about most Baptist churches and people; I say that what they ought to say when asked what they believe is, "I believe in change." They change all the time.

I have some preacher friends -- and I'll tell them one of these days, "Have you written that into your by-laws. That is what you believe. You don't have near the stand you used to have! Evidently you believe in change."

The more wicked society gets, we won't go as far as they go, but we want to go in that direction too. If society changes, then churches change. They change in their music. They change in their dress. And if we are going to keep from being moved, we must have some principles to live by that will keep me from being moved.

God wants us to be faithful, and that is what we are talking about here. We are talking about being faithful in walk, in work, and against evil.

Let's go back now to II Peter 1. God wants to make sure we are adding to our faith. So character is built on faithfulness, the right values and principles. Principles are things that never change because they are based on the Word of God which never changes. If we are going to operate by principles that are established forever, then we need to operate by the Bible. If our walk is governed by the Bible, our work is governed by the Bible, our speech is governed by the Bible, what we are against is governed by the Bible.

If we are going to be against something we must have some Bible for it. This is why I'm against it. If I'm for something, I need to be able to look in the Bible and say, "This is why I am for it." What I honor is governed by the Bible. What I promise God I will do is governed by the Bible. What I do with my money is governed by the Bible. Then I am operating by principles that will not change. They are deep rooted in the very nature of God, and they will last forever. Then things will be alright.

Christian character is the superstructure of the Christian life. Character is like the foundation of a house. Most of it is below the surface. The strength of the house is not the vinyl siding or the windows. These might improve the looks of the house. It's not the talent that I have, or my ability to preach and deliver a message, or how smooth a talker I am. (I'm glad for that. I'm not that smooth.) It's what I am made of in principles.

A man without character might be saved, but he cannot be built into a good Christian. There will not be a good Christian without principles. You have to have them. He won't be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, because he does not have faithfulness to establish Christian principles.

Someone who has established faithfulness in his life will more than likely establish the principles. Once they learn the principles they will be faithful. It goes together. But there has to be faithfulness in order to learn the principles.

Matthew 28:19-20 gives the Great Commission. The first thing is to go and teach the Gospel; tell them how to get saved. Then we are to baptize those that believe. Then we are to gather them together and teach them "to observe." However, I can't teach them to "observe" if I can't get them together. I can tell them how to get saved at their home -- that's soul winning -- but I must get them together in order to teach them beyond that. If they don't come to church, you won't succeed.

One thing we need to teach them is, faithfulness. "You be at church at the appointed time." In

these forty-plus years of the ministry, I have never seen anyone faithful to God who wasn't faithful to the local church.

When they find out that they are not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, and they want to live by that principle, they will eliminate the possibility of instilling in their lives the things that would hinder them. It is like the foolish lad in Matthew seven. Jesus said, "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock." The testing time came, and that man's house stood.

He also said, "But he that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, I will liken him unto a foolish man." Someone hears the Scripture, 'Don't forsake the assembling of yourself together,' -- they know that, but they don't do it. They are foolish, and they are building their life on the sinking sand. And that is just one example.

*The man of character will add to his faith, and be faithful to the principle of faith. The principle of faith and faithfulness are closely related. So add to your faith. Notice that he said, "Add to your faith VIRTUE..." He didn't say, "Add to your faith knowledge..." We are to add **VIRTUE**, then knowledge.*

It is important to get these things in order. They are written in this specific order for a purpose. If I don't add to my faith virtue, is it possible for me to add knowledge according to the plan that God gave? Not hardly.

Many people have been in church all of their lives -- they have heard the preaching for forty or fifty years -- and they still are not growing up. They are still babes. I'll tell you why. They tried to bypass this order. You cannot learn knowledge until you first learn virtue.

*Many people want to learn knowledge, but they are not going to be virtuous and clean. They're not going to live separated lives. They are not going to separate from the world. They are not going to separate from sin and ungodliness. If you are going to be separated unto God, and do what the Bible says in sanctification, you have to be separated **FROM** sin.*

In position, we are already set apart. Every Christian is set apart positionally, but we are supposed to practice what we are set apart for. In this wicked day I don't think you will find any preacher who is worth his salt at all who wouldn't agree with me that in position we are set apart from the world. But then they won't go ahead and preach and teach and practice being set apart. The reason? Lack of character.

There is order in the building trade. I am not a builder, but I think we all understand: Do you build a roof before anything else? Is that the first thing you do, build a roof? That would be foolish, wouldn't it? Well, God is a God of order; and in this II Peter text He tells us how we can grow in the grace of God. When you put your faith in Christ you are saved, but if you are going to be Christ-like in conduct you have to add to your faith. And you cannot add just what you please, nor when you please. You must add in order the next thing that God prescribed in the Book, and that is virtue -- separation.

What does baptism picture? Read Romans six. It pictures not only Christ's death, but it pictures being set apart. It pictures our death to sin. Sin shall not have reign over us any more. We are not the servants of sin anymore. We are the servants of Christ.

*After salvation comes separation, cleanness of heart and life. Then he went on and said, "Add to your virtue **KNOWLEDGE**..." Not just **A** knowledge, but **THE** knowledge: the knowledge of Christ and His will. "For if these things be in you and abound," he said, "they will keep you from being unfruitful. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and forgetteth that he was purged from his old sins."*

And here is why: because of the evidence in our lives. There ought to be evidence in a Christian's life -- enough to convict him of being a Christian. There ought to be enough evidence to the neighbors to convince them that we are Christians. The devil has attacked them and robbed them of any assurance of salvation -- and we all wrestle with that occasionally.

Brother H_____, who was just saved a few weeks ago, was talking to me after a recent Sunday night service. I asked him, "How have you been doing?"

He kind of shook his head, and his wife just looked at me. I went ahead and asked them, "Has the devil kind of been on your case?"

She went on and said, "He is amazed at the thoughts that come to his mind." I understood that, because I have been there and so have you. Probably the devil, after he put bad thoughts in his mind, accused him and put in his mind, "Are you sure that you are saved, when you let thoughts like that come into your mind?"

If Satan can convince me that I am not saved when I am saved, he can keep me from trying to get anyone else saved. Many people in the pew are wrestling with this thing of their salvation. We all might wrestle with it some time or other. Therefore, they are not really positive about their Christian life and they don't really enjoy it because they have so much doubt. Sometimes they think they are saved and sometimes they think they are not. When a person really gets that settled, and adds to his faith virtue and knowledge and temperance, etc., then the devil can't do much with that person. He has too much character for the devil to succeed.

Satan works hard to convince saved people that they are not saved. And he might try to get an unsaved person to think that he is saved. We make it easy for him if we don't add to our faith and grow in grace, and we're not able to see afar off. That's what the Scripture says. "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." And you will have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What a way to wind it up.

Let's not make it easier for Satan. Character is not born, or inbred. It cannot be bought. It cannot be faked. Character is built. A good question to ask is, "Are we under construction."

*I like that kid's song that they sing often, "He's still working on me, to make me what I ought to be." Are you progressing? Are you adding anything? The exciting thing in life is when we are adding to our Christian experience. We are going farther with the Lord. We see in our own lives that God is making a difference, and we are overcoming some things in our lives. We are still not what we ought to be, because our goal is to be like Jesus. But we can say, "I am not what I used to be." **Character is built, not born.***

LECTURE #3

WISDOM

In Matthew chapter ten Jesus sent the apostles out to preach and to heal, and he gave them some instructions. In verse 16 He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye

therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” He then went on to tell them that when they are persecuted, the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak.

Sheep in the midst of wolves. This sounds like a desperate situation. He told them that it was no accident that they had enemies. They are like wolves that would like to devour and destroy them. Even in our day, we are in a country that is infested with wolves. If you haven’t noticed that yet, you will -- or you had better wake up.

Sheep are not very smart. They are not very fast. They don’t have sharp teeth. They don’t have horns. They have no fighting ability to defend themselves when they are attacked. They don’t have great speed to flee from the enemy. It sounds like they are in big trouble, and they need a shepherd. Sheep have to have a shepherd. That is why God likens us to sheep. We are in big trouble unless we have the protection of the Great Shepherd.

There are two statements to be dealt with in this passage. Number one, He said that we need to be wise. We are in a desperate and dangerous situation and we need to be wise enough to deal with it.

*Let me give you a simple description of wisdom, and we will define it a little bit more as we go along: **WISDOM IS THE ABILITY TO SEE THINGS THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD, TO SEE THINGS FROM GOD’S VIEWPOINT.** If you don’t see it like God sees it, you have a distorted view. It is sort of like driving down the road in a hard rain, and you don’t have your windshield wipers on: your view is distorted, and you become dangerous to yourself and to everyone around you.*

We need to have a clear view of things, and see things as God sees them. Jesus said to “be ye wise as serpents.” Why? Because He sent them forth “as sheep in the midst of wolves.” We are in a desperate situation. If we don’t have a clear view, and see things as God sees them, we will certainly be devoured.

When we go out on visitation, sometimes we feel like we are knocking on the doors of wolves. But when we understand the situation, we understand why people react the way they do. The way we understand is: God tells us in His Word why they react that way. They are lost; they are blind. Therefore, we know how to deal with it.

Jesus made another statement. He said to be “harmless as doves.” Do you realize that a person who sees things as God sees them is definitely a wise person? He definitely has the knowledge, and is able to manipulate people. Many preachers have been wise; God has given them special wisdom. God wants us to be wise enough to be able to manipulate people. But He wants us to be Christian enough that we wouldn’t dare! When a person gets wisdom, and sees like God, that is quite a bit of power. There is power in true wisdom -- but we need to be as harmless as doves.

Have you ever noticed? It is pretty easy to see things when you are up on a mountain top. The view is good and clear. But in the valley you need God’s eyes to see -- down in the darkness and shadows of the valley. That is what the psalmist was saying: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” He couldn’t see very clear, but he knew that God was with him, and he had special wisdom.

If we don’t have wisdom, we might not come to the next mountain peak. We might be devoured in one of the valleys. Most of our lives will be spent in the valley. That means that we desperately need the wisdom of God, or we will be in trouble. It is in the valleys that we really need wisdom.

Most people confuse knowledge with wisdom. Just because we learn a bunch of facts does not mean that we have learned wisdom. Knowledge is not the same as wisdom. If you don’t believe that,

go to some of the seminaries and check it out. They read and study books until they have a weariness of the flesh, but they don't see it like God sees it. There are a lot of people with knowledge, and sometimes they are the ones who don't see it like God sees it. All of the knowledge that they have accumulated is useless and worthless. They accomplish nothing for the glory of God.

Knowledge without wisdom is like a lawn mower without a handle. You have the power and the potential, but you can't get anything done. Sooner or later, if you don't obtain wisdom, even though you have knowledge, you will be devoured.

Proverbs has a lot to say about it. Proverbs 3:13 says, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom." God says that if we ever get to the place that we see things like He sees them, we will be happy. And I can understand that.

Things don't have to go perfectly if we see things like God sees them. We can handle all the ups and downs, and even enjoy them because we know that God is going to preserve us. And we can even thank God for them if we see them like God sees them.

Where do we get wisdom? Where does it come from? If wisdom preserves us and protects us, and keeps us from getting devoured -- and if it is so necessary for happiness, then where can we find this wisdom? Jesus said, "I send you forth as sheep among wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents..."

This is a command. He commanded us to be wise. It is not just a suggestion. To tell you the truth about it, He is sending us forth. We are His disciples. We are to represent Him. We don't even have an option in this thing. So we need to notice that this is a command.

It is sort of like Ephesians 5:18 we are commanded to be "filled with the Spirit." Is that a command? Yes it is.

When Jesus said, "Be ye therefore wise....," is that a command? Yes it is. That means that if it is a command it is within reach. God doesn't give commandments without enablements. We need to know that if He commanded us to have wisdom, then it is within reach of everyone of us. It is not that some are born wise and others unwise. All of us are born unwise. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child," the Scripture says.

No one is born wise. We might be born with a higher or lower intelligence quota. I think I was born with a very low IQ, but that didn't keep me from getting some wisdom; and I thank God for that. Someone figures out what wisdom is and goes after it, and finds it to be sweet and what they need.

The first requirement to God's salvation is FAITH. It is totally impossible for a lost person to see things through the eyes of God. A lost person just cannot do it. A lost man cannot see it like God sees it, even if he wants to. I Corinthians 1:30 says that "Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom....."

There is no redemption or righteousness outside of Christ. We definitely have none of our own. Our righteousness is "as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). When we get saved we receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. Then we are to put on a practical righteousness.

We cannot have communion with God outside of Christ. We can't even get to God outside of Jesus. We can't even get to God's ear outside of Christ. Then there is also no wisdom, no wisdom to see it like it is, outside of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why He could say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

In I Corinthians 2:14 the Bible speaks of the natural (unsaved) man; he is just what he is from the natural birth. He might be well trained; he might have had good raising. But he still doesn't understand the things of God. He might even be reared in church. A 'church kid' who grew up in Sunday School all of his life -- if he fails to get born again -- won't understand the things of God. More than likely, it will turn him off.

The natural man "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." Notice the words "neither can." It speaks of the incapability. That means that he is not capable of seeing things like God sees them because he is outside of Christ.

Now, there are even a lot of people who are saved, but they still don't see things like God sees them. They still have no wisdom -- they don't see it like God sees it. They see the plan of salvation, but they don't see beyond that.

That is why some people have trouble with standards of separated Christian living. Many people have trouble here. Did you ever see a day when so many have trouble with standards? When I was a child, we didn't have all that trouble with standards. They have all kinds of troubles in the areas of the Christian life. That is why they get bitter.

Has it ever occurred to you that God never gets bitter? Has it ever occurred to you that God has never been deceived? He always understands. God always sees it clearly. That is why He could say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," when they were taking His life. He didn't get bitter about it because He understood -- they didn't know what they were doing.

If we can ever get to the place where we see our lives through the eyes of God, we will get to the place where we don't get bitter. That is so important. Then we will see things clearly, from an eternal heavenly perspective. But where do you find wisdom? We need to find wisdom.

*First of all, **WISDOM IS OBTAINED FROM THE WORD OF GOD.** In II Timothy 3:15 Paul told Timothy, "And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to **MAKE THEE WISE** unto **SALVATION** through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The Bible is the Word of God -- to be more precise, the Bible is the mind of God in print. We have the mind of God written down here. That is why the Word of God was settled in Heaven in eternity past.*

God esteems His Word even above His name, because that is the mind of God. The Bible is the Word of God, the mind of God in print, and that is how God sees heaven and hell. We would know nothing about heaven and hell if it were not for the Word of God, but you can rest assured that when Jesus talked about heaven and hell He saw it just like it is -- exactly. And when John the revelator was called out and he began to see the future, he saw it just like God sees it. That is how God sees eternity; just like it is spoken in the Word of God. God sees it; that is the mind of God.

That is how God sees salvation. That is why a person can know they are saved, because of the Word of God. I like I John chapter five; I found that when I was in my twenties. "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; he that hath not the Son, hath not life." Aren't you glad that it is that way. I'm glad that it doesn't depend on me having to go through confirmations and good works. It is just as simple and clear: if we have Jesus we have life.

We don't have to wonder what God thinks. All we have to do is open the Bible, and find out what He thinks. "What does God think?" Open the Bible and find out. He'll tell you what He thinks.

"What is God's position on this?" Open your Bible and you will find out what His position is on it. That is the mind of God.

"What is God's opinion?" Open the Bible.

"What is God's view point?" Find out in the Bible.

Do you want to know why so many religious people are going to go to Hell? They have a plan of salvation that doesn't match up with the Bible. You are not being mean when you tell people that. They are going to Hell. That is why the Jehovah's Witnesses are going to Hell. Their plan of salvation doesn't match up with the Word of God. They have their own religion -- their own plan of salvation. They haven't been made wise by the Bible. They say, "This is what I believe."

They have a leader; they follow a man and write their own rules and principles. They say, "This is what I believe. This is what I think, what I feel." But it's not worth a snap if it is not what the Bible says!

*They don't find out what God said in the Bible about sin and salvation, and they die and go to Hell -- and that is a tragedy. The Bible will not only make a person wise unto salvation, it will also make us wise unto **SEPARATION**. Sometimes I can't help but be bothered why people don't want to live by the Bible, even after they are saved. It is so plain. Just read it. It is the mind of God. Just read it.*

I realize that being saved is the most important part, but God isn't just offering us fire insurance to keep us out of Hell.

The Bible will help you to see God's viewpoint on prayer: what He has to say about it. Also, about soul winning and reaching the world. It will give you God's viewpoint in print on all of the questions that you might have.

Peter said, giving a testimony when on the Mount of Transfiguration (and it must have been great), that we even have a "more sure word of prophecy" than that. We have the Word of God. We don't have to wonder about what God wants us to do. Everything is written.

So first of all, we can get wisdom from the Bible. If we read the Bible enough, it will make an impact; it will change our lives. There is no doubt about it. We don't even have to understand all of it, yet it will make a difference.

Someone explained it like this: you pour water through a strainer, and the water goes on out, but the strainer will be cleaner. You put the Word of God through you and it will make you a lot cleaner.

If we want to know what is right we must find it in the Bible.

We are all guilty of reading other books, and listening to what man has to say as we neglect the Bible too much. We need to get into the Bible and find what God has to say.

*Then wisdom can be obtained in **PRAYER**. The Bible is the primary source, but that is not all. James 1:5 (one of my life verses) says, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God..." That sounds like a promise to me; doesn't it to you? I like that.*

If we are in the Word of God, and we want to see it God's way, we can find an answer to our question in Scripture. But there are some details that the Bible doesn't deal with. Then we can pray, and God will supernaturally help us to see it clearly. Most of the things we need to see clearly, we can

just go to the Scripture and see it.

The Bible says, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel." So I know from the Bible that God wants me to do that. But there are some details in my life that are not given me in the Bible. But if I am searching the Bible for wisdom, and I obey what God teaches me from the Word, and I still have questions -- I can pray. And God says that He will give me wisdom.

However, if you reject what the Bible says all the praying in the world won't make you wiser. A person is going to have to be obedient to the Word -- there is no use praying about something that God has already made clear in His Word. All we are doing then is trying to change God's mind about it. His mind is already made up. He isn't going to change His mind.

Most people don't approach prayer as an avenue to receive wisdom. Most of the time (and we have all been guilty), when we pray we don't ask God to help us see it as He sees it. "God, help me to see it as you see it."

Instead, most people are trying to convince God of their viewpoint. We tell God what we think. There is no use spending our time telling God how we see it; He doesn't need straightening out. I will guarantee you: He sees it right.

We would do a lot better if we would yield to the Holy Spirit of God and say, "Holy Spirit, teach me to pray. Help me to see it like you see it."

We have our ideas about everything, don't we. And we are going to tell God how we see it. That's kind of proud, though. One of greatest promises in the Bible is II Chronicles 7:14. He said that when we "humble ourselves, and pray, and seek His face...."

We need to realize that our vision is distorted. We must strive in prayer to be able to see things through the eyes of God. If we want to be wise, then we must ask God to help us see it like God sees it. Most of us don't want that. We already have our opinions set in concrete. That is sad, but true.

My opinion has changed about some things because I just couldn't find it in the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit thus couldn't confirm it. I am grateful for my raising, but there were just a few things that I was taught in my church that I couldn't find in the Word of God. And I just didn't have the heart to push something that I couldn't find in the Word of God.

*Wisdom can also be obtained in **SOUL WINNING**. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise."*

In many of the Bible colleges they are required to go soul winning. I am for that. But what bothers me about some of the young people who have gone to those colleges is, when they came home they never showed up for soul winning here at their home church. I suppose if we had leverage we could enforce it. The problem is that they haven't had the discipline to establish some good habits in their lives. And, to be honest with you, that is a lack of wisdom.

I realize that going out at the appointed time is not all there is to it. But if a person doesn't have the wisdom to be concerned about souls, they don't have much spiritual wisdom. Everything hinges on keeping people out of Hell. That is why Jesus came. And if we see it like God sees, we are going to see the need. Our whole life's goal ought to be that.

I thought that when I got saved at nine years old, that was all there is to it. But eventually I got under conviction again, and I began to see the need to see people saved. I have not been a good soul

winner. I have never been satisfied with my achievement. I thank God for being able to lead several people to God through the years (I count that as the greatest thing I could do).

But we are faltering because we don't establish character and principles. We don't get the job done. Proverbs 11:30 means that if you go out and win souls that you are wise. Wise people will be soul winners, because they will see lost people like God sees them.

God sees the lost like they are -- the terribleness of it all. God sees them in the light of eternity. God sees their destiny. And He cries out in Ezekiel, "As I live...I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

It also means that He will impart wisdom to the soul winner. He will give more wisdom to the soul winner. For instance: why did Jesus come into the world? Luke 19:10 says it was to "seek and to save that which was lost."

Did He do anything else while He was here? Sure He did. He didn't stop with seeking and saving the lost. He healed people. He raised the dead. He met the needs of a lot of people. He helped people with their physical needs, but that isn't why He came. The primary purpose of His coming was to seek and to save that which was lost. He never lost sight of that while He was here. He did a lot of other good things, but He never lost sight of the one major goal.

We are left here to do what Jesus would be doing if He were here. We are the body of Christ. When He left Heaven and was born of a virgin, He did that to seek and to save that which was lost.

When He lived a perfect life, He did it to seek and to save. When He died on Calvary, it was "to seek and to save." When He was buried and arose again the third day, He did it "to seek and to save." When He ascended up on high, and now being seated on the right hand of the Father interceding, He is yet doing that "to seek and to save."

II Corinthians 5:20 says, "...we pray you, IN CHRIST'S STEAD, be ye reconciled to God." He said that Jesus is not here in body any more, and we are here instead of Him. We ought to be doing exactly what Jesus came to do. Why did He come? To seek and to save.

We are here in His stead. So we are here to seek and to save the lost. We must give ourselves to the thing that God gave His Son for. If we don't we are not very wise. We must trust God to give us the wisdom to reach sinners with the Gospel. (We could go on and on about that!)

A soul winner shows wisdom to choose that pursuit because he is in touch with Heaven, and he sees the value of a soul. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Soul winners see the value of a soul.

Wisdom can also be obtained from **GODLY COUNSELLORS**. In Proverbs 12:15 the Bible says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." A fool is a fool because he thinks he is never wrong. He never does wrong, according to him. If you are never wrong you can never be corrected. If there is nothing you don't know, you cannot be taught. The biggest problem with most of us is not what we don't know; it is that we don't know that we don't know! That's my problem. That is what makes us so dangerous.

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." God said that if we are wise we will hearken unto counsel. That means we will take it to heart. He didn't say that if we get a lot of counsel; He said, "He that HEARKENETH unto" it.

God doesn't give shortcuts in the Christian life. We are always trying to find shortcuts to everything. He DID give us one shortcut here, but most people aren't willing to take it. He said, in essence, that we don't have to live to be seventy years old to know what some seventy-year-old people know. Just sit down and talk with them. You twenty-year-olds, if you will sit down and talk with a seventy-year-old, you can gain twenty years' worth of wisdom in a short time.

We can gain wisdom from Godly counsel. Our pride doesn't like to admit that we could use some help. One of the greatest sins we commit is to not be willing to admit that there are some things we don't know. We need to get all the help we can from godly counselors. There are many young men thirty or forty years old that are wise, and I wonder how they got so wise. The pastor down at Crown College, for instance, is fairly young but he is very wise. I wondered how he got so wise -- then I remembered that he spent a lot of time with Dr. Lee Roberson. Dr. Roberson is not a dynamic man, but he is a wise man.

They tapped somebody's resources and got what they could get. They didn't start at ground level. They started out twenty years ahead. We say, "Boy, that guy has wisdom beyond his years." If he does he probably tapped into someone else's wisdom. He lives in the Book, the Bible; he prays; he wins souls; he hearkens to Godly counselors.

Then, wisdom is the result of **WALKING WITH WISE MEN**. Proverbs 13:20 says, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." He didn't say if we walk with fools we would be unwise. Neither did he say that a companion of fools shall be foolish. He said they shall be DESTROYED. It is: be wise, or be destroyed. See it as God sees it; if you don't you are headed for destruction.

We live in a day of education. Our society spends billions of dollars on education. If you run for a high office, you had better be for education. If you run for the senate or congress, you won't get elected if you don't offer to spend more money on education. However, if just getting knowledge was the answer to it all, why would we be needing more prisons all of the time, with people headed for destruction faster than ever before. I really believe that our society is dying for a lack of wisdom. "Fools make a mock at sin."

Put a high price in your own life and in the lives of your children, on wisdom. I am definitely not against education, but in our land we have a lot of educated fools. We have a lot of wise devils, and we would be a lot better off to have a bunch of dumb devils. The Lord said, "I send you forth as sheep among wolves."

You have to have wisdom in our day to cope. Members of your own families will tear you apart on this thing, for instance, of separation. They will nag you to death. They will say, "Why do you want to do that?" It takes the wisdom of God.

You can tell your loved ones, "I see it through the eyes of God. That is what God says in His Word."

They are not interested in being taken to the Book -- I will guarantee it. If they tell you, "If you can show me in the Bible, I will do it," you won't have any trouble.

We live in a day of the unisex movement. In this day of 'queers' and Sodomites, it is abounding. A bunch of girls had a boyfriend at one time who had an earring in his ear, but he had one in his tongue also. Poor devil. I realize that he probably just needed to be saved. There are some messed up minds there. That boy might have an IQ that is twice as high as mine, but he doesn't have any wisdom.

LECTURE #4

DANIEL, A MAN OF CHARACTER

Our first lecture was on EXERCISE THAT BUILDS GODLY CHARACTER. Then in our second session we studied the fact that CHARACTER IS BUILT, NOT BORN. In the last class we studied WISDOM. We are just hitting it from all directions. This lecture will give us a look at a man in the Bible who had great Christian character: **DANIEL**.

Daniel, the Bible says, was “preferred.” The king preferred him above all the other men around him. Why was Daniel preferred?

“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. **THEN THIS DANIEL WAS PREFERRED** above the presidents and princes, because **AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT WAS IN HIM**; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.” (Daniel 6:1-3)

We will be looking closely at this account in this lesson. When you “prefer” something, it means that you elevate it in your preference. Personally, I like Coca Cola, but I prefer Pepsi Cola.

Daniel got special treatment, privileges, and preferences; and the amazing thing is that he didn’t compromise to get it. He didn’t drop his standards to get this preference. As you look at his life there is something outstanding about him that caused people around him to trust him.

We find that Daniel was a young man who was respected, trusted. Because of that he was elevated above his peers. He got preference to his peers.

As we look at this, I am not talking about you trying to elevate yourself. I am talking about you being the kind of Christian that others would prefer and trust. Sometimes we try to be somebody. We set goals, and we try to reach toward something. But in Daniel’s life, he just wanted to be a Christian who was obedient to his Lord.

Daniel was a captive in a strange land. He wasn’t in his home land. It wasn’t the king of his home land who preferred him. He had been kidnapped and forced to serve in an enemy’s palace. It is interesting to read the first six chapters of Daniel.

Daniel started in the Babylonian captivity, and his life span spilled over into the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. We find that several different leaders preferred Daniel above others, not just one.

When he was first carried away, the man who was over the captives was a man named Melzar. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were singled out and befriended by Melzar. Then we find that they were preferred above others by Nebuchadnezzar. Then Belshazzar preferred Daniel above others. Darius and Cyrus were both kings of the Medo-Persian empire, and they also preferred and trusted Daniel.

I said all that to say that it wasn’t because Daniel was a Babylonian or a Persian. He wasn’t. So

it wasn't "when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do" that got him that position of respect. He preserved his purity as a child of God throughout many years, even though he was immersed in a heathen culture. When you look at that, you have to respect him.

The fact is, Daniel was different. He was so different that he stood out. And the thing that gave him preference was that he wasn't the average person, like everyone else. He stood out with a purpose; and that purpose was to live for God and put Him first in his life.

When we were teenagers, to some extent we all wanted to be independent. Teenagers usually cannot wait until they get out and get their independence. But the fact is, most of them don't have any independence at all. Their peers lead them around by their nose, and they are more enslaved to their peers than they ever thought about being at home. That is like someone who says, "I am tired of getting bossed around by my parents. I am going to join the Army."

They rebel against adults, and let one of their peers dictate how they dress, how they act, where they go, and what they do. Daniel was not that kind of person. He stood on his own two feet, and had some back bone. We need some Daniels in our day, who will find out what the Book says and stand on it, and say, "I don't care what anyone else does, I want to be the kind of person who will be respected whether they agree with me or not. They will know that they can trust me because my life will be characterized by honesty, character, integrity, and godliness."

We do need some more Daniels in our day. Daniel was preferred, not because he was trying to get special treatment. You read all through the book of Daniel, and you will find that he did not push for promotion. He was such an outstanding young man with such a peerless character that others couldn't help but admire and trust him. Even today in the world, companies are looking for people they can trust -- someone with character who is not easily swayed.

There are at least four reasons Daniel was preferred.

1. AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT WAS IN HIM -- v. 3

This needs to be engraved in our minds and hearts, and it has made an impact on me as I prepare these studies. The importance of the right kind of spirit within us. We are not talking about the Holy Spirit, but the human spirit.

The king thought to set Daniel over the whole realm. He had an excellent spirit. You don't consider setting someone over the whole realm of your leadership unless you trust him. Remember, Daniel was a foreigner, not a Persian. He was from an enemy land. He did not agree with their life style. He did not agree with their philosophy. He had a different religion than the king had. But the king watched Daniel and said, "This man has a good spirit, a good attitude. He has a good outlook on life. He has some wisdom and insight. He has proven that he can be trusted. He has an excellent spirit."

The word "excellent" certainly means something above the normal, something above the average -- not just the 'run of the mill' spirit.

You might not have an excellent IQ -- some do and some don't -- you might not be a person who can excel academically. But you can have, regardless of your education or IQ, an excellent spirit. I trust that the aim of this lesson would be for us to have an excellent spirit -- and that has to do with our attitude.

I am not down on the teenagers of our day -- we have some great teenagers who inspire me -- but what bothers me about many teenagers is their long, frowning faces. There is a teen who comes in

off a bus route, and she flops down in the back of the church and she has the most terrible expression. She feels like the world is coming to an end.

Most teens don't have a legitimate problem in the world. They don't have to worry about paying the bills. They have no responsibility whatsoever. In our day they have a lot more than Bro. Norm (elder gentleman in the class) and I ever had. They have a hundred times more.

There is no reason for that. It is a reflection of the condition of their spirit. They have a bad spirit about them. When my children were growing up, I was more concerned with their spirit and attitude than anything else. As a parent, I kept my eye on their attitude. They could abide by the rules, but they were not allowed to do it with a bad spirit and attitude.

An excellent spirit has several traits and qualities. We need to understand that Christianity is a religion of the spirit. That is what sets it apart from all other religions. Every religion has a form of worship. Every religion has a book that they go by. Just about every religion has a meeting place and some rituals involved. **BUT CHRISTIANITY IS A RELIGION OF THE SPIRIT**, not just the flesh; not just outward, but inward.

Hebrews 11:6 say, "Without faith it is impossible to please God...." When we put our faith in Christ, that is when our spirit is regenerated. It is our spirit, not the flesh. We experience a spiritual birth, but it has to do with our spirit and our soul. Christianity is a religion of the spirit.

Therefore, if we do not have a right spirit, we are not very good Christians. Every area of our lives is to be affected by our Christianity; but the first thing that we need is a Christ-like spirit, an excellent spirit. We need our spirits to be in harmony with the Word of God.

Having an excellent spirit means to have a refreshing spirit. Our spirit should be such that, when we get into the Word of God we get refreshed. Paul's spirit was refreshed by the friendship and fellowship of Philemon.

Anytime you see someone who moves around like an old hound dog, that person can't be trusted. Anyone who can't handle their own spirit any better than that cannot be trusted. If they can't control their own spirit they can't control much of anything else.

I am the one who dictates what people can trust me with -- the only one. My spirit is where it all begins. It is not the finishing line, but the starting line. If I have the right spirit, I am at the right starting point, where I can do something.

This young man, Daniel, who was a captive in a strange land, estranged from his parents, certainly had an excuse to hang around with a long face. Can you put yourself in his place? Carried away, captive in Babylon, and then remaining captive through king after king and leader after leader; yet in spite of it all he had an excellent spirit.

If I understand anything at all about this text, it is not my circumstance that dictates my spirit -- it is me. That is why Paul would say, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." That has to do with his spirit. Paul had a great spirit.

That means that I decide whether I have a good spirit or not. I decide whether I am going to have a right attitude and yield to the Holy Spirit or not. If we want our human spirit to bear witness with His Spirit we can. God definitely wills that.

When I am yielded, then the Holy Spirit will show Himself in my life, and produce His fruit in my

life. And His fruit is “the fruit of the Spirit” found in Galatians 5:22-23. When the Holy Spirit is in control of my life, then He will produce this character quality in my spirit. That will result in an excellent spirit. This sounds like we all need to work on our spirit -- our inner man -- and I plead, “Guilty.”

You will rise or fall to the level of your true character, and that has to do with your spirit. Daniel consistently rose to the level of his character. A person of true character will work on his spirit. Through my mind, I can go back and remember people I have met who had an excellent spirit. And they are the ones who got the promotions; not just the ones who had a great IQ. Someone with a good spirit is going to have a good attitude and is going to be a quick learner, even if they didn't have all the other qualities.

That doesn't mean that we won't have problems. It means that we make adjustments, and keep ourselves yielded to God. Life is full of adjustments; life is full of problems. It isn't that some people just don't seem like they never have any problems. Have you ever met anyone like that?

We need to keep our heart and attitude (our spirit) right. The Bible uses the words, “heart” and “spirit,” interchangeably. The “heart” in the Bible is not the organ that pumps blood. It is talking about my spirit. The Bible says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22). Here both terms are used in the same verse. If my heart and my spirit are merry and in good condition, then I will have an excellent spirit; but a broken spirit “drieth the bones.”

If your spirit is broken, it is going to be the end of you. What is in the bones? The bones have the marrow. The marrow produces blood, and the Bible says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11).

Do you know what God is saying? He is saying that if your spirit is broken, the very source of spiritual life is dried up. It means that you are a ‘gonner.’ A person who can't get out of a bad spirit, you might as well bury him. I have met people who get ‘tee'd off’ about something, they have a bad spirit; if they don't get over it, I am always glad when they move on. Some people are just determined that you are not going to help them out. They are going to have a bad spirit, no matter what.

When our spirit is right, our attitude is right. Referring back to young people, I watch attitude more than anything else in our teenagers. I don't mind seeing a young person act like they are young. They are not going to act like adults, as much as we sometimes would like them to. They are going to act immature at times. But it is alright as long as they have a good spirit. As long as they will take correction right, they have a good spirit about them.

If anyone had good reason to have a bad spirit, it was Daniel. But he had, not just a good spirit; he had an excellent spirit.

2. HE HAD A CLEAN TESTIMONY

I like what it says in verses 4 and 5 of Daniel 6: “Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

Here are some fellows who are jealous of Daniel, because he is preferred. He didn't elevate himself; he was lifted up because of what he was, not because of what he was trying to be. He was trying to be one who ruled his own spirit, not rule the country. He was just trying to be a good Christian. He was just trying to have a right spirit, and because of that he was preferred.

This happens all the time: As soon as God blesses somebody, someone else gets jealous. When they get jealous, then they try to find something against that person whom God has blessed. These fellows got together, started researching Daniel's life, and tried to find an accusation that they could make against Daniel. They thought, "Surely he is crooked about something. Surely he said or did something wrong. We'll find something." But the Bible says that when they researched his life, they couldn't find "any fault or occasion." He hadn't left any doors open to make that possible.

That is why we are commanded to "abstain from all appearance of evil" in I Thessalonians 5:22. Daniel did not allow any appearance of evil in his life. They couldn't find any occasion of evil against him. He wasn't sinless, but he was innocent. And there is a difference. If you ever get yourself in a position where God can bless you and use you, you had better not be reckless about it, because someone will be "searching for occasion..."

There was no fault, no questionable area, in Daniel's life. He was blameless. The old timers would say, "He was as clean as a hound's tooth."

3. HE WAS FAITHFUL

It goes on to say, Daniel was "found faithful." Faithfulness is consistency. He wasn't even spasmodic about what he did. He wasn't up one day and down the next; on one day and off the next; in one day and out the other. He lived a consistent life. He was faithful. They found no fault, no error, in his life.

I think that means that Daniel was very wise in what he did. He didn't miscalculate, make foolish decisions. A lot of people don't purposely do wrong things, but they miscalculate all the time -- because they live in the flesh. They do what they feel like doing, and later regret it, instead of having the wisdom to examine it and do what God said they ought to do. And when they realized that they couldn't get him because of any wrong doing on his part, they had to get him for doing right.

They said, "We've got to make a bad law that disagrees with the law of God if we are going to get him. We can't get him because he has done anything wrong. We are going to have to get him because he is doing what is right." And that is exactly the way the devil works. If you do wrong and you are a member of the church, the world will talk about you. They are after you. Even when you do what is right, they are still after you.

The only way is if the law of the king (they connived) is contrary to the law of God. Wouldn't it be wonderful if folks knew that the only way they could get us in trouble would be to make a bad law so we would be in trouble for doing right? They knew Daniel had enough conviction that he wouldn't change because a bad law was made. That is a compliment to Daniel.

They wouldn't have gone to all that trouble -- to make a bad law -- if they thought Daniel didn't have enough conviction to stick with the right. They knew he had the conviction and courage to do right, no matter what the law is. He was going to serve God, pray, faithfully read and obey the Bible no matter what! What a man!

They said, "Let's go tell the king that we're trying to exalt and honor him. Let's tell him that we so appreciate and admire you that we want to pass a law that for 30 days everyone will have to worship him. If anyone prays to anyone else but him for the next month, they will be executed." That sounded pretty good to the king, and within their hearts and minds they knew Daniel well enough that he was going to open his window and get on his knees to pray three times a day, just like before. It doesn't matter what the law says, Daniel was going to be faithful.

This law was surely to get him, so they got it passed. This is one of the problems with our egotistical flesh. We are so vain, that if someone tells us that they are going to exalt us we don't ever examine the motive. The king should have examined their motive. He liked Daniel. He didn't want to do what he would have to do. We think that we are so wonderful that we deserve it; and the king probably thought, "They are finally realizing how wonderful I am."

If the king had been paying any attention he would have known what they were up to. He would have figured it out.

4. HE HAD CONVICTION AND BOLDNESS IN THE FACE OF DANGER

*Verse 10 says, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, **AS HE DID AFORETIME.**" Daniel was not a rebel.*

I have met some people who don't have that kind of conviction about prayer, but if there was a law passed that prayer was illegal, they would do more praying then than they have ever prayed before - just out of spite. But that wasn't Daniel's motive.

God wants us to do right based on conviction, not quit doing right because we are in jeopardy. God wants us to have Bible convictions. Listen, and I hope you get this because if you have any convictions at all your convictions will be questioned. And if you don't have Bible, you might as well not even answer them. Your answer should always be, "That is a Bible conviction; I have no power over it whatsoever. The only option I have is whether I want to be obedient or disobedient to God." That will shut the critics up.

Remember, in Daniel chapter one when he was first carried into Babylonian captivity -- in verse 8 it says that "...Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." As a young man he purposed in his heart that there was some things that he would not do. He formulated his conviction based on the Bible, and then stuck with it faithfully throughout all the years of his life.

You that are parents, or you teach children, what you need to do is get them established on some Bible convictions. We must get them resolved that they will be faithful to some Bible convictions throughout all their lives.

When they tried to get Daniel to eat the king's meat that was offered to idols, he "purposed in his heart" that he "would not defile himself" with that which was defiled. If you read the whole thing you will find that he didn't blow up at Melzar and say, "Listen, buddy! I'm not doing it!"

He said, 'God will bless us if we do right. We can't drink intoxicating drink and eat meat that has been offered to idols. I don't have the right to do it. I must obey God. Bring us something else for 10 days and see if we don't look more healthy afterward.' He told them what kind of diet to bring, and Melzar agreed to do it. He purposed in his heart -- he had a decided heart -- he wasn't going to change on this issue because God stands here, and I am going to stand with Him.

There are some things that shouldn't be negotiable. If God says it, it is not up for negotiation. I am sure that when Daniel began as a young man to pray toward Jerusalem every day that he purposed in his heart that he wasn't doing it to irritate anyone. He no doubt determined also that he would never

quit doing it if it did irritate someone. He was going to do it because it was the will of God.

Many times, if you have some convictions about dress it irritates many folks. I don't know why, but it does. It looks like they would mind their own business. That is kind of silly, isn't it. We ought to say in our minds and hearts that we don't want to irritate someone, but we won't quit doing it because they get irritated. We must do it because it is the will of God; there is such a thing as Bible modesty.

If I have convictions about some things, it is something I can't change anyway. How in the world can anyone change something when they have convictions about it. I'll be honest with you: I see older people that begin to change. I guess it might be because they are in their second childhood or something. I don't have a right to change it. I don't have permission to change what God has written in His Word. It is not within my power. If it is a command of God, then I have no right to change it.

Daniel wasn't praying because it was legal, and he didn't stop when it became illegal. By the way, the day will come when soul winning will become illegal. It is almost already here. They make it pretty hard on running buses in the cities -- where it is almost an impossibility for churches to reach others that way. And they don't want you to pass out tracts any more in public places.

The day has already come when it is considered a crime to spank your children. If you spank them and leave even a little mark, you might be in trouble. How can you spank them, and not leave a little mark? But to obey what Proverbs and Ephesians says, it is already settled. My counsel is, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, and the rod of correction will drive it far from them."

That is why we have kids going to school shooting each other. They have no discipline and leadership in their lives. There is nobody to keep them in line. Some of these murdering teens are ones who have all the material possessions they could want. I read of one in Colorado who drove a Mercedes Benz to school. Yet he wasn't happy.

Our convictions are going to be tested. Daniel had made up his mind what was right, and he wasn't about to change. What we need to do is make up our minds about some convictions about what is in the Word of God, which never changes, and just hold it there. It doesn't matter what happens. We live in a day of change, and it is not for the better either. Daniel had boldness and convictions.

When Daniel did that, he received two responses. And when you have Biblical convictions and stick to them, you will get one of these two responses. **(1)** It will make some people angry. Those who opposed him were angered at what he did. However, **(2)** he also had the admiration of some people. He even had the admiration of the king.

The king had to let Daniel be put in the den of lions, but I love what he said to Daniel in verse 16. He admired him for having enough conviction for taking a stand, and being willing to lay down his life for what he believed. That verse says that the kings said, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee."

The king even had the confidence that Daniel's God was real. I wonder if he had compromised if the king would have said that. I doubt it. We are talking about a heathen king, not a king of Israel. He said, "THY God...", not "a heathen idol."

He knew that Daniel served God "continually," not just on Sundays; not just spasmodically. He knew that he served God day and night, everywhere and all of the time. He didn't just serve God when it was convenient, when others served God. He didn't just serve God when he felt like it. He served God continually.

In the great resurrection chapter, I Corinthians 15:58, it says, "Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Do you know what people are looking for in our day? I really believe they are looking for someone who is real. They might get a little angry at us, but they will respect us. They have to. If I am real, serving God all the time, I am going to make some impact. I am going to make an impression on minds and hearts; and Daniel certainly did that with the king. The king began to believe in Daniel's God. He said, "Your God is not going to let these rascals have their way. He will not let them rejoice over victories against you."

"Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." That sounds like a preacher. You would have thought the king was a preacher, counseling him before he went into the lions' den.

Be faithful. Be bold. Be courageous. Be willing to stand on convictions. I don't believe you ought to seek after position. I don't think God wants us pushing for position. I'm not against sending out a resume seeking jobs, etc., but the kind of Christian that can be respected and trusted is the kind that will be preferred. I trust that will be a reality in our lives. If so, we must constantly work on our spirits.

We are all capable of getting a bad spirit. I would be lying if I told you I have never had a bad spirit. But when we get a bad spirit, the Holy Spirit convicts us. We must make daily adjustments to our spirits.

The only way Daniel had an excellent spirit is that he worked on it continually. In his prayer life, his devotional life, he worked at things that produced an excellent spirit in him. We can produce an excellent spirit in ourselves if we will work at the things the Bible says will produce an excellent spirit. That is another thing we need to note.

A good attitude, a good spirit, is not something that comes automatic. We must work at it; determine to work at it. Paul said, "I have learned...." to have a good spirit in "whatsoever state I am." He seemed like he entered into a class that was a special class: "I have learned" in that class. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

If we are going to be preferred by God, and be preferred and respected by men, it will be because we have an excellent spirit. We must have a clean testimony. We must have conviction enough to take a stand when no one else does. We must believe some things so deeply that we cannot change. It must be because we serve God continually; and others will see the consistency of our service. We must continually serve our God.

Each of us has a choice. I have a choice. I like to be trusted and respected. If I had to make a choice between being liked and being trusted and respected, without any second thought I would be trusted and respected, and not want to be liked so well, rather than to be a politician that changes colors all the time with every crowd. There are very few preachers that I have much respect for -- a few, but not many. They say they believe the Bible, but many of them don't. They change. They, like the modern politician, find out which way the people are going and they head out in that direction.

A person can have determination about some things that are even wrong. Conviction is Biblically based. Determination to do right can come only from God. We will have a lesson in the future on determination. A person has to be determined, but the foundation of it must be based on the Word of God. We all know some strong-willed people who are determined to do wrong. We must be determined by God's power to do right.

It is imperative that we get into the Word of God and find out what He has to say about life and about convictions. We have to. If we don't we will not know what Biblical convictions are. We must find out what He has to say. That is what life is all about. We are to "be not carried away with every wind of doctrine." Some people will try to pull you this way and that way. We must not be tossed like a ship at sea. We see it all around us. But when we just determine to do what God says, we will have Biblical convictions. That is what Daniel did.

The amazing thing about it is, all successful people are like Daniel. He was successful in this life as well as in eternity. I wish I had learned what we are studying here about forty years ago. God gave me convictions a long time ago, but it is good to read and get established a little more.

Everyone has some conviction, but it must be based on the Word of God. Everyone has conviction about everything -- some of it is pretty liberal. This thing of dress, in our day, is a big issue. Most people have no Biblical standards -- even professing Christians. It is nothing to go downtown and see absolute nudity. Even those people have some convictions, but it is certainly not Biblical convictions.

Years ago, the Bible was more influential in lost people's lives than it is in church people's lives in our day.

LECTURE #5

GIVE ME THY BEST

"Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the Lord, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it....All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine and of the wheat, the first fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee.....Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor, and as the increase of the winepress.....And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die."

Numbers 18:29, 12, 30, 32

You find in these statements over and over again that we are to give God the best, the first fruits, the cream of the crop. How many have ever worked on the farm and milked the cows? The cream comes to the top -- have you ever drank of any of that cream? It is good, isn't it!

God wants that which is first-picked in our lives, not the leftovers, what we don't want. God expects from us our very best. I like the old song (we sing it sometimes), "Hear ye the Master's call, Give me thy best. For be it great or small, that is His test. Do then the best ye can, not for reward; not for the praise of man, but for the Lord."

At the time of his conversion, the apostle Paul asked God, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

If God would give a verbal answer to that question, it would be just this: "Paul, give me thy best." There are far too many in Baptist churches who plead an insufficiency, a lack of talent or an inability. Therefore, they want to cop out and not give the Lord anything.

*God never said that we have to have ability. There is something that every one of us can give: **our best**. And God will be satisfied with that. With our children, we ought to be satisfied when we know they are doing their best. Not all of them are going to make the same grades. If you have more than one child, you will find that they might not all make the same grades; but if they are putting out and doing their best, you ought to be satisfied. God is.*

My best might not be what your best is. But God says to us as individuals, "You give me your best." It matters not how faithful we are in church attendance, giving, etc., if we haven't given our hearts to Christ. Otherwise, we haven't begun to give anything to God.

There are many in our churches who are sincere, even sincerely religious, but are not born again by the Spirit of God. Right here and now, God points to each of us and says, "Give me thy best."

We have a tendency to compare ourselves by ourselves, and then compare ourselves to others, and that is not wise. God says that we are to do our best. We might not be able to do what someone else can do, but I CAN do my best. I can put my heart into it.

Matthew 25 is a well-known portion of Scripture that is very relevant to life. It says beginning

with verse 14, "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey."

Let me pause here. Jesus has left earth and gone back to heaven. He has left us here. And He left with us a certain amount of talents and goods, and we are stewards. One of these days He is going to come back, and at His return He comes to reward us. Over and over the Scripture says that when Jesus comes back, "...and His reward is with Him, to give every man as his work shall be."

It goes on in verse 16 to say, "Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: and I was afraid..."

Oh, my! That fear! Fear causes failure so much. We are often afraid. Paul wrote to Timothy (II Timothy 1:7) and said, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of a sound mind."

It continues, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."

Then it says, "Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

God blesses success with more success. God does not like to invest in failures. He points out here that we are to do our best.

The lord of these servants gave to each of his servants what he wanted them to use. He departed into a far country. And our Lord has given to each of us some spiritual gifts. Everyone has some gifts, some talent, some ability. And He expects us to use these to serve Him. We will all stand before Him one day, as these servants did, to give account of how we have used what God has given us. That is a little scary, isn't it -- it is awakening.

The servant who had received five talents doubled it. The one who had received two talents doubled his. And the lord said to them, "Well done, thou good and faithful servants..." And by the way, he gave the same commendation to the servant who had two as he did to the one who had five.

Very likely the servant with one talent said what many of us might have been saying: "Since I cannot do what someone else can do, I'm just not going to do anything."

We have a lot of people in our churches who don't do anything because they don't think they have any ability; and God knows what they can do. At least they could double what they do have. This thing of compound interest works miracles over a lifetime.

He who did nothing with the talent that was entrusted to him heard the words, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." The Lord didn't use those words very often. I never heard of him using them to a drunk or to a wicked sinner. What He puts the emphasis on here is: He wants our best. Oh, that we might do what we can do with what we have so that God will be pleased with us when He comes back. (This is more of a sermon than a lesson. I could tear loose and preach right about now!)

The Lord doesn't expect us to do what someone else can do, but He does expect us to do our best with what we have. He will reward us in proportion to what we have, and as compared to what we are ABLE to do for Him. When He comes we will give an account for what we have done with what He has given us.

"To whomsoever much is given," the Scripture says, "is much required."

Dwight L. Moody once said, "I claim to be nothing more than a one-talent Christian. If every one-talent Christian would give God their all, we could turn America up-side-down with the Gospel in a matter of a few weeks."

We have many people who are playing church, just going through the motions, not giving God their best. A wealthy business man once heard of D. L. Moody in the early years of his ministry. When he had first started out in the ministry, he started out as a very common Christian. This businessman wanted to see for himself what was taking place, so he went to a small run-down building where Moody was holding a meeting. As he came in, he saw Moody with a small black boy in his arms, and others sitting around. Moody was reading the story of the Prodigal Son to the boy.

The business man said that he stumbled through many of the words, skipping of some. Then he preached. When he finished preaching, several got saved in that little meeting. When the businessman arose to leave at the end of the service, he wiped a tear from his eye and said, "If God can use Moody, He can use anybody." And he was exactly right.

The reason that God could use Moody is, he was completely yielded to God. He heard a preacher say, "The world has never seen what God can do with one man who is totally yielded to Him." Moody was stirred in his heart, and he purposed in his heart to be that man. He said, "God, help me to be that man!"

There are probably none of us who has less talent than what Moody had, according to what I have read about him, yet he led thousands to Christ. I heard of an educated lady who came to hear him preach once. She criticized him for his 'unrefined' use of the English language. He looked at her and said, "Lady, I am just doing the best I can with what God has given me. What are you doing?"

The song writer wrote, "Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control?" Dwight Moody was used mightily of God because he was completely surrendered. God just wants us to give Him our best.

There are a few things that we will mention in this lesson:

1. OUR LIVES

God wants us to give Him the best of our lives. Life is made up of hours, days, months, and

years. That is what life is all about. Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

God says that when people don't remember Him in their youth, and give Him the best of their lives while it is still ahead of them, there will come a time when there is no pleasure in what they are doing. The most miserable older people on earth are those who have wasted their lives foolishly.

You can go and visit some of them in the nursing home. There is a difference in how some people grow old. Time is the most precious thing that we possess, because it is a measurement of our lives. According to Leviticus 27:30 we are supposed to tithe on everything that we possess. It says, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord."

According to the Scripture, we need to tithe even on our time. We are given 168 hours each week. One-tenth of that is 16.8 hours per week. This is our tithe of our time. It is a lot easier sometimes just to pitch in the money, although we realize that we had to give time to make the money. So, either way we go, we are giving time when we tithe.

If we rob God, we are subject to the curse of God on our lives. God did not say that he wanted the leftovers of our lives. I am not a stewardship preacher, but we will deal with it because it is such a fundamental thing in life. We never prosper when we steal from God.

We are throwing away our lives when we refuse to give of our time to God. We cannot give Him what He deserves, but we can give Him our best. He certainly deserves more than we could ever give Him. The story is told of an old man who sat by the roadside in a far country. His clothes were ragged, and his hair was matted. All of his living was in a little clay bowl. He was a beggar beside the road.

One day he looked off into the distance and he saw a cloud of dust arise way down the road. He pondered in his mind and heart who might be coming. He had heard that the king of that country had often reached out generously to poverty-stricken people like him, and he was hoping that it would be the king. He was sure, as he looked at the size of the cloud of dust, that it was a large caravan, and his heart began to pound in anticipation.

When the caravan finally entered the village, he knew it was the royal array of the king's court. This was his chance of a lifetime. For sure, the king would never pass that way again.

The king saw the beggar beside the road. He stopped the caravan, and dismounted his camel. With a stern look the king approached the old fellow. Holding out his hand to him he said, "Give me the rice that you have in your bowl."

The old man couldn't believe his ears. That is all he had: a little rice in the bowl. He had awaited this opportunity for many years, that maybe the king would pass by this way and give to him. Now the king says, "Give me the rice in your bowl."

He reached into the bowl slowly and picked out one grain of rice, placing it in the king's hand. Again the king stretched out his hand and said the same thing, "Give of your rice to the king."

With hatred in his heart, cursing under his breath, and fire in his eyes, he reached into the bowl and said, "Here is another grain." Then he picked again, and said, "Here is one more grain. The rest is mine. It is all mine and I'm going to keep it for myself."

Without another word, the king walked back to his caravan and mounted his camel. The caravan moved on. As it did, one of the soldiers who had received a commandment from the king walked up to the old man. He reached inside a bag, pulled out three shiny gold pieces, and placed them in the old man's bowl. Then he turned and rejoined the king's caravan.

As the old man stared speechlessly into the clay bowl, he had no more pleasure in the worthless grains of rice. He realized that he had played the fool. For every grain of rice he had given, the king had given him a golden coin in return. Had he been willing to give it all the whole bowl of rice, then the whole bag of gold would have been his. His dream of a lifetime would have come true. Now he is left with a worthless bowl of rice and a broken heart; for he knew the king would never pass by again.

About 42 years ago the King came by, and I was sitting like a beggar beside the road. He asked me to give him the "rice" in my bowl. "Give of your rice to the King," he said.

I said, "Lord, it is not much, but if you can use it, take it."

And the gold He gave to me -- all that I have. I don't have anything but the gold He has given me: treasures laid up in Heaven. That is all I have. Give God the best of your life.

Almost 25 years ago, God seemed to come by again and say, "I want more. I want you to come out from among them and be separated. I want you to take a stand." And again I surrendered all. I surrendered a lot of my friends of a lifetime; many of my preacher friends who now won't even speak to me. I left the Convention because it was going liberal. And I didn't know if I would ever pastor a church again. But God gave more than I have ever given up. We would never have this great ministry if I hadn't been willing to surrender to the Lord.

2. OUR LOVE

Give God the best of your love. Matthew 22:37 says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." How much? With ALL of it. Give God the best of your love.

That is what Jesus conveyed to Peter in John 21:15-17, "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST THOU ME more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I LOVE THEE. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST THOU ME? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I LOVE THEE. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, LOVEST THOU ME? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I LOVE THEE. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

Jesus used the word, "agape," which means, "divine love," but Peter answered with the word, "phileo," which means, "fondness; brotherly love." In essence Jesus said, "Peter, do you love me with all your heart?" And Peter answered, "Yes, I am fond of you."

Again, Jesus said, "Peter, do you really love me?" And Peter answered, "Lord, you know that we are good buddies. We are good friends. I am fond of you."

Finally Christ used the same word that Peter was using, "Peter, are you even really fond of me." The Bible says that Peter was "grieved in his heart," and said, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I am really fond of you."

Peter at that point didn't really love the Lord as much as he should. If he had, the Lord wouldn't have had to question him three times.

I have heard some hypocritical people say, "I put my family first. I can't go to church faithfully and be involved because I work many hours to provide for my family, and I spend all my time with them." I had a fellow one time, several years ago -- he led the singing when the church was fairly new -- he had three children; he came to me one day and said, "I just need to do a lot more things with my family." He began to give some excuses for not being faithful; and we kind of butted heads.

I told him, "Listen, you put God first, and your family will be a lot better, and they will turn out right." But he didn't put God first, and now he is separated from his wife and his family is in trouble. In fact, his youngest boy is in a big mess, in trouble all the time. And his two daughters are all messed up.

In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

A lot of people say, "I love the Lord!" But they don't go to church very regularly. I think that if a person really loves the Lord, they will be in the house of God. I believe that if we love the Lord, we will love souls, for which He died.

A lot of people should say, "Lord, I appreciate you going to Calvary, and I am fond of you, but I don't really have the godly love that I ought to have."

They are saying, "Lord, I want to be your friend; I would like for us to be buddies," but they really don't want to give Him their best. May I say that if we really love Christ, we will obey Him.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous," says I John 5:3. When we truly love God, obedience will be a joy, not a burden. To do things for people we love is not a burden; it is a blessing. We enjoy doing it.

Jacob served fourteen years for Rachel to be his wife; and the Bible says that "it seemed like a few days" for the love that he had for her. Fourteen years is a long time to work for a wife.

When we truly give God the best of our love, then obedience will be a joyful privilege. I have read where the average Christian gives 3-5 years of faithful service, then they burn out. I sort of believe it; but our church is somewhat different than that. We far exceed that.

We have a lot of "used-to-ers," or "has-been-ers." Do you know why they burn out? Because they don't give God the best of their love. When you love God with all of your heart it is a joy -- Christian service is a joy that God blesses. It bothers me that pagans and cultists are more fervent in their love for idols and evil spirits than church members of today. And Christians are serving the true and living God.

I read of a missionary nurse who worked among heathen people. She had delivered a set of twin babies for one of the pagan mothers of the village. One baby was fat and healthy, and the other was small and sickly. The healthy baby had a real good chance of survival; the sickly one was almost sure to die in that primitive culture.

Just a few days after the birth of the twins the nurse saw the mother with the two babies down by the river's edge. She saw the mother as she laid the sickly baby down and took the healthy one up in her arms, as it twisted around, and she would hug and kiss it. Then she held it up, muttered some words to her god, then threw it out into the river. As she cast it into the river, the jaws of the crocodiles

had already opened to receive it.

The shocked nurse ran down to the woman. She grabbed the mother, shook her, and said, "What have you done?"

The mother said, "I am making sacrifice to my god."

The nurse said, "If you must worship your god that way, why didn't you offer the sickly child? Why did you kill the only one who had a chance to live?"

With a stern look on her face, the mother said to the nurse, "I don't know who your god is, but my god deserves my best."

I am certainly not advocating human sacrifices, but I think we could learn something from these pagans and cultists. If they love their gods that much, surely we could love our living God and give him our best -- the best of our love.

3. OUR LABOR

We need to give God the best of our labor. Paul said to the church at Corinth, which needed to be encouraged, and even rebuked, "We are laborers together with God." What a privilege! What a privilege it is to be a co-laborer with God.

The devil tries to blind us and make us feel sorry for ourselves. But what a privilege it is to yoke up with the very Son of God in the Gospel ministry, and when we walk out to visit we should look on it as though we were walking side by side with Jesus. If He were here, He would be doing that: carrying out His work. And we would be carrying out His work with Him, headed in the same direction that He is going.

When you go forth with the Gospel to a lost soul, you can just mark it down that Jesus is with you, because that is exactly the direction that He is going. We can ask God to be with us all that we want, but if we are not going in the same direction He is not going to be with us. That is kind of common horse sense, but if you want God to be with you, you must be going in the direction that He is going. He isn't going to turn around and go in your direction.

You take a worldly church member: he is wasting his breath praying, "God be with me." God is not going to be with a worldly life style. Of course not!

He is going to be bearing the same burdens that we bear, working toward the same goal. There is no greater honor in all the world than to go soul winning with the almighty God of Heaven.

I have heard people say, "I'd give anything to spend some time with a great prominent preacher like Dr. Jack Hyles, or Dr. Lee Roberson." But I know of a famous preacher that I get to spend a lot of time with, all the time I want to. His name is Jesus.

Stephen, one of the first deacons, gave the best he had. He was a man of wisdom, "full of the Holy Ghost." He started preaching for the Lord, and he didn't preach long before he got stoned to death. But he was true to his Lord. He looked up when he was dying and saw the Lord standing, welcoming him home.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ," and if I lost my life for Him, it will be "gain." As he finished

the course he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me..."

Have you ever read about the communists, the true communists? I have read where they get up at five o'clock, go to bed at about eleven o'clock at night, and they work for their cause eighteen hours a day -- promoting the ungodly doctrine of communism.

Give God the best of your labor. When I got out of high school, back in the early 1950's, jobs were hard to find. Norm (70 year old student in the classroom), you remember those days. My brother-in-law and I -- I never shall forget: we got on a train. That is the first train ride I had ever had. We got on the train and went to St. Louis. I had an older sister who was working up there. We looked for a job, but couldn't find one. There were just none available.

Finally, that same year (1954), Brown Shoe Company hired me. I was glad to get a job. I was off the farm, and I had all kinds of energy and goals. I had dreams of working and making money. I would work, and when everyone else was going on break I wouldn't take one. I wasn't interested in taking a break. I was there to work! I'll be honest with you, I never missed a pay check in twenty-seven years. I was never laid off for anything. I'm here to say that I never drew one unemployment check, because they were looking for someone to work. I gave them my best, and I think that is the way it ought to be. But if I would do that for a secular job -- I hate to say it, but I haven't given God all that I should have. In a way, I have put Him first, though. I want to give Him my best.

4. OUR LIVING

Then, give God the best of your living. Right now I am going to stop teaching and preaching, and I am going to meddle a little bit. In Malachi 1:7-8 the priests were making sacrifice to God of what they didn't want. The Scripture says there, "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar, and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? Saith the Lord of hosts."

He is saying, "Try offering the sick and lame to the governor. See if he will be pleased."

God said, "I don't want your leftovers. They are an abomination to me. Give me your best."

Then He went on to say in chapter 3, verses 8-9, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

Some people say, "But that is Old Testament." I am amazed at some people's wealth of Bible knowledge. I know many who claim Jeremiah 33:3, but that is Old Testament too. I will guarantee that if you will check your Bible you will find that the Old Testament has not been done away with in the New Testament. It has been fulfilled in the New Testament.

I am not for offering animals as a sacrifice, but it helps me to understand that Jesus Christ was offered once for all as a fulfillment of the Old Testament.

The backslidden Baptist, trying to justify being stingy with God, asked the preacher, "Does the Bible say that you are supposed to tithe on the gross, or on the net?"

The preacher responded, "That depends on whether you want a gross blessing, or a net

blessing.”

I heard of a preacher who got up and said, “Folks we ought to give until it hurts.”

The old deacon jumped up and said, “It hurts me just to think about it.”

Queen Mary was the bloody queen of the land of Scotland. It was her pleasure to go out often, dressed in common clothes, and meet the people. On one such occasion she went out visiting with the common people, and she got caught in a rain storm. She stopped at a house and asked the lady of the house for an umbrella. The lady of the house, not knowing who it was, started to give her new umbrella; then she changed her mind and handed the queen an old umbrella that leaked. The queen opened the umbrella, and proceeded down the street with the rain dropping through on her. The next day, after the lady had forgotten about her visitor, a knock come on her door. It was the royal guard. An officer stepped up to the door and said, “Ma’am, the queen asked me to return an umbrella that you loaned to her yesterday.”

The lady gasped in dismay, and cried out, “If only I had known that it was the queen, I would have given her my best umbrella.”

There were two fellows, Jim and Bill, who went through high school together. They had even gone through grade school and college together. They were very close friends. At the close of their college years, Jim looked at Bill and said, “Bill, I have to ask you something. I have watched you since we were kids, and you have always excelled at every sport you played, every subject that you studied. You were the valedictorian, the captain of the football team; you were the recipient of every honor that has been given. Tell me, what is it that always drives you to your best?”

Bill looked back at Jim and replied, “I have never told anyone this, but I am going to tell you now. Years ago my parents had not been able to have a child, and they prayed and begged God to give them a child. My mother was soon happy to announce that I would be born. They began to make preparation for my birth. When my mother was in the delivery room, the doctor ran out to my father and said, ‘Come and talk to your wife. I have told her that if she bears this child, she will die. I begged her to let me save her life, but she won’t let me.’”

“My father rushed in to her side, but already she had her hands up in protest, and said, ‘No. I prayed for God to give me a child. I will bear it, even if it costs me my life.’”

“With tears, my father took her by the hand and stood by her side as I was born, and as she was dying. She told my father that I was to be named, Bill, and said, ‘You tell Bill that Momma’s last words were that he is to do his best.’ That is why I have always given my best. Because of the great sacrifice that my mother gave me, and her last request. As long as I live, I will do my best.”

That was the request of the One who died for us, “Give me your best.”

LECTURE #6

DETERMINATION

Thinking about what character really is, Webster gives such a broad definition of what character is. I looked twice at what he had to say, and if I had to analyze what he had to say, and what character really is, I would say that "character is the quality of a person." A person can be of good character, or be of bad character -- and we are studying some very important things that will help us to have good quality.

Good people are an asset in any community, and anywhere you go. It is my prayer that this will help me, and maybe you can get some help also.

We have been studying some Bible characters, such as Daniel. I am sure before this is over that we will get around to the Apostle Paul. I thought as I was driving in this evening about the difference that he made. Not only in his day, but even people like us can be used; and he was used because of his dedication and consecration.

*Tonight we are going to look at an Old Testament Scripture. We are going to lay a foundation for one word: the word, "determination." Isaiah 50:7 is a prophetic passage speaking of the coming of Christ. It reads like this, "For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I **set my face LIKE A FLINT**, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."*

*In Luke 9:51 it says, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he **STEDFASTLY SET HIS FACE** to go to Jerusalem." Here it is speaking of going to the cross in Jerusalem.*

The Bible tells us that when Jesus approached Jerusalem on that last trip -- when He knew that He was going to be taken and crucified -- He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Jesus was determined to go to the cross, and He did it for us. He was determined to fulfill God's plan, His plan of redemption.

Prior to this, He had prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. There, the devil literally tried to kill Him. His prayer there was a prayer of determination to go to Calvary. He prayed something like this: "Lord, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." No doubt, the human side of Christ dreaded the cross. As He looked into the cup, and meditated upon the sufferings that were to come (and we will never understand on this side what was involved as He bore our sin, became sin for us), He was determined to fulfill it all.

During these incidents Simon Peter took out his sword to defend Christ and cut an ear of one of the soldiers off. But Jesus didn't commend him for doing that. He rebuked him. Peter, in essence, said, "Lord, we're not going to do that. We are not going to let that happen."

Jesus ended up saying to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

To be anything like Jesus, we must learn determination. Determination is so important. There are some words that we need to forget if we can, and take them out of our vocabulary: "I can't," "I quit," and this sort of thing. Basically, those words or those excuses most of the time mean, "I refuse to try."

We lack determination in doing the will of God in our lives. And I am putting myself in that group also, "we." But Jesus prayed often. He set a great example in praying. He had a great determination to go to Calvary, and fulfill the will of God for His life. He had a determination to die for every sinner, and I thank God that He did.

You recall that in the upper room, as He came through the closed doors, He calmed the disciples and said, "Peace be unto you."

And then He said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

We know what would have happened, and where we would be, if Christ had not come. But also, what if we are determined to do and finish the work that God has given US to do? There is a vast difference between STUBBORNNESS and DETERMINATION. It is a little bit hard to define. I am a pretty stubborn person. Many claim to be determined, when they are just plain stubborn, but that is not what determination is: not to be stubborn and rebellious, be yielding, and yet be determined. We must be yielded and surrendered in our lives. That is what Jesus was.

Jesus said that He knew that God would help Him. He said, "Therefore will I not be confounded." He said, "I am sure that, because God is my helper, He is going to help me." God was always with Him, and He knew it.

Romans eight says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If God be for us, what does it matter who is against us? It doesn't matter! But in our day, and it has always been this way, we have too many quitters. The cause of Christ has really suffered because of quitters. Someone quits and it makes it easy for someone else to quit.

We never go fishing alone. Simon Peter said, "I go a fishing." And the others said, "We also go with thee." Then Jesus had to come on the scene and say, "Simon, do you love me more than these?" He had denied the Lord three times, so Christ made him confess his love for Him three times.

Determination is necessary in everything in life. You see the lack of determination in the marriage life, in the vows that people make in our day. It takes determination. We have a lot of quitters there, too many quitters. If you don't have determination, you won't finish.

You can't build a church without some people that have determination. You can't build anything without determination. Bus workers cannot build Bus Routes without determination. You can't raise your family right without determination. A lot of parents quit on their kids too early. They give up when they become teenagers.

Nobody ever understands a teenager. No one hardly understands a junior high age young person. I don't know what to do with a lot of them. If you could just put them in a box, and nail it shut for a few years, then let them out. But you can't give up. You must be determined.

None of us will live for God for a long time if we are not determined. The devil will pounce on us, and do everything he can to discourage us. We must be determined. In Proverbs 16 it says, "A just man falleth seven times and riseth up again."

That tells me something. First of all it tells me that just men, and we are talking about you ladies too, do fall. They don't fall just one time, but each time they get back up. Just men are determined.

Many come to me and say, "I just can't stay up." Well, I don't know what I told them, but the next

time someone comes to me like that, I am going to say, "Well, don't you stay down, then. If you can't stay up, at least don't stay down." We should either be getting up or knocked down. Don't stay down. If you can't stay on your feet, at least don't stay on your back.

"But I just keep getting knocked down." Then just keep getting up: that is what I have done for fifty years.

Now, in that thought, there are **THREE POSSIBILITIES**: The **first** is, and it is not really a valid possibility, but I will mention it anyway -- if you can live your Christian life and never fall. (I am not talking about a great fall like getting drunk or killing someone. I am just talking about falling away.) I don't know a person who has lived their life and never gotten discouraged and almost fallen out. No doubt there are a few people who have enough character to keep going, but their heart might not have been in it for a period of time.

The **second** possibility is, you can fall and stay down. I have seen many like that in my ministry who have tried, failed in an area, and they won't attempt anything else for the Lord in their Christian life. I call that getting knocked down and staying down. Some do that.

Then there is a **third** possibility: you can fall and get back up. You can fall again and get back up again. That is, if you have the determination to do so, you can. Through the years, you could have asked me the question, "Preacher, have you ever entertained the thought of quitting preaching?"

I would have to say, "Yes, I have."

I have pastored five churches, and I have resigned them all a hundred times in my mind. The Sunday and Wednesday night blues -- where you feel like you went to the pulpit and did the best you could, but nothing worked and it was dead -- and the devil just beat you to death over the thing. I would get in the car and drive home, and he gets in and sits right beside me and whispers in my ear, "You were a failure tonight, weren't you! How in the world could you preach such a lousy sermon after all the years you have been preaching?" And I have to agree with him sometimes. I don't know how I did it, but I managed.

Situations are never perfect in life. We look for that perfect situation. All of us are dreaming of it: the time when everything will be just right, just perfect. But it won't be that way very much, and determination takes over when the situation is not perfect.

We are always looking for the easy way: the ideal job, the ideal church with no problems. The great resurrection chapter, I Corinthians 15, verse 57 says, "But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory..." I know that it is talking about victory over death and the grave, but He also gives us victory in other ways as well. "This is the victory," I John 5 says, "that overcometh the world, even our faith."

You will notice that this verse doesn't say that God gives us tranquility; He gives the victory. The word indicates that there is a conflict. Life is full of conflicts; constant conflicts. We can't have victory if there are no conflicts. How can we have victory in our lives if we don't have some obstacles to overcome. Life would be dull without these conflicts, to tell you the truth about it. They are not pleasant, but the pleasant part about it all is, being an overcomer. And there is some excitement in the right kind of fight.

I can't have victory unless I have an opponent. And the devil makes sure that we have an opponent. We don't want an opponent; we want everything to run smooth.

Sometimes we develop a strange idea about the will of God. We sometimes want to think that if

a person is right with God, everything will be 'hunky-dory.' Surely, we think, if things are not going just right it is because I am not right with God. Well, I think you'd have a hard time selling the apostle Paul on that. He lived a life that was pretty well right with God, and he had conflicts constantly. And you don't get that philosophy of no conflicts for the Christian out of the Bible either. We don't really want victory; we want tranquility. But what we need is victory.

Being a pastor, there are always things that aren't just right. The pastor knows more about what is going on -- just enough that it will gnaw at you. And the devil will take that and try to beat you down. Too often, most pastors live their entire lives in discouragement. Let me say this: it shouldn't be that way. And I have had my share of that. However, the older I get the more I am determined I am going to have victory in Jesus.

I want victory. I have gotten to the place where I don't care about the tranquility; I just want victory. I have been looking for tranquility for years, and it has never come. I just want victory. If you get backslidden, you can have all the tranquility you want. I see people who aren't doing anything for the Lord, and they seem to be just as tranquil, complacent, lukewarm, and spiritually sleepy as anything. And the Lord doesn't want that.

The church at Laodicea was very tranquil. They were very satisfied. God wasn't satisfied with them. And we live in that day: most people go to church just enough to soothe their conscience. Our church is an exception; I will guarantee you that. But most people don't have victory. Yet God has promised us victory if we are determined, and don't quit.

A person may try for years to build a Sunday School class, or a pastor may try for years to build a church, and never really think that he is successful. But if he never quits -- whether it is a pastor building a church, or a Sunday School teacher building a class -- then he is successful. (And that is the way to build a church: you have Sunday School teachers building classes. You build enough Sunday School classes and you will have the opportunity to reach others successfully.)

Someone may set out to be a great soul winner. In spite of years of working and trying, they still may never lead hundreds down the aisle, but as long as they don't quit, they can be successful. I think Noah was a successful man, but he didn't have very many converts. The Scripture says that he was a "preacher of righteousness" for one-hundred-twenty years. He won his own family, and that is a success!

You are not a failure because you fail; you are a failure because you quit. Quitters are failures. Quitters quit because they don't have the determination to stay after it all the way to the finish line. I like the statement in our text: "Therefore have I set my face like a flint."

Consider this interesting fact about a flint. Every time you strike a flint, it puts out new fire; it puts out new spark; it puts out a new light. Flint thrives on friction. You hit a flint, and it sparks.

Adversity to someone who is determined doesn't do anything but fire him up. I don't get the calls like I used to get from young preachers who are discouraged, but every time that I'd get a call from one, all it would do is just fire me up. I'd get off the phone, and I would be fired up. I'd talk in my mind and I might have mumbled at the devil, "You ornery devil, you! You think you are going to discourage us all!" It did nothing but fire me up. It also gave me new determination, new fire.

Some people, as soon as they are smitten, their fire goes out. It is because they don't have their face set "like a flint." We need to get some goals in our lives, and set our faces like a flint and determine to go no matter what. Adversity comes -- it will just fire us up that much more. When obstacles get in front of us, we will either go over, around, or through it.

We need to say, "This is the will of God, and God is my helper, and I will win. Because of that I will never quit, never back off, never stop getting back to my feet when he knocks me down." I may not stay up, but I won't stay down, either.

Going back to I Corinthians 15, verse 58 comes right after the verse where Paul thanks God for the victory. It says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding..." in results? No, that is not what it says.

"Always abounding in success..." No, that's not what it says. "Always abounding in prosperity?" No, it doesn't say that. "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." That is what it says.

If we would abound in the work of the Lord, the success would take care of itself. A lot of times we look for success, and if it doesn't come we get discouraged. We just need to abound in the **work** of the Lord. Just get excited about the **work** of the Lord. We are laborers together with Him, and nothing can change that. Just abound in it.

The truth is: the church, the group of people that is excited about God and the work of God, is going to have success. No doubt about it. If it is the work that challenges me, I will stay excited about it all the time. If I can keep my eyes on the fact that it is the work of the Lord. But if I have my eyes on whether I am succeeding or failing, I will get discouraged. You look close enough, and you will see some failure somewhere.

If I have to abound in success or results to stay motivated, then most of the time I will flounder in despair. But if I let myself be challenged and charged up by the work itself, then there is always the motivation that I need, because it is the work of the Lord. And our labor is "not in vain," the Scripture says, in the Lord. We know that our labor is not in vain in Him.

I know people who are discouraged because they are bound by success or results or public opinion. Someone in the community, or someone that they have a little respect for, criticizes the preacher because he stands for standards, and they go moping around. They think everybody ought to love the pastor all over the town. The country club group, the drinking group -- they ought to love their pastor and love their church. Hey, let me say this: the devil is not going to love us! The devil is against this place; if he is not, we are not doing what we ought to be doing. And we need to know that. And if we will get work oriented, success will take care of itself. Just get your mind on the work of the Lord: what is the work that God wants me to do? I am going to be determined to do the work God wants me to do, and just keep at it. Just stay in the work -- stay in the work. God blesses work.

Jesus said in John 14:12, "He that believeth on me, the **works** that I do shall he do also, and greater **works** than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." The reason is: we have the Helper, the Holy Spirit of God. He has come to help us.

People with determination do whatever everyone else says is impossible to do. With God and determination, nothing is impossible. And that goes for the secular, too. It is not the person -- I found this out when I was in management for 20 years -- it is not the person with a high I.Q. that will get the job done necessarily. It helps to be smart, but I was never blessed with intelligence, so I had to work hard. But it is that person who has determination that succeeds. It is that person who will get their mind on the work and be willing to work and sweat, and have the fortitude and determination to stay in the work.

I like to read about men like Thomas Edison. He had a tremendous work ethic. That guy had about 1,000 patents in his life time. One time he and a fellow worker were working on a project. They weren't making any progress, and his coworker was very discouraged. Edison turned to him and said,

"We haven't failed. We have just found out a thousand things that won't work."

If he could be that positive about something that nobody had ever done, I suppose I can get positive about the Bible. I can get positive about the promises of God. I can get positive about something that is eternal. I reckon I could set my face like a flint about the work of God. Determination is not hinging upon what other people do. It doesn't have a thing to do with what our fellow man does.

Joshua was a man of determination. In Joshua 24:15 he said, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." He said, "Are you going to serve a false god of wood and stone, idols? Don't forget God gave you the land of these false worshipers, but if you want to serve the false gods like they do, go ahead. I would rather you didn't, but if that is what you are determined to do, go ahead." He went on, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." I see determination in that man.

There are so many people using someone else as an excuse not to serve God. I would say to them, "Sorry, but your problem is that you don't have any determination or a will to do anything to serve God."

You can find plenty of people who turn aside, or turn back, and go away and determine to live different for a while. Preachers have turned aside by the dozens. I have a lot of close friends who have done that. There was a time in their lives when they pioneered in some things that helped me. One I think of right now; we grew up together. He had deeper convictions on some things before I did. You have to be taught, you know. I made the profound statement the other night, "Do you know that everything I know I have learned?" If we are going to know anything, we must learn it. That is why the Bible says, "Study...."

When I was born, I didn't know anything. I couldn't even dress myself. I didn't have any teeth to eat with. I couldn't take myself to the bathroom. I was a pitiful little mess, wasn't I? And you were too. We had to be taught. But just because someone else turns aside doesn't give the next person an excuse. Just because we live in that day -- we have a Bible, and we have a God who says, "I change not." That is no excuse. We might use it as an excuse, "But everyone is doing it." That's a poor excuse, isn't it? That is a sign that there is no determination. We need some folks who have some determination. (Man, I want to preach a little bit!)

Do you know what determination is? It is being single-minded. Determination sees beyond the obstacles, and sees the goals. James said, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Determination never loses sight of its dream, no matter how far and distant it may seem. Determination sees that dream and keeps pressing toward the mark. Paul said, "...this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before..."

It is sad, but there are some heathen people who have more goals than some Christians do. It bothers me when the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are so determined, and they seem to be more determined than Baptists are. They really don't have anything real that can change a life and save a soul. But they are determined that they are going to go out and spread their false doctrine. I guess the devil doesn't oppose them -- maybe that is why.

But determination will not be denied by a friend or by a foe. Sometimes the worst enemies we have in the will of God -- and listen to me carefully; don't misread me in this statement -- but the worst enemy that we have might be someone who seemingly loves us the most. There are many wives that have hindered their husbands from doing the will of God.

I had a pastor -- I preached his funeral a year or two ago -- he had a sweet wife, but she didn't

love the Lord; she wasn't determined to serve Him. She worked on Sunday while he went off to pastor a church. She was a waitress. Do you think that was a hindrance to him? You had better believe it was. How could he preach faithfulness to the membership when his own wife was at a restaurant on Sunday morning?

I preached a revival for him one time, then went to the restaurant after church where she worked; and she waited on us. Well, I don't mean to be gossiping, but what I am saying is that sometimes people who love us the most can hinder us the most. We kind of listen to them, and we really get fired up; and they say, "Oh, aren't you a little bit over zealous. Don't you think you ought to kind of slow down a little bit?"

How many have had the determination pulled out of them by family members who are close to them? The devil knows who will be most effective, and he will use them. I don't care who it is. You will have to overcome that. You will have to overcome any kind of obstacles that are not only by the enemies of the Gospel, but might even be friends or loved ones who can be enemies of the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus faced many things on His way to Calvary. One of the greatest was from people who actually loved Him. One person said, "Your mother and your brethren are here."

He said, "Those who obey the will of God are my mother and my brethren."

A little later He came to John the Baptist and said, "John, it is time to be baptized. I want you to baptize me."

John said, "Not so. I have need to be baptized of thee, and you come to me?"

Jesus said, "Quit arguing with me, John." That is what He really said. He said, "Suffer it to be so."

The Bible says that Peter opposed Jesus. He didn't want Him to go to Calvary. Do you remember how He responded. He didn't say, "Oh, thank you friend. I'm glad you love me so much that you don't want me to go to Calvary." He didn't say that; He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan. You are not saying the things of the Lord."

Why did the Lord call him, "Satan?" Peter was doing the devil's work: hindering God's plan.

If someone tries to keep us from suffering for the cause of Christ, and going through some hardships, it might sound like we should say, "Oh, I'm so glad you love me that much." We need to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

It takes a spiritual mind to understand that, but that is exactly the way that it is. We have children who are called to the mission field, and they know that they have been called. Even though it may be a hazardous field, we had better stay out of the way or we will be intervening in their lives in a way that Satan would want us to.

Most people today don't want God's deliverance from sin. Most people want to be saved from the penalty of sin; they don't want to be saved from the power of sin. That is sad. They will say, "Oh, Lord, I need your help, but not your interference. I want your help for salvation, but after that I don't want you to interfere."

It is fine for a preacher to preach "Calvary," and, "Jesus loves you, and wants to save you," but then the preacher preaches separation (and the Bible is full of it); they will say, "Oh, I don't want to

change my lifestyle. I want to go down to the Baptist church that doesn't have any separation."

As far as I am concerned, the next Baptist church that doesn't have any separation is doing the work of the devil. The Bible says that after we win souls, we are to teach them to "observe..." I wouldn't have a church where people could come because they get offended at someone who preaches separation. Brother, as a pastor it would stir me up to think I was getting people who came from a church because they didn't want separation. Now I am getting on a pet peeve.

Judas gave Jesus a kiss of betrayal. Was Judas Jesus' friend? Jesus greeted him; He didn't say, "You stinking enemy. You reprobate."

He looked at Judas, and called him a "friend." He was not a friend of the Son of God, but Judas was a friend of the will of God. You will have to think that over.

Sometimes your enemies are your friends because they push you to do the will of God. If they push you to do the will of God, and I have been on this kick for a little bit, they are your friends.

Probably, one of David's best friends was Goliath. You wouldn't have thought so. But Goliath pushed him to do the will of God. David would have never been king if it had not been for Goliath, the Philistine.

Paul was determined to be at Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. He knew it might cost him his life, but he was determined. And he didn't avoid the danger. (I'm not going to get done. I can see that already. I am looking for a place to start landing.)

*Let me say this: **DETERMINATION TAKES THE LONG LOOK.** You just have to have the long look. You cannot be short sighted. We want instant everything in our day. "Well, preacher, I tried that soul winning one time, but it just didn't work for me. And I tried to be a Sunday School teacher, and build a class. I tried to practice that separation thing that you preach all the time, but it just didn't work."*

Most people have that "one time" affliction; which means they had no determination. In forty-five years Caleb's determination never waned. He never lost sight. He never wavered. When he crossed that river after God had delivered them out of Egypt, he saw a mountain and said, "I want that mountain." He was determined to get it, even when he was too old. He said, "I am determined."

One of the greatest deficiencies in our churches today is the lack of determination and lack of desire. Our greatest problem is not the presence of evil. It is not the presence of evil desire, even though that is a problem. It is the absence of godly desire that overcomes us.

Our desire to serve God and obey Him should out weigh any kind of evil desire, because the devil will give every person evil thoughts and evil desires. Our desire to please God so overrides and overflows that evil desire -- or, at least it ought to.

Let me ask you a personal question. What is it that makes you tick? What is the driving force in your life? What is it that burns in your soul?

You say, "Let me think about it for a week, and I'll tell you then."

Well, if you are going to have to wait a week to tell me, you might as well forget it. You don't have anything that is burning very much.

What about Jacob when he came to the brook? He wrestled with the angel of the Lord all night,

and the angel said at daybreak, "Let me go."

Jacob said, "I am not going to let you go until you bless me. I must have a blessing."

That is determination. God said, "Okay, but it is going to cost you."

Jacob said, "I don't care what it cost me."

God said, "It is going to cost you. You are going to limp the rest of your life."

Someone could have seen Jacob limping along and said, "Oh, I am sorry that you hurt your leg. You are going to be lame the rest of your life. You are going to limp all the way through."

Jacob would say, "Don't feel sorry for me. What I got from that blessing is worth the limp."

How about the little woman who came to Jesus and said, "My child is dying; I have to have your help."

Do you know what He said? Jesus said to that little woman on this occasion, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs." That's a pretty rough statement, isn't it?

Most of us would have said, "You call me a dog? I don't want your help."

But not her. She said, "But Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. I'll take the crumbs."

She said, "If I can't get the answer as a person -- I know I'm not an Israelite, one of your favored children. But if I can't get the answer as that, I'll take it as a dog."

Needless to say, Jesus said, "I have never seen any kind of faith like that. I never saw that kind of determination."

Friends, our pride ruins us. It ruins us. We have a bunch of ego maniacs running around the country trying to build a name for themselves. They want to hobnob with someone who is famous. Why don't we just try to hobnob with God, and not worry about being famous!

The unjust judge heard the poor widow plead, "Oh, judge, avenge me of mine adversary."

He said, "Look, woman, I am not worried about your little problem. I have more important things to do."

She said, "Avenge me of mine adversary!"

He said, "Get out of my office. I told you that the docket is full. I have no time for you." And he probably told the servants to throw her out. I believe that is what happened.

He probably left work and went to the restaurant, and instead of a waitress, here comes that widow. She said, "Avenge me of mine adversary."

He said, "Lady, don't you see that I am eating? You are ruining my meal. Leave me alone."

He got home that night. He had no more than walked in and the phone was ringing. Who do

you think was on the phone? It was that lady. She said, "Judge, avenge me of mine adversary."

He slammed the phone down. And the next morning, she was at the door of the courthouse. She pled, "Avenge me of mine adversary." Day and night, again and again, that woman was determined.

God said that if that wicked and unjust judge would grant that woman her request, even just to get rid of her, what do we think God will do for His own children? When we are determined in our prayer life, determined enough to persist, God will hear us. God wants us to be determined.

Determination. Good, old-fashioned, up-to-date determination will get the job done. It will work in the secular world. You must have some determination to set some goals, and it will work.

LECTURE #7

CONSISTENCY

Tonight we are going to deal with consistency. Let's look at two foundational Scriptures for consideration. Deuteronomy 5:9 says, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto **the third and fourth generation** of them that hate me."

Judges 2:6-14, "And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the Lord **all the days of Joshua**, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all **that generation** were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose **another generation** after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroath. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies."

You will notice in this Scripture that there are three generations mentioned here. And in the Deuteronomy passage it says that the sins of the fathers are passed on down to the second and third generation. That doesn't mean that the father is guilty of some sin, and then the sons and the grandsons are punished for his sins. What it means is, that we reap what we sow, and the harvest is always more than the sowing.

That can be encouraging, because if we sow good we can reap a lot more than we sow. It would be good to know that when we die we will rest from our labors, and our works shall follow us. It can follow us for quite a few years. But it also means that if we have bad influence, that will follow us too.

What we do in inconsistency, our grandchildren may do in abundance. That is a sobering thought, and that is what we will deal with tonight. The inconsistencies of the first generation will become the sin and iniquity of the second, third, and fourth generation. I believe that is what this Scripture teaches.

Stop and think about it for a moment: After Moses and Joshua, the great leaders that they were -- after they left off the scene, another generation arose right behind them that knew not the Lord, neither the works that God had done for Israel. Can you imagine that? God had done mighty works, and He had commanded them to teach their children. They were to keep the Word of God constantly before their eyes, reminding them of His deliverance and what He had done for them.

One generation after Joshua, the people did not know the Lord. They didn't know His work, nor His power, nor what He had done for Israel. Somewhere along the line, the previous generation had

failed. They were not bad people. They were good people. They had some convictions -- and I'm talking about Joshua's generation. But somewhere they failed, and did not get the job done. It is imperative that we pass on convictions down to our posterity. We have to.

I guess we could entitle this lesson, "The Importance of Consistency," or we might entitle it, "Why Our Kids Don't Turn Out Right." There are two things that are very important; they are the two hardest things that we battle with in our Christian life: **balance** and **consistency**.

We have so many good things to do, so many right things to do, that we struggle with having the balance to do all that we are supposed to do. We can fill our lives with good things, and yet not make an impact. They are not bad things, but they are not the priority things.

I struggle with those areas, and no doubt you do as well. It is a battle for balance. And once I get the balance, now to be consistent in my balance. I can get the balance for a little while, and then get off balance again.

Each generation has a tendency to get a little looser about that area. What one generation fights in inconsistency, trying to hold up the standard for a while and letting it go for a while, the next generation will tolerate. They know that it is not quite right, but they will tolerate it. The third generation will endorse it; and the fourth generation will promote it. They will literally promote the evil that their great grandfather stood and fought. And if, somewhere down the line, we did not become inconstitence we would not permit degeneration in our children and our grandchildren.

Now, I'm talking to you all who have convictions and standards, those who stand right and believe right. What we have to deal with, is to make sure that we are consistent. It is our inconsistency that permit's the degeneration to take place in our young people.

It scares me to think that my great, great grandchildren might promote the very things that I am against because of my inconsistencies -- or maybe the next generation's inconsistencies. They might not only tolerate and agree with it, but they will actually get to the place where they will promote what I spent my life fighting. That is sad; and yours might do the same thing.

I will guarantee you that we could look back (and I have, because I have lived for a long time) and find preachers of years gone by and check their children and grandchildren, and find the very thing that those preachers stood out against and preached hot and heavy against with conviction, but weren't quite as consistent as they should have been -- they opened the door to allow degeneration to begin in their posterity. One old preacher that I really loved to hear when I was a boy; he was my favorite preacher, was a big heavy set and jolly old fellow. He could have you laughing one moment and crying the next. God gave Him the gift -- and he had the power of God on his life. He didn't own an automobile. He would hire someone to take him to meetings.

He spent a lot of time in our house. Him and my dad would stay up late at night and talk after meetings. I never will forget. I would stay up and listen to them, and sometimes I would fall asleep in the corner on the floor.

I will never forget: I went to his funeral years later. You can tell when people are really worldly or not by their appearance. I saw his grandchildren and his great grandchildren. They really looked worldly. They weren't anything like he preached during those revival meetings.

If I want my great grandchildren to be what I am, then I must work at it and do it relentlessly -- I must be consistent day in and day out, and year in and year out. It matters not what society does; it matters not what they think -- because the Bible says, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye

transformed.” Truth doesn’t change!

One of my pet peeves with Baptists is: they ought to put in their statement of faith that one of the main things they believe in is, change. That is their doctrine. As the world gets more worldly, they are going to get more worldly, so they believe in change.

Being consistent doesn’t mean that you are perfect; but it does mean that when you do fail, you admit it. You repent of it; and you don’t try to cover up and think it’s okay for you. We adults are real bad about being inconsistent with our children. If they do something, they get into trouble; but if we do it, we won’t admit that we did wrong.

To be consistent means that when I do fail, I admit that I failed and I make it right. I don’t keep making the same stupid mistake in front of my children again and again. I have to be more consistent.

Joshua was a man of commitment. You check Joshua 24:15 and he said, ‘You folks do whatever you like. We came into a land where they serve false gods. You make up your mind whether you are going to let them influence you, and you are going to bow down to their false gods. Or, are you going to stay true to the God who brought us out of Egypt. But as for me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord.’ That is commitment. That is conviction.

He said, ‘I am committed to this thing of serving the Lord. I am sold out to it.’ Joshua was a man of conviction and character. Our land is dying, and our churches are dying, for lack of conviction. You can’t tell me that the charismatics have the fullness of the Spirit of God, when they have no convictions. The Holy Spirit came to convince us of sin, and to convince us of the value of righteousness. That is what it says in the Gospel of John.

If the charismatics have the fullness of the Spirit on their lives, the Holy Spirit is going to convict them of sin. They are going to have some convictions. You had better believe they are! And so are we. Anyone who has the fullness of the Spirit of God is going to have convictions. I’m talking about Bible convictions.

Degeneration took place when Joshua had passed off the scene. After he died -- he lived to be 110 years old -- there were some other people around who had served the Lord, but they were inconsistent. Then the next generation was a little less than they were.

There is a difference between having beliefs and having convictions. A conviction is something that I believe with such intensity that I will be willing to die for it. Many of our children have the same beliefs that we have without having convictions about it. I see it all the time around here. I think they believe the same things as their parents, but they don’t have any convictions about those things. They don’t have the intensity and the fervor of it. They might see too much inconsistency in adults.

This second generation still believed in God. They never had their faith tested like the previous generation did. They still believed in the same God and went through the same ceremonies, but they did not have the same dedication and fervency. Degeneration had set in. They were tolerant. They allowed some of the heathen to come in.

In Judges, when they settled the land, God told them to drive out the inhabitants of the land, and He did it for a reason. He knew they couldn’t coexist with them without it influencing them. And that is what happened.

Some people have personality that is out of this world. They can come up and pat you on the back, brag on you a little bit, and you think, “Man, he’s a great guy.” And you become tolerant. “He is

not that bad, after all.” And it will sooner or later affect you.

I’m not saying that we need to be nasty. We need to be nice to people, but we need to let people know in a nice way where we stand. We need to be able to smile and do it.

Moses and Joshua said, ‘We are going to have to clean out the land, and get rid of the evil.’ The next generation came along and cohabited with them -- one step down. And after they spent one generation like that, they started yoking up with them; marrying them. And that’s a no-no. Then the third generation didn’t even know the Lord. Do you know why? They had forfeited the power and blessings of God, and their children had never seen God do any mighty acts.

Our churches need to see a move of God; our children need it. When I grew up, it wasn’t the average church service that made an impact on me, although it was important that I was there. It was when God really moved through. I’ll guarantee you, when God moves in and He moves your heart, and you feel the power of God, I don’t care who tries to cram some junk down you, you know that God is real. You know the Word of God is true.

The Bible says that a third generation came along, and knew not the Lord. The first generation was driven by conviction. The second generation was operating by beliefs. The third generation was driven by carnality. They were carnal Christians.

Beliefs without conviction won’t do much for your kids. It is the conviction that will do something for them. I was sitting down with one of my sisters, and she reminded me of my mother. She said, “Do you remember how we used to close the services years ago? They would have the old-fashioned handshake.” That was common where I grew up. They would sing some good old song, maybe “God Be With You Until We Meet Again.” And there was always room from the front down the aisle where the people would meet and fellowship with a handshake.

My sister said, “Do you remember that Mom would get happy during that time and she would shout and get happy?” It wasn’t a put-on with Mom, either!

I said, “When Mom passed off the scene, the church lost something.” I knew that if Mom wasn’t there that we wouldn’t have a very good service that night. It was amazing that, even when I was a teenager, I could gauge the service by Mom and my uncle being with us. He had such a spirit about him. When they called on him to pray, he would pray with such a fervency!

Belief without conviction won’t do much. It might keep you out of trouble temporarily, but it will destroy you in the long run. Our young people need to see someone who believes something with all of his heart.

That is why today even young people will rally behind strength. That is why they like those radicals and rock groups. You know the rock stars put themselves into what they do and what they believe in. (I haven’t been to very many concerts, but I see it on TV once in a while -- laughter!!) And young people get with it. I am not talking about putting on. Evidently, they have some conviction about what they are doing, even though it is wrong. I am as convinced that what they are doing is wrong as they are that they are doing the right thing.

I will guarantee you that if they really amount to anything, our teens must see some conviction.

Verse 11 says, “They did evil in the sight of the Lord.” This was the third generation. Was Joshua a great man? Was Moses a great man? Yes, they both were. They were greatly used of God, but there was some inconsistency in that generation that caused the next generation to be tolerant. And

the next generation after that was ungodly.

The Bible called Abraham, "a friend of God." He had a wonderful walk of communion with God. He was a man of conviction and character. In Genesis 18:19 God said, "For I know him (Abraham), that he will command his household after him."

God said, 'I know that he will do the right thing, commanding his children after him. He will set the right example, and he will command his family and his children to walk after him.' God had a lot of confidence in Abraham. I wonder what He would say about us? (I just had to sneak that in; it wasn't even in my notes.)

He is not talking about a father requesting, "I wish you would do right. It would so please me if you would do right."

That is not what Abraham did. He said, "You are going to do right."

*You won't find anything in the Bible that says I am supposed to **persuade** my children -- I am supposed to **COMMAND** them. And I have to start early, but I have to be doing right. I have to have some conviction. I have to have some character. And I have to have some commitment myself before I have anything to command them to follow.*

I had an older brother who liked to smoke cigars. His son got to be a teenager and he took up smoking cigarettes. My older brother beat the tar out of him for smoking cigarettes. I was just a teenager -- nearly 20 (I am about 18 or 20 years younger than my older brothers) -- and I knew that wouldn't work. Common sense tells me that you can't whip a child for something you do. You can't do it. You have to set the example. I wouldn't have the heart to whip a child for doing what I have a habit of doing.

When Abraham came into a new land, the first thing he did was build an altar to God. Then he would dig a well. An altar had to do with his commitment to God. A well gave them possession of the land. It was like a deed. If you moved into a land and got a well dug, it was just like you had a deed for that land. It was a landmark that identified that land.

We read that the Philistines came along and filled up the wells. The reason they did that wasn't that they didn't want a well. They filled it up because they wanted to remove the ancient landmark. Water was important, as it is today. In that country, if you have ever been there you know this, it is very dry. And water is very important there, even more important. So when someone put in the work to dig a well, it was their land.

When they had their wars and the enemies stopped up the wells they were saying, "We are taking possession of this land. We are not respecting what this well says anymore."

Abraham had God first in his life. He took care of heavenly matters -- then he took care of the earthly matters. Hear me tonight: if you don't put God first, before your children, you are in trouble. I have noticed parents who have missed church over any little thing (company comes, or it rains, etc.), but the next day, even though company is still there and it might still be raining, then the kids have a right to say, "Well, I don't guess we'll go to school today; we'll stay home."

And you know what the parents say, "Get up and go to school. You can't stay home from school." Do you know what they are saying? They are saying that to educate the mind is more important than serving God. That is inconsistent, and it won't work.

Abraham was a man of faith, but there came a time when his faith wavered. He was inconsistent. He lied to a king to keep the king from killing him for his wife. We brought that out in one of our other lessons. He was fearful for his life. He said to his wife, Sarah, 'You tell them that you are my sister.'

No one had threatened his life. If he had been trusting God, he wouldn't have had to do that. And here is this great man of faith who came to a time in his life when his faith wavered. He was a great man of faith, but there was some inconsistency in his life.

The next generation, another came on the scene: his son, Isaac. Isaac had the same beliefs that Abraham had. He worshipped the same God, but his priority was a little different. (Follow me.) When Isaac came into a new land, the first thing he did was dig a well, and the second thing was build an altar. He did it backward to his father, Abraham. There was a difference.

He didn't turn away from the worship of God. But he put earthly matters first. Then he put heavenly matters second. He put possessions first, and God second. God was still in his life, but He didn't have the pre-eminence that He had in Abraham's life.

Abraham gave God pre-eminence, but he was inconsistent. He was a great man of faith, but there was some inconsistency in his life. Isaac had the same beliefs that his father had, but not the same convictions. He worshiped the same God, but he didn't have the same priorities.

Do you remember how many times Abraham lied? He only lied **one** time; but Isaac lied **at least twice** to protect his wife. You see: it is getting a little worse. Things are going down hill.

How about the third generation? After Isaac came Jacob and Esau. Abraham told one lie; Isaac told two lies; and Jacob was a consistent liar. That is where he got his name, "supplanter; conniver, sneak." He was a deceiver. Yet Jacob was the best of the bunch. He was better than Esau. Esau went out and married heathen girls just to irritate his father. He was a rebellious rat.

Jacob, even though he was a conniver, won the blessings of God. He was the good boy of the third generation, even though he was sort of a chronic liar. We are really getting in bad shape now, aren't we.

If you think that is bad, you check Jacob's son out, the fourth generation. Reuben committed incest with his father's wife. They sold their own brother into slavery, and said a wild beast had killed him. They lied about it. It is getting even worse, isn't it? The very thing that Abraham despised and hated, and would have been against, his great grandsons promoted and indulged in freely. It sounds to me like degeneration.

It wasn't because Abraham was a bad man. He was a good man. But there was a little inconsistency in his life. Then Isaac came along and increased, and Jacob and Esau got worse. And the next generation was really in a mess. The sins of the father are passed on to the third and fourth generation. That is degeneration. That is the eroding of character and conviction.

I could pause now and say, "Look at our society." Lost people, when I was a boy, had more conviction than 90% of the pastors in our Baptist churches have in our day.

We must be consistent. When we get lax and inconsistent we are going to reap heart break. What you don't like, but you are inconsistent about, your children will tolerate. And what they tolerate, their children will embrace and endorse. What they embrace and endorse, their children will even promote in society. That means that in four generations there can be a 180 degree turn around in one

family, all because of inconsistency. That scares me. And I'll tell you what: it had better scare you.

I am taking this principle out of the Word of God, but let me say this: it is confirmed over and over in our society. You live fifty years, almost all as an adult -- I saw in a community where I grew up a big family. Their last name was, King -- Doc and Lucy King. They were good, honest people, but God wasn't first in their lives. They might go to church once in a while. One of their boys was just a few years older than me. I never will forget: he laughed and mocked at me when I got baptized. I tried to win one of their alcoholic boys to the Lord when he was dying of a liver disease in the Poplar Bluff hospital a few years ago. He didn't get out. He called me by my first name because he had known me all of his life. He said, "I'll come to your church when I get out."

I told him, "You may never get out of here alive."

My dad had nine children. Goodness knows we are not perfect by a long shot. I had four brothers; one is dead now, but they were all deacons in Baptist churches. But they don't quite have the conviction that my mom and dad had. When I go to family reunions I see their children and their grandchildren. Wow! They are in church, but they dress like heathens. I can see it.

I am talking to a generation that has some conviction. We believe in some things, but if we are not careful we won't be consistent. And if we are not, it will affect our children. The iniquity of the fathers will be passed down to the third and fourth generation.

There are some things going on in society today with our young people because of the inconsistencies of the adults. One generation has conviction; the second generation compromises; the third generation operates in carnality. The first generation is interested in people; the second generation is interested in things; the third generation is interested only in self. The first generation believes in the King James Bible, but they are inconsistent in their lives; the second generation totes an NIV; and the third generation doesn't even care whether they have a Bible at all. That is the way it works.

The first generation is faithful to the local church, and believes in being in the house of God, except when they have company come from out of town (or when they are really tired). They believe a person ought to be in church, but they are inconsistent about what they believe. The next generation doesn't think it is important to go to church all the time. They think you are doing God a favor when you go to church. The next generation doesn't go to church at all. They don't need church. Oh, they read their Bible once in a while at home, but they don't need church, they think.

The first generation has a conviction about alcohol, but they are inconsistent. The second generation believes it is okay to have a social drink in moderation. The third generation is a bunch of drunkards.

The first generation has convictions about the movies, but now and then they bring home an R-rated video, and say, "Oh, I wish they wouldn't do that." (Well, they couldn't do it if you didn't bring it home and put it in the VCR.) The next generation is going to watch every R-rated movie they can get their hands on. And the third generation goes to the movie theaters and watches every kind of immorality there is.

The first generation believes in holiness. The second generation is kind of mediocre about it. The third generation can take it or leave it. "It's okay to have standards, but I'm not going to be a fanatic about it," they say. "I won't fight about it; I'm not going to cause any trouble. I'm not going to enforce them in my home, either, with my kids. I'm going to let them choose for themselves." Then why don't you do that about everything else: taking a bath, eating their food, going to school, etc..

Degeneration has set in. The next generation operates not in holiness, but in mediocrity and in ungodliness. By the way, in this New Evangelical Movement there is a whole generation of Christians with their hair down over their ears. I watched the Gaither video -- I like singing; I like some of those old programs where they have the old-timers on -- but I can't figure out why he has that guy that sings with his hair down the middle of his back!

You say, "Well, Brother Parker, what is wrong with you?" Why don't you ask God what is wrong with Him! He is the one who wrote it. It is a shame, He says. That is a shame. I could take care of that if I were in Bill Gaither's place; but he wants to appeal to that crowd, too. That is why he has that guy there.

The next generation will be bunch of long-haired fruit-cakes with earrings. One crowd sings songs and hymns and spiritual songs. The next generation wants "Gospel rock" and "contemporary Christian" music. There is no such critter as "Gospel rock." That is a street term that prostitutes used to describe their business. You study it. I'm talking about illicit sex for money. That is the kind of music that identifies with certain cultures. Anyone with any smarts, if they will read up on it, will know that.

So now we have a Gospel prostitution music in the average Baptist church. That is like "Christian homosexuality." That is like "Christian adultery." That's like "Christian drunkenness." None of these terms belong with the term, "Christian." You can't take rock and roll and yoke it up with true Christianity. They are opposed to one another. You can't mix them.

What about "contemporary Christian?" Once again, there is no such thing. Contemporary means, basically, "in step with the world." Christian means, "in step with Christ." You can't be in step with the world and in step with Christ. You don't have to have a doctor's degree to figure these things out, but most of those preachers who have doctor's degrees can't figure it out. Could it be that they have never been born again?

First John says, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." You can't be in step with the world and in step with Jesus at the same time. You just can't do it. You can't have music that is in step with the world and in step with Christ at the same time.

The old Christian lady had it figured out pretty good. She said, "You will never see a dancing foot and a praying knee on the same person."

The third generation, then, embraces heavy metal, punk music, and every other kind of junk. The first generation served God; the second generation serves self; and that is where we are in our society. Our generation is only interested in getting what they want. Then the third generation ends up serving the devil.

The first generation is Baptist, and proud of it, and yet they will yoke up with a bunch of folks who are not Baptist, and be willing to overlook some important things. The next crowd doesn't believe in being Baptist. They call themselves, "the Bible Church," or "the Community Church." In a Bible Church you can get rid of the pastoral authority. You can have an elder board that makes all the rules, and tells the pastor what to do.

"If I don't take any position on anything, I can fellowship with anybody at any time I want to. I am just a Bible Church."

There is one preacher here in town who says, "I'm just a Baptist. I'm not any brand of Baptist." Well, baloney! He had better identify himself. There are a hundred different kinds of Baptists. There are hard shell Baptists, primitive Baptists, general Baptists (who believe in falling from grace). I wouldn't

want to just say I am Baptist. I want to be identified.

"I'm just a Bible Church. I don't have any doctrinal beliefs and statements." And by the way, it wasn't Bible Churches or Fellowships that got their heads cut off. You study history. It was Baptist preachers. I am glad that we have a rich heritage.

I'm not a nut on this, but you are not going to make me feel bad about being a Baptist. The Baptists have stood for some things down through the years. I criticize Baptists because I am one of them, and I feel like judgment needs to begin at the house of God. The Baptists are the people through the years who have stayed closest to the Word of God. We are people of the Bible.

But the third generation doesn't have a church at all. They are liberals, and liberals don't have a church. A church is a called out people. They don't have a called out people. The sins of the fathers bring on degeneration. The inconsistencies of the fathers bring on the iniquity of the children, the grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

One generation fights with inconsistency; the next generation tolerates; the third generation embraces; the fourth generation promotes. It concerns me to think of my great, great grandchildren. It really does. I would hate to think down the road that they might promote what I have stood against. And if they don't know God, they will.

*My dad wasn't perfect, but he was really consistent. You didn't have to wonder what he believed. And now the ball is in my court, and it is in yours, too. There is a generation coming after us -- and whatever we do with convictions and standards, and respond to the truth as it is preached -- we set the pace for the next generation. We need to learn from the Bible the examples set for us. Inconsistency will reap iniquity and sin in the next generation. It did with Joshua's life, and it did with Moses' life. **CONSISTENCY!***

LECTURE #8

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT

In this lesson we are going to study one of the great secrets of the Christian life. This is where true happiness is found. And I think in Christian character, it is so fulfilling because the more of Christian character we have, the more fulfilled our lives are. Therefore, we are more satisfied in the right way: with God, with our salvation, and even with ourselves.

Paul writes to Timothy (my favorite portion of the Word of God) in I Timothy 6:1-6, "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain."

In verses one and two, Paul talks about being a servant, and he talks about a good work ethic. We are supposed to have a good testimony at the work place. I could enlarge on that a lot, and it is so needed. We live in a day when a lot of people have a poor work ethic. Our society has developed into a welfare society, and it destroys character.

As goes character in general, so goes the character of the church. We live in an area (Piedmont, MO) -- and I don't mean to be mean or critical, and it is no disgrace to be poor (if it is, I have lived most of my life in disgrace) -- but we live in an area where the job opportunity has been poor; and it is as profitable to be on welfare as it is to work. So a lot of people choose welfare, and it hurts their character. And we continue to develop more programs, our government and society, and more programs just destroy the character of people.

That said, the first thought here is dealing with doctrine, the "doctrine which is according to godliness." Notice verse 3, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness."

I am supposed to have some elements in my life that are in harmony with the character of God. That is what some early Christians had, and that is why they were named "Christian" by their enemies. They had some characteristics in their lives that made them like Christ. So they called them, "Christians." The Scripture teaches that they were first called Christians at Antioch.

*I should have a relationship with God that is so close that some of God rubs off on me. Does that sound reasonable? My character is to be pleasing to God. Of course, we are never going to be perfect, but we CAN be **godly**. We have the idea that we should be ministered unto all the time, but our goal and our intention is that we get to the place where we can minister. This world needs to be ministered to. We live in an ungodly society that needs some mature Christians that have the character*

to minister to them. The Bible says that people who don't have Godly character are "proud, knowing nothing." That is a strong statement from God, isn't it? It is from the inspired Word of God.

Pride is a wicked sin. Pride is usually the Christian's downfall. Pride goes before destruction, the Bible teaches, and a haughty spirit goes before a fall. God hates pride. God resists the proud. God gives grace to the humble.

"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up," the Scripture says. In Proverbs 13:10 the Bible says that every bit of trouble we have in our churches is because of pride. "Only by pride cometh contention." Pride is the source of all contention.

I told my wife the other day, "You just don't prove the Word of God wrong. It turns out right every time."

Pride is the source of all contention, all trouble, all heartache. Think about it. Whether it is two, or a group of people, when we humble ourselves before the Lord and accept His way, we will end up saying, "I was wrong. I was at fault." Usually when there is contention and trouble, there are a lot of people involved.

In verse 5 Paul said that the unwise people described in verse 4 "suppose that gain is godliness." That sounds like the TV crowd of our day -- the TBN crowd. They think prosperity is godliness. That crowd will tell you that "gain is godliness," or that good health is godliness.

All of us would seek after, and desire to have, gain, good health, and prosperity. Some think that when things go our way, that is godliness. If we are going through difficult times, we must not be right with God, they say. That philosophy is nothing new. Job's friends said, 'There is bound to be something wrong in your life; with you going through all this difficulty. Job, you've got some sin somewhere.' And that is the same old story today.

They haven't read much of the sixty-million martyrs who died during the Dark Ages. Their preaching is not in harmony with the Bible, nor with history. Paul said, "From such withdraw thyself." That is most of the charismatic group. Withdraw yourself, or they will mix you up. There are more people messed up in all this junk of wrong doctrine than you can shake a stick at -- this prosperity Gospel.

I believe in divine healing. Don't get me wrong. But I don't believe that there is a divine healer that I have an ounce of confidence in. You read after them. Not only that, most of them die before the average age expectancy. It looks like something doesn't tally out!

Paul said, "From such withdraw thyself." He is teaching separation. Of course, you would expect that out of me, wouldn't you? But, you should expect that out of Paul too. Do you know where I got all this crazy stuff of separation? I got it out of this Book here; every bit of it. And to tell you the truth about it, I am not as fanatical as this Book is. I don't care what they say in this town -- or out of town either.

Paul is teaching separation. He said that these folks who don't have separation don't have a Biblical philosophy of life, and they are not cultivating godly character. They are pleasure-lovers; they live for pleasure and prosperity and the good feeling. I'll be honest with you. It's good to let off a little steam once in a while. We are in an uptight generation, and you can go to a ball game and holler and scream, and let off a little steam, and I'll guarantee you, it will probably be good for your health. Or, you can go to church and do the same thing. You can even have a cry and you will feel better, and I'm not against any of that. But it probably won't help your Godly character any. Character doesn't come that

way. But "godliness with contentment is great gain." Hey, don't forget that!

Paul said elsewhere, "Bodily exercise profited little, but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and the life that is to come."

Godliness means, we develop a God-pleasing character, and we take on some character traits that God Himself has. And when we get to the place where godliness totally satisfies us -- we are satisfied with godliness -- that is GREAT GAIN. The problem, in a church like ours, is that if a young person grows up in our church and doesn't get to this point of Christian character, where being godly is satisfying to them, it is going to be sad. If they are doing it because the preacher, or their parents, want them to -- as soon as they get to the age where they are out on their own they will go in the other direction. They have never been satisfied with Godliness.

Were they saved? I don't know -- I hope so. But I guarantee you that if a person grows in Christian character he will see the value of it all. There's no value in ungodliness. Even if there is some pleasure, it is temporal. It will be so temporal that even the pain of the temporal pleasure will far exceed it even in this life.

What is "contentment?" Contentment is, when I have enough and I am completely satisfied. When I get to the place where godliness itself is enough; not the outcome, or the blessings, or the benefits of godliness, but when godliness totally satisfies me, that is great gain. I would even go so far as to say that I don't have to wait until I get to heaven to enjoy the benefits. I can even enjoy the benefits of it here.

I can't control the outcome, but I can control whether or not I am godly. I can't decide whether the blessings come. I might live godly, and yet have to suffer persecution. In fact, the Scripture says, "All who will live godly in Christ **SHALL** suffer persecution." And it is because people criticize more a godly person than they do just the run of the mill person. There is no doubt about it.

I can't decide whether the blessing comes. I can't decide how many people are going to get saved; and I can't even decide how much I prosper. But I can decide to do right. And I can decide to be the right kind of person.

I see a lot of variations, and we will deal with them. I have seen contentment without godliness, and this is one of the main problems today. Do you think any born again Christian ought to be content, even when they are not living godly? Of course not. But there are many who claim to be born again, but they seem to be so satisfied with not living godly.

We compare ourselves, and measure ourselves, by ourselves -- and the Scripture says that we are not wise. We compare ourselves with other people, usually those who are more liberal, and then we say, "We are doing pretty good."

I was in a church yesterday in Kansas City, a church of older people. They have had a church split, and the younger ones went with a younger preacher who wants to go the contemporary route. The old heads just didn't want to go that route so they stayed. They have beautiful facilities. And they are hungry, but, needless to say, you need some younger people to have life. I sang a couple of songs, and I don't know when I have had people appreciate poor singing as much as they did then. Cheryl (daughter) called after we got home to see if we made it, and said that in the night service they were talking about it. That tells me that they are hungry.

I sat in a Sunday School class of old people; I think Imogene (wife) was the youngest one there -

- she is younger than me. They are very shallow, although good people. They have good jobs, people of means (most of them), but so shallow. They don't know much about the Scripture, and even about Godliness.

We need to compare ourselves with Jesus. We need to have the mind of Christ, the Scripture teaches. "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." And, really, when you boil it down, it is the mind of humility.

What kind of mind did He have? "He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; wherefore, God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus....." Or, maybe even now it should happen.

I used to always quote that verse as saying, '...every knee SHALL bow,' but it says, "...every knee **SHOULD** bow, and every tongue confess..."

I will never get satisfied with myself, and my spiritual maturity, if I measure myself with Jesus. I think we have the whole thing backwards. I am supposed to be content with WHO I am, how God made me, and how I grew up, etc.. I have seen many kids who have resented their raising. They moved off after they got out, and have done a little better, and seem to be ashamed of their parents. That is sad, when the parents did the best they could.

I am supposed to be completely satisfied. You have heard this from me a lot: My dad died when I was sixteen years old. Out of nine children I am the only one who finished high school and had some aspiration of going on to college. However, my dad died before I could finish my junior year and I knew college was out. But we are supposed to do the best we can with what we have.

I am supposed to be satisfied. Paul said 'whatever state I am in,' I am to be content -- but I am not supposed to be satisfied with my spiritual maturity. Does that sound reasonable to you? I am not supposed to be satisfied with the kind of servant that I am, what I am doing for Him. I'll be honest with you, I am a long way from being satisfied in that area.

Contentment without godliness is one of the most destructive forces in America today; being content without godliness. Now, I can preach like this, and I am almost sure you are listening -- but I can preach like this in a regular church service and a lot of people will sit and yawn, and go to sleep, because they don't have any appetite for the things of God. There is nothing burning in their soul. I mean, there needs to be something burning in our souls: a desire for God. They don't yearn within and say, "I must have the power of God on my life. I have to have more of the power of God on my life! I have to grow more in grace!"

They think that gain and prosperity are godliness, but it's not. We all think that way too much. If we are not careful, we will get caught up with it. And it's not just the charismatic crowd. Their philosophy has affected us, consciously or subconsciously. I will guaranty it has affected the Baptist people. That is why I am here to tell you that Baptist people are nothing compared to what they were thirty or forty years ago. Their worship is nothing like it used to be. We think now that you have to have that hyped up music, and drums, and you have to pump people up some way; and they don't have the character to hunger after the Word of God, so you have to get the old flesh moving some way. We think you have to make them feel good, or feel something. And many people don't even know if what they feel is real.

I never will forget, and I think I have already mentioned this: a young couple with whom we grew up. I have known them ever since they were dating and got married. Back in those years, there was no

TV. Imogene and her folks, on Saturday night, would come to Jeffers Theater, and it was Hopalong Cassidy. It was fairly wholesome. My folks had taught me not to go to the movies. Once in a great while I would slip off with my cousin and go -- man, it made me feel terrible, hoping they wouldn't find out. I'm talking about fifty years ago.

This young couple went to picture shows all the time. I heard her testimonies. She got saved at one of those secular movies on Saturday night, because it was one of those that was really "touching." Man, she cried and had an emotional spell. She said she got saved. I don't know. I will say this: you don't get saved apart from what Christ did on Calvary, no matter what kind of spirit you felt.

We have been influenced just enough to rob us of the contentment we are supposed to have when we live for God and sell out to Him. That is where the contentment is supposed to come from.

In Revelation 3 (I refer back to this church so much), verses 15-17 it is the Laodicean church. I believe that we are living in the Laodicean age; that is the last church mentioned in the seven churches of Asia. And I think we are in the end, the closing out, of the church age.

This is sort of an apostate church, and they had contentment without godliness. Jesus told them, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Why? "Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..."

They were content, but were not godly. They had (in my version) padded pews -- thank God for padded pews. They had air conditioning. They had a full time pastor. The budget was taken care of. Everything was going great. Here is God's opinion of them: "...and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

How in the world could God's view of them be so different than their view. How could a church think they were doing so good, when in the sight of God they were in a mess? Now, if you go back to the wisdom chapter you know that they didn't have any wisdom. Wisdom is, seeing things through the eyes of God. They were seeing things through the eyes of man. They were so far from God that they didn't even know it. They were satisfied with the things they had, even though they were so far from God.

God said, in essence, 'You don't have what I am looking for. I know you have a lot of things, and you think you are superior, but you are lacking something that has depth. You have no godliness, no surrender, no communion with God.'

Do you know what? Not only does THIS Scripture tell me, but the entire Bible builds this subject precept upon precept. God wants everyone of His people to be fervent. He wants us to be fervent in spirit, in love, in prayer, in laboring. God said, 'If you are not hot, I would rather you be cold than lukewarm.'

This verse used to puzzle me. I thought that lukewarmness is closer to hot than cold it. Surely it would be better, I thought, to be lukewarm than to be cold. Doesn't that sound reasonable? Since God's first choice is for me to be hot, fervent for Him, why would He rather I be cold than lukewarm?

Did you ever notice that what we call "hot" is uncomfortable; and "cold" is uncomfortable. Lukewarm is comfortable. God doesn't want us to be comfortable, complacent, full of apathy. We have gotten too satisfied, too comfortable.

God wants us to be moved with zeal and conviction. We have to have zeal and conviction. He doesn't want us to get satisfied with less than His best. That is where the Laodiceans were; they were content with what they had. But in reality they didn't have anything that had any eternal value about it. So, contentment without godliness is great loss. They were content without godliness.

If we are not careful, we become content without the power of God on our lives. Oh, how we need the power of God! We can go to church, hear the preaching, and if we are not careful we will think, "That sermon was for somebody else."

(I have to do this; you will just have to bear with me. You are in the class, but some will see this on video.) We have gotten satisfied with less than God's best. Contentment without godliness is a disaster. We live in a disastrous church age. God sees us just like that Laodicean church. We lack discernment in our age. We don't even know how bad off we are. We are content without the power of God, without real revival. Our kids' lives will never be touched and changed until Holy Ghost revival comes.

Every generation that ever experienced revival -- there was an element that had become discontented. They had prayer meetings -- they prayed and begged God. You don't see that anymore. Our little prayer meetings are nothing like we had when I was a boy. Oh, they are more dignified and more orderly. Our prayer meetings back then weren't too orderly. People got carried away, crying out to God. They got worked up.

You would say, "Boy, they really got worked up!" They would cry out to God -- loudly. I can yet hear the prayers of some of those old men at the altar. I used to go and preach revivals over at Mt. Carmel. You know where it is. Do you know Bea Mells? He was a Congregational Methodist. I don't know how long he has been dead.

He liked my preaching; he would come to those revivals. He didn't belong to the church, but he would come. Before the preaching began, they would gather around the altar and pray. Old Brother Bea Mells would cry out to God. Man, he would pray! You could tell that he was not a novice at prayer. He had been used to talking to God, crying out to God.

David said, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."

It seems like some of the people who have the least reason to be content usually are. You talk about them getting busy and serving God, and they act like they are thinking, "What do you expect of me?"

And they give excuses, saying, "God understands."

You had better believe that God understands. What He understands is that we are backslidden. He sees it all. He says, 'Repent, or else I will come unto thee, and deal with thee.' That is what He said to everyone of those seven churches in Asia Minor.

*Let me say this: **God doesn't change.***

In I Timothy 5:9-11 Paul said, "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saint's feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry..."

This is an example of what I am talking about. We are talking about service. The Bible gives instructions concerning widows, and those who should be taken into the church and taken care of. I don't have time to get into the details of this, but God has given this business of taking care of widows; not to the government, but to the church.

God warns against taking in the young widows. He is not against someone who has lost a mate marrying again. He says, 'When and if they come to the place that they are not satisfied with Christ ALONE....' They then become "wanton," He says.

If I have what God wants me to have, and I am not satisfied with it, I am wanton. That is a principle of the Word of God. It could be for money, or even wanton against Christ. When I have done what God expects of me, and I am in His will doing what I am supposed to do, and I am not content with God's will for my life, I am then wanton against Him. That is pretty strong, isn't it?

That means that in my discontentment, I am transgressing against Him. And here is why people get out of the will of God, and why a lot of people get out of church. They think that if they make more money they will be happier, so they are looking for another job. And it doesn't matter where it moves them off to. When they get to chasing the dollar that much, they won't see if they have a good church to take their family to. They will go and join anything. (I could give you names and addresses on this.)

They are not happy with doing the will of God and living with what He provides. Now, there is nothing wrong with getting a better job if you don't have to get out of the will of God to do it. But let me say this: if a person has to get out of the will of God to get a better job, it will mock them. The better job will mock them.

People say, "I believe it is the will of God, since things are not working out like I want them to and like I thought they would, that I go somewhere else. I am not content with the outcome of this godly living. I am not making as much money as I thought I would. I see people making a lot more money than I am. God is blessing them, and they don't put Him first."

Hey! Don't blame God for a bunch of that junk. My mind just doesn't work like the average person's mind, I guess. They want to blame God, for instance, for what happened September 11th (terrorist attacks on America). I know that God allows things to happen. He could also have kept it from happening. He controls it all; I realize that. But let me say this: what about this matter of sowing and reaping? When we sow to the flesh, there is going to be corruption.

America's philosophy, as far as the standard of God is concerned, is so far away that I don't think it will ever get back. We let anything get into our shores. In fact, it seems like the more wicked they are, the more welcome they are. They make it easy for them. And some good old down-to-earth people can't get help if they need it. I'm not against the foreigners, but I believe in taking care of the household of faith first.

Who are we dealing with, here? It isn't the old grassroots of America. In our line of prosperity, we think we have to have more people. I don't understand it all.

Let me get on to finish this: Adam and Eve had godliness, but they weren't content. They were in the garden. Man, how much better could they want it? Yet they weren't content. It cost them their home. It turned their son into a murderer.

David was a man after God's own heart, but there came a time when he wasn't content with godliness.

Gehazi, the servant of Elijah, went out to Naaman and lied to him concerning what his master had said, 'The master said that he wanted some of that gold, and some of those garments.' And the master had said that he didn't want it. Elijah didn't want that for healing Naaman. He had a good job, serving the man of God, but all of a sudden he got his eyes on money, so when he saw that it was within reach, he lied to get it. He said, 'I could have that if I just leave the will of God a little bit, and lie one time. I'll bet if I had that gold and some new clothes, I would be a lot happier.' But he sure wasn't; it turned him into a leper. He ended up a leper because he decided godliness was not enough.

In Colossians chapter 4 Paul said, 'Demas is my fellow-servant, my fellow-laborer.' But in II Timothy 4:10 he said, "Demas hath forsaken me."

What happened to Demas? He "loved this present world."

Do you realize how many preachers are wrecking their lives today. I'm slow to say anything about this because, for one preacher there are a thousand laymen doing the same thing, or worse. But they're just not as noticed.

A lot of women wreck their lives by running around half dressed. They don't want to have an affair with everybody; they just want everybody to want to have an affair with them. I guess that's the way it is. They would say, "I would never...."

And I say to them, "Yes you will. If you keep doing that, sooner or later you will be trapped by your own desires. You will want that certain somebody to want you. You will find someone who wants you, and whom you want, and it will happen."

It's the same thing for young girls. They don't want to be immoral. I don't think Christian girls start out wanting to be immoral. But when they show their legs, they want guys to look. They do! "I've got pretty legs." And some MEN must THINK they have pretty legs; I see them all summer long. It's going to be a problem for them. (Man, I get into trouble for this stuff!)

If they would ever get to the place where just being a godly young lady would be good enough for them -- find exactly who God wants them to have -- they would be totally satisfied. But they will never be satisfied the other way -- never. Instead, many of them are going to wreck their lives because they want every guy to want them. We never hear of Demas returning to the will of God.

The lost man's pride will make him wanton for all eternity. He will want all of his life, and never be satisfied. He will die and go to Hell, and want for all eternity. The backslider's pride will make him wanton IN THIS LIFE.

Luke 15 -- classic chapter -- talks about the prodigal after he left home. He had it pretty good at home. His father had servants. You know that he was well taken care of. But he didn't know he had it pretty good.

You know, a person has it pretty good in the will of God. Do you know that? Just being in the will of God is pretty good, if we only come to know it. Jesus knew that the woman at the well didn't know. That is why He said, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it was that asked you for a drink -- if you only knew, you would ask Him.'

Isn't that the case with every lost person? If they only knew, they would be calling unto God and getting that water of life. The Bible says that the prodigal, when he had spent all and there arose a mighty famine in the land, began to be in want. He had spent all of his wealth. He had spent his character, his virtue, and his purity. And he spent much of his life. That is always the way it is when you

leave the will of God.

If I were teaching the young people's class, I would say something like this, "You proud young people. You don't want your parents to tell you what to do. You might have learned that from your parents, because some of them don't want the preacher telling them what to do."

They go home and have the preacher for Sunday dinner, "Who does he think he is, telling me how to live and how to dress? Who does he think he is?"

When the prodigal decided he wanted to be free from authority and leadership, he threw himself to the wolves. The Bible says, "He began to be in want." The thing about it is: when he had some godliness, he wanted something else. When he got something else, he said, 'What I threw away was pretty good, after all.' He finally "came to himself."

In America, what we lack is: COMING TO OURSELVES. We haven't come to ourselves yet, to see our real need; to see how good revival would be -- how good it would be to have families that are together, worshipping together, loving each other, and having the right atmosphere at home and having the power of God on them. When we come to ourselves, we will want all of that again.

People getting saved is great gain. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Godliness with contentment; I don't think you can say it any better. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." You can't put it any other way and make it come out right. For me to live for self, to die is not gain. For me to live for popularity, to die is not gain. That's pretty down-to-earth stuff, isn't it? Contentment; when we have God, He is enough.

I know, because I live in the same old hunk of clay you live in. And I'll be honest with you, there has been that part of me that had to work constantly on it. But Paul had learned something that most of us never learn. It is something you have to learn. It won't come naturally. He said, "I have learned..."

He entered into a sorority that most people never get to. 'I have learned this: in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.' Discontentment is misery.

I heard of a relative of somebody who killed himself. He was a heavy investor on the market. He yet had plenty of money, but he stayed glued to that TV about this September 11th thing, and he got so depressed that he sent the family away and killed himself. He wasn't content. What good is his wealth? I mean: I'm not talking about chicken feed. Sure, he might have lost a few million, but he really lost it now.

The Kodak man, Eastman, was a rich man. He killed himself. Why? Discontent.

LECTURE #9

THE WISDOM OF CHARACTER

Years ago I had preached on this portion of the Word of God, on these four little characters that God says are very wise. They are little; and I want us to look at them, and that will be the basis for our study. I trust that it will be of interest to you.

Proverbs 30:24-28 -- God said, "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces."

Tonight as we think about the wisdom of character, we'll look at these four small creatures. Wisdom is the ability to see things as God sees them, and character is the matter of doing right, and doing it by reflex -- doing it so often and so continually that it is just a natural reflex to do right. And that comes with discipline.

Most folks never do anything consistently enough to develop reflex habit in their lives. A lack of character will keep a person from obtaining more character. If I have some character I can build some more character. I must use what character I have to get what I need. That is also called "spiritual growth."

God never intended for me just to get saved, then live and die in the same spiritual state as when I got saved. I am supposed to grow, and mature, and move on. My Christian character, to a great degree, will dictate whether I grow, or live and die without growing and stay stagnant in my life.

The devil is always going to say, "You are okay. It is alright. You are going to make it." He tries to console a person out of the will of God. He tells the lost person that he is okay.

Then, as soon as a man gets saved he says, "Okay, you're saved, but don't get too excited about it."

God wants me to have enough character to continue to move forward and obey the commands of the Bible, even when it doesn't feel good, and it isn't enjoyable. Why? The outcome is what will be enjoyable. We will enjoy doing right, I think, now -- at least part of it. But, one of these days we are going to really enjoy the fact that we did right in this life.

You know, there are some things about the Christian life that you have to develop a taste for. And it comes through Christian growth. It's kind of like some of the stuff you eat all the time, but when you were a kid you wouldn't have liked it at all. What I ate for my evening meal, I would have had to be starving to eat it as a kid. I am eating now pretty healthy; when I was growing up I didn't eat healthy.

God wants us to develop character in our lives. And wisdom and character are joined. Let's look now at these four little creatures that are small, but very wise.

Verse 25 says, "The ant are a people not strong, yet prepare their meat in the summer." The

*ants teach us about this matter of **PREPARATION**. It takes character to be prepared for things ahead of time -- for things that you don't know for sure when they are going to come to pass.*

There are a lot of folks who don't even believe that they are going to die. How do I know that? Because they are not making any preparation. However, statistics say that one out of every one dies! Some folks still don't believe it; if they did they would get ready, they would prepare -- no doubt about it.

The craziest thing in the world to me is that folks will buy car insurance because they might have an accident. They will buy house insurance because the house might burn down. They will buy health insurance because they might need to go to the hospital -- but they might not. They prepare for all kinds of possibilities, then neglect the one thing that is for sure. (You can use this out witnessing.)

*Hebrews 9:27 says, "**And as it is appointed unto man once to die.**" It is an appointment. It is going to happen. I have an appointment with death; I can't change it, I can't escape it, and I won't be late. I'll be on time.*

*To prepare for the inevitable means I **MUST PREPARE AGAINST THE JUDGMENT OF GOD ON SIN**. God doesn't want me to go to Hell -- He doesn't want anyone to go to Hell. That is why He sent His Son. If I went to Hell, it wouldn't be God's fault. It won't be His fault for those who go there. It will be because of the lack of preparation.*

It will be the lack of preparation on the part of the person who spends eternity in Hell. And I don't mean: working your way in preparation. I'm not talking about that. The Bible says, "Marvel not that I say unto you, Ye must be born again."

Many folks just don't take the preaching of the Bible and the preaching about God and sin and what the Bible has to say very serious. They don't take eternity real serious. But the rich man in Luke chapter sixteen took it serious, after he died. When he was alive, he didn't take death serious. Being as successful as he was, he had to take serious making money and being successful in that realm. But he didn't take dying serious.

He didn't take Lazarus and his witness serious. What could the poor man, Lazarus, tell him. I know Lazarus witnessed to him, because when he ended up in Hell the first thing he asked for was for Lazarus to be sent: "Send Lazarus..." I wonder why: he knew Lazarus had concern and compassion on him, for he had warned him. He had been warned, but he hadn't made preparation.

Hell is overpopulated with people who heard the Gospel, but did nothing about it. Preparation is absolutely necessary. If I don't prepare against the day of my death, it will take me by surprise. If it takes me by surprise, I'll spend eternity in Hell.

Listen! Whether people want to realize it or not -- we live in a day when people don't think much about it, even in church life. Church life is so much fun with fellowship and entertainment, that it is just a little better way of life. That is not what church is all about. I'll tell you what church is about: It is about keeping out of Hell. It is serious. And by the way, it is not only the lost who need to get prepared; every child of God needs to take Scriptural principles and apply them to his life so he will be prepared for the attacks of Satan.

The Bible says, "The ants are a people not strong..." They can't bear a lot at once, so they make many trips. When I was a boy growing up, I would sit and watch the ant hill. It is interesting. They are workers. They make many trips. They start far in advance to get it all done. Little by little they prepare.

Many people are perpetually unprepared. And that is not only lost people; that is also saved

people. Hardships of life will come, and we have to prepare ourselves for them. Not everyone can handle it when everything is going smooth.

I had an old saying I used to tell folks: PREPARE FOR THE WORST; IF SOMETHING GOOD HAPPENS, YOU CAN WORK THAT IN. But prepare for the worst.

Since we are not strong enough to stay alive, we have to prepare to die. Since we are not strong enough to defeat the devil, we have to prepare to deal with him when he comes. He is going to be there. And if there is a way to deal with the devil, we had better prepare for it. I'll be honest with you: not many people overcome.

Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do ALL things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." I'm not strong enough to do it by myself, but when I am yielded to Him and He is in control, I can do everything I am supposed to do, everything that is right for me to do. The Lord has promised me that. There is not a person alive who can't do what they are supposed to if they will yield themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many saved people are not operating in His power today. They do okay when the waters are calm, when everything is going good -- but when the storm comes, they haven't prepared. They haven't put on the whole armor of God.

The whole armor of God is a spiritual preparation. Do you realize that it is too late to put the helmet on after you have been shot in the head? It's too late to put the breastplate of righteousness on after you have been shot in the heart. You must prepare when you are healthy, when you are alive. You must prepare before it comes, and that takes character: to do some preparation when things are going good.

You can't get most people in church until tragedy comes; they don't feel like they need it, everything is going smooth. You try to witness to someone when everything is going good. But death comes, or sickness comes, or they go to the doctor and get some terrible news -- and they begin to listen.

God tells us here that we need to learn from the little ant, which shows its character in its advance preparation. Although it is little and weak, it won't get caught by surprise.

God says that you and I are just dust. That tells us something, doesn't it? If I am weak, and I am but dust, then I had better not be operating in my own strength. If I am not prepared in advance for the days ahead, I am in for trouble. The ant prepares -- he is smarter than we are. Isn't that something? I wonder how many of those 255 who died instantly today (plane crash) were prepared.

If the ant is wise enough to prepare, and I am not, then the ant is wiser than I am. That is bad, isn't it? When a little bug is smarter and wiser than I am! The tragedy is this: an ant doesn't have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of him. I do have the Holy Spirit of God. I have more potential to be wise and develop character than any other creature on the face of the earth. I am talking now about the other preparations that we need to make.

We are not as strong as we think we are. Much of the time our thinking is just not in line with the Scripture. We might be closer to death than we think we are, too. Those 255 who boarded the airplane at Kennedy Airport: do you think that they thought just a few minutes after they boarded that plane that they would all be dead? Preparation: that is everything!

There are so many ways you can go in this thing of preparation. We need to prepare ourselves

even for this life in many ways. I wish someone had taught and preached this to me years ago. They might have, and I didn't listen enough -- I don't know.

Let's go on to the wisdom of the little coney. Verse 26 says, "The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks."

We are not studying about a lion here. We are not studying about a big bear. We are not even studying about a coyote. Matt (student), they woke me up twice last night. They had a time. It seems like they were right in the yard.

God is talking about a little coney, like a little rabbit. He is trying to teach us that there is some wisdom in what these conies do. They realize that they are unable to defend themselves, so they make the rocks their dwelling and their defense.

Could I tell you tonight that my protection is not found in my ability to fight back? I am not my own protection or defense. You know, I have lost every battle I have ever tried to fight, when I fought back -- at least when I fought in the flesh. I have never won one. And I doubt if you have, either.

My protection is in the Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. In Psalms 18:2 David said, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

If we are wise enough to understand this, we could teach others and help them. If we would have the character to practice it, we would be a lot better off. When we think about it, we know that He is our protection. But our practice is not in line with what we know to be true. We decide that we are going to defend ourselves, and fight back too much. We try to win the victory in the flesh. And I have done it -- and lost every time.

I hope I'm learning some things in this Character class also. I have not arrived. I am glad that somehow God has taught me many of these principles years ago, and I have put some of them into practice. I know they work; and that is why I can teach you with the assurance that it works.

You say, "Preacher, I am supposed to fight the good fight of faith." Yes, if you can figure out what that faith is. FAITH HAS TWO BASIC ELEMENTS. FAITH IS "**DEPENDING UPON GOD;**" AND FAITH IS "**EXPECTANCY FROM GOD.**" So if I am fighting the good fight of faith, I am fighting the fight of depending upon God, and I am fighting the fight of expectancy from God. So if I am fighting the good fight of faith, that means that instead of me defeating my enemy I am depending on God -- and I am expecting God to take care of me. I give God my attention, instead of my enemy.

Now, we all (I'll be honest with you) -- when we have conflicts -- let our enemy get our attention, and we take it off of God. We need to keep our attention on God, and say, "God, I am turning this over to you."

If He is our fortress, and we are hiding in Him, in His presence, in order for anyone to hit me or bother me, they are going to have to come through God. They are going to have to hit Him first. And I think He'll be able to defend me.

I am not qualified to protect myself. We live in a day when the devil is going to see to it that if you live for Christ, you will have some conflicts. And he works through people. They will try to get through to you. If you have standards, they will try to get to you that way. And if we are not careful, we will fight back. We would be better off to smile and say, "It is written in the Book; and if it is written, it is right!"

I can't protect myself. I am like the coney. I need to realize that victory is not based on my ability to defeat my enemy. But if I will be wise enough to have the character to flee to the Rock that is higher than I.....

Well, what about fighting the good fight of faith? What about that dependency and expectancy? Write it down: dependency and expectancy. Notice that it is not a bad fight; it is a good fight of faith. Did you ever notice how good and evil contrast each other in the Scriptures? Good and evil: there is a fight in our day of these two. There is a war going on. Evil is a destructive force. Evil is tearing America apart. And there has to be a fight between good and evil.

Our weapon is not carnal to tear down the strongholds. Our weapon is spiritual. Good is a force that builds and helps. That means that my fight is a fight that builds and helps. It has been people of faith and expectancy that have helped me to build my faith through the years.

What we need in our churches is to lean on God so much that our dependency and desire will be on Him. He can arrest people, and He can make an impression on our young people. What our young people, and all people, need is to experience the power of God in our services. That is the fight of faith. It will build up their faith.

When I was growing up, it wasn't the normal services that had much impact on my life; but, boy, when God came by, and he did (because of someone's faith) -- that is what made a difference for me. And I knew when God showed up. I believe every Christian does. God is a spirit, and His Spirit bears witness with our spirit. And it built my faith up. If I had gone on to higher schools of learning, and a professor tried to tear my faith down, he couldn't have torn down what I had experienced. Those times when God was so real, and so close, were precious times.

In order for me to fight the good fight of faith, I must overcome the flesh. The flesh wants me to fight in the flesh. For me to fight the good fight of dependency and expectancy, I have to overcome the desire of my old flesh to fight the evil, destructive fight of the flesh. I have to trust God to take care of my enemies.

God said, 'You just get to the Rock that is higher than you, and I will take care of your fight. You just keep doing right, stay close to me, stay in my presence and let me be your Protector, and I will take care of your enemy.'

Now, getting back to the reality of the coney, that little rabbit: here is a big hound after that small creature. They know that they can't outrun the dog; they will be destroyed. So where do they head? They head for the rock.

So, the wisdom of the coney is realizing that his defense is not his ability to retaliate. Could you see him turning on that big old hound sticking out his sharp teeth? Wouldn't that be foolish? His defense is in the rock.

It takes character not to fight. I think when we get older, we get some wisdom. We learn that we don't want to fight our own battles. We want to let God fight them.

Then we go to the locust. Here is the wisdom in the third creature. "The locust has no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands."

The locust doesn't have a leader. He has no king. There are two or three things about the locust that we could look at.

One thing: **they go forth.** There is a cause big enough that they all go forth. They all have in their minds to go forth. They are all involved; they all get organized without a leader. They get organized and go forth. Isn't that something? They know that there is strength in banding together.

When I used to preach that, I would preach the ant's PREPARING, the cony's PROTECTION, and the locust's COOPERATION, and the spider's ASPIRATION. I used to preach it like that years ago.

God ordained leaders, and I am not talking down leaders, but a person with character will do right without a leader. We ought to be something without a leader. We ought to get to the place where we don't have to have someone out front saying, "This is what we have to do." We shouldn't have to have that. There ought to come a time when we shouldn't have to do that.

I think Paul writing to Timothy wanted him to get to the place where he didn't need someone to ride him and try to stir him up. He told Timothy that the last days and perilous times are coming. He told him to get at it, keep at it, and not get discouraged.

Paul said, 'Stir yourself up.' I think we all ought to get to the place where we don't have to wait for someone else to inspire us. What is wrong with just getting alone with the Book, alone with God, and getting stirred up, and getting driven by principles or by a cause? We need to get a cause or principle in our lives that is bigger than we are, bigger than any earthly leader. We need to have something that is bigger than all of us, that exceeds a physical leader.

You see, the person who has character is not offended by the presence of a leader. They don't say in their heart, "I don't need a leader." They understand God's delegated authority, and they respond to it. However, they have enough character to follow a leader, but they do not require a leader. Is that confusing?

Through the years God has put me in fellowship with those kinds of people. Through the years, Bro. Pat Hutchison (former deacon and faithful member of Victory Baptist Temple) was that kind of guy. If I would have asked him to tie my shoe, he would have. I wouldn't ask him to do that, but he would have been willing. He was just the kind of guy that didn't need to be motivated -- but he had enough character that he would follow. He didn't have a problem with leadership, and he understood that.

If we don't follow a leader, we won't be a leader. To be a leader, you have to follow a leader. The man with character is going to do right and obey God. He is going to keep moving in the right direction, even if there is no leadership present. That is character.

Sometimes young people will say, "Why don't you treat me like an adult? Why do you treat me like a child? Don't you trust me?"

I want to say, "Why don't you act like an adult? When you start acting like an adult, then someone won't have to stand over you. If they don't have to stand over you, maybe they won't. If a child gets to where you can trust him, you don't have to try to warn him at every move because you know he can be trusted. But until you develop enough character to where you don't require authority and a leader, you must be under leadership and authority." That is what you have to tell them.

The Bible says, 'The locust is a little nuisance of a bug without a leader, king, or authority over him to rally him to do what he should.' Really, their rallying point is truth, not personality. They rally to a principle. God has put an instinct in them, a principle, that they rally to.

Most people rally to personalities, not principles. The Bible tells the story about David coming to

the battlefield when he was just a lad. He came down there on his own. He was not really down there on his own, although his brothers thought he was. He was actually sent down there by his father with cheese and bread for his brothers in the army. And when David came and saw what was going on, the Philistine giant was crying out his threatening. David said, 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine down there making fun of God? Why doesn't somebody do something?'

There is a principle here: just a lad, but he wanted to do something. Then he went on to make that famous statement, "Is there not a cause?"

His brothers, of course, said, 'Boy, shut up! Go back home and tend to those little sheep.'

But David said, "Is there not a cause?"

Most church people don't have enough passion about a cause to continue to work at it -- to see it through. David didn't have much in the realm of leadership. Nobody was encouraging him. He didn't have any leader influencing him. He had no one motivating him. In fact, I didn't see anything that was helping him, to motivate him. But he had something within him. David had built some character, and God knew that. That is why he chose him to be a king. David had something in him bigger than human leadership. He was responding to a need and to a cause.

The locusts went forth, all of them, by bands. IT IS KIND OF SAD, ISN'T IT, THAT THE LOCUSTS CAN GET TOGETHER FOR THEIR CAUSE, BUT THE AVERAGE BAPTIST CHURCH CAN'T BAND TOGETHER FOR AN ETERNAL CAUSE. It is because of the lack of wisdom and character. You talk about foolishness. When Christian people let anything deter them from the cause of Christ, and carrying out the Gospel, trying to get people saved. That is a lack of wisdom, isn't it?

A bug does right without a leader -- a little old bug, a locust -- and here we have the Bible, and in most cases have God's ordained leadership. Yet the little old bug: he doesn't have a Bible; he doesn't have leadership; but they band together. That is why God says, 'Let me show you some things that are small, but they are extremely wise.' That is the wisdom of the locust.

We might ask the question, "What is it that motivates me?"

*I Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the **WORK** of the Lord..." We are not supposed to abound in the results. Most people want to abound in the results of something. I have spent too much of my life wanting to abound in the results -- and if I didn't get the results I thought I ought to get, I couldn't abound. Do you see what I mean? We are supposed to abound in the work of the Lord and leave the results to Him. If we can get to that place, it will be easier for us to abound. I want to abound in the **work** of the Lord -- and, I'll be honest with you, I wish there were more results. But a lot of things must be taken into account for what we call results. And what man might call "results" God doesn't call "results" at all.*

"Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding IN the work...." We can be driven by principle, by a cause, and if no one stands with us we can still be driven. And that is called "Christianity." Christianity is when we don't have to have a whole group with us; we can stand, if we have to, all alone. But it sure helps out when we have a whole lot of people standing with us.

*Then, there is the spider: **SHE TAKES HOLD WITH HER HANDS (V. 28) AND IS IN KINGS' PALACES.** There are a couple of things I would like to say about the spider. One is: I like where the spider chooses to end up at. I like where the spider chooses to build.*

Stop and realize: the spider is not welcome anywhere. They're not welcome in a cabin, or in the

palace, either one. He is an intruder anywhere he goes; he is not welcome. If you are going to be an intruder, you might as well set your sights high.

I like where the spider builds. I like the **aspiration** of a climber. And I think the outstanding characteristic of the spider is, its **perseverance**. Have you ever noticed: if you take a broom and knock down a spider web, if you don't get the spider, the next day you will have another one there. It might not be quite as big, but you'll get ready to knock it down again. And then, the next day it will be the same thing: if you don't get the spider, that rascal will be back again. And it will always be in the corner, as high as it can go.

What does that say to me? I ought to build something. If someone tears it down, I ought to build it again. If they come along and tear it down, I ought to build it again.

We don't fail until we quit. Just keep on building. It doesn't matter how big it gets, just keep building. Persevere. It doesn't matter if it doesn't get very big, just keep working on the building, doing the best you can.

The truest test of a man's character is what it takes to stop him. And when I say man, I am talking about mankind. What it takes to stop us.....

I WOULD HATE TO THINK THAT AN UGLY OLD SPIDER HAS MORE CHARACTER THAN I DO. God intended for me to persevere. If the devil gets me off track, I am not supposed to give up. I am supposed to get up and try again. If I fail again, I am supposed to try again, and again, and again..... The wisdom of character is seen in these little creatures.

The ant teaches the vital importance of preparation, which is so necessary in everything in life. We fail because we don't prepare.

The coney encourages us to understand that our protection is not in being strong enough to defend ourselves, but in being wise enough to flee to the Rock of God.

Anybody who has lived as long as many of us have lived, knows that when you are younger you think you can handle any situation. But then you realize you can't. When it comes to dealing with people, you can't. Boy, you would like to control people -- it just comes natural. You think you know what is best in every situation. But you can't -- and if you are not careful, it will just drive you mad. You must go to the Lord, and turn it over to Him.; flee to the Rock.

I'm not talking about, for instance, when you are rearing children. You must do some things. But even then, any parent can bang, bang, bang on them. And it takes that, and I believe in that. But it takes more than that. I will guarantee you, the power of God can do more in a child's life.

I will never forget (they are not here anymore), the R_____ family. He had led the singing for us for years. They were having trouble with their oldest daughter. They came to me, and I said, "Have you ever knelt and prayed and cried with her? That is something that is serious enough to do." To me, it is serious enough just to get God in on it. When He gets in on it, He is able to do some things.

THE LOCUSTS ARE DRIVEN AND UNITED BY PRINCIPLES, NOT PERSONALITIES. He teaches us that, even in the absence of a good leader, we should still be motivated and united to a cause to keep doing right. We shouldn't have to have a leader to do right. Now, it would be a blessing to have a good leader -- that would be a help, and God set it up that way -- but it shouldn't be necessary.

And finally, THE SPIDER TEACHES US THE VALUE OF PERSEVERANCE AND ASPIRATION. Keep climbing just as high as you can get. Don't be satisfied. Hey! The view is better on the mountain top. We spend too much time in the valley.

This pops to my mind: An old fellow lived at the foot of a mountain for years, a tremendous mountain, and he had never climbed it. A friend came by and asked him one day, "Have you ever been to the top of that mountain."

He answered, "No."

The friend said, "Let me take you to the top of the mountain."

He took the old gentleman up the mountain and got him all the way to the top. He looked out over the scenery, tears coursed down his cheeks, and he said, "Just think! I almost lived and died without seeing the view from the mountain."

God said that these creatures are small, but they are very wise.

LECTURE #10

HUMILITY

*This lesson will be on another great character subject: **HUMILITY**. We are going to be studying one of the greatest problems that humans have: **PRIDE**. We will be dealing with that here.*

Romans 12:3 says, "For I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Here we find that we (Christians) are warned not to think too highly of ourselves, not to get inflated egos. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Pride was the problem that Lucifer had, the fallen angel. It was a problem that Eve also had. We could go on and on down a long list of those who were led to a fall by pride. The human race fell because of pride. The fruit that tempted Eve was a fruit to be "desired to make one wise." The devil used her pride. He used her flesh, her ego. And he used it against her.

The devil wants us to think we are somebody, that we are really something. He wants us to think that we are doing better than what we are. When we think we are doing really good, and think we are above sinning, we need to beware. We think we are out of danger when we think that we are above temptation, then we have to beware. That is when we are in the worst position to be tempted.

That happens in many areas. The Lord warned about us watching for His return. He said that He would come in an hour when we think not. In 1 Corinthians 10:12 it says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall."

We need to really think honestly about ourselves, have an honest heart. God says that we are just dust; we are frail beings. He said that since we are so wicked we are prone to wander. The Bible says we have a "wicked" heart that will "deceive" us. The heart is desperately wicked, and we don't even know it -- Jeremiah 17:9.

All this is rather scary, isn't it? Often we operate our lives on emotion, but we cannot trust our hearts, and we had better not trust our emotions. Now, I like emotions, and I like feelings. Anybody would be a fool not to want to feel good, happy, and high. But I'll tell you what, you cannot trust even those feelings.

The only man in the Bible who ever wanted to feel anything to decide whether it was right or wrong was Isaac. And he was deceived by his feelings. He said to Jacob, thinking it was Esau, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau, or not." And he was deceived by feelings.

A preacher friend told me about going to Israel and Egypt on a tour. I've never been to Egypt. The tour I took to Israel in 1985 didn't go to Egypt. (We have all heard about the pyramids.) My friend said, "When I was in Cairo for the very first time, when we arrived at the hotel it was after dark. The next

morning, "he said, "I looked out the window and I saw the pyramid. It was about a mile away, but it was so huge that it looked real close."

He continued, "After breakfast we started walking in the direction of the pyramid. The closer we got, the bigger and bigger it was. From the hotel it looked real large, but you could see some scenery around it; but when you got closer you couldn't see anything but the pyramid. The closer I got to it, the more overwhelming it became." He went on, "When I got right up to it, it was all I could see. It occupied my entire view. The closer I got the bigger it became, and the smaller and more insignificant I was."

I never will forget the first time I went to St. Louis. I was just a kid. One of my older sisters was there and I went up to spend a few days with her. We rode a streetcar downtown St. Louis, and I never will forget. Here I was: just a kid out of the country. I never will forget looking up to those huge buildings. I would look up to them, and it seemed like I was a little ant compared to those buildings.

But I have had a similar experience in my Christian life. The closer I get to God, the less I think of myself. When you compare perfection with imperfection, you see a lot of things more closely. The more clearly you can examine perfection, the more faults you will see with imperfection.

If a person never sees perfection, he will never really understand the defects of imperfection. It is as true that the farther we remain from God's perfection, the more likely we are to think we are doing pretty well. There is a principle here, a very simple one, but it is very profound.

God doesn't tell me to find the town drunk and compare myself to him. I might look pretty good to him. To have a true evaluation of myself, I need to compare myself to the perfect Son of God. And then I will see; I will be comparing myself to the true goal. The main reason people don't walk down an aisle and weep on the altar is, they are too far from God to realize that they are bad enough and need it. And I think sometimes that they might think, "Why are those others using that altar all the time?"

In most cases, those who are using the altar all the time are close enough to God to see their need, where those who never use an altar are so far away from God that they don't ever see the need. They don't even know what a Christian ought to be. They never feel the need; they never feel how imperfect and tainted with sin they are. Their relationship to God has drifted too far away to see how perfect He is, and how undone they are.

The closer we get to God, the more we understand the need to get on our faces and get right with God. There have been times in my life when I really thought I was doing pretty good. I'll be honest with you. And you have probably experienced the same thing: times when you think, "I am doing pretty good."

I look back on those times and, honestly, I wasn't doing near as good as I thought I was doing. In fact, I was cold and indifferent and I thought I was doing pretty good. The best Christian in the room here doesn't think he or she is the best Christian.

Some of you might remember old Brother Shearer; he died in the 1980's. He was an old Nazarene preacher who came to church and joined here at Victory. He was a very humble man. He prayed as though he was the worst sinner around. I think I understood it some then, but I think I understand more closely now. He lived really close to the Lord. He would set his alarm clock for 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the morning to get up and pray. I'll be honest with you, I have to admit that I am not that spiritual.

When a person doesn't have that heart and attitude, it is isn't because they are so close to God. It is because they are too far away to realize their need. The closer you get to the Lord, the smaller you

look to yourself.

There have been times in my life when I really thought I was doing pretty well, but I wasn't. The apostle Paul, being the great Christian that he was, had an experience similar to what we are talking about. When he wrote Romans 11:13 he said, "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles: I magnify my office." He was proud of his office; he lifted up his office.

It seemed as though at that point in his life Paul, though a great Christian, might have had a measure of spiritual pride -- maybe not, but it just seems the possibility is there. His attitude seemed a little different than it did later.

In Jeremiah 45:5 we read this statement, "And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not."

A few years after Paul made that statement in Romans 11:3, he wrote the epistle to the church at Philippi. In the third chapter, verse thirteen, he said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do...." He considered himself an incomplete Christian. He realized that he had not arrived. He had room to grow. He took inventory of his life, and knew that he had not arrived yet.

A couple of years later, Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus and said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given; that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). That statement is an impossibility in English. You cannot be "less than the least." But he was trying to emphasize something; he was saying that he was lower than the lowest, less than the least.

That was a big step down, wasn't it. Actually, it was a big step up because it was a big step closer to God. And the reality of his own unworthiness was settling in upon him. I think the apostle Paul was a very humble man. The more we realize our imperfections and our insufficiencies, the better shape we are in.

If you really want to see the ultimate realization that Paul came to, in I Timothy 1:15 he said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I chief." Now he has a realistic view of himself. He saw himself, how insufficient he was.

The rich young ruler came running to Jesus, fell down before Him, and said, 'Good Master, what can I do to get to heaven?'

Then Jesus asked him, 'Why do you call me good? There is none good, but God.' What He was saying was that if He wasn't God, He wasn't good.

In Romans it says, "There is none righteous, no not one." We are told in that chapter that we have all gone out of the way; our mouth is an open grave.

Paul's realization didn't give him a lack of confidence. Sometimes this false humility that some have, and sometimes we do try to hide behind a false humility, can cause a lack of confidence. Paul didn't have lack of confidence in God; it didn't cause him to resign the ministry. It made him more powerful in the ministry, because he realized where his sufficiency came from. He wasn't about to go around doing the work of the Lord in his own strength, his own wisdom, his own sufficiency.

Paul was a great intellectual man. His credentials were out of this world. But he would say, 'I haven't come to you in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the power of God.'

The closer he got to God, the smaller he looked to himself, until finally God was all that he could see.

I don't care how great a man thinks he is -- there have been many great men fall, multitudes of them. God got along without them before they came on the scene, and He will get along without them after they are gone. What makes a person great is the fact that he has humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and God is working through that individual. And He can do great things with anybody.

If I get sidetracked, I chase rabbits quite a bit, but I never will forget: Tom Malone told his people that they were going to survey the whole area one Sunday afternoon. He said that one old boy came out wearing a cap, and he couldn't read a lick. He said he wanted to go out, so Bro. Malone gave him some cards. He went out, and he came back with all the cards filled out.

Bro. Malone said he walked up to him and said, "How did you do it?"

He said, "I just walked up to them and gave them a card, and asked them if they wouldn't sign their name,...."

He said the same old boy had a brother that lived in another area, quite a distance away. This simple boy had a burden for him. He had such a burden to lead him to the Lord, so he went to visit him, and led him to the Lord.

Bro. Malone said, "I was curious to know how he did it."

He said that he just turned to John 3:16, pointed to it, and told his brother to read it. The brother read it, and he got saved. Here is a young man who couldn't even read, but was able to lead people to the Lord.

I heard of an old boy who couldn't even talk; he was deaf and dumb. He would stand outside the church. There was a cross on the top of the building. It was pretty close to a thoroughfare. He would stand out there and point to that cross, then he would point to his heart. Then he would point to that cross again. He ended up leading several people to the Lord.

There is something bigger than you and me, something bigger than our churches and our ministries and our plans and our dreams. There is Almighty God! And the smaller we become to ourselves, the more room God has to work in our lives. The more empty we are of self, the more full we will be of God.

Humility: by the way, HUMILITY IS NOT A POOR SELF IMAGE. Some folks have a poor self image and blame it on their so-called humility. They use it as an excuse not to serve God. That is not humility; that is a cop-out.

I believe that if a person is saved, God can use whatever ability they have. We are supposed to study to show ourselves approved unto God, "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (II Tim. 2:15). We need to do the best that we can, but we shouldn't use the old flesh as an excuse not to let God use our lives. Everybody's flesh is in the same state as yours. No one feels sufficient when it comes to serving God.

"Somebody else can do that job better than me." Did you ever hear that in church? "I can't do it!" Hey! And it is usually someone who may not have the ability that someone else has, but who has died to self, who gets the job done.

The first test of a great person is their humility. God wants to use us as instruments in His hands. One writer said that He wants to use us like a pipeline, to work through us, that we might work in the lives of others. A pipe is empty until something fills it.

And I'll be honest with you: we are all pretty empty on our own -- though we might not think we are -- until He fills us! But God will fill me and use me and give through me what others need, if I will just make myself available.

I am really impressed with Isaiah, the Old Testament evangelist. In chapter six of his book, he came into contact with the holy presence of God in the temple in the year that King Uzziah died. He came to the conclusion after he saw God, holy and high and lifted up on His throne, and the presence of God filled the temple -- he came to this conclusion, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." That was his conclusion.

He said, in essence, 'I see myself; I see how wicked and vile and worthless I am, because I have seen God.'

Wait a minute! We are talking about a great statement of a great prophet. Isaiah wasn't that wicked in our eyes. He fellowshiped with the king. Uzziah was his hero. But the closer he got to the reality of God's holiness the less he thought of himself.

If God came down in the average Sunday morning service in the average Baptist church with His holiness and glory, you would see some broken hearts. If we could see in our day, with all the unholy living and all the carnality and all the going through the play thing of trying to serve God -- there would be a revival take place. But the devil is so busy blinding the eyes and raping the mind. He is going to try to keep God hidden.

The more aware we become of who Jesus is, and what He came to do, the less we will be in our own sight. John the Baptist said (John 1:27), "He it is who coming after me....whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

John the Baptist was hailed by the Jewish people as one of the greatest prophets in history. And Jesus said about him, "Among them that are born of women, there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). But John said, 'I am not worthy,' when Jesus came to him to be baptized of him.

While he was a great preacher and a great leader in his own right, he still insisted that Christ "must increase, and I must decrease."

THE HUMBLE PERSON HAS NO GRUDGES. *He has nothing to have grudges about, because he sees himself as more lowly than anyone else could ever treat him and see him. A few years ago I had a fellow call me, and he said, "I want you to forgive me. I have talked bad about you."*

I said, "Well, that's no problem. I forgive you for that."

I said, "If you would have called me before you had started talking bad about me, I could have given you plenty of things to say -- lots of ammunition." I just felt led to say it. And I felt that way.

Andrew Murray said, "THE HUMBLE MAN FEELS NO ENVY OR JEALOUSY." The humble man can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised while he is forgotten. Why? Because the humble man doesn't feel that he deserves any praise or recognition. He doesn't feel slighted. He doesn't serve God for recognition. If we can get passed the point where we

have to be patted on the back -- and that is real Christian character -- we will be humble and usable.

In fact, we worry far too much about what people think about us. Someone said that we'll find out that they weren't even thinking of us at all. Remember, the closer we get to Jesus Christ, the smaller we are and the more vile we will look in our own eyes -- and the greater, the more wonderful, the more powerful God seems to us. No one has ever been in the presence of God, but what they saw the glory of God. And when a person sees the glory of God, you won't have to worry about the response. It will be right!

Paul said, "So then neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase," as he talked to that church that was so carnal (Corinth). And they were followers of men. Some liked Paul, some liked Appollos, some liked Cephas, etc..

The apostle said, "Who is Paul? Who is Appollos?...but servants of God." One plants, the other waters, but it is God who gives the increase. It is God who gives life to everything. We can't give life.

But Paul didn't stop planting because he couldn't give life. And he didn't stop watering because he couldn't give life. We know that we can't save people. We know that God will have to do it; and we must do what we can do. Paul didn't say, "Well, I am nothing. I can't do it. God will have to take care of it all."

No, he said, 'I am nothing, and Appollos is nothing, but we still plant the seed of the Gospel. We will still do what we are commanded to do.'

We live in a day, in a generation of folks who have inflated egos. We live in an egotistical day. It seems like just about everyone wants to demand their rights. Young people start very young -- boy, they have their rights. They don't want anybody telling them what to do. And the only right that we really have is to die and spend eternity in Hell. Everything that is better comes to us by the grace of God, which we don't even deserve.

There is a frightening majority in our day who are willing to sit in judgment of Almighty God when everything doesn't just go their way. I heard of a young man whose dad had an accident. He was backslidden, and he was blaming God for it. "Why did God let this happen to me? Why did God do this? If God is loving, why does He allow this?" He was questioning the holiness of God, the justice and love of God. Do you know why they do that? They have drifted so far away from God that they feel like they have the right to question God.

I went home one night and turned on the Gaithers -- they had one of those singings. I enjoy most of their singing. But there were some statements made on there similar to that. "When I get to Heaven," one person said, "I am going to question God on that. God and I are going to have a little talk on that." Can you imagine such an attitude?

Romans 9:20 says, "Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"

The story is told of Samuel Morris, a very devout Christian missionary, who came back to the United States to attend the university. He was asked by the school president, "Which room would you like in the dormitory? We want to honor you and we want you to look them all over and we'll give you the choice room."

They offered to let him walk around the building and choose, but he didn't do it. When the president came back to enquire about his choice, Morris said, "If there is a room nobody else wants, I'll

take that room."

The college president turned and walked away in tears and said in his own heart, "I sure wonder if I could have been willing to do that."

A good question to ask this class would be, "How close are we to God?" I can tell you how you can measure it: the way you will see yourself will determine it to a great extent. If you see yourself as a pretty good Christian, it is because you have drifted far from the presence of Christ. And many of us are guilty.

In Colossian 3:12 it says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you so also do ye."

The thought there is: if the King of kings and Lord of lords could forgive me and wipe my slate clean, I ought to be able to forgive anyone of anything they have ever done against me.

The closer I get to the perfect and holy God, the less I think of me and the smaller I look to me. How big are we in our own eyes? In I Samuel 15 God used Samuel the prophet to remind King Saul of something. He made the statement to him, "When thou wast little in thine own sight, was thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?" When he was small in his own sight, when he realized he was nothing and couldn't do it on his own, then God said, 'I am everything; I will do it through you.'

But the day came when Saul became puffed up in pride, thinking he was something. He began to take matters into his own hands, and disobey the commands of God. Then Samuel had to come back and give him this tragic report, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected thee from being king over Israel."

When he was small in his own eyes, he was greatly used of God; but when he got too big in his own eyes, God put him on the shelf.

Paul was afraid of that -- being put on the shelf.

Some people have a good beginning, but a tragic ending, as in the life of Saul. More people have been ruined by success than you can shake a stick at. A lot of people can't stand success. They can stand failure a lot better than success. When God gives an accomplishment through them, it inflates their ego -- and I guess that is a warning to us all.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT THE BEGINNING OF GREATNESS IS TO BE LITTLE. THE INCREASE OF GREATNESS IS TO BE LESS. AND THE PERFECTION OF GREATNESS IS TO BE NOTHING.

A young Christian came to a man of God who had gained the wisdom of many years by walking with God; and he asked, "What do you consider to be the three most necessary Christian virtues for God to use a person?"

The old saint of God looked at him and replied, "Here they are. The first is HUMILITY. The second is HUMILITY. The third is HUMILITY."

Too few are big enough to become small enough to be used of God. Humility always comes before honor in the Bible. We shouldn't try to be somebody. Let God use us as an instrument to make Him somebody in the eyes of others. That is what it is all about.

We ought to want to make Him famous. If a church -- the people in it -- would just want to make God famous in everything we do, giving Him the honor and glory, it would make a difference.

Years ago there was a man in London who had the opportunity to hear two great preachers of that day. When he went to hear the first one, he was moved by the speaking ability; how smooth and how dramatic the preacher was. He walked away saying, "What a preacher!"

He went to hear the second one: Charles Spurgeon. After hearing him pour out his soul -- because Spurgeon always read the text and, as he said, "I always make a beeline to Jesus" -- he left saying, "What a Savior!"

The Bible says, "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus..." It wouldn't have been robbery for Jesus to be equal with God, but He "took upon Himself no reputation." He wasn't any big-shot, was He! In fact, He was so meek and humble that He didn't even have a place to lay His head.

God highly exalted Him. This is a Bible principle: when we humble ourselves, He will exalt us in due time. When we exalt ourselves, we will be abased. But the closer we get to God, and the more clearly we see Him, the more accurately we will see ourselves.

The song writer said, "When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of Glory died, My riches gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride."

In closing, the truth is: most Christians don't visit the altar very often, and the cause could be that they are not close enough to God to even see that they have a need. They don't see their own sinfulness, and their weakness and powerlessness. It is because of blindness and drifting away from God -- that was Samson's problem. He was a Nazarite from his birth; God empowered him, and he had supernatural power.

I know some of the modern scholars say that he was a big giant of a man, but that can't be true. The Philistines wouldn't have had to ask where his strength was and try to get Delilah to learn the secret of his strength if he were ten feet tall and had muscles bigger than mine. He had supernatural power, but there came a time when pride took it away from him.

He would kid with them, and tease with Delilah, and get up and shake himself as at other times, and pick up something and slay a bunch of those Philistines, the enemies of God. However, he had too much pride and he told her all his heart. His blindness took him away from God. That was his problem. And then he didn't know God had departed from him. He thought he still had it. But they blinded him -- punched out his eyes -- and bound him. Then they took him down and had him perform the duty of a donkey: grind at the mill.

Humility is a natural outcome of drawing near to God. Every time we draw near to God we get humble. The Bible says that if we will draw near to God, He will draw near to us. And the closer we draw to God, the greater we become in God's sight. The closer we get to Him, the more humble we get, and the more He occupies our vision. When we get close enough to him, like the preacher of the pyramids, all we can see is Him. We won't see anything else.

Humility! God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

LECTURE #11

WHEN STRENGTH BECOMES WEAKNESS

We are going to study in this lesson the fact that OUR STRENGTH CAN BECOME OUR WEAKNESS. That sounds a little strange, doesn't it. But we will consider that thought.

In I Corinthians chapter 10 the Apostle Paul reminds the church at Corinth about God's deliverance of the children of Israel out of bondage. He said in verse 1, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ....Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.....Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

Verses 12 and 13 contain our thought for tonight: when our strength can become our weakness. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

God gives a warning here to those of us who might be doing well in our Christian lives -- and I think we might all fall under that category. We seem to be maturing, and doing better than a lot of other Christians are doing, maybe. God said not to let yourself get too proud, and don't think you have arrived, or it will be your downfall.

I don't know whether you have ever noticed how many Bible characters had an outstanding characteristic in their lives. Then, in the very area in which they were known for being strong, that is where Satan attacked them and they fell.

For instance, Abraham: I know we have a lot of respect for Abraham, for he was known for his great faith. Hebrews 11 says that "by faith Abraham.....looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

The Bible talks about the faith of Abraham, even in the New Testament. In Romans four it talks about how great faith Abraham had. But there were at least two times in his life when he sinned because of a LACK of faith -- because of his unbelief, and failing to trust God. In Genesis he lied to Pharaoh because he did not believe that God would give him the protection that he needed. He told his wife to tell the Pharaoh that she was his sister. That was a half truth, which happens to be a lie. It is true that Abraham's father and Sarah's father was the same man, but their mothers were different women.

Abraham had enough faith to trust God in leaving Ur of the Chaldees, but he didn't have enough faith to take care of him in the midst of adversity. He said to his wife, 'When they see how beautiful you are, they will want to kill me and take you.' That sounds like a lack of faith, doesn't it? It sounds like some fear is creeping in there.

But Abraham's outstanding trait in his life was that he was a man of great faith. Yet he fell in the area of unbelief and doubt and fear. Fear is always a result of unbelief. Fear is a lack of faith; it is a lack of taking God at His word, not being willing to submit everything into God's hands, knowing that He will do His best.

Abraham didn't only do it once; he did it twice. In Genesis 12 he lied to Pharaoh; in Genesis 20 he lied to the king Abimelech. That was twenty years later; he was guilty of the same sin. He was guilty of trying to protect himself by telling a lie.

Now, Abraham was a friend of God. He had great faith in trusting God. In Hebrews 11 it mentions that he was one of the heroes of faith. But in this area he fumbled the ball. The only thing really stated in the Scripture had to do with his lack of trusting God, and lying to protect himself instead of telling the truth and trusting God. That is the only area in which the Bible mentions that Abraham did wrong in such a prominent way.

Moses was known as a very mild-mannered man. Other than the Lord Jesus, he was probably the meekest man who ever lived. Now, meekness is not weakness. Gentleness is not weakness.

Actually, Moses' strength was his meekness. MEEKNESS IS STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL. Yet when he stumbled and messed up, it was because of this one time, at least; he let his temper get away from him. And here we see the meekest man that ever lived take a rod and say, 'Come on, you rebels, must I fetch you water out of a rock?' He smote the rock a second time, and disobeyed God because of anger.

In I Corinthians 10 we found out that Moses got into trouble. The Bible says that the rock that followed them, out of which they received water, was Christ. And Christ was to only be smitten one time for the sins of the world forever.

Moses was to smite the rock one time, and after that he was to speak to the rock. And Moses got into great trouble because of it. Jesus Christ was smitten on Calvary one time, never to be smitten again; and now, we just have to call on Him and ask Him for that water of life. Moses, in a fit of temper, smote the rock twice, destroying one of God's pictures of the Savior. And because of that he did not have the privilege of going across into the promised land.

The promised land was not a picture of Heaven. Canaan is not a picture of Heaven. It is a picture of the blessings of being in the perfect will of God and having victory. There are no battles to be fought in Heaven; yet in Canaan they still had battles. They had to fight the giants.

The great strength of Moses was his meekness; but his strength here became his weakness.

David, the Bible says in Acts 13, was "a man after God's own heart." One of his outstanding characteristics or traits was his purity of heart and life, at least in his early days. He sat out on the hillside playing his harp and singing songs to God. And he had a character that was strong. His great strength was in his purity of heart. But in the time of weakness he was not close to God, and he fell into sin and adultery.

Solomon was known as a wise and unselfish king. You can read in II Chronicles 1:10-12 and hear him pray and ask God for wisdom that he might guide the people aright. He didn't pray for money. He didn't pray for power. He didn't pray for prestige. He didn't pray to conquer his enemies. When you read that you find God commending him because he prayed unselfishly. And God said, 'Because you have not asked for riches and honor, but you have asked for wisdom, I am going to give you wisdom.'

But I am also giving you the things that you didn't ask for. I am going to give you wisdom; I am also going to give you riches.'

Solomon started out with a very tender heart toward God. He started out as a wise and unselfish king. But we find after some time that he subjected himself to ungodly influences in his life. He married heathen women who worshiped false gods. He yoked up then with heathen nations. Before long he became a man who was selfish and greedy. The Bible says he had three-hundred wives and seven-hundred concubines. Boy, I feel sorry for that guy! Can you imagine all those nylons hanging in the bathroom? Can you imagine dealing with a thousand women? Sorry, ladies!

Solomon got greedy, didn't he, in his old age. He did some very foolish things. His strength of unselfishness got him into trouble. His strength of unselfish leadership became his weakness because he relaxed. The wisest man in the world made some very unwise choices later in life. The very area in which he was strong became the area in which he was the weakest.

Elijah, the great prophet, was a great man. One thing that stands out about Elijah was that he was a very courageous man. You have to be impressed with his courage. He stood toe to toe with King Ahab and said, 'God is going to send a drought into the land at my word. It is going to dry up as a result of your sin.' It's in I Kings; I believe it's chapter 17 and 18, where you find these events unfolding.

Ahab came to him after the drought and said, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"

And Elijah said, 'No. You are the one troubling Israel: you and all your wicked sin!' He actually talked to the king like that.

Then, Elijah had a great stand-off with eight-hundred-fifty false prophets; and it seems to me like he slew all of them. All of them were killed. His odds were eight-hundred-fifty to one, but he never blinked an eye at the odds.

You see, these men worshiped Baal, the sun god, the god of fire. So what did Elijah say? They had a discussion and he said, 'Let's prove whose God is real!' I think that is where he said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions...'

He said, "The God who answers by fire, let Him be God." Now, fire was the outstanding characteristic of their false god. But after he defeated the prophets of Baal, he got scared.

I read the story. You know how they built their altars, put the sacrifices on them -- it was amusing; you ought to read it. The false prophets prayed all morning long until well into the afternoon. They even cut themselves until their blood gushed out on the altar. And Elijah just stood back -- can you imagine one man standing against all these prophets? And he would say something like, 'Your god may be on a journey and hasn't got back yet. Or, he might be asleep. Why don't you cry out louder and see if you can wake him up.'

And then when they got through he cried unto the true and living God, and fire came down. Prior to that he told them to pour four barrels of water on the sacrifice. He had dug a trench around the altar and the water filled the trench. And then he prayed, and God responded. He came down in fire and consumed the sacrifice on the altar.

But do you know what happened after that? You would think that a courageous prophet like that can stand up to anything. What would he be afraid of? But he met a woman, Jezebel, after that -- I think the next day or two. And King Ahab went home and told Queen Jezebel what had happened. And when Elijah met her, she said, 'If you are not dead like all my prophets by tomorrow, my name is not

Jezebel.’ (And, by the way, they were her prophets.)

After standing alone with eight-hundred-fifty men, false prophets, he turned and ran from one woman. His strength actually became his weakness.

You get into the New Testament and study Simon Peter. One of his outstanding traits was his boldness in speaking for the Lord. Sometimes he might have been a little bit too fast in speaking. Most Christians are intimidated in our day, and I suppose we all are to some extent. We just don’t speak out like we should.

The Bible says in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses....”

Then in Acts 4:31 it says, “And when they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Not with tongues... They were filled with the Holy Ghost and, the Charismatic would say, the evidence was that they spoke with tongues. No, the Bible says they “spake the word of God with boldness.”

I believe the reason we get intimidated out soul winning is because we don’t have enough of the Holy Ghost on us. Because the Holy Spirit gives boldness. That is why, if you have had any experience preaching, when you get to preaching and God gets on you, you have boldness. Holy boldness comes from the Holy Spirit.

Peter had that boldness for witnessing. He was a spokesman for the twelve. And when Jesus asked, as He came off the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, “Whom do men say that I am?”

Peter was the one who answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.” And Jesus was happy with that.

Jesus said, ‘Peter, you didn’t get this out of a book. Man didn’t tell you this. My Father which is in Heaven revealed it to you.’

Then He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

Peter was the one who said to the Lord, ‘Though all men forsake thee, yet I will never forsake thee.’

Do you remember that occasion when he tried to stay true to his word and he cut off a soldier’s ear? It is kind of strange, though, that the fellow who was the chief spokesman, known for his boldness, came to the place where he cursed and swore and denied the Lord. Strange!

The first thing he did after he fled and followed Jesus afar off was to gather himself with the enemies, and warm his hands by their fire. Listen: when a person starts warming, fellowshipping, with the enemies of the cross -- I don’t care who they are -- they feel some obligation to keep their mouths shut when they should be opening them up. When you get on their turf, it will take some holy boldness; you don’t want to upset anybody.

A little maid came by and said, ‘Oh, you are one of them.’

Peter said, ‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’ He tried to play dumb.

Another came up and said, 'You are one of them.' And the Bible says that he denied it with an oath that time. He didn't play dumb that time.

Finally, a third one came by and said, 'Your speech betrays you. You are a Galilean. Surely you are one of them.' Then he cursed and swore and denied the Lord. Who would have ever thought? He actually denied him all three times, because the Lord said he would.

Drawing the picture, then bringing it in to how it applies to us today: Satan will attack you and I in our strong areas. You say, 'I thought he would attack in the weak areas.'

Well, he might attack there too. But let me expound on the reason he attacks us on the strong areas. We looked at six Bible characters, and all of them heroes in their own rights of the faith. And I am not trying to say that they weren't great Christians. I am not trying to put them down. I am just saying that they didn't have great strength that we would want to follow at those points in their lives. We would want to take a lesson from them.

EVEN GREAT CHRISTIANS ARE IN DANGER OF FALLING INTO SIN; in fact, maybe in greater danger than just mediocre Christians. And it is not their weak areas that really gets them. It is the strong areas.

There are men in this country who are known for being great in some areas. And I have known some of them. I have lived long enough to know some who had great convictions on separation, for instance. And that is where Satan attacked them.

Sometimes he attacks them through their families. The first thing you know, they fail there. They no longer hold up the standards. I have known great men, great people, who were soul winners, and Satan will attack them there. And the first thing you know, they are almost Calvinistic in their belief. They are now almost against going out soul winning. They no longer try to get out and win the lost.

Let me say this: the Bible says, "Go..." I like to see them come to church where they can be preached to, too. But if you can't get them into church, what are you going to do? You are going to have to preach to them out there. You have to go where they are.

There have been great prayer warriors; then they let down. There is nothing that gives the devil more joy and glee than to topple us in the area in which we have been known to be strong. We can understand that with national heroes, for instance, where they have developed a strong leadership in some areas. They have many people who look up to them in those areas. Then when Satan is able to topple them in that strong area, it really hurts a lot of people. Because there have been people who have respected them because they were strong in those areas; then it's gone.

Whatever is my strength is the area in which I am a leader. You have to be strong to be a leader. Anyone who has enough strength in any area is a leader in that area. You will be a leader if you are strong enough. You might not necessarily have a public position, but you will be a leader if you are strong. You can't help it. You will speak out; you will act out. You will become a leader.

That is why the devil likes to attack us in our strong points, where we are really leaders. When he knocks us down there, it destroys our influence for good. No one has a lot of influence in their weak points. We have an influence in our strong points.

If I am known for purity and I fall into impurity, it destroys my influence to promote purity. I won't promote it any longer; I can't. Do you see what I mean?

Soul winning, or anything else; it is the same thing. I can't promote soul winning if I am not out there trying to win souls. It just won't happen.

WHEN YOUR STRENGTH BECOMES YOUR WEAKNESS IT PUTS A QUESTION MARK IN EVERYONE ELSE'S MIND WHOM YOU HAVE INFLUENCED ALREADY IN YOUR LIFE. *I will guarantee you: I could give you personal references to that. And this robs God of His glory, that is due Him, because He is the one who gave you that certain strength and put that conviction there. The Holy Ghost of God did it. Then when you lose it, it is God who gets the black eye. It is always the cause of Christ!*

How many know someone in leadership who was strong, and they had many folks looking up to them, and rallied behind them from a Biblical standpoint (not getting on a tangent); and when they lost that, it caused a lot of people to fall? And it robbed God of the glory that was due Him.

When you fall in that area you rob God of the glory He intended to get out of your strong point. God gets glory out of our strength, not out of our weakness. God doesn't get glory out of a weak Christian or a weak church. They are a dime a dozen; not worth that.

Don't ever forget the devil came into the garden in Eden, and he ruined the best situation that mankind has ever known.

In the book of Job, there was no man on earth like Job at that time; he feared God and shunned and eschewed evil. He was a great man. What did the devil do? I wonder why the devil didn't attack some weaker man! No. The devil is interested in attacking strength. That's where he is going to attack; you had better believe it. So he attacked Job.

He even walked into Heaven and said to God, 'You see your servant Job? You have blessed him so much -- that is why he is true to you. You just take away those blessings, and you will see what will happen!' And God allowed him to do it.

Job's wife even came along and said, 'Why don't you just curse God, and die?' But he was a man of integrity. He finally said, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.'

In Matthew 4 and Luke 4 the devil had the audacity to approach the very Son of God. Can you imagine? He attempted to cause God in the flesh to sin. He came against the Son of God and made an effort to tempt Him. If he did that to the Son of God, you can mark it down: he is going to tempt you and me. He is going to work on us.

Now, most people have never had a direct confrontation with Satan, and I will tell you why. The devil is not going to bother you until after you have overcome the world and the flesh. If a person can't overcome the world and their own flesh, the devil doesn't have to do a thing. Most people, the world or the flesh will get them; and they won't ever have to worry about the devil having a confrontation with them. Our three enemies are: our flesh, the world system, and the devil. If the world and the flesh don't get us, I'll guarantee you, the devil will be after us.

YOUR STRENGTH BECOMES YOUR WEAKNESS WHEN YOU TAKE IT FOR GRANTED. *We feel like we are strong in a certain area. We have a tendency sometimes to take it for granted, that we will never fall. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

WHEN YOU OVERLOOK THE SOURCE OF YOUR STRENGTH, YOU ARE A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR A FALL. *It doesn't matter how strong you are, you just can't let down your guard. Look at Samson -- he's a good example. He was a man who had God on his life; he was a Nazarite, set apart from his birth. He had the power of God on his life.*

The Philistines were the enemies of God. You will find the heart of the story in Judges 16. Samson began to play with his strength -- joke with his strength -- thinking that he could never lose it. He lay with his head in the lap of the world, Delilah. She began to tease him, and try to find out where his strength was. You know the story. He would lie to her, and tell her if the Philistines would tie him with green ropes, etc., he would become as other men. Then he would get up and shake himself, and go out -- but, when she got to the place where he told her all of his heart, that if she cut off his hair (a symbol of his separation), then he got up as other times thinking he was the same as always. But his strength was gone! They took him; they tied him; they bound him; they plucked out his eyes; and they took him down to Gaza to do the job of a donkey! His strength became his weakness because he took it for granted.

YOUR STRENGTH BECOMES YOUR WEAKNESS WHEN YOU NEGLECT IT. *We have to groom it, and keep it maintained. Even a new car needs some upkeep: it needs to be washed and kept up. Sometimes we get to a certain place, and we look at everybody else and think they need to be careful; but in our mind we say, 'I don't have to worry about that.' We neglect to work at it.*

And it doesn't matter what our strong points are, we are not beyond sin. If I am going to be a good Christian, I have to work at it. I mean, all the time I have to work at it. It doesn't matter what I was six months ago, or six years ago -- it is what at I am now. One day at a time.

There is a reason why a certain thing becomes my strength. There is a reason why I am strong in some areas (if I am strong at all). It is just no accident. If a person is strong, I can tell you exactly why he is strong: HE PUTS EMPHASIS THERE. You have to put emphasis in what you think is important, and in what you think the Bible says is important. If you don't put emphasis there you won't have any strength.

You have to work at it; you have to labor at it. If you are going to be strong, you must work at it. If you are going to be strong physically you must work at it; and if you want to stay strong you have to keep working out. And spiritually it is the same way. You must take it seriously.

That is what bothers me in this day: I see far too many who don't work at being strong, don't work at being separated.

The Apostle Paul wrote one-hundred chapters of the New Testament. But in Philippians three he said, "Not as though I had already attained....." He didn't count himself to have apprehended. He still 'pressed toward the mark of the prize of the high calling...' Paul was fearful that he might be laid on the shelf. He pressed on.

Hebrews 6:1 says, "Let us go on unto perfection." When you stop growing do you know what you start doing? You are dying. And I suppose we older Christians are more tempted in that area than you younger Christians.

You get someone who thinks they are retired from serving God, and you have a real dead-head. I have met preachers who retired from serving God. I am not saying that the time won't come when they need to retire from, for instance, the pastorate because they are not able to keep it going. But I'll tell you what, there is no such thing as retiring from serving God. When you do you start dying; you don't have any power.

Your strength will become your weakness when you think you have reached the place where you are immune. I have known people who just knew they would never go back to the old ways. But they start laying out of church. Maybe they had a problem with alcohol, or with some other sin, and you warn

them, "You had better be careful."

They say, "Oh, preacher, I would never do that again!" And I have seen them later, and they did it again. They started laying out of church, then getting back with the old company. And the first thing you know they were doing what they said they would never do.

That is why the Bible says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He is LOOKING for who he can devour.

I like to watch boxing matches a little bit. Imogene (Mrs. Parker) says, "How in the world can you like that! You know it is cruel." But you know, nobody is perfect. I remember seeing a boxing match where one guy was just knocking the daylights out of the other guy. He had it all under control.

Then he just jumped around swinging; he got cocky. He thought, "Man, this is a piece of cake." And the first thing you know, that old boy came up and knocked him out cold. He was as cold as a cucumber.

Do you know what his problem was? He got to the place where he didn't have any respect for the guy he was fighting. He lowered his guard. We had better never get to the place where we have no respect for what the devil is able to do, and lower our guard.

I have seen a lot of Christians do the same thing and get knocked out in that very area of their strength. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:15, "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise."

I think it goes on to say, "Redeeming the time because the days are evil."

OUR STRENGTH BECOMES OUR WEAKNESS WHEN WE THINK WE CAN'T FALL. It happened to Abraham. Are we better Christians than Abraham was? It happened to Moses. Are we better Christians than him? It happened to David, and he was a man after God's own heart. It happened to Solomon, and he was a wise, unselfish king who had God's blessings and God's hand on him. The Holy Spirit came down on him and filled the Temple when he prayed, when he dedicated the Temple. You can read it in Chronicles. He knew the power, the presence, and the glory of God. Hardly anyone in the Old Testament knew it like Solomon knew it.

In II Corinthians 12:9 Paul said that his weakness became his strength. God told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Then he said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me, for when I am weak, then am I strong."

You say, 'I am weak.' That can be to your benefit. When you think you are strong, that is when you are in trouble. We need to thank God if He has given us some strength in areas that have helped us. But we just need to thank Him, and realize that it is all because of Him. He has given us the strength.

You need to thank God if you have grown, and made progress in your Christian life. But don't forget to be careful. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall." When our strength becomes our weakness.

LECTURE #12

BE NOT WEARY IN WELL DOING

Our thought will be on being not weary in well doing. I know that I need this lesson, and I think that we all do. Our text is in Galatians 6:7-10, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Be not weary in well doing. That needs to be imprinted on our minds. The word "weary" means "cumbersome," or "tasteless." Sometimes we can let the good things become a chore; things that are eternally important, yet we can let them become a chore to us. They can become cumbersome, and become a big task to us. They can even become a miserable job, instead of being enjoyable and precious to us.

God says we are not to let the good things of God become cumbersome or tasteless. When God talks about "well doing," it means to "do that which is excellent or honorable."

Then he says, "in due season..." You know, the Bible speaks of planting time, and harvest time; there is a time of sowing, and there is a time of reaping. There is also a time of waiting for the harvest. We just have to be patient and wait -- "in due season." When it is time to reap, you will reap.

The Bible says that if we sow we will reap. In fact, whatsoever we sow THAT we are going to reap. God has a law. This is the law of God's harvest. I don't know any truth of Scripture, outside of the Gospel, that is more important; just to know that the law of God is SOWING AND REAPING.

About all of the counseling that I do is just that. If someone comes in with a problem I say, "Listen, you have been sowing wrong, and now you are reaping wrong. The only cure for it is to start sowing good. Now, you may yet do some reaping; but finally the good harvest is going to overcome and you will start reaping that good harvest."

In the spring time a farmer plows and discs, and gets all the seed bed ready -- then he sows. Then, if it's corn or something that needs to be cultivated, he will cultivate and work the crop. Then there was a 'laying by' time on the farm. Dad would say, "Let's lay by the corn." That meant that was the last plow, and when you did it with a team of mules you were glad for that last plow. In fact, you didn't mind it because the corn was big, and you didn't have to watch it so carefully. You could just kind of go by there and follow the team.

But there is a process. We want right now to see things; and a lot of times things just don't happen that quick. There is a process we go through. God said, "in due season" you will reap "IF" you faint not. And most people faint and fall by the wayside, and that is why they don't reap.

People get exhausted in the work, and give in to the pressures and the heartaches in the midst of the battle. In the sowing and reaping there is work. In fact, serving God is work. Anything that is worthwhile is work. Life is filled with work. People that are successful in any area, they are successful because they work. They get to the job; they stay with it until it is done; and they are the successful

people.

A lot of times folks are in a good work, but they get exhausted under pressure. They don't wait until the "due season" time to reap. They get discouraged in the service of God.

Pastors sometimes get discouraged. If they wouldn't get discouraged, there would be some reaping time coming. Usually, getting exhausted, or giving in, comes from what we call "burn out" -- trying to do too much too quickly. We can only do so much. They are trying to go too far too fast, not pacing themselves with a consistent pace, doing it patiently, waiting for the fruit to come.

A runner must pace himself. He can't win the race in the first lap. It doesn't matter how far a runner is in the early part of the race -- they don't count that. All that matters to a runner is how he ends up, how and where he finishes.

I like to watch boxing. Sometimes these heavyweights try to win in the first round. They get in there, and you can tell that their goal is to knock out their opponent in the first round. In so doing, I have seen them several times leave themselves open. They would no doubt win the match because it looked like they were the best boxer; but they got over-anxious and they found themselves getting up off the floor.

I like what Paul said in II Timothy 4:7, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith..." It is a battle. I mean serving God is a battle. We are not invited to a tea party. We are in a battle.

Paul didn't sit back in the corner and let somebody else do the work. He didn't burn out, either. He stuck by the stuff. And he said, "...run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..."

Some folks are what you might call "Alka-Seltzer" Christians. They fizz big for a while, but it doesn't last. They are a flash in the pan. They are big for a while, then they fizzle out.

Sometimes young people are more like that. I have had several through the years. They will get excited, then fizzle out. Matt (student), do you remember A_____ B_____? Man, he was a fireball for a while. He would write articles and put them in the paper. And they were pretty salty papers. Some people thought I was writing them and he was putting his name to them, but I wasn't smart enough to write the articles he wrote.

But A_____ is not even in the ministry now. He fizzled out. And I could name several that did that.

*George Whitfield said, "Lord, I get weary **in** the work, but not **of** the work." It is not unusual to get weary **IN** the work -- we get tired and weary -- but not **OF** the work. Because, just as soon as you kind of rest up a little bit you are still excited about the work. It is tiring to do the will of God. Some of you came to class tonight tired, no doubt.*

It is tiring to be faithful and consistent. It is going to take the extra time and extra effort. You have to push yourself. But if you get weary of well doing, not just weary physically in the midst of it, it becomes a task. It becomes a chore instead of an enjoyable thing. It won't be long before you quit.

Chapter 15 of I Corinthians, the resurrection chapter, says, "Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ."

Then it says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

May God let us be like the man who had it written on his tombstone, "Here rests a man who never rested." He just kept going. He didn't do anything miraculous, but he did it week after week -- faithfully. Boy, it takes that! I mean: faithfulness, week after week, etc..

Paul wrote, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith." We just have to keep looking for the opportunities and be not weary in service to God.

Why should we be steadfast, according to I Corinthians 15:58? Because of what is involved; abounding is abundance, always excelling, not just getting by but doing more than what is required.

What we have a tendency to do is to look around and see where the results are. If we can't see the results right then we want to quit. We want to see the harvest when we are sowing, don't we. We want to see the stalks of corn before we have ever put the seed in the ground.

Don't worry about where the results are; just keep laboring for God. God didn't tell me to look for the results; He told me to do the work. The results will come if we are doing the right kind of sowing.

In II Corinthians 4 the Bible says, "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not." What is our ministry? We need as Christians to sit down sometimes and meditate on what is our ministry. What is the ministry of every Christian? I think -- and I might have mentioned it recently in a sermon in church -- **WE HAVE A MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION IN PRAYER.** All of us do. We are kings and priests. We are to intercede for others. We are to pray.

The song writer said, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." God responds in answer to our prayers. Later on we'll talk about not being weary in praying. But we have a ministry of interceding.

SECONDLY, WE HAVE A MINISTRY OF GIVING OURSELVES, AND OUR FINANCES. That is a ministry of giving. "Give, and it shall be given unto you," Jesus said. You know, you can't out-give God. That is part of that sowing and reaping. "Give, and it shall be given unto you" in abundance (Luke 6:38).

WE HAVE A MINISTRY OF GIVING OUT THE GOSPEL; giving out the Gospel message. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). That is a commission of the church, and of course the church is every member of the church. Everyone has this three-fold ministry: **PRAYER, GIVING, AND SOUL WINNING.** Every born again Christian ought to be concerned about soul winning. Soul winning would probably solve any problem any church ever had.

While you are serving God you can rest assured the devil is going to keep on putting some pressure on; and he is going to do it all the time. There is always something to discourage you. But it is not just you. If you think the devil is just working on you, trying to discourage you -- it is not only you. You can rest assured he is trying to discourage each of us.

There is always something to get your mind off the main thing. The little riff-rafs that come into any kind of fellowship or churches, there is always this little trouble. The main reason the devil does that is to get our minds off the main thing. The devil doesn't quit; he doesn't have any quit in him. He is like a roaring lion -- he is always going about, seeking whom he can devour. He is doing it day and night; he never sleeps. And we have to be careful that we don't get worn down and give in under the pressure that we face in our daily lives.

Thomas Edison was telling the truth when he said, "Success is about one per-cent inspiration and ninety-nine per-cent **PERSPIRATION**." Just plain old sweat, work, and labor -- faithfulness -- that will get the job done.

I was raised on the farm, and I think all kids ought to be raised on the farm -- its good for them to work hard. But it doesn't matter how much you know about raising a crop, when the time comes you have to get out there and do what is necessary or you won't get a crop. You can have the seed; it can be in the bag. The ground can be out there. And you can have all the faith you want to: "Boy, I am going to raise a harvest. I have the seed. I have it all."

The seed for us is the word of God. The world, the Bible says, is the harvest field. But unless we take the seed and plant it into the hearts of people, there isn't going to be a harvest. But if we will do that consistently, there will come a harvest.

Dr. Dennis Corle, whose books on "THE ELEMENTS OF GODLY CHARACTER, Volumes I and II," I am using as my text books to get these lectures; he told about working on the staff of a church as a young preacher. He went out in a little town, not too far from the church and started a bus route nearby. And he said, "I went out there on Saturdays and I would visit from 6 to 8 hours. I did that week after week, and after several weeks the most I could get to come on the bus was two or three kids. Needless to say, I was getting discouraged. I came to the conclusion that maybe it wasn't God's will that I start a route out there."

He continued, "And so I decided I would go one more time. That Saturday I was out there and I ran across a guy named Ed. I had been talking to him every week, and I would encourage him and try to get him to come, and try to get him to accept Christ. He would always say, 'No, not now.' But this Saturday, Ed (about 40 years old) came out into the yard; and I said, 'Ed, I just wanted you to know that I love you, and I want to see you get saved and get in church; that is my heart's desire for you.'"

"And Ed said, 'I have been waiting for you to come by today.'"

"He said, 'I want to get it settled, and I want to get it settled right now.'" And Bro. Dennis took the Bible and led him to the Lord.

Ed said to him, "I'll tell you what. I'll drive that bus for you." Dennis had been driving the bus himself.

Bro. Corle said, "Okay."

He said, "I went out there with the bus the next morning, and that guy had about 40 people in his yard and in his house. He had all that little old community rounded up; and not only that, he had driven about 15 miles away and got some folks to come to the house."

He said, "I picked up a bus load right there at his house. I was there for several months on that route. We ran 40 to 60 on that route all the time, and saw several people saved."

Then he said, "What if I had quit the week before? I was discouraged enough to quit. My flesh wanted to quit; my emotions said that it is no use; nobody's going to come. I'm wasting my time." But God had a different plan than that. You never know if it is just about to break through.

There is a young lady by the name of Wilma Rudolph who went to Tennessee Temple University back in the 1960's. In 1960 she won the Olympics; she won three gold medals as one of the greatest

runners of all time. What most folks don't know is that about 1/3 of her life she was a cripple. She couldn't hardly walk. She was the youngest of seventeen children and weighed 4 ½ pounds at her birth. She got double pneumonia a little bit later, and she barely pulled through that. Then she got some kind of paralysis in her leg. And that leg was just a withered limb.

The doctors didn't give her mother much hope at all that she would ever walk. They did say that if she would work that muscle, that would be the only possibility of having a chance.

For years her mother exercised her; she made her get up and stretch her muscles, and use her leg. She did it continuously. When she got to college age, she was one of the finest runners in the entire country. It was the result of her mother's vision and faithfulness. She wouldn't quit! And you have heard stories like that. She faithfully worked that leg, and when others said that there was no hope she didn't give in. She didn't get "weary in well doing."

Most of us remember Evangelist Tom Williams. Several years ago his wife was stricken with the meningitis bacteria that she got when she was in Israel. She was in a coma for a long time. Bro. Williams told the story -- he even had it on a video -- how that the doctor said that there was no hope.

However, he carried her into his meetings; and many of his friends said, "Brother, we wouldn't think bad at all if you would just put her in a nursing home." But he wouldn't do it. He would carry her into his meetings; she was like a little baby; he would lay her on a pallet. Because of her mind, she would always want to return back to the fetal position she was in before she was born.

But he kept working with her. He is a persistent man. I have prayed with him a few times; and I'll tell you what -- he prays, and prays, and prays, and prays. He knows hundreds and hundreds of pastors, and he mentions them all by name.

His wife came a long way. She got to where she could walk, and even talk some. All because of his persistence.

Be not weary in well doing. BE NOT WEARY IN SOUL WINNING. It is so easy for us to give up on lost people. This is one of the main things I would like to stress to you and to myself: it is so easy to give up on lost people.

In our day, when it seems like it is pretty hard we give up -- and that is one reason we don't see the fruit that we would see otherwise. We get discouraged. In our minds, we go out knocking on doors - - discouraged -- and we already have in our minds that we are not going to get a good reception. We really shouldn't worry about that. We shouldn't have our minds set on: I wonder if we are going to get a good reception or not. That is beside the point. That should have nothing to do with us being obedient to the command God gives.

We don't reap -- we don't see more people saved -- because we don't do enough sowing. We become weary in well doing. And with new converts -- many times we see them make a profession of faith, then fall by the wayside. But we need to remember that when our children were born, they didn't come to the table on their own. We had to bring them. New converts are just babes in Christ. Sometimes we expect them to be full grown as soon as they are saved. And if they don't come on to church, we say, "Well, I don't think they got saved. If they had gotten saved, they would be in church."

Well, not really so! They need to be brought. They need to be taught: "...teach them to observe..." We wouldn't say that about a child: "Well, they didn't come to the table on their own. I guess they didn't really get born."

No, we said, "Hey, we have to get them. We have to bring them to the table and feed them. We have to take care of them until they grow up." It is the same with brand new converts. If we are not careful the devil will make us so negative about people getting saved. We will get the idea that nobody is going to get saved, and we are wasting our time. We will get weary in well doing in soul winning.

CHURCHES GET WEARY IN WELL DOING. They start changing their ministry and putting the emphasis somewhere else because they want to see something happen. I have seen a lot of churches spend all of their time in benevolent work. They feel like they have to do something. But there is nothing more important than the well doing of soul winning.

Most people go soul winning for a few weeks. They come back saying, "It is terrible. I haven't seen any results." Then they compare themselves to someone who has been soul winning for years and they decide to let them do it. They think others are better at it than they are. "I guess I'm just not cut out to be a soul winner. I just can't do it."

But God says, "Be not weary in well doing..." Don't be weary in soul winning. Don't be weary in the matter of delivering souls from Hell.

Listen! I just know that this has to be emphasized. There is nothing so important. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). And it is unwise when we don't make that our life's goal. Just keep at it -- keep at it -- keep driving at it.

We are going to have several different kinds of fruit. We need to realize that. Matthew 13 gives the parable of the sower who went forth to sow. We need to look at that. It might encourage us a little to see how it works. In verses 3 through 9, "And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." The Lord wants us to hear that.

When the first sower went forth to sow, some never took root; fowls came and devoured them up. That is the crowd who, when you tell them about Christ, they don't show any interest. Satan comes right away and sweeps up what seed you have planted out there, and it is gone. It never has a chance to germinate; it shows no signs of life. So, I guess the sower quit, huh? He said, "What's the use?"

No. Notice: he didn't say, "I just guess I'm not cut out for farming. I guess I don't have what it takes. I might as well as quit and get another kind of job."

No, the Bible says that he kept sowing. Some of his seed fell upon stony places, where there isn't much earth. And they sprung up, but had not depth. Because they were so shallow, they came up hurriedly. And when the sun was up they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. That's the crowd that we talk to, and they pray the sinner's prayer, but they have no root, no depth, in themselves. And it is hard for us to tell when somebody gets saved. When some of our "converts" pray the sinner's prayer, we try to judge; we would probably be better off if we didn't.

A lot of people don't have any character. These received the word of God, but they don't have any depth about them at all. For a while the seed came up, and it showed forth some life. But the sun came up; adversity came into their lives -- and when the heat came, they didn't have the character, the gumption, to continue on. Many folks don't have character in our day. It takes some character to make

it.

When a person gets born again, the body isn't saved. If the body has never been taught to have character, it doesn't make much difference in their lives. Nancy (student) knows. She is working with some folks like that now.

You say, "Man, it looks like if they were saved...." But they are living in an old body even if they did get saved. They still have an old body that doesn't have character. You get someone who was taught right, and had character -- you get them saved, and it is a lot easier to get them into church and to serving the Lord. Does that make sense? They don't have this lack of character to deal with.

If you can get that person where the spiritual man within them grows, and becomes dominant, and they die to self -- that person will grow. I think there is a message here. God wants us to stay at it.

The Bible says that some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns choked them. In another passage, the Lord makes it clear that the thorns were worldliness: riches, and other things, and sports, etc. There are all kinds of things to get people's attention; that is the thorns that choke the life out of them.

Or, maybe they go to church and the preacher preaches on separation and they say, "Man, that offends me. I like that worldliness. He might preach a hard sermon on seeking first the kingdom of God, and putting God first, etc., but don't preach against worldliness." Then they know some folks down the road who go to a church where the preacher doesn't preach like that. They end up changing to a church where they don't have to listen to hard preaching. They don't like that hard preaching.

Well, some folks get so busy in other things, they don't have time to go to church and serve the Lord. And the first thing you know they have fallen by the wayside. They have withered away. They have died out. Their Christian life gets choked out by thorns. YET THE SOWER DIDN'T QUIT! He has sowed among thorns; he has sowed where the ground was hard and shallow; he has sowed on the roadway where it didn't even come up at all -- BUT THE SOWER DIDN'T QUIT.

And Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

You hear this! He kept sowing. And what happened? "Others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold." We need to hear. That is what the Lord said.

He had three opportunities to sow, but he failed. He sowed and yet saw no visible fruit at all. He sowed and saw signs of life, but couldn't keep the fruit. Then he sowed a lot, but it didn't last. Man, that is discouraging, isn't it? But finally, after he kept sowing and didn't quit; he sowed the seed that fell into good ground, and was productive.

Now his fruit is bearing fruit; and he is in business now. When you can get someone saved who starts bearing fruit, you have some things going for you. You have some rewards in Heaven when you can get that. And just think, after you die and go to the grave, they are still bearing fruit. At least, if we can teach and exhort them, that is exciting, isn't it? It is exciting for me. So, be not weary in sowing, soul winning.

Be not weary in striving against sin. In James chapter 4, verse 7, the Bible says, "Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

We pick up on that last part (I say, "we" -- I do it a lot), but we forget the first part. I am glad that

one day it was pointed out to me that we need to submit ourselves to God. We say, "resist the devil and he will flee." That is true -- after we submit ourselves to God.

The first thing we need to do is submit ourselves to God, then we can resist the devil and he will flee. We have no power to resist Satan until we have submitted ourselves to God. That is the first thing. Then we will have the power. We need help to resist the devil. We need the Lord's help, so the first thing we need to do is submit ourselves to God.

When we are under control of the Holy Spirit, then we can have victory striving against sin. Some people will say, "Well, I just can't do it. I can't live it. I have tried, but my old habits have a terrible grip on me and I just can't do it!"

God says, 'Don't get weary in well doing. Don't give up. Don't say you can't.' God says that victory is available. "Greater is he that is in you..." Nothing has come our way but what somebody has already been through it and has overcome it. There has always been someone who has overcome every obstacle that we have ever faced. And God gives the victory.

Then, be not weary in prayer. In I Thessalonians 5:17, and I am impressed -- and you have to be, too, in this matter of prayer -- where it says, "Pray without ceasing."

Then in Luke 18:1 it says, "And he spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." We are not to be faint-hearted about this praying business.

I turned and read again today in Luke chapter eleven and chapter eighteen. The Lord gave us the admonition not to faint in our prayer lives. One was persistent in praying on behalf of the needs of others -- in chapter 11. You remember the parable of the friends. One friend had a friend who came to his house late at night. He was hungry; he didn't have any bread. And the man of the house didn't have any bread, so he went to his other friend down the road to ask for bread, but he was already in bed. He had the kids down.

The first friend hollered, and said, "Hey, Friend, I need bread!"

And he said, "Well, come back tomorrow. I'll give you some then. Don't holler, or you'll wake the family up! Hush up! Tomorrow I will give you bread."

I can see him as he says, "Well, I guess that sounds reasonable." And maybe he started to go back home.

Then he thought, "Man, my friend is hungry. He needs bread now."

So I can see him as he turned. They always slept in Israel in the upper rooms and maybe on the rooftop. The first friend hollers again, and yet the guy wouldn't give him bread. But finally, he was so persistent that the fellow said, "Shut up! I'll give you the whole bakery!"

Well, the other (chapter 18) was about the widow who went to see the unjust judge who didn't care for man, and had no compassion and no respect for God. He didn't care for this poor widow. It didn't bother him that she was a widow in need. She needed somebody to avenge her of her adversary, but he didn't give her the time of day.

However, she was persistent. She wasn't going to take "no" for an answer. He said, "Lady, I want you to know that I am busy in court. My docket is full. I don't have time to mess with you. Get out!"

She wouldn't do it. So he finally had somebody to get her out, probably. But when he got done with court that day, who was standing outside the door? It was her. When he went to the restaurant to eat, who do you think came in to aggravate him? It was her. When he went to the mail box to get his mail, who do you think was there? You guessed it!

And the Scripture says that even though he had no respect for man or God, he avenged her because of her persistence. And God commended her for that. That would be a good Scripture to turn to and read if we had time.

Persistent in prayer: on behalf of our own needs as well. Hey! How about Jacob? Man, he wrestled. He was going to meet Esau, his brother. He had heard that Esau was coming after him. He had stolen his brother's birthright years before, and he knew that he was in trouble. So he wrestled at the brook with the angel of the Lord. He just said, 'I am not going to let you go until I get a blessing.'

He just got hold of the horns of the altar and prayed. He had persistence in prayer. There is nothing that is more encouraging than staying with it, praying and not giving up.

George Mueller gave an excellent example of this persistence in prayer. He began to pray for a group of five personal friends. (You have no doubt heard the story before.) After five years one of the men came to Christ. After ten years, two more found peace with the Savior. He prayed for 25 years, and the fourth man was saved. He lived years later than that, and just a few months after he died -- after fifty some odd years -- the fifth guy got saved shortly after Mueller's death. That is persistence in prayer.

It takes persistence to get the victory. Failure, and failure, and failure equals success -- if we don't quit. You have not failed if you don't quit. The man who won't be beat, can't be beat. You just can't be whipped down if you won't give in.

When I fail I just have to get back up again. I don't quit. Nobody is defeated because they fail. They are defeated because they quit.

It was seven years before the missionary William Carey baptized his first convert in India. It was around seven years before Judson won his first disciple in Burma. It was years before Moffett saw any definite moving of the Holy Spirit in Africa. It takes years sometimes.

Don't allow the good will of God to become tasteless and cumbersome to you. "Be not weary" in doing well. Be not weary in acting in an honorable way, acting in behalf of others. "For in due season....."

When the natural course of life bears your well doing, "you shall reap" if you don't get exhausted and quit, faint. We need to be like the Apostle Paul so that we can someday say, "I have finished the course, I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith" in my service to God, in soul winning, in striving against sin, in being persistent in prayer, etc.

If we don't faint, we will reap "in due season." We have to keep going, keep sowing, keep praying. We must do it to reap. If not, we fail.

That's not a very profound lesson tonight, but it really is simple. But that is what it takes; and that is where Christian character comes in. We don't fail until we quit. Quitters never win, and winners never quit! That is Bible, really, isn't it? So, may we not forget it.

LECTURE #13

CHARACTER: PARENTING YOURSELF

Tonight we are going to go right on and cover this great subject of Christian character. We are going to kind of head it in another direction. We want to hit the angle of parenting. Character is: parenting ourselves.

I Corinthians chapter thirteen is the great chapter on "charity," love. Verse 11 says, "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

Look at I Corinthians 9:27. Paul said here under inspiration, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Paul is talking here about the difference between immaturity and maturity in saying, "when I became a man..." He wasn't talking about when he got to be six feet tall, or maybe age sixty-five. God does not equate those things with manhood. Paul said that maturity, manhood, is when I got control of my life.

The Scripture says that when Moses "became of age" -- having been raised in Pharaoh's palace -- he went out and saw one of the Israelites being mistreated by an Egyptian he got involved in it. I don't know what age Moses was, but the thing about it is, when he began to be concerned about others, and got his mind off himself, he "became of age."

"When I became a man I put away childish things...." Character, when you actually look at it is: parenting ourselves. It is when you take charge, and you no longer require somebody to stand over you and tell you what to do. Now you tell yourself what to do.

There never will be a time in your life when authority and accountability is not needed. The man or woman with character is someone who becomes accountable to themselves, to truth, and to the principles of the Bible. Someone with character does not require outside force to govern them, because they govern themselves from within, with a principle. They learn to tell themselves, "No."

Proverbs 16:32 says, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." It is more important and more valuable for me to be able to rule over my own spirit than it is for me to have enough force to take a city in warfare. I need to get myself under control.

Paul said, "When I was a child I spake as a child, I talked like a child, I acted like a child, but when I became a man I outgrew that childish stuff, and I no longer require the outside force to keep me in line. I started keeping myself in line, when I got rule over my own spirit, I put my childish things aside."

Then, in I Corinthians 9:27, he said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..." Now if I have to bring something into subjection, that means that it doesn't cooperate. We need to understand that. There is a part of us that doesn't want to cooperate. That is why Paul had to say, "I am crucified with Christ..."

The great doctrine of sanctification is just that. It is putting self on the cross. And we don't hear much about that in our day. It just doesn't come natural. Character won't come natural. It is something that we have to really put emphasis on.

Paul went on, "...lest by any means when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway." The word "castaway" has nothing to do with Heaven or hell. It has nothing to do with supposedly losing your salvation. It speaks of a disapproved servant, someone who has spoken the word of God, and taught the truth, taught a Sunday School class or did other things for the Lord, but didn't practice what they taught and preached. They didn't practice what they said they believed. We see a lot of that in our day. They say they believe it, but they won't practice it.

I am to have character, then I am going to do for myself what once my parents were required to do for me. And that is going to be the thought in this lesson. What my parents used to do for me, keeping me in line, and jerking in line, I now have to do that for myself.

Have you ever noticed that children don't grow on trees, and then fall off when they are ripe? God gave them parents because they require parents. They need an outside authority to govern them until they have enough character to govern themselves. Somebody has to keep the right kind of pressure on them until they begin to operate by principle rather than with input. That is called "character."

The truth is, I have seen folks who are forty years old and still don't have character and maturity. Notice carefully that character is not one and the same as spirituality. Listen carefully to what I am going to say: If a man or woman does not have character, they will not be spiritual. Why? Because character is necessary to do the things consistently that makes a person spiritual. It takes character to read your Bible. It takes character to pray. It takes character to be faithful in church, and to be concerned about souls, and faithful to our responsibility to God and to our fellow man. It takes character to put your will above your body, and the desires of the flesh. It takes character to decide what is right and what is best.

CHARACTER IS PARENTING YOURSELF. There are several things that a parent is supposed to do. To parent myself, I need to understand what the responsibilities of a parent are. There is a need for that today. Most of us (in the classroom) have children. If you don't have any children left in the house, you will one day be a grandparent, and you can help your children.

In Genesis 18:19 it says, speaking of Abraham, (God speaking), "For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

There are two things I want you to notice here. First: I CAN'T COMMAND ANYONE AFTER ME UNLESS I AM GOING IN THAT SAME DIRECTION. I must first head there myself. If I am going to get them to go somewhere, I must be already going in that direction.

This thing of, "Do as I say, not as I do," won't cut the mustard. Years ago I had a preacher (bless his heart) who used to say, "Now, don't do as I do; you just do as I say." First, we must set the example.

The second thing I must do is, BE IN COMMAND -- whether it is a household, a church, or a business. Somebody has to be in command. If nobody is in charge, it is in disarray. It is a messed up thing. A home is not a democracy; it is a monarchy. That doesn't mean that I am not supposed to get input, and consider anyone else's thoughts, opinions, or feelings; but I am supposed to do what is right by God. If I will do that, then I will treat my wife and children right. There never was a parent, or father, that (if they are right with God, and right with the principles of God), who won't have to worry about treating the family right; they will just do it.

To us fellows in this class: if we have any kind of an authority complex, we need to understand that authority doesn't come just because we are of the male gender. You find the principle of the centurion coming to Jesus to get his servant healed. I don't have that Scripture reference at my finger tips. But he made an important statement about authority -- and this is a very important principle that we need to remember: he said, "I am a man under authority." The centurion said that.

He continued, "And I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Do this, and he does it."

What he was saying to Jesus was, 'Jesus, you can just speak the words; you don't even have to go to my house.'

He didn't say, "I am a man having authority; I know what authority is." Even though it seemed he was a man that had authority. But he said that he was a man under authority; and that vested him with some authority in the lives of others. The only authority that we have is when we are under authority.

You take a person who is not under the authority of God; he doesn't have any authority. A man doesn't have any authority, but that which he receives by being under God's authority in the chain of command. Do you see what I mean? When he submits to God's authority in leadership over his life, then God places authority on him to lead others. But somebody must be in charge. Somebody has to be at the helm of things, and make the decisions.

If I am going to do what a parent ought to do with his children, I have to be in command. I have to set the pace; I have to set the example. I have to command them, not just request them. "I wish you would just do this. Oh, you just break my heart; I wish you would...."

Hey! That's not the right approach. It is not a request. You don't ask them if they feel like it, or let them vote on it, or think that if they will be persuasive enough they can change your mind. Your mind is already set because God has given you the command, and you know what is right or wrong. If it even appears to be evil, that is good enough: the Bible says to shun it!

I am to command them after me. The truth is: if I command them to do what I am already doing, I am not going to get much kickback from them. The problem, I think, is that a lot of parents are trying to command their children to do something that they won't and don't do. I think I told you in an earlier lesson, one of my older brothers smoked cigars and chewed tobacco. His oldest boy started smoking, and he beat the tar out of him for smoking. Needless to say, that boy grew up kind of resenting his dad. He is not much younger than I am. There is no way you can whip a child for doing something that you do yourself and be effective. You can do it, and you might cause them to slip around behind your back and not do it in front of you, but it won't be in their heart; and it won't be effective.

We have all kinds of folks who want to command others to do things they don't want to do themselves. That creates problems. A parent's job is to set the example and be in command, and thirdly, to restrain.

In I Samuel 3:13 the Bible tells us that judgment came upon the house of Eli because his sons made themselves vile, and "he restrained them not." They were doing wicked, vile, things, and he didn't stop them. If you will read the chapter you will find that he did make a plea, but he didn't restrain them.

I can just see him now. A lot of otherwise good parents say, "Now, don't do that; I wish you wouldn't do that." But that won't get it done. It might on a few children, but it won't on most of them. If I restrain somebody, it means that I do whatever is necessary to stop them from doing wrong. We are not talking about negotiating with them, and sitting down and talking it over.

*In my forty-some odd years I have had parents who want to sit down and talk for three hours with their children. I'll be honest with you: words are so cheap and worth nothing sometimes. It doesn't do any good. There is a little two-letter word that is really complicated, but if we could ever learn it -- it is, **NO**. And say it and mean it.*

If I restrain my children, that means that if they get out of line I pull them back in line. Just keep pulling them back in line. And sometimes you might have to grab them and shake them and look them straight in the eye and make sure you have their attention. "I say, No, you are not going to do that."

Now, at the supper table at our house -- we sat down and ate together. And my kids went to the public school. I realize that it is worse now than it was back then. But they weren't going to get involved in some things at school. I would listen to them. I always told them, "I will sit down and listen to you, now. But when the conversation is over, and I have listened to you, and I say, 'No,' that is it! We don't discuss it any farther. I don't even want it brought up. If you bring it up, it is going to be a problem for you."

Parenting means to restrain them. Don't just say, "Oh, son, you are breaking Daddy's heart (Mommy's heart)." My dad never said that. I'll tell you what he did: he went ahead and broke my heart.

All these philosophies today about child training are in conflict with the Bible. I'll be honest with you: I am no authority on it, but God is. God is the authority, and the Bible is actually a manual in all areas of life.

The Bible says, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction drives it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). And whether we like it or not, God said it, and He is not talking about child abuse either. He made a place to spank and to whip. I don't believe we ought to slap around on them. Man, never in my life did I slap around on them; but I have whipped a few times, and when I whip they knew they had been whipped. It is not effective any other way.

The psychologists say, "You are going to warp their personalities." Man, their personality needs to be warped. Mine did. Mine needed it. So did yours. So does every child need his personality warped. If they have their own way about everything from birth on, they are going to wreck their own lives. That is what it is going to amount to. They are going to ruin their own lives.

Up at Potosi (prison) right now, that place is full of kids who had their own way -- and look where they ended up. They didn't have the protection of authority.

Judgment came upon the house of Eli, not because he didn't tell the kids -- I believe he did; I think he told them what was right and wrong. I think he encouraged them by saying, "Sons, don't you do wrong."

But it was because "he restrained them not." When they made themselves vile he didn't stop them. What he should have done was gotten red faced and said, "Boys, this is not going to happen."

He didn't go far enough in dealing with the situation to prevent them from doing what they shouldn't do, and it brought God's judgment upon Eli's house and his children.

In Proverbs 22:6 it says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It doesn't say that when he is old he will come back; it says that he won't ever depart from it. I'm talking about departing from it.

Training has three basic elements: Number one, TRAINING IS SETTING THE EXAMPLE. Secondly, TRAINING IS TEACHING THE PRINCIPLE. And number three, TRAINING IS ESTABLISHING THE DISCIPLINE TO KEEP THE PRINCIPLE IN TACT.

Now, discipline is not primarily for punishment. I mean, discipline is for the benefit of correction. Parents ought to discipline -- not because they get mad at the child and say, "Man, that's the last straw. That is the straw that broke the camel's back. Boy, are you going to get it?" That is the wrong kind of thinking. It is supposed to be for correction.

Chastisement is not God being angry at us. God doesn't get mad and say, "I'm going to beat the tar out of you, my child." He doesn't do that! He doesn't do it with emotion. It has to do with what is best for me. He loves me enough to want what is best for me, and He knows He is going to have to correct me and discipline me because He wants what is best for my life.

Has anyone in here ever had physical therapy? Have you ever had a stiff shoulder and had to get it worked out? Did you go because you wanted to, and it was fun? You say, "Oh, boy! I get to go to therapy again!" No! It was no doubt painful. I have never had it, but those who have will testify to that fact. That therapist's job is not to hurt you. His job is not to wait for you to come so he can hurt you again.

The thing about it is, you were paying him to help you so you could get something working that had stiffened up. Pain is part of the process, but the object is not pain. That is not the object of it; that is part of the process of discipline, but not the object. The object is to correct what is wrong and to restore to usefulness again.

When we stiffen up and God has to give us therapy, He wants to be able to use our lives. We get prideful and we get our necks stiffened -- we are going to stiffen up to God -- and God says, 'That is not what I made you for, my child. I am going to see to it that you get therapy, because I love you, and I want your life to be usable. That is what I created you for.' So He gives us some therapy. (Everyone of us has had some therapy from God.) And it is going to hurt. He knows where to hit us where it hurts, but the object is not pain; the object is to correct us and make us usable again.

By the way, that is what a parent is supposed to do for his children. If what you call discipline is taking your anger out on somebody, they are going to hate you. A lot of children, it seems, almost hate their parents. That is sad. And I believe a lot of parents had right motives, but they just didn't understand all of this. They didn't have the wisdom.

And all of us -- I can't stand here tonight and say that I did everything perfect with my children -- but if you are in tune with God, He will give you enough wisdom. I had not studied child training. I wish I had. I would have been wiser as a young parent if I had. But somehow, when I look back now, God had put some things in my heart and gave me some wisdom. A child is not going to do better; they are going to rebel worse, with the wrong kind of discipline.

Did it upset me when my children did wrong? You had better believe it did! And I'll tell you what: the Parkers all had tempers and I was no exception. My dad had a bad temper. And you have to have the ability to get mad. The Scripture says, "Be ye angry, and sin not." You can be angry without sinning.

A person isn't worth two cents who doesn't get angry. You have to get angry at the devil. You have to get angry at some things before you are ever going to get any results. But let me say this: don't ever discipline a child when you are mad. Send him into the room. Let him sit there and wait until you are calmed down and have had time to think it over. No one ever told me that, but every time there was

a need I would take them and sit them on the commode in the bathroom, and I would say, "I want you kids to do right. What can I do? Do you know anything I can do to correct this problem?"

And they would say, "I don't know anything, except what God says to do."

Then I would use my belt. Imogene would go out and break a twig off the bush. The kids still kid her about that bush. It never did grow until after they grew up and left home!

Training is a long term process that includes some of these other elements: setting the example, teaching the principles, establishing the discipline, etc. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." And I don't think that means at age 65.

Paul said, "When I became a man..." He was talking about coming to a place of maturity. The Bible promises that then they won't depart from it.

Do you know what training boils down to? Setting the example; teaching the principle; and establishing the discipline. Then, keep them in the form until they set up that way.

How many have been around, and knows what pouring concrete is? What is the first thing you do if you are going to pour concrete? You set the forms. And in child training, you need to build the form out of the Bible principles, and leave the form on until they set up, until their character hardens.

Do you know what will happen if the form falls down before the concrete sets up, or you didn't build the form strong enough? What happens? It will drift to its own form then. How long does it take? Well, it depends on a lot of things. Different mixes take different lengths of time. If you have quite a bit of water, and it is soupy, it takes a longer time. And the weather also has something to do with it.

No two children are going to set up exactly the same way in the same amount of time. It is my job as a parent to see that they stay in the form until their character hardens. I don't know exactly what age that is....

Some parents think that when they get to a certain age, they need to be let out. No. The age is not going to tell it. Most parents do well with their children when they are young. And listen, this is true if anything is ever true: when they get to be teenagers the parents get scared to death. A lot of parents get scared of their teenagers. I mean, they get worried..

Rather than being parents to them then, rather than command them, they want to switch and get on the 'buddy system.' They want to be their buddy, and then hope that they will do okay. But they are not set yet. They are like that concrete, and they are pulling the forms away and they are not set yet. You are going to be their buddy; and they are not ready to have the form removed. They are not ready to have that pressure off of them.

A lot of parents say, "I'm afraid they will rebel."

If you are pouring concrete and one place starts to buckle out, the answer is not to remove the form so it will run in any direction. You reinforce that place where it is bulging out. When the children become teenagers, and they start putting pressure on you in a certain area, what do you do? You come back and reinforce that area; you just reinforce it more, and keep the form up until they set up. Don't get scared of your kids, and throw out the principles and rules of the Bible, afraid that they might rebel.

*Some elements in training children: **PARENTS MUST BE MATURE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT CHILDREN NEED.** All the time they need love. They need to know that you love them. There is nothing wrong with*

them knowing that you are their friend. But parents must be wise enough to be able to take that child, fellowship with him and have fun together, but when it comes to where they need it you must become their authority just like that.

You must establish rules that are good for the children, not what is popular with them; not what they want so they can have so much fun. You can't work on that buddy-buddy program without damaging your children. It won't work. You can be close to your child, and still be in charge.

You have to be close to them. They have to be able to talk to you, but you must be in command. The parents must be in command; it is not a democracy -- somebody has to be in charge.

The parents must restrain their children when they are doing wrong. You have to stop it. Parents must discipline their children. You have to say, "No," to them. I know, as I said earlier, that is a big word. I mean, when God says, "No," He means no. And God does say, "No," in the Scriptures. And we as parents must say, "No." When the Bible says, "No," say, "No."

When it is questionable, the Bible already has the answer. If it is questionable, say, "No." You see, if it is right it is not questionable at all. And that is usually those borderline things; that is the starting point of the form being taken down too soon. It is dangerous.

Children are born crooked; they are sinners; they are stubborn. They have to be broken. I heard a guy tell me that he had a finger that was crooked. Do you know what they had to do to correct that? They had to break that thing! Then they had to put a cast on it to get it straightened out right. That is sort of the way you have to do with children. They are born crooked, and you must break their will. Their rotten will has to be broken. And some children don't have a strong will while others do. Those who have a strong will, you had better build a strong form.

I had a cousin just older than me. He was a good boy, and never got into much trouble. But, boy, he was so stubborn! And his dad corrected him one time. He bucked up, and I thought his dad was going to beat him to death. His dad was a Baptist preacher, and a good man. And I wondered, "Why in the world don't you buckle under and submit?"

Finally he did. He turned out to be a good guy -- a great guy. But, boy, that one time! And his dad knew what he had to do. You have to keep pouring it on. I don't care: you can't stop!

I never will forget: I was pastoring in Cold Water, MO, about 1963. I don't know how big Cheryl (oldest daughter) was, but she was the first one and she was just spoiled. She would go into church; and she was big enough that she loved purses. She would look around -- it was a smaller church -- for the lady who had the largest purse, and she would want to go and sit with her. Boy, those women loved that!

But Imogene (Mrs. Parker) had problems; Cheryl threw a little fit and Imogene took her out and "pow!" She brought her back in and she threw another fit; and Imogene took her back out and "pow!" She threw another fit, and Imogene took her back out and gave her more. And the third time she beat the tar out of her.

Cheryl had enough that time. And the ladies of the church got all over Imogene. But they didn't understand: that is what she had to have.

You know, that was restraining her. If we had let her get by with it, it was gone. She would have gotten worse.

It is a shame: you go into Wal Mart and see kids throwing fits! They fall on the floor and kick their parents! It's a shame! It makes me so sick I just have to get away from them. I want to go outside and throw up.

I have to restrain myself. I mean, I have to learn to say, "No," to myself, my appetites. At least when you have health problems and you know you just love a certain food, but it is bad for you, you have to say, "No." That thing -- you go through the kitchen and you can just hear it saying, "Eat me! Eat me! Eat me!"

I have to say, "No! I'm not going to eat you!" So I tell myself more than anybody else.

A little girl was wearing a T-shirt, and it had on it, "My name is No-No, but my grandma calls me Precious." You know, a little kid hears that, "No No," a lot, don't they. I have to discipline myself to do the things that are right: pray, read the Bible, etc..

You do it long enough and you will get addicted to the right thing. If you really analyze it all, you will see some people who just delight in doing right, doing the things of God. They just enjoy it. With others, it is such a chore.

And I think what happens is, they do it enough until they get addicted to right. In I Corinthians 16:15 that is what Paul said: "The house of Stephanus; they have addicted themselves to the ministry." The ministry had gotten into their blood and that is all they wanted. It is like some people who get on a habit and get addicted to it. These people did that serving God.

I can get to the place where I have some yearnings and some cravings for the right things. I have a need in my heart for these things that are right. I have a hunger for them, an appetite for them. And my life is just not what it ought to be without them. That is why I desire, and yearn for them.

Have you heard teenagers complain, "Why are you always treating me like a kid?"

A good answer is, "Why are you always acting like one? Do you realize that if you act like an adult, you will be treated like an adult?"

"I'm tired of everybody telling me what to do!"

Good, then tell yourself what to do, so we don't have to! If they are not going to govern themselves, then they have to have someone do it for them.

The less character we have, the more government we require. This gets into the political realm a little bit. (There is a clock on that wall; I had better keep watch on it.) The mentality of most politicians in this day and age is for a global society, big government, and lots of controls. The reason, they say, is because people don't have any sense anymore. They have to say that, and think that. People don't have enough sense to think for themselves, so the politicians think they have to think for the people. "They won't take care of their kids, so we are going to put them in day care early. We are going to haul them off to the nursery, and we are going to feed them breakfast. They won't feed them breakfast, so we have to feed them breakfast. We have to do it. We have to get them in school with a 3-year-old program now." I think that is a bunch of baloney!

And, do you know what? They are going to destroy 100% of the people's liberty to take care of the 10% of the people who won't do right.

The less control I have over myself, the more government I require. Do you want to know why

government moves in and takes over? It is because of a lack of character, and then they think they have to. If I don't have enough character to work, the government is going to have to feed me and take care of me; then when they feed me and take care of me, they are going to start commanding me what to do, and telling me what I can't do. Do you see what I mean? It works that way.

You talk about the importance of a character class! Maybe we don't need it as bad as people out there; but I'll tell you what: we need it to be able to teach others. We need to develop some philosophies ourselves so we can influence others.

BEFORE I CLOSE, LET ME SAY THAT YOUR CHARACTER WILL ALWAYS BE TESTED AWAY FROM YOUR AUTHORITY FIGURE.

Eve was tested away from Adam. Adam was the head of the household, but when the devil tested Eve he caught her when she was alone. Eve wasn't a rebellious woman. I don't believe that she gave Adam a minute's trouble when he was there. But Eve was deceived when he wasn't there. Her character was tested and she failed the test.

Lot did well as long as he was with Uncle Abraham. When they were together, he never rebelled against Abraham and said, "Abraham, I am tired of you being the boss. I am going to get out on my own."

That isn't the way it happened. He didn't come to his uncle and say, "I'm going to tell you something, Uncle Abraham: I don't like how you do things! I am going to take off down to Sodom. That's the place for me. I can sell my product there. The plains there are well watered, etc." That is not what happened.

The herds got big, and the herdsmen fussed; and they had to part. But when he got away from Uncle Abraham, he didn't have enough character, did he.

Aaron usually did fine when Moses was around. He was the Assistant Pastor, and I believe he did fine. But Moses went up on the mountain to get the Ten Commandments, and Aaron didn't have enough character to say, "No." The people had said, "We don't know about this Moses. We want a god we can see." And you know the rest of the story.

But not everyone fails the test. Daniel was carried off into Babylon. (And we studied the lesson about why he was preferred.) He was carried off as a young man. Not only him: there were 10,000 young people carried off into Babylon also. But, you know something? Nine-thousand-nine-hundred-ninety-six compromised. Only four (Daniel and his three friends) didn't compromise, because they had some character. They had been taught right. Daniel had been taught not to defile himself with the king's meat, etc.. And he didn't compromise when prayer time came, because he had character. He was able to say, "No." And God blessed Him; and God always will. **CHARACTER IS: PARENTING OURSELVES.**

LECTURE #14**GODLY DESIRES**

Tonight we are going to deal with one of my favorite subjects on godly character. We will be reading from Philippians chapter three, which is also one of my favorite portions of Scripture. It is all my favorite. We are going to deal with godly desires. I preached on this a while ago. I was studying ahead, and I got so excited about it that I preached on it on a Wednesday night.

Philippians 3:12-14, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

I think we all agree that the Apostle Paul was a very godly man. And it wasn't an accident. He was a godly man on purpose. We will find that is the only way one becomes godly.

I have learned some things through the years. One of the things that I have learned is that people will usually do what they really want. That is the way we are. If they want something badly enough, they will find out how to get it. That is just the way we are. If we really want something -- desire is the driving force in everybody's life. It is one of the strongest driving forces.

And DESIRE WILL TURN INTO DESTINY. You and I desperately need to control our desires and cultivate godly desires. Paul, as I said, was a godly man because his desires were godly. Over time he became what he desired to be.

Everything begins with desire. Before we got saved, we had a desire to be saved. We wouldn't have gotten saved if it were not for that desire. But something happened in our lives, and we had a desire, and wanted to be saved.

I can tell lost people how to get saved, but I can't make them want to be saved. I might be able to help them some in wetting their appetite by telling how they need to be, and what happens if they don't.

And this applies to all areas of life. I am not going to try to make anybody do anything they don't want to do. Maybe I can help their desire to do right, and the Holy Spirit, of course, does that.

I can't help you be a better Christian than you really want to be. I can tell you how, but I can't make you want to. I can tell you how to be a blessing, but I can't make you want to be a blessing. I can tell you how to serve God, but I can't make you want to serve God.

Everybody has a desire of some kind. We all have some strong desires. For many folks, their desires are strictly selfish. All of us, I guess, to some extent have selfish desires. And if it is a desire to please the flesh, it's still a desire that is guided by our nature.

Everybody has desire. For most people in our day, it is certainly not a godly desire. Now, a person can have desire, and it might not be an evil desire, but also it might not be a godly desire. Since

desire is going to be the driving force, the thing that causes me to separate and go after the object of my desire, then if I don't have godly desires I will never separate myself unto godly living. I have to have the desire.

Worldliness in church members is because they don't have a desire to be anything else but worldly. I will never develop godly character until I have godly desires. Paul was a godly man who lived a godly life because he had a godly desire that was burning in his soul. He gives a list of his desires in Philippians three. Some things, you can tell, he wanted very badly in his life; things that he really yearned for in his soul.

Tonight if I can convince you to endorse and embrace some godly desires, and help you get in pursuit of them and get you focused and yearning for that which is godly (and I think most of you are; that is why you are in this class and attending so faithful) -- I could guarantee that God would do a marvelous work in your life. We must focus on that which is godly, and that which is right. We must focus on it; think about it.

Paul said, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord" in verse 8 of this chapter, "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

He said here in this verse, 'I count it all worthlessness and waste. All that I have lived my life for is worth nothing. I have now left everything, but really have left nothing.' He had his eyes focused on the goal before him.

The first desire that Paul had was, "that I might win Christ." I think he was saying, 'I want to please Christ.' He wasn't concerned about winning the favor of men, I will guarantee it. That is the interest of most people: we want to please people.

Stephen kept that in view when he was being stoned to death. The heavens were opened to him, and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. Jesus was giving Stephen a standing ovation for being faithful unto death.

I heard a story -- I might have told you -- of a young pianist who did a recital. He was a very talented musician. When he finished the recital everyone in the auditorium gave him a standing ovation, except one older man who was sitting up front. The young man went down from the podium, and walked through the audience with his head down, stooped-shoulders, with his countenance sad, as if he was dejected. And yet the crowd gave him a standing ovation.

One of his close friends saw that something was wrong, and he ran after him. He said, "Why are you so down and upset? Your music was tremendous. Everybody loved it, all except that one old gentleman."

The student said, "That old man is my teacher. I would have rather he stood and gave me a standing ovation than all of that crowd."

We get too people conscious. Paul said, 'My prize is Jesus. I want to win His 'well done, thou good and faithful servant.'" That was the driving force in Paul's life. The Bible says, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, or men-pleasers, but with singleness of heart, fearing God" (Colossians 3:22).

He said, 'Don't just obey because they are looking. Obey all of the time because God is watching.' I am supposed to do my service with a singleness of heart; that is, keeping my eyes focused

on the Lord Jesus Christ and the judgment seat of Christ, knowing that I will be judged one day. I need to want His approval, and that is going to be at the judgment seat of Christ.

There is only one person's approval I need to be concerned about: Jesus Christ's. This will solve a lot of problems. If we try to please everybody, and if we are not careful we will try to please a lot of people who don't even know what the will of God is; we will be wrong. You couldn't please that crowd if you wanted to. Just try to please the Lord. That is the only way to pastor today.

There is a part of you that wants to please everybody, and make everyone happy, but you will be so frustrated. If you can just please Him, that is all that matters. Paul said, 'This is my object; this is my prize; this is my goal -- that I may win Him.'

In Galatians 1:10 Paul reminds us, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Tonight we all have to make up our minds and decide whether we want to serve men and try to get their applause and their pat on the back, or serve Jesus Christ. We can't do both.

So Paul said, 'My desire is to please Jesus. I want to win Him. He is my reward; He is my prize.' But that is not all that he wanted.

In the 10th verse of Philippians 3 he said that he desired four things. First of all, he desired, **"that I may know him."** Paul had already been saved. We are not questioning his salvation.

We are not asking, "Paul, didn't you get saved on the Damascus road?" He is talking, rather, about a union with Christ.

In John 15:5 (the fruit bearing chapter of the Bible) it calls this oneness "abiding in Him." Jesus said, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit....for without me ye can do nothing."

Now, what does that mean? What does it mean to "abide?" It means to remain attached. They might have been going through the garden, or going through a grape vineyard. In those days there were a lot of grape vineyards. He might have reached up and broken off a twig or a vine and said, 'If this vine is severed it is going to die. It won't bring forth any fruit. That branch had no ability or power to bring forth fruit unless it is attached to the vine.'

And Paul said, 'I want to be attached and connected to the Lord. I want a oneness, a bond, a special bond with Him -- a oneness and a relationship.' Paul had a godly desire in his heart; he experienced that closeness. There is no doubt about that. Do you know why he did? Because he desired it; that was the desire of his heart.

'I want to know the power,' he said, 'of His resurrection.'

I don't think Paul was saying, 'I hope I get resurrected some day.' I think he wanted to live the resurrected life. And he penned the words in I Corinthians 15, that great resurrection chapter. I think he meant that the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power of the Holy Spirit, is available to me and you every hour of our lives.

Let me prove what I am saying. In Romans 8:11 it says, "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Now, he didn't say, "quicken your dead bodies." Sometimes we associate that as being a resurrection passage. But he said He will "quicken your MORTAL bodies."

He didn't say He would quicken your corpse -- although He will.

I will be honest with you. If we are going to be raised incorruptible, I don't think the old corruptible body is going to be raised and changed. I don't know. I haven't given that much thought. It just popped into my mind.

In Jesus is life. There is a lot to be said there. Life! And the same Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead is the Holy Spirit. And that same Holy Spirit lives inside my body and your body if you are saved, since the day we got saved. Everybody that is saved has the Holy Spirit.

Don't you think that if the Holy Spirit of God could raise up Jesus from the dead, maybe He could help you and me with temptation? If He had the power to raise Christ, don't you think He would have the power to help us with temptation? Don't you think He could help us to overcome discouragement in life, and rise above it; and the obstacles that so many people encounter? Don't you think He cares for all of our needs? Sure He does! But we must tap in on that power source.

The Bible says in Isaiah 44:3, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." Who does He give it to? That isn't a broad promise to everybody. He gives it to people who are thirsty. I am here to say tonight that there is power in desire and thirst.

Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

People who have a desire like the Apostle Paul. He said, 'I want to know the power; I want to experience that power in my daily life. I want Him to quicken this mortal body and give me victory.'

You know, sometimes I think we say, "Well, you just can't live above sin in this life, so we will just have to wait for that day when He changes this old body, and fashions it like His glorious body. Then I'll make it!"

I think our mistake is, we say, "Holy Spirit, give me your power!" And we should pray that all of our lives. What God is saying is, 'O Christian, give me your body!'

We say, "I need power to do something."

And He says, "No. I need your body to do something. If you want to experience my power, give me your body." (I think that is what I preached on Wednesday night: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed...")

You know, the first part is, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, that ye present..." (To whom?) How many church members do you think really present their bodies to the Lord to be holy and used? I am so appalled in our day in how little we preachers and churches put on holiness; and challenge their people to present their bodies a living sacrifice.

You know, we get on the charismatics because they have no standards. You can see it on TV -- and if you want a good laugh, almost, that is the place to get it. They are so gaudy and so worldly looking; and they wave their hands back and forth. It grieves me in my spirit, how a person can be so worldly. I think that once in a while you might hear a good preacher on there, but they are few and far between.

Two men were discussing what they thought was the greatest unused power source in the world.

One man was not a believer, and he quickly said, "I think the greatest unused power source of energy in the world is Niagara Falls."

The second man said, "No, I don't think that is right."

The first man said, "Then what is it?"

The second man, who was a believer, said, "The mighty power of the Holy Spirit."

Notice something else Paul desired: **"...that I may know the fellowship of His suffering."** He said, 'I want to be called a little Jesus.'

Did you know that Jesus called us to suffer? I am amazed at this attitude that if you get saved everything is going to be hunky-dory in your life. There is nowhere in the Bible that Jesus promised that. In fact He promised us the opposite. He did! He said, "If any man will come after me, let him..." do what? "...deny himself."

Do you think that's fun and joy? It's not in the way that they think it is. In the end results: it will be a holy joy and a peace that could not be had any other way. But Paul said, 'I want to be loyal to Jesus.'

You will never see loyalty on the top of the mountain; you will see it in the valley. You will never see loyalty in peace time; you will see it in war. Anybody can jump on the band wagon when it is comfortable, and everything is going good, and it is easy. But you will see who is loyal when the battle comes; when the attacks come; when there are reproaches.

You say, "Does that mean that the person who is loyal wants to have pain, wants to suffer?"

Nobody who has good sense wants to suffer. I don't want to suffer. I don't want my friends to suffer. But if he suffers, I am going to suffer with him. The same is for persecution. The same is for trouble.

Look at this verse, "For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him..." Now, when you believe on Him, who profits? You, or Him? We do -- you do, who believe on Him. So the Bible says it is given in behalf of Christ not only to profit, at His expense, but also to "suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

I like what Paul said in the book of Galatians just before his death: "For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He said that it had made its imprint in his life. It had caused him to be loyal. He said that he desired to be faithful unto death, bearing some suffering.

He said, "I am crucified with Him; nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me."

Something else he desired: **"...that I might be made conformable unto His death."** Now that is practicing the crucified life. And that is in the here and now. I am not going to get into that, but here is the reason you don't hear holiness and sanctification preached. I don't preach it enough, and I probably preach it more than most preachers! I will guarantee that you could go to the average Baptist church for a whole year, and never hear a sermon on sanctification. That is kind of a shame, isn't it!

Now, you have heard me say many times that when you think of justification, who do you see on the cross? You see Jesus Christ on the cross. We are justified by His death on the cross. But when you think of sanctification, who do you see on the cross? You see self on the cross -- it's not Jesus on

the cross any more. It is us on the cross.

I want you to know that the crucified life is not something that just happens to you. It is something that you practice. A cross is not something that is imposed on a person. A cross is something that we choose to take up. Paul said that he desired to practice the crucified life, and to be conformable unto His death. Then the Bible says, "Likewise, reckon ye..." -- that is a decision. You reckon. That is something you do in your mind, and that is when you begin to cast yourself down in your mind. That is a decision you make, to reckon yourself to be dead with Him.

When the devil speaks to you, you say, "No, devil. I am dead to you."

In the days of slavery, a slave was set free if someone would redeem him and set him free, or if he died he was free. And when we die to Satan and sin, that is when we will be free from him. In our minds, in our reckoning, when Satan tempts us, we say, "Satan, I am no longer your servant, your slave. I am dead to you."

That is why you got baptized. Baptism points to the fact, not only that you have placed your faith in Christ's death, but also that you are buried with Him. You have died with Him to raise to a new life.

It is a decision, a choice, a state of mind. You reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God. Romans 6 says, "Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ..." (6:11).

If you went to a funeral, and you went down to the casket in the front of the church and talked to the dead man. If he was your enemy, you could rail on him all you want to, and he is not going to talk back. You can bad-mouth him. How does he respond? He doesn't! he doesn't know and he doesn't care. He couldn't care less!

If you come by and flatter him, saying, "Boy, you were the most wonderful person that I ever met." What would his response be? Nothing. He doesn't know; and he doesn't care.

You wave sin in front of him. Wave pornography, or whatever you want to, in front of him -- what is his response? Tempt him. How does he respond to temptation? He doesn't respond. Do you know why? Because he is dead to this life. That is what Paul is talking about. He is dead to the world, dead to flattery, dead to insults.

But he is not dead altogether. He is alive to some things, too. He is alive unto God.

Let me say this: If you want to know why churches are so dead spiritually, it is because they are alive to the world, and they are dead to God, dead to spiritual things. Do you know what God said? He says, 'I want you to get an early start on eternity. I want you to get out of touch with this old world, and let your consciousness be on me only. I just want you to get out of the frustration and the temptation and the flattery and the insults of this old world.'

Let me say this: A true, dedicated, holy person is not going to enjoy this world. I don't care who it is. I am talking about the world system; he not going to enjoy it. He can't. He is going to be grieved with it. He won't enjoy death -- that is all you see; eternal death.

You go to a ball game, and if you are sensitive you are going to see death and condemnation. And you will tune it out. They don't know a thing about life. And God said, 'I want you to reckon yourself dead so you can choose to be conscious of me and my plan and my will only, in touch with me.'

That is what the crucified life is. It makes a person really alive -- more alive than ever unto God. We shouldn't be flattered when people say nice things about us. Do you know why? Because we know our righteousness is as filthy rags.

We shouldn't be upset when people insult us, when they say nasty things. We won't let that affect us, either. We would really enjoy life if we would figure out what He is talking about here. If you and I wouldn't let people insult us, we wouldn't get upset too much. But we won't live the Christian life right unless you want to; that is the key to it.

I know most people don't want to, because they don't want the preacher to preach in a way that crucifies their flesh. There is not one Baptist church in five hundred that will call you to help them crucify the flesh. Have a testimony service, and have people quote their favorite Scriptures, and see if any of them will quote Galatians 2:20.

It is a decision. It is not just something that will happen to a person. We are waiting, thinking, "If I go to church long enough, I will get to the place where I will reach that point." No, not really. That is why some people reach it in a hurry; others will never get there. Because some desire, they hunger after it, and they reach it in a hurry.

Paul said in I Corinthians 15, "I die daily." He said, 'My flesh rises up every morning. My old flesh gets resurrected every day, so I have to die daily.'

My old flesh is just as mean as it was the day I got saved. It is just as conscious of sin and everything that people say and do, so I have to reckon it dead constantly. Paul had the victory and lived in companionship with God because he chose to live the crucified life.

*Another desire that he expressed was, **"...that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Jesus Christ."***

I really believe that he was literally saying here, 'I want to get a hold of what God has gotten a hold of me for. God has gotten a hold of me. He has apprehended me.' We wouldn't be saved if He hadn't. He has arrested me. 'And I want to do what God saved me to do.'

What did God save us for? Not just to keep us out of Hell. We need to find out the purpose of why we are here; why we are saved, and what God has for us to do. Most people are not too ambitious for that. Most of the time they say, "I am going to do what I want to do. Then, God, I want you to put your approval on what I want to do."

And I will tell you what: this probably hits me the most. We all have ambition -- and sometimes personal ambition is what stands in our way. The disciples had it. They said, "Which of us is going to be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

Even the mother of James and John came and said, 'Can my boys sit on your right and left side in the kingdom?' And Jesus wasn't pleased with that. Who cares who is going to be the greatest? Who cares? God didn't save me to be the greatest! He saved me because there is an eternal purpose in my life. And I need to find it, and be faithful to that purpose, whatever it is.

To tell you the truth about it: Jesus really put it down one time. He said, 'Okay, boys, you want to know who is the greatest?' And He took a little child and said, 'Whoever comes like a little child...'

I need to get a hold of what God has for me. Sometimes young men run from the call to preach because they are afraid to do what God wants. I heard a great singer one time. I asked him, "Man, you

would be a power house for God if you would just turn your life over to Him."

And do you know what he said? "I am afraid to."

Could I tell you something? If God made us a wrench, and somebody used us as a hammer, our lives would be battered and destroyed. If God made us a screw driver, and somebody took a hammer and used us for a chisel, we would be ruined. God didn't make whatever He made us for, in order to be ruined.

We had a dear lady. I preached her funeral. She was at our church. She was a little chubby lady. Her funeral was something. Back in those days, Baptist always fought. It was election time, and people were jockeying for different positions. And she wanted a position she didn't get. They offered her something else, and she said, "No, if I can't be a table cloth I don't want to be a dish rag." Poor thing!

There is no happier place, no more sacred place in this world, than to be in the center of God's will. If God appoints you or me to be a janitor, let's just be a soul winning janitor. If He wants us to be a factory worker, just be a soul winner, a good witness in the factory. If He wants us to be a preacher, we just need to preach -- and be happy with it. We will be a lot happier and successful and be able to fulfill the purpose for which we were born if we say with Paul, 'My desire is to apprehend that for which I was apprehended for.'

You see, he knew. The Lord had told him, 'I saved you, and you are to be a messenger to the Gentiles.' I want to get a hold of what He got a hold of me for. He has saved us for a purpose. It doesn't matter where we are.

If we could see that! Some people don't think they are talented, so they don't do anything. They don't do a thing! I think that is why Jesus gave the parable of the talents: one talent, two talents, and five talents. The guy who had one talent wouldn't do anything, because he was afraid. He went and hid it. And the Lord used some strong words, "Thou wicked and slothful servant."

In the church -- the church is a body. In my physical body I have a little toe. But if that little toe is not functioning right, it will cause a lot of problems. If every person who belongs to the body of Christ would realize they need to fit into that body and function in the area for which they were saved, and be satisfied -- and have a desire to do that -- they will find as much fulfillment as any other person.

In closing, DESIRE IS A VITAL ISSUE. I can't put too much emphasis on the fact, Bro. Norm (student), that what you desire determines what your character will be. If a person desires to have character for the glory of God, he will become what He wants. What you desire will determine what you think about; and what you think about will determine what you are. I am saying that godly character begins with godly desire.

LECTURE #15

AVAILABILITY AND DEPENDABILITY

We will look in the Scripture in Isaiah chapter six. We won't be reading as much in that chapter as we would like to read. It is a great chapter. I refer to it often, and a lot of preachers do in their preaching.

Chapter six begins like this, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." That is an experience Isaiah had in the year that king Uzziah died -- in the temple. He had an experience that no doubt changed his life from there on out.

In verse eight we find the results of that experience, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I. Send me." And that was Isaiah's response after he saw the Lord in His glory. I have often thought, and have probably often said it, that when we see the Lord in His glory -- see Him like He is -- you just can't keep from responding. We will respond when we see Him high and lifted up on His throne. And Isaiah had that kind of response.

And God said to Isaiah, 'There is a need out there. There is something that needs to be done.' He said in Isaiah's day, 'I need someone to represent me, to represent the Gospel. Who will go for us?'

Then Jesus came along and gave the commission to the church to go forth. Isaiah said without any hesitation, without any reserve, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

First he realized that he was a man of unclean lips. That doesn't mean that he was a filthy talker, but I think up to this point, he hadn't used his lips for the supreme thing. And he said, "I dwell among people..." also the same way. They talk about everything but what is really important and, "Here am I, Lord. Send me."

Isaiah was available. Probably the greatest abilities that we could have are availability and dependability. It's not some God-given talent that is had by only a choice few; because I will be honest with you -- in my experience, the ones that God uses are usually not the most talented, and not the one who has the greatest IQ. It is those who are available and will yield to the call of God. The greatest ability you have is one that every person has. Everyone of us in this room tonight has this ability, and that is to be available: availability.

God will always use what is available. God will use someone if they are available. You have no doubt called somebody on the phone, and someone will pick up on the other end and you will ask for a certain person, and they will say, "They are not available at this time." They might be doing something that is pretty important, but if they are not available they can't help you. You just can't get through. You have wasted your time if they are not available. If I make a call, I need that person to be available, or I am wasting a call.

And that is the way God is, only in a greater sense. God calls. Many are called. The Scripture says, "Many are called, and few are chosen."

And I will tell you why only a few are chosen, because there are just a few that are available to the call of God. Multitudes have been called by God, but they are just not available. They are too busy with something else.

And they might be doing something that they feel is good and is pretty important -- and many times God calls and we are so busy doing good things that we are not available to do what He wants us to do. It is not bad things. We are so busy doing something: not an evil thing, not a sinful thing, not a wicked thing maybe. We are just so busy with good things that when God calls us to do the best things, we are unavailable. We are preoccupied with other things demanding our attention; and we live in a day when it is very demanding.

God spoke to Isaiah, and he didn't say, "Lord, I am too busy. I have other things to do."

You know, Jesus said -- and some of this is just now popping into my mind -- He said to a certain one, "Follow me." And he said, "Let me go home and bury my parents." He was saying that he wanted to go home and take care of them until they die, then he would follow the Lord. And that seems like a very wholesome thing to do, but the Lord said, "Let the dead bury the dead. Come and follow me." In other words, He is saying, 'Don't let anything stop you.'

Isaiah had one thing on his mind, and that was doing the will of God, after he saw the glory of God. He wanted to obey God. He wanted to do the work God was speaking to him about. "Who will go and tell?" He was available.

Hell will be filled with people who weren't available when God gave them the invitation to come to Him to be saved. They intended to get saved some day, but they weren't available then. They had too much to do. "Some day. Some day I will be available to God. Some day." But that "some day" never comes. They are not available.

I like some of those old invitation songs such as, WHY NOT TONIGHT. "Tomorrow's sun may never rise, to bless thy long deluded skies. This is the time, oh then be wise. Why not -- why not tonight?"

You just mark it down: when the Spirit of God no longer deals with a person, they are no longer a prospect for salvation. I mean, we need to keep this in mind as we witness to our loved ones and let them know that there is a harvest time for an individual. There is a time when it is just ripe for them to get saved. If they don't respond during that time, they might never get saved because God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." And then they will begin to have a stony, cold heart; and the Spirit of God won't even communicate with them. And that is sad.

When God calls, and the message is preached, they had better make themselves available for salvation. That is why the Scripture says, "Today, if you hear His voice...Today, don't harden your heart....Today!"

We are all creatures of procrastination, aren't we? And lots of people will spend their whole life time in putting off. I am one of those creatures, too. The Holy Spirit not only deals with lost people about the urgency of the matter; He also deals with Christians and there is an urgency about it. A lot of times I feel the urgency and then I will push it away, don't you?

You know, a living example of not procrastinating was old Brother Dwight Parker (Bro. Parker's nephew -- deacon at Victory Baptist Temple) concerning old Lloyd Hunter. God had put Lloyd Hunter on Dwight's heart and mind. He would wake him up at night, so Dwight told me, "Man, I've got to go and see him."

So he went that Thursday night to visit him, and he had a broken heart and said, "I had to come and see you tonight because God has been waking me up to think about you." You know, Dwight is tender hearted. He broke down and cried. Old Sister Hunter in the kitchen had been going through a difficult time with cancer and an operation. No doubt God had been working on her heart, too. And she broke down and cried. Old Mr. Hunter -- that caused him to break down.

Dwight stopped afterward and said, "I just knew he was going to get saved, but he told me that he would do it Sunday." There is no doubt in my mind that God used Dwight to bring him to the Lord.

Many times we can even be involved working for the Lord in something that is good, but it might not really be what He has put on our hearts that He really wants us to do -- and we will try to trade off. When He was dealing with my heart, and I didn't know exactly what He wanted me to do, I wanted to trade off with Him. I always liked to sing, even though I don't know notes, but I liked to sing. And in the old country church that I grew up in, anything was pretty good. The music was terrible, you know. And I really thought, "That's where I am going to get in there and try to improve the music of the church." But that wasn't exactly what the Lord wanted for me.

We must decide in spite of the fact that we are busy, that we are going to be available when He calls. Whatever keeps us from answering the call of God is going to mock us. It is going to mock us, no doubt, for a long time.

People who answer the call of God are not people who have nothing better to do. They are people who, in spite of being busy, have time for God. They make themselves available. And you know all of this. I am teaching a lesson. I am not really preaching at you as if you are guilty one way or the other tonight. But we are dealing with this characteristic of dependability and availability.

People of character have priorities in the right place. They believe that God's will is more important than anything else. You just have to lay aside other things. We could stay busy all of our lives doing good things, yet never doing what God says to do. That is exactly what most of the world is doing.

You have heard this before, but you need to think about it again. Have you ever used a shoe to drive a tack in the wall? All of us have done that a time or two at least. Do you know why you did that? A hammer would have been better, but it just wasn't available. So you picked up a shoe -- you even pulled off a shoe if you had a slip-on.

Did you ever use a knife for a screw driver and break your blade off? I have done it. Why? The knife was available. We need to get a hold of this. There are folks who are a lot more equipped for what we are doing than we are. There are a lot of people who are better equipped, no doubt, for doing the job that I am doing. But they weren't available.

My uncle was an old time Baptist preacher. I remember him telling about his conversion. He got saved in one of those old time Baptist meetings. Back in those days, they would have some shouting when they got saved. He was around twenty years old when he got saved.

One of his buddies -- they rode horses together and dated together -- he got saved too. He said that when he got saved the people were happy and shouting and his buddy said, "This really gets you on the move, doesn't it?"

My uncle said, "I wouldn't have been surprised if God had called him. He was a talker; he had the gift of gab. I always wondered why God didn't call him to preach." But my uncle went on; he was available and dependable. He had character all of his life until he died. He had a stroke.

This fellow was in and out of church, and I knew him. He had finally moved into town here. He was a pretty good fellow, but never did anything for God. He just wasn't available; he didn't make himself available. Who knows? God may have spoken to him.

Usually we use something because it is available; not necessarily because it is the best. We use a screw driver for a chisel -- I have done that, and broken the handle off the screw driver.

You get a phone call, and if you can't find a pad to write on you will pick up an envelope, a used envelope. What are we trying to say? We are more like God than we realize. He is not going to chase down that other person, keep chasing him down -- that guy who has the charisma and the personality -- if He has someone close by who is available who is less talented and has less ability. Talented people are not always available. It is a shame. So God uses people who have enough character and conviction and dedication and consecration to be available. They set themselves apart and say, "I am available to God. I might not have much to offer, but I will give Him what I have. I may not have much talent or personality, but I am available."

I never will forget, through these years: there was a fellow, and most of you would not know him. (Looking at a student) Did you know Gale Roach? Gale never got married; he was the most backward person I have ever met. He lived with his mom and dad until they both died. They owned a farm out there on the Peach Tree Road to the right.

After Gale got saved -- he didn't get saved until he was about 20 years old -- my uncle pastored the church there and said that he could never talk to him unless he chased him down first. Finally, one Sunday evening after the chores were done and the cow was milked, he hemmed him up in the stall as he was in there milking a cow. Finally, Gale got saved and he answered the call to preach. I never will forget it.

He was quite a bit younger than me, but I took him with me one time to preach and he was so backward that he never could look up to the people as he preached. But bless his heart, he preached! I believe that he did the best that he could. He finally pastored a little church down here in Mount Pleasant for a year or two.

God will use that which is available. In I Corinthians 1:26 the Bible says, "For ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh..." It is talking about being wise in the eyes of the world. Not many who walk in the wisdom of this world are called.

Then it says, "...not many mighty, not many noble..." are called. Why aren't they called, if they are so qualified? They are not available. They are too busy working at their nobility; too busy building their empires; too busy pursuing the wisdom of the world. A lot of smart alecks that seem to know everything, pursuing positions and everything else, and almost look down their nose at the call of God -- God cannot use them. God uses uneducated Christians, instead of the educated Pharisees.

Doesn't it look like Jesus would have tried to get those Pharisees converted. After all, they were already students. Well, he did call one of them: the Apostle Paul. He convicted him. But instead he used those fishermen. They were available. He used tax collectors instead of a priest. Tax collectors like Matthew, sitting at the seat of custom -- Jesus said to him, 'Matthew, come on and follow me.' And he just left it all behind and followed Christ.

In Luke 10 we find the story of the Good Samaritan. A man was beaten and lying beside the road; left for half dead, the Scripture says. The priest came along and he just looked at him and went on. The Levite came by, and he passed by on the other side. Later a Samaritan came along; they were

half-breeds, and counted as dogs by the Jews, but God used that Samaritan. God used him and he was more like Jesus than the others.

It sounds like Jesus all the way to me. He got off his donkey. He changed places with the man, put him on the donkey, took him to the Inn (which is a picture of the church). He said, "Take care of him. When I return I will repay you whatever it cost." And of course there is a good message there.

God used Dwight L. Moody, who butchered the English language. He often got scolded by those educated people. Some women got all over him for how he butchered the English. He said, "Ladies, I am doing the best I can. What are you doing for the Lord?" I wonder why God didn't call an English major to preach instead of D. L. Moody. Moody was greatly used of God because he was available.

In Ecclesiastes 9:4 it says, "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope. For a living dog is better than a dead lion." When you read and think about that, it has to kind of thrill you. We can come to the conclusion that we are still living. Spurgeon, for instance, was a great preacher, but he is dead! He isn't going to preach anymore. He was a lion of a preacher, but he is gone now. So, since I am still living, I had better do what I can do.

I think that is what it is saying, "To him that is joined to all the living there is hope." As long as we have breath, we can do something. Thank God for Spurgeon; thank God for Moody, and Jack Hyles and John R. Rice and R. G. Lee (and all those); but these fellows are gone. They are gone; they have already run their race. And just because I can't preach like them, and I can't do as they did, doesn't mean that I shouldn't do anything. They are not available anymore; God is looking for somebody who is available. Thank God for their memories; I couldn't hold a candle to them.

It doesn't matter so much about our credentials if we are available. It doesn't matter how brilliant we are if we are unavailable. What does that matter?

*The second greatest ability is: **DEPENDABILITY**. Someone who won't make himself available can't be dependable. You have to be available, yielded and accessible to God, before you can be dependable for God.*

I thank and praise God for people who are dependable; faithful, staying by the stuff for years. Listen! There is no substitute for that. Years ago people were taught a little more character than they are today. Young people were taught. Years ago, when parents gave you a job to do, you had better stay with it until you were finished with it or you would get marched right back -- I guarantee you. They taught character; and they were wise to do that.

Through the years I have met those who would flash up for a while -- boy, they are brilliant starts -- but they didn't shine very long. A _____ was one of them. Man, he could shine; he had a mind. Back in the '70's when we started here he was really on fire. But his sister came in a few years ago to borrow money to get him out of jail in Texas.

The Bible says that it doesn't take much character to flash up for a while. There is glory in that. In a way, there is glory in something new -- for a while. A new work -- there is glory in it; it has everyone's attention. But look ten or twenty years down the road.

When people find the will of God, and do it dependably and reliably, and do it for a lifetime; that stirs me. Faithfulness, reliability, and trustworthiness -- all good character traits. In I Timothy 1:12 Paul said, "I thank God He hath counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."

Let me say this (about all ages are in here): You younger guys, if you want to serve the Lord

then be dependable and faithful. Paul told Timothy to endure hardness as a good soldier. He was simply saying, 'Be dependable in the battle.' That is when you have the tendency to want to quit. Just when the old flesh wants to quit, that's when you need to dig in and be dependable as a good soldier.

Paul said that there will be some hard things out there. If you are going to be a finisher, you are not only going to have to be available; you are going to have to be dependable. It doesn't take much to join the military. No doubt there have been a lot of young people join the military because they were impressed with the sharp uniforms; and maybe they wanted a paycheck. But a lot of them didn't want to fight; and that is what you need the military for, not to shine their guns and draw a paycheck and clean the barracks. That is not what they put them in the military for. The soldier was put in there to fight a war.

Some may be available enough to join; but they are not dependable enough to fight. We have a lot of them in our fundamental churches as well. When the battle is raging, they bail out. That is why I like that old song (I haven't quoted it in a long time): "Must I be carried to the skies, on flowery beds of ease, While others fought to win the prize and sail through bloody seas? No, I must fight if I would win. Increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word."

In the military you are instructed to continue to the last command, until you hear from headquarters. If a fellow is doing that, if he is staying at the last command, then the commander knows where he can find him to give him another command. If I am still where the Lord told me, doing what He told me to do, He will know where to find me (and, of course, He does anyway); but He will know where to find me when He has another command for me. If I am not dependable, I won't even know the will of God for my life after a while. It is the people who are faithful and dependable who will know the will of God for their lives.

Somebody said, "The sun is dependable. It always rises in the East and sets in the West. You can count on it." The Word of God is always the same; you don't have to wonder about John 3:16. It was the same 2,000 years ago as it is now. And to tell you the truth about it, if time lasts 2,000 more years, it will still be dependable. And God's people ought to be that dependable.

We expect dependability out of our car, out of our refrigerator, out of the mail man, out of the old coon dog, etc.. Man, if he won't hunt we are not going to feed that rascal. The story is told of a man looking for work during the Depression. Most of us don't remember the Depression. I was born right after it. This man was looking for work, not a job. He was looking for work.

I'll be honest with you: in 1955 I was too. I went to St. Louis, but I couldn't find a job. In the '50's (Norm probably knows what I am talking about) -- it was hard. You know, there has always been work. The problem is, most people want a position and a paycheck; they don't want to work. Don't worry! If it is work you are looking for, there will always be work. Some people could always find a job; others can't find a job. The reason is, they want a job without the work.

This man was looking for work. He came to a wealthy business man by the name of Girard. He went to his office and said, "Sir, I need work. Do you have some work I can do?"

Mr. Girard looked at him for a moment and said, "Yes, I believe I do."

He looked out the window and pointed to a skid full of bricks that was stacked neatly on one side of the lot. He said, "You see that skid of bricks down there?"

The potential employee said, "Yes, sir. I see them."

He said, "I want those bricks moved to the other end of the lot. And I want them stacked neatly."

The man said, "Yes, sir!"

Without any question he left and went down and carried the bricks to the other side and stacked them. It took him about all the day, and he did it without any question. The next day the young man knocked on Mr. Girard's door and said, "Do you have any work for me today, sir?"

The business man said, "Yes, I do. Do you remember the skid of bricks you carried over to the other side? I want them carried back over there."

He said, "Yes, sir," and went out without another word. And he did his job well.

This went on for almost a week. In fact, he finished out the week, and came in on Monday. He said, "Mr. Girard, do you have any work today?"

He said, "Yes, I do."

He had two checks in his hand. He said, "You go down to the store and buy yourself a new suit. And with this check I want you to go to a certain location and place a bid for materials for my company."

It was an amazing story. This man went from being unemployed to being the purchasing agent for a large company in seven days because he was dependable. He did what he was supposed to do without complaint and without question. I think the employer thought, "If you'll be that dependable, you are just the man I need."

A fellow that is not dependable can't stand any authority. He starts a power struggle. If a person will be available and dependable, God will lift him up and use him because he is qualified by dependability.

God is looking for someone who will prove to be dependable and faithful. That is what He is looking for.

*Dr. Lee Roberson is still preaching. He is 91 years old. He goes all over the country. He drives. His wife is still living. He doesn't like to fly. He tells a story about when he was just a kid living in Kentucky. He grew up on a farm, and they lived on a **little** one. They had been farming; and what little farming they would do they did by hand. Back in those days, it was mostly gardening, etc..*

He said that they decided to go and buy a horse. So they went to Louisville to a sale barn, and he said, "I was just a little boy. I saw a pony that pranced around -- it was beautiful."

He said to his dad, "Dad, that is the one I want. I have to have that one."

His dad said, "Well, I don't know if that is the one we ought to get. I don't know if he will pull a plow."

He said, "Oh, Dad, look at him; how he can run. He can pull a plow."

So they asked the owner and he said, "Yeah, he will pull a plow."

So they bought the horse, took him home, and hooked him up to a plow -- and he wouldn't pull. He was a pretty horse, but he wouldn't pull. He said they tried all morning, but they couldn't get him to

move the plow. His dad said, "Son, we will have to take that pony back. We can never use him."

So he said, "I rode the pony back to the stock yards and said to the man who sold it to us. I said to him, 'Sir, I am in trouble with my dad. We came to buy a horse, and I saw that pony and wanted it; but it won't pull a plow.'"

He said, "The fellow pointed over off to the side and said, 'You see that old mare over there?'"

And he said, "You mean that old ugly looking one over by the fence? That thing won't pull, will it?"

The man said, "Oh, yes! That one is use to pulling a plow."

Dr. Roberson said that he looked at that sad-looking excuse for a horse and said, "Are you sure that she will pull a plow?"

The man said, "Let me show you." They harnessed that old mare up to a big stump, and just like he said, it squatted down and pulled that stump.

So he took the horse home and hooked her to a plow and she just plowed as straight as an arrow. The next day, as they hooked her up, they found out that the good looking pony looked good, but it was the one that was faithful and had already been tried that worked out.

AVAILABILITY AND DEPENDABILITY: THAT IS GOOD CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

LECTURE #16

DOING IT GOD'S WAY **THE IMPORTANCE OF DETAIL**

This lecture concludes our course on Christian Character. I have to say that it has been a joy for me to teach this class. I know I have gotten more out of it than you have because I have spent a lot more time trying to prepare. It has done me some good. I only wish I had it taught to me about thirty years ago, so I could have put it into practice through these years. But I appreciate you having the character to be here every night, and to have a part in the class.

Tonight we are going to conclude by studying DOING IT GOD'S WAY, or, THE IMPORTANCE OF DETAIL. The subjects that we have studied in this course have all zeroed in on different points of godly character. We have studied about the wisdom of character, why Daniel was preferred, determination, giving our best, determination and desire, availability and dependability, and other subjects like that. I am not sure this will be the best one to end up on, but I really feel that it is important. In fact, it is probably as important as any lesson we have studied thus far: DOING IT GOD'S WAY; THE IMPORTANCE OF DETAIL.

Often we get the idea that because we have good intentions it doesn't matter how we carry them out, because our hearts are set on doing right. We are trying to do a good thing, so it doesn't matter much how we do it. However, the Bible tells us the importance of detail.

Turn in your Bibles to I Chronicles chapter thirteen. I was discussing some of these names with Bro. Norm (student); and I am sure I won't pronounce them right. I hope the detail of pronunciation isn't that important.

In I Chronicles 13, beginning with verse 1, it says, "And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: and let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul. And all the congregation said that they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people."

Drop down to verse 7: "And they carried the ark of God in a new cart out of the house of Abinadab: and Uzza and Ahio drave the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets. And when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him because he put his hand to the ark; and there he died before God. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore that place is called Perezuzza to this day. And David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me? So David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obedom the Gittite. And the ark of God remained with the family of Obedom in his house three months. And

the Lord blessed the house of Obededom, and all that he had."

This gives us a good Bible lesson, and a setting for what the lesson will be about tonight. If there is anything that this story illustrates, it teaches that the end does not justify the means, and that you and I need to pay special attention to what this Book, the Bible, says even about small details.

Our God is a God of order. He has placed things in a certain order and given us some specific instructions in the Word of God. It is not only important that we do right things, but that we do them in the right way and do what God wants in the way He wants them done.

David had said, 'Let's get all of Israel together.' God likes it when His people get together in unity and harmony.

In the New Testament, in Acts 2:1, it says that "they were all in one accord in one place." They were not scattered everywhere in accord; and they were not in one place in discord.

David was a king, but he got all the leaders together and said, 'What do you think?'

He had a men's meeting and said, 'Let's talk about this -- pray about it -- and I believe God wants us to do this thing. What do you think?'

He led them and they made a decision of what they intended to do; and it was a noble thing to bring the ark back. It was good to get God's people together, and it was good to decide that the ark of the covenant needed to be in its rightful place.

All the time that Saul was king, Israel didn't use the ark. It had been taken away. The ark represented the presence of God. The whole time he was king the people really hadn't consulted with God. They didn't have any prayer in the schools; Sunday (Saturday) was just another day. And David wanted to do a good thing, so he said, 'Hey! Let's get everybody together and bring the presence of God back. Let's bring the ark back. It's a good thing; I know it's a good thing.'

*It was a wonderful thing that he wanted to do, but if you want to do the right thing, you have to examine the Word of God. I think he failed to really get into the Word of God and study God's instructions about moving the ark. He has some instructions about how it was to be moved. He needed to find out **HOW** to do what God wanted done.*

They decided to bring the ark back on an ox cart. That is what the Philistines did. They had taken the ark on an ox cart. They didn't have the law of God. The Philistines really didn't know any better. To tell you the truth about it, as far as I know God didn't kill any of the Philistines because they didn't handle it lawfully; they didn't have the law of God.

Anyway, when the Philistines decided to get rid of the ark they put it on an ox cart, but they didn't know Numbers 4:11 and 13 -- what it had to say about how they were to transport the ark of the covenant. They didn't have the Old Testament Scriptures -- they were not the people of God.

What happened was, God's chosen people went ahead and did things the way that the heathen did them instead of doing it God's way. Now, we need to look closely at this. The end was a good thing -- what they wanted to do was right. They wanted to bring the ark of God, the presence of God, back. They wanted to unite the nation of Israel around the presence of God, and that was a good thing.

David was a man after God's own heart. I believe he was after revival. He saw the error of Saul's ways.

The word, "revive," means, "life again." God is our life; Christ is our life -- He is the way, the truth, and the life. For us to have revival is to get back to a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What David was trying to do was to unite the nation of Israel around the ark of God, that which represented the glory and presence of God. He was trying to promote what we could call a "revival, a turning back, a getting back to God." That was a noble and right thing to do, but he disregarded Numbers 4:11 and the instruction there, and in verse 15.

Thirteen times from Leviticus 10 to Joshua 8 it tells us that the Levites, the sons of Kohath, were supposed to carry the ark on staves; but David didn't pay much attention to the Word of God.

This brings us to this thought: If a man is going to be any kind of a leader he is going to have to get into the Bible. The leader of a nation needs to get into the Word of God and see what God has to say. The leader of a church needs to get into the Word of God and see what God has to say about what the church ought to be about, and what the church is to do. The leader in the family needs to get into the Book and see what God has to say about the family, and see what God has to say about the order of the home -- it is going to affect the family. We need to find out the particulars. It doesn't matter that your attentions are good and noble. Many people have good intentions, but they don't know what the right way is. And the Bible tells us the right way. If you go about it the wrong way, it is going to bring about disaster, heartaches, and problems.

Now, the Bible says in Numbers chapter four, verses eleven through fifteen, "And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof: and they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar: and they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon: and they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the flesh hooks, and the shovels, and the basins, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it. And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward, after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: **BUT THEY SHALL NOT TOUCH ANY HOLY THING, LEST THEY DIE** (emphasis added). These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation."

Now you notice that He gave three specific instructions: **(1)** He said that the Levites were supposed to come and cover the ark. Then **(2)** they were supposed to put the staves in it. Then **(3)** the sons of Kohath were supposed to come and pick it up by the staves. But even they were not supposed to touch it, or else they would die.

Now, David's goal was to produce a revival and unite the nation of Israel around the presence and the glory of God -- which the ark signified. But he didn't do it God's way; he did it his own way. You might say that he just carried on what the heathen started. The heathen did it that way; they sent it so far on an ox cart, and he tried to finish the same way the heathen started.

That would tell us that it doesn't matter what works for the heathen, we are the people of God. It doesn't matter how they do it -- even if it works. I am not interested in what Bill Hiebels is up to, what he is doing. Sometimes I might be tempted to be. Boy, it looks like they are succeeding, you know. They are getting the crowds. But I am not going to join the Willow Creek Association. I am supposed to do God's work the way God prescribed it in the Scriptures. And He has already given us specific instructions as to how to do what needs to be done.

Now we are kind of getting into the nitty-gritty of it all. Up to now, it just seems to be an Old Testament story that is a ways off. We are now going to bring it more into focus of how it applies in our day.

Keep in mind that the ark was to be carried on staves by the sons of Kohath. But instead of the old staves it was a new cart. After all, it just seemed more logical that they get a new cart, and that they get the modern way of doing of it. May I say that anything that has "new" on it ought to worry us! I mean: when you even get the "New" King James! What is wrong with the old King James?

All the real revivals I know of came from the old King James Bible. I have lived a long time and I have never seen a revival come without the old King James. I am talking about a real revival. You can have crusades of any kind, and not have a revival.

You have all these new versions, then you have all these new types of worship -- all these new kinds of churches. And it seems to work for some. It seems to work, but I don't see it really changing lives. This thing of living any old way after they get out of their big worship services -- most of them do. A lot of them go to church living together, not even married! Maybe down the road, after a few years, they decide to go and get married -- after they have lived together and had children, and all of that. That is what is new in our day.

It used to be, that wasn't the right thing! Just about anybody in the lost world will tell you that is wrong. And that is not what the Bible teaches.

We can make all the excuses we want, but this life-style evangelism is something new. The old way is to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

These popular dress styles where God's people dress like the heathen world; that is not new. It has been around now for a while -- it is almost getting old.

Charles Spurgeon said years ago, "LONDON GETS ITS DRESS STYLES STRAIGHT FROM PARIS. AND PARIS GETS HER DRESS STYLES STRAIGHT FROM HELL." And it is still the same today.

I don't care about going to the devil's crowd to find out what is new. I don't think ladies ought to go and see what the devil's crowd has come up with -- the new styles. Most of the time they come up with something new because they want to sell it, and they have to change it often -- but it is pretty wicked.

There is a lady named Dinah who went out to see the daughters of the land in Genesis 34. Have you ever read it? It turned out to be a disaster for them. She went out to see what the new trend, the new style, was and a young man took her and defiled her. She lost her virtue. If you know the rest of the story -- her brothers were so enraged that they murdered all the men of the town. Then Jacob had to pull up roots and leave. They lost their home, their testimony, their morals. She had lost her virtue, lost everything.

The charismatic movement is fairly new. This tongue-teaching stuff about the Holy Ghost of God is not much over fifty years old. You can go back and study it.

I kind of like the old ways, the old paths. I will be honest with you. This modern charismatic stuff is not working. You can watch in on TV and see how they look. Their appearance is like the world, even the leaders. Not all of them, maybe, but most of them are just like the wicked world.

This contemporary Christian music; of course, there is no such critter as "contemporary

Christian.” Contemporary means “in step with the world.” Christian means “in step with Christ.” And the last time I checked (I think I made mention of it last night), Jesus and the world are on different ends; they are diametrically opposed to one another.

It is totally impossible for me to be in step with the world and be in step with Christ at the same time. You need to mark it down, because you need to tell some of your relatives and friends (and I do too) that you don't have to get something that appeals to the world to entice them. It is totally impossible for me to be in step with the world and be in step with Christ, unless I have a split personality -- and I am demon possessed.

I am simply saying that we have these new ox carts, and we have abandoned the old staves of the Word of God. We have abandoned the methods and truths of the Bible that plainly tell us just how it ought to be done.

Let me say this: we are not winning the world. There are more churches than there has ever been. We are not influencing the world, are we. You read statistics: it is not getting better, it is getting worse and worse. When do you think society would ever be smart enough to stop and say, “It is not working!”

All most pastors are concerned about is the numbers. If the finances are good and we have a good crowd, brother we are bound to be doing good, they think. Brother, we know better than that.

We just think that because it works for the heathen world it must be alright. Let me say this: you will find that the heathen world is in the church. The world is in the church, and the church is in the world, and you can't tell the difference between the two.

You can get a big crowd at the football game. We are not trying to get people to come so we can entertain them. We tell them to go to the football game if they want to be entertained. The church is not for entertainment. The church is set apart to teach the truth, the old time ways of God. That's what the church is for, to change lives.

You could get a big crowd by having free beer promotions, if you tell them you are not going to preach anything. I am amazed how they run from preaching. They abandon the truths that change lives. They abandon the principles of the Word of God. They abandon what has been tried and proven, the old King James Bible.

I think we just need to take the five smooth stones and the slaying that David had tried over Saul's armor any day. Sure, it's bigger and shinier. The armor looks more modern. It looks better. It is better technology. We have gotten into this age of marketing the church. We have to use the world's terminology, you know.

I am told that in the bigger cities the first thing they ask is, “What have you got to offer?” And they're not talking about the Word of God. They're not talking about your convictions and the truth of the Word of God. “What does your church have to offer?”

We need what has been tried and proven, and has worked. The principles of this old Book have been tried, proven, and have worked. It is the only thing that I know has ever changed lives. I have never had anybody come back with the testimony, “Boy, that rock Christian music has really changed my life....That contemporary service on Sunday night, where you can come dressed any old way, that has really changed my life!” Have you ever heard that?

They could probably say that it has changed their lives to be more worldly. It soothes their

conscience.

Through the years, it seems like Sunday School is almost becoming obsolete now. And I know that there was a time way back there when they didn't have Sunday School, but teaching the Word of God has worked. Now they have "cell groups" in the cities where on Sunday nights the churches just break up and meet in little cell groups in homes all over the place. I really don't believe that it is going to work out.

We have board-run churches instead of Pastor-run churches. There was no controlling board in the New Testament. But, you know, the problem is that some people just don't want to do it God's way. They have a new way.

Another thing is Sunday morning religion. That is the new thing. You check the book of Acts -- they didn't have just Sunday morning. They met every day. They didn't just have revival meetings; they were in the spirit of revival every day. Today, people don't have time for church. They are too busy with other things.

We need to get back to the old things, the old paths. Jeremiah said that they had forsaken the true fountain of living waters, the old paths, and they had dug out cisterns that don't hold any water. The Bible says numerous times, "It is written." I wonder why it is written. Don't you think God wanted you and I to know the will of God so we could read it for ourselves.

He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone," in Matthew 4:4, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."

He didn't say that I am supposed to live by "some" of the words. If that were the case, I could use any version of the Bible and I could get some of the words of God, and that would be fine. He said, "every word." Since I am supposed to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, some of these words deal with the fine details, such as the movement of the ark on staves by the sons of Kohath. After the Levites covered it, the sons of Kohath moved it, and nobody was to touch it.

Instead of two fellows putting it on the ox cart like the heathen would do, they were supposed to put it on staves and carry it. That is the convenient way. You know, that is quite a bit of burden for two guys to have to carry. We don't want the burden. We live in a day when we want it easy. We don't want to bear any burden in the work of God.

Do you know something? I am supposed to bear some of the burden of the work of God. God intended it; and His intentions can never be replaced. It amazes me how many people establish their own standards based on their own circumstances, instead of what the Book says. We had better get things in order and find out what the Bible says and do it God's way!

We want to do what is convenient about everything in life. I will tell you the truth about it: I think that is one of the things that is destroying America's very foundation. Class, hear me tonight: the foundation on which this country rests is the moral principles of this Book. That is the foundation, and it is being destroyed. "If the foundations be destroyed," the Scriptures says, "what can the righteous do?"

When the foundations of the book are being ignored, the home is destroyed. If the home is destroyed, the church is destroyed. If the church is destroyed, the nation is destroyed. And you can mark it down: more money isn't going to help. More money poured into the schools won't make it happen. I don't care how much more money you pour in. The outcome of the lack of attention to the details of the Word of God -- the refusal to do things God's way instead of the heathen way -- has destroyed this country.

Uzzah died. He was just obeying the king. Poor fellow! He was pretty innocent, wasn't he; just obeying the king. But he was destroyed. I believe that he was sincere. He might have been as sincere as he could have been. The ox stumbled; he reached out to keep the ark from falling off the new cart and smashing. But thirteen times between Leviticus 10 and Joshua 8 it states that the ark is to be carried on staves.

Uzzah was trying to do a good thing, but he was in violation of the Word of God. People had better watch out when they step across boundaries that God has established.

Saul lost a kingdom by stepping across the boundaries that God had set. God had given him instructions.

Uzzah reached across the boundaries that God had established, and he died. And we need to take serious the boundaries that God has set.

You know, everybody has a realm of authority, and we had better respect that. All of us have a realm of authority. Since it was written, they were responsible. The Bible says that if we know these things, happy are we if we do them.

Sometimes it doesn't seem logical. We live in a day when we want to use logic. Sometimes the Bible just doesn't seem logical in some areas, does it; because it is completely contrary to what the world does. The Bible, in our day, is contrary. But it doesn't matter. God says that it is still right.

"Well, I don't know why they would have to carry that heavy ark when they could go ahead and put it on an ox cart. Why?" Do you know why? Because God said so. God doesn't want short cuts. God didn't want the sons of Kohath to miss the opportunity to bear the burden that they were made to bear.

God created us for a purpose, and there is a burden for me to bear: the purpose for which God created me. God doesn't want me to find a way to escape bearing the burden that He made me to bear. Every person God created, He created to bear a burden. He doesn't want you to bear my burden. I may want you to bear my burden, but God doesn't want you to bear my burden. Nor does He want me to bear your burden.

If we are not careful we will get in God's way of trying by bear somebody else's burden when bearing that burden is the very thing they need! Sometimes somebody comes and wants a little financial help, and the reason they need the financial help is because God is trying to teach them a little wisdom. Therefore, if we bail them out we are getting in God's way.

God doesn't want me to find a shortcut so I don't have to do what He wants me to do. Since it is written, and since we are responsible, we ought to get real familiar with what God's Book says.

The Bible was written, for one, to tell husbands and wives about their roles in marriage. There is no doubt in the Word of God of what the role of each is in marriage. No doubts! But the average church could care less about the role in marriage -- I am here to tell you. You preach about God's roles in the home, and it is the most unpopular message you can preach, at least for the women. And to tell you the truth about it, a man shouldn't gloat over the fact that God has put him as being responsible for his home because it is an awesome responsibility. It is a humbling responsibility. Because God is not going to say to Mrs. Adam, "Where are you?"

He didn't come into the garden in Eden and say, "Mrs. Eve, where are you?" did He?

It seems to me, and I hope that I am not biased, that she was the biggest offender -- really. At least in a way. She is the one that partook. She is the one who was deceived.

But God came into the garden and said, "Adam, where are you? What are you up to? What is wrong with you, Adam?" Why? Because Adam was responsible.

It is important (in the Bible) that everybody fulfill their role and take their part serious. Sometimes we want to plead ignorance, but that is no excuse. In Romans 2:1 it says, "Therefore they are without excuse."

God said that the creation itself bears witness against us. We have also the witness of the Holy Ghost of God inside of us. We even have human conscience to tell us the truth about it. We have the witness of the Word of God also. We are without excuse.

Now if David had feared God enough to search the Scriptures he wouldn't have had to fear God after he got a man killed. He wouldn't have had to be afraid of God. The fear of God is not being petrified and terrified at God. The fear of God is "the beginning of wisdom."

I don't need to be terrified when I am obedient to God. I don't have to be. "Perfect love casteth out fear" (I John 4:18). But perfect love is obedience. If you love me, Jesus said, "keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

He said again, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3).

Love will be proved by obedience. Jesus told Peter, 'If you love me, feed my sheep and my lambs.'

Perfect love is not sinless perfection; but perfect love is obedience. There is a difference between obedience and perfection. For instance, let's say I am here and I am headed over there. And over there is perfection. There might be someone else that is closer over there to perfection than I am, but they are not headed on to perfection; they are headed back the other direction. I am not perfect, but I am headed in that direction. God can bless me because my direction is right.

Now follow me. That person who is more perfect than I am, God can't bless him because he is headed the other way. Do you follow me? You might wonder sometimes why God seems to be blessing the more liberal group than He is blessing us -- it is because many times we went that way and we (fundamentalists) paused.... It used to be that fundamentalists were separated, and now they are not. They are turning back.

You might have a liberal group over here, but they are kind of headed that way now; and God is blessing them. They might not be as separated as this group that is closer to perfection, but they are headed that way. Do you follow me? And God is interested in our being headed in that direction. A person can have already headed there, and got pretty close to good standards, etc., but then slack off and start turning -- and we lose the blessings of God.

It is not a location; it is a direction. (You will have to think about that; you might disagree with me.) A wrong direction, regardless of our location, will hinder us.

It is not my location, but my direction, that will bring the blessings of God. I didn't expect perfection out of my children. That would have been unreasonable. However, I did expect obedience --

prompt obedience. And I expected them to do it with a good attitude.

David wanted to bring the ark back. The goal was good. The motive was good. But the method was not right. And after the tragic incident when Uzzah died, David said, 'I don't want the ark.' So he took the ark to Obbedom. After that, you follow it, everywhere the ark of the covenant was, God blessed.

And so the problem was not with the ark. The problem was not with God, because everywhere the ark was, God blessed. The problem was with David.

In the 15th chapter of I Chronicles, verses 1 and 2, "And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent. Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him forever."

It would have been a good thing if he had come to that conclusion before Uzzah died. If he would have checked that out first, Uzzah would have still been living.

David decided to bring the ark back; still a good thing to do, but he didn't do it God's way the first time. But he did it God's way this time. In verse 12 David "said unto them (the Levites), Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord."

And the key to the whole situation was David's confession, "we sought Him not after the due order." They didn't do it God's way the first time.

The same ark that brought sadness in disobedience brought joy in obedience. The Bible says in verse 25 of chapter 15, "So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obbedom with joy."

Verses 28 and 29 say, "Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. And it came to pass, as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the city of David, that Michal the daughter of Saul looking out at a window saw king David dancing and playing: and she despised him in her heart."

The difference between blessings and cursings is the "due order." Most folks do the big things right. They are headed generally right.

Most people do the big things right in their homes for their children, but it is the detail that is important. We let go unnoticed those little rebellious streaks in them. We are not sensitive enough. We think if we keep them in church when they are little that everything will turn out okay. We are not sensitive enough to the little things. It is the little foxes that destroy the vines.

How about Abraham and Sarah? Didn't God promise them the seed, a child who would become a great nation? Wasn't that seed to come out of Abraham's loins? He was one-hundred and she was ninety, past child-bearing age. So what did they do? They stopped trusting the Lord. They began to try to bypass Him. They took matters into their own hands. 'We are going to have to help God and do it

our own way.’ And Abraham had a child by the name of Ishmael, born to Hagar the handmaid. He is now the father of the Arab nations, and is still causing a lot of problems.

All the fighting in the middle east, and problems that Israel (the people of God) have had through these years, have been the result of Abraham doing the wrong thing. He was outside the plan of God.

When they took things into their own hands and decided to do God’s work in their own way, it got messed up. How about Cain? Didn’t he come and worship God like Abel? Sure he did.

Don’t you think his parents taught him the same things that they had taught Abel, that it took a blood atonement? But he came with the fruit of the ground. He did it his way.

I never will forget: I preached the funeral two or three years ago of a stock broker out in Springfield. The singing was terrible. I demanded that they sing “Amazing Grace” before I preach, because the rest of the music was a bunch of junk. Dale’s wife (the deceased man), in the closing song after I preached (and I don’t even know the song) was, “I Did It My Way.” I thought, “Poor Dale, you did it your way, but it is sad.”

That is exactly what most folks are doing today, doing it their own way. Dale died in his fifties. The young man that I do business with now says that he went to Dale and led him to the Lord on his death bed, and I hope that is true.

“Now, I don’t need to go to church to worship God. I can worship God anywhere.” But God says, “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.”

Wasn’t Moses supposed to be the deliverer for the Hebrews in Egypt? He had it in his heart to deliver them. Brother Miller (Associate Pastor) preached on it Wednesday night, didn’t he. When Moses was 40 years old he went out there and saw one of the Hebrews being mistreated by the Egyptian. He had it in his heart to deliver him, but instead of waiting on God, doing it God’s way, he took matters into his own hands -- and it didn’t work.

How about Jacob? Wasn’t God going to give him the inheritance anyway? Did he have to supplant his brother? Did he have to connive and manipulate? I believe God had it already in His plan to give Jacob the birthright.

Saul went to fight the enemies of God, but he didn’t do things God’s way. He did it his way. God said, ‘I want you to destroy every animal; I want you to destroy everything.’

Do you know what he did? He brought back Agag the king as a trophy, like the heathen kings did. He brought him back and paraded him up and down the streets. He also brought back the best of the animals. His excuse was, they were usable. ‘We can use them for sacrifice to God. Boy, they’ll be good sacrifices.’

Doesn’t that seem so innocent? But God said, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

Joshua did God’s will God’s way at Jericho. To me, it sounds like a pretty dumb thing, because when you think of the walls. The walls of Jericho were wide enough for chariots to race abreast around on top. And to think that they could march around those walls and the walls fall. That seemed to be foolish. But God told them to do that. It took some faith.

And they did it without saying a word! Can you imagine Baptists marching that long and not

saying a word? Not even saying, "This is the most foolish thing! Joshua has lost his mind." But they did it God's way, and it worked!

And it still works today to do it God's way just like God says.

Well maybe that will help us to study the Scriptures a little closer and get the details, some Biblical principles. If we are not careful in our humanistic society, our thinking will be wrong about it.

We need to do it God's way.