



**IF YE DO
THESE
THINGS,
YE SHALL
NEVER
FALL**

BY TIM SULLIVAN

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THINGS,
YE SHALL
NEVER
FALL**

SECOND EDITION

BY TIM SULLIVAN

**TO
JESSICA,
MICHAEL,
AND
BRANDON,**

**WITH LOVE
FROM DAD**

OTHER BOOKS BY TIM SULLIVAN

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I AM WHAT I AM
WALKING ON THE KING'S HIGHWAY
THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE
IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT
THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Translated into German by Beatrice Mantock

DIE WAFFEN UNSRES KAMPFES
AUF DER STRASSE DES KÖNIGS GEHEN

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

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All Scripture taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Foreword

Are you one of us? Have you, after years of professed faith in Christ Jesus, come to the awful realization that the holy, incorruptible thing you received remains in you a barely germinated seed? Or perhaps you've lamented the fact that the development of spiritual fruit is continually stunted by the abundance of fleshly passions that still hold sway in your soul. If either is true of you in any degree, then you, like I, have joined the fraternity of people who can no longer find rest or hope in a merely conceptual gospel of regeneration. We yearn to experience the emergence of the light, the royal splendor of the person of Christ in us which is the new man, but oh, how often we stumble in the inner darkness of the old! And in our frustration we cry out "What's wrong; what's WRONG??" God's gift is flawless, so the problem must lie elsewhere.

Consider this: Our common use of the phrase "born again" rightly implies that we received life once through Adam and then again through Jesus Christ. The first is irreparably corrupt, the second unchangeably divine, and both abide. Therefore we must take a lesson from the soil. Any gardener will tell you that a patch of earth poorly tended is, though sown with the finest of

seeds, little more than a garden of weeds. This is our problem: improper cultivation due to ignorance, slothfulness, or both. An unhappy situation to be sure, but you need not be discouraged, dear reader. Help is in your hands!

Rev. Sullivan has delivered a treasure to the 21st Century Church. It is a highly readable work that will lead you on a tour through scripture, giving instruction as to how you may cultivate those qualities of character that spring from the very life of Christ within you. It is, after all, the continuing exercise of your freewill that ultimately determines what flourishes, godly, fruitful character or the corrupt, fruitless variety (weeds). Now in order to maintain a balanced perspective, let me remind you that the Bible has the first and last word concerning the process of your spiritual growth and development. This book however, is a word fitly spoken in due season which may speed you on your quest to actualize the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Its very title is God's iron-clad promise of success as given in 2 Peter 1:10. If you are ready to take responsibility for the relatively small but indispensable part you must play in this, then with all my heart, I urge you... Read on.

Steve Monahan
April 14, 2010

Prologue

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country,” says Proverbs 25:25. The Christians in Jerusalem must have been overjoyed to receive a letter from Peter coming all the way from Rome. But their elation turned to anguish when they read that his life was soon coming to an abrupt and unnatural end.

Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. (2 Peter 1:14)

No doubt the believers tried to console one another, recalling the many times God had rescued Peter from the hands of his enemies. Surely the Lord would bear his mighty arm once again! But as he awaited his execution in Nero’s Rome, Peter knew there would be no such intervention. The hour had come for a prophecy to be fulfilled.

Years before, in the days between his resurrection and ascension, the Lord Jesus called Peter aside for a private word:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake

he, signifying by what death he should glorify God....
(John 21:18–19a)

At the time, this prophecy seemed part of a far-distant future. But when he sat down to dictate his second epistle, Peter knew he was writing his final letter to the church.

A REMARKABLE LIFE

The Bible gives no indication that Simon Barjona (as he was then known) was on a spiritual quest the day when he met Jesus. He was a simple fisherman, preoccupied with the toil of his trade. It was his brother Andrew, himself a disciple of John the Baptist, who brought Peter to the Lord.

One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus....
(John 1:40–42a)

Moments after meeting him for the first time, Jesus gave Simon a new name that perfectly reflected this young man’s character.¹

... And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone. (v. 42b)

Unlike a rock or a tree, a stone has neither heft nor root; it is easily tossed about. Such a man was Peter, carried about by whim and emotion. A servant to his own impulses, he routinely acted first and dealt with the consequences later.

Peter’s remarkable odyssey with the Lord began soon after this introduction. Early one morning, Jesus was teaching a crowd

¹“Cephas” is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek “Petros,” from which comes the English “Peter.” Paul referred to Peter as “Cephas” in 1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:22, 9:5 and 15:5, and in Galatians 2:9. He called him “Petros” in Galatians 1:18, 2:7, 2:11 and 2:14. When the angel of the Lord sent Cornelius to Joppa, he told him to “call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter” (Acts 10:32). Throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts, he is referred to either as “Peter” or “Simon Peter.” In his first epistle he identifies himself as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”; in his second, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

of people along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Nearby, Peter and his fishing partners James and John were washing their nets after a long night's work.

And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. (Luke 5:3)

After Jesus finished teaching, he had a blessing – and a test – for Peter. “Launch out into the deep,” said the Lord, “and let down your nets for a draught.” Immediately the fisherman protested, saying, “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.” Then as if to appease him, Peter added, “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net” (vv. 4–5). Peter would pay for his condescension. Jesus had told him to let down several nets, but Peter cast out a single net only.

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. (vv. 6–7)

Peter realized that he had grossly underestimated Jesus, and he abased himself before him.

When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so *was* also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon.... (vv. 8–10a)

Peter had many flaws but being self-righteous was not one of them. He knew he was a sinful man and made no attempt to justify his mistakes once they were exposed to him. This is a quality we all should emulate.

... And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. (vv. 10b–11)

The Gospel of Luke alone testifies of the miracle of the draught of fishes. Adding the testimonies of Matthew and Mark, we can deduce that Jesus again spoke with the two pairs of brothers on

a following day, and that is when he invited them to be his disciples. (We can also surmise why James and John were mending their nets!)

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18–22)

As recorded in Matthew 16:13–16, the day came when Jesus decided to test the perception of his band of followers. “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” he asked. They answered, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” Jesus now asked a more probing question: “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus was pleased by Peter’s answer and shared with him a very special revelation.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (vv. 17–19)

It is highly unlikely that Peter understood what Jesus was talking about. But whatever the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” might be, Peter knew he had been set apart for something special. Did this knowledge cause his head to swell with pride? Consider this possibility as we read what followed soon after:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke

him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. (vv. 21–22)

Peter had to be feeling quite highly of himself to think he had the right to rebuke the Lord! Jesus wasted no time in setting him straight.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. (v. 23)

We Christians are often slow to realize that the Lord does not seek our counsel. He does not need our advice; he needs our trust and obedience. But even after such a sharp rebuke – the kind that would send most men into hiding – Peter never stopped speaking his mind. Witness the *very next* recorded event:

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. (Matthew 17:1–3)

Was Peter trying to stay unnoticed, afraid to speak for fear of being wrong? Never! He was *still* making suggestions to the Lord, howbeit with far greater discretion!

Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. (v. 4)

This is the kind of man Peter was, as brash as he was devoted, but genuine through and through. We see this in his reaction the day Jesus wanted to wash his feet.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet.... (John 13:6–8a)

Peter could not bear the thought of Jesus so humiliating himself. But he had no rebuttal when Jesus said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (v. 8b). Even so, in Peter’s mind washing his *feet* hardly seemed sufficient to thoroughly cleanse

him. Peter knew his hands were dirty with the things he had done, his head stained with the things he had thought.

Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. (vv. 9–11)

Later that evening, Jesus told his disciples that he would soon be leaving them.

Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. (John 13:36)

Peter expected to be at his Master's side until the very end. "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now?" he asked. "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (v. 37). Jesus' response hit him in the face like a club.

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. (v. 38)

To Peter, the idea that he would deny Jesus was unthinkable, simply *outrageous*. "I will lay down my life for thy sake!" he insisted, and as far as he was concerned that was the end of it. Peter knew that he was a flawed man but he was *very* sure that he was not a coward. *How could Jesus say something like this?* I doubt that Peter really heard anything else that was said that evening. I believe that this prophecy was still weighing heavily on his mind when Jesus was arrested, and that this explains his sudden act of violence towards the high priest's servant.

Judas then, having received a band of *men* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons... Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. (John 18:3, 10)

Was Peter trying to disprove Jesus' prophecy? Was he trying to prove his courage, hoping to be arrested along with the Lord? This seems likely. Imagine his confusion when Jesus turned and

healed the man's injured ear.

And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. (Luke 22:51)

Moreover, imagine his agony a few hours later when he realized that he had fulfilled the prophecy.

And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this *fellow* also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest [this was his third denial]. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. (vv. 59–60)

The following verses are painful to read:

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. (vv. 61–62)

The next time Peter saw Jesus was after the resurrection. Once again, his emotions must have been in a whirlwind. It was sweet rhapsody to know that Jesus was risen from the dead. But how could he ever face him? In time past he had heard Jesus teach, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33). Peter no doubt expected to be damned for his denial. Imagine his relief when he realized that Jesus *still* loved him.

What was it like to see Jesus as "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9)? Peter's head was still spinning from all these events when, on the Day of Pentecost, his world was turned upside down again. A healing at the temple gate sparked a spiritual revival that swept Jerusalem. The same jealous hostility that had been aimed at Jesus was now directed towards his apostles.

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. (Acts 5:17–18)

Some of the apostles probably thought their lives would soon be over. God had other plans.

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. (vv. 19–20)

Peter's second imprisonment was by order of King Herod, soon after Herod had killed James, the brother of John. Herod intended to execute Peter as well, but God overruled him with an angelic rescue.

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. (Acts 12:6–8)

It was only after they arrived at the city gates that Peter realized he was not dreaming.

And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews. (v. 11)

In secular life and in ministry, they had been a band of brothers – Peter and Andrew, James and John. Now James was dead, his life cut short by a ruthless and paranoid king. Stephen was another man who was dear to Peter's heart, another victim of the persecution. So many people Peter had labored with were now imprisoned or dead. It had fallen upon him to comfort and encourage the young church during such times. How often he must have wrestled with his own desire for retaliation.

When Peter heard that Saul of Tarsus had accepted Christ, did he believe the report right away? What went through his mind three years later when he finally met Paul face to face and welcomed him as a brother in the Lord? Who could have imagined the day when Peter spoke of his former adversary as “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15)?

What a life this fisherman had led! As a boy growing up in Galilee, he could never have imagined that such adventures awaited him. But now the final chapter of his mortal life was about to end. There was time for one more letter.

MAKE YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE

The epistle we call 2 Peter is his last will and testament to the church. Every fiber of his being was wrapped into every word – all that he had witnessed, all that he had learned. Nestled within this epistle is a word of instruction followed by an amazing promise: “If ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10b).

To *fall* is to abandon your faith. How many Christians had Peter known who were running the good race but fell along the wayside? How many have you known? This has always been a very real problem in the church, something even the most steadfast believer must never forget.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

What can we do to ensure the longevity of our service to the Lord? Peter said, “If you do *these things*, you shall never fall.” Could it be so simple? For the Christian who desires to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus, this promise is like finding a treasure map to untold riches. This is not theoretical mumbo jumbo that may or may not prove helpful. This is the answer straight from heaven!

How many “things” would you expect to find on a list of requirements for a fruitful Christian life? One hundred? Fifty? Ten? Amazingly, only eight truths complete the list: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.

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. (2 Peter 1:5–8)

It is the nature of fallen man to blame his impoverished spiritual condition on the wickedness of the world around him. The Word of God makes no such allowance. The fruitfulness of your Christian devotion depends entirely on you. If you do these things, you will stand; if you neglect them, you will fall. It is that simple.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (v. 9)

Salvation is a gift of unmerited grace. If obtaining it required even one work, it would not be of grace.

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. (Romans 11:6)

But being saved is the beginning of the Christian experience, not the fulfillment of it. Along with the free gift of salvation comes a holy obligation to the King of kings.

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Because we have been saved, we should occupy ourselves with “the things that accompany salvation.”

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. (Hebrews 6:9)

The things that accompany salvation are our ministry to the saints and our labor of love in his name. These are things we must diligently maintain “unto the end.”

For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.... (Hebrews 6:10–11)

This is how we make our calling and election sure.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.... (2 Peter 1:10)

To fulfill your ministry is the grandest achievement of this life.

It is your *raison d'être* (reason for being). But such an accomplishment is guaranteed no one. We must continually examine our steps to ensure we are on track with the Lord. As Paul said to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col. 4:17).

Give diligence, wrote Peter. *Diligence unto the end*, says Hebrews. *Take heed*, said Paul. The Christian's need to guard his spiritual wellbeing is established by a multitude of witnesses.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

Those who let this warning slip away will see their golden opportunity for a fulfilled life slip away with it.

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. (Hebrews 2:1)

TO PUT YOU ALWAYS IN REMEMBRANCE

It is a failure among Bible teachers that we often pressure ourselves to bring a *new* word to the people of God. In that way, we treat our congregation as if they were no more sophisticated than the men of Athens who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). Peter was not concerned with bringing something new to the church; he wanted to give Christians something tried and true. With whatever time he had left, Peter pledged to remind the church of the truths they had already received. In so doing, he left a word for all generations to come.

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know *them*, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting *you* in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off *this* my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. (2 Peter 1:12–15)

Peter's spiritual race ended many years ago. His legacy lives

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

on in a charge of eight truths that enable a Christian to stand and never fall in his service to God. In the chapters that follow, we will examine each of these precepts one by one, in the hope and expectation that we will learn how to make our calling and election sure.

Faith

Eight biblical precepts hold the key to a vital Christian walk. “If these things be in you, and abound,” wrote Peter, “they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:8). First on the list is our precious faith.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.... (2 Peter 1:1)

It is faith that defines Christians as *believers*. Faith is fundamental to the Christian experience. God has purified our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9). We are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18), justified by faith (Rom. 3:28), and made righteous by faith (Rom. 3:22). We stand by faith (2 Cor. 1:24), walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7), and live by faith (Heb. 10:38). We are all the children of God by faith (Gal. 3:26).

It is faith that makes each Christian experience unique. “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,” says Romans 12:3, but it is still required of each man to *exercise* that faith. God has constrained himself to intervene in the lives of his people only so much as their faith allows. In that way, God is limited by our faith.

Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, *nor* the day when he delivered them from the enemy. (Psalm 78:41–42)

No man will walk with God beyond the confines of his faith. These boundaries are self-imposed, conditioned by our opinion of God. Faith is personal. It is not governed by THE truth but rather by *your* truth. We exercise our faith in proportion to our *acknowledgment* and *expectation* of God.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

In order to have faith, you must first believe that God is. Yes, the Bible says that “God is not a man, that he should lie” (Num. 23:19), but this truth does you no good unless you *believe* that God does not lie. Do you believe that God is indeed the great I AM, “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20), and that “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37)? Do you believe that God is truly “full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Ps. 86:15)? When you believe in your heart that *God is*, then you are well on your way to having faith in him.

It is one thing to know that God is great; it is quite another to know he will exercise his greatness on your behalf. Equally important to your acknowledgment of God is your *expectation* of him. Do you believe that God is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” when *you* seek him?

Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” But this wonderful truth will not benefit you unless you believe it in *your* day of trouble. Psalm 86 was written by a man who lived in acknowledgment and expectation of his heavenly Father. These verses demonstrate the kind of faith we all need.

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me. Among the gods *there is* none like unto thee, O Lord; neither *are there any works* like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall

glorify thy name. For thou *art* great, and doest wondrous things: thou *art* God alone. (Psalm 86:7–10)

Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal in order to confront the unbelief among the people of God. “How long halt ye between two opinions?” he demanded (1 Kings 18:21). Many times we Christians seem divided by two opinions about our heavenly Father. It is as though we have two gods, one whom we worship on Sunday and the other whom we deal with the rest of the week. Our Sunday god is the God of the Bible, all-powerful and ever-present, full of love and mercy. Our Monday to Saturday god shakes his head in disgust when we fail, and wags an “I told you so!” finger as he leaves us alone with our problems.

It is our opinion of God from Monday to Saturday that makes our Sunday worship either authentic or feigned. Songs of praise effervesce from deep within us when we witness in our spirit that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. May the God of mercy and love we acknowledge each Sunday be the same God we count on in our time of need.

WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?

Jesus devoted much time to teaching his disciples about faith. He led his disciples to enlarge the borders of their faith in God by placing them in situations that confounded their natural minds.

Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy. And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish.... (Luke 8:22-24a)

At least four of the disciples were professional fishermen. Undoubtedly they had ridden out many storms at sea, but this one was so terrible they feared for their lives. Picture the lashing of the waves and the sheets of rain pelting their faces as the ship rose and fell like a piece of cork. Hear the howling of the wind and the wood bending and breaking while the men frantically shouted instructions one to another. How long did they fight the storm

before they decided to wake up Jesus? Who was elected to do the job?

... Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm. (v. 24b)

In an instant, the wind and rain ceased. The dark clouds vanished and the boat rocked in gentle waves like a baby nestled in his mother's arms. The disciples stared at each another in astonishment.

And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him. (v. 25)

"Where is your faith?" Jesus asked his disciples. They had set sail in obedience to his command. The Lord was with them on the boat. Would God now abandon them to drown like rats aboard a sinking ship? Would he not be with them through any obstacles they might encounter along the way? Is this not what he has promised?

And the LORD, he *it is* that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:8)

"Where is your faith?" this same Jesus asks his disciples today. At what point does *your* faith quit? At what point do the problems you see eclipse the God you cannot see? How big can your problems grow before they are bigger than your God?

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

The disciples were amazed when Jesus calmed the wind and sea with his word. But their instruction on faith was not complete. Again he sent his disciples to sea, but this time he remained on shore.

And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. (Mark 6:46–47)

Another storm threatened their lives but this time Jesus was

not on board to save them. Would this be their end? Imagine their amazement when Jesus walked out on the water to help them!

And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.
(vv. 48–51)

Jesus did not disperse the storm until *after* he boarded the ship. That means he walked right through it. He did not eliminate the obstacle; he triumphed over it, demonstrating that faith prevails even in the face of tumultuous opposition.

But there was more to this lesson. *Before* Jesus boarded the ship, he pushed the boundaries of Peter’s faith even further by telling him to join him out on the stormy sea.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.
(Matthew 14:28–30)

As far as I know, Peter is the only mortal man to ever walk on water. Even in this age when astronauts have walked on the moon, this is unequivocally the greatest “one small step” ever taken by a man. But did Jesus congratulate Peter for the few steps he took? No, he chastised him for losing his faith along the way!

And immediately Jesus stretched forth *his* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. (vv. 31–32)

“Little faith indeed!” one might be tempted to say! Who among us has ever taken *one* step on water? But the Master’s lesson to his disciple was plain. The waves did not sink Peter – it

was his doubt! It is our doubt – not our circumstance – that sinks us. God never fails us, but our faith surely can. “I have prayed for thee,” Jesus later told Peter, “that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:32).

When their ship was floundering in a raging sea, Jesus caused the storm to cease immediately at his command. Later, his disciples watched in amazement as Jesus walked on water in the midst of strong winds. Finally, the Lord challenged Peter to leave the security of the ship and tear down the preconditioned boundaries of his faith by walking out to join him on the water. Jesus lifted his disciples to higher levels of faith as he set greater and greater challenges before them. So long as they did not quit, the disciples continued to grow.

In our dull-mindedness, we pray for a life so comfortable that we do not *need* faith. We think that the answer to our problems is for God to change our circumstances. We don’t see that God is using our circumstances to change us!

The muscles in our physical body develop as they encounter greater and greater resistance. Faith, too, needs resistance to grow. We will never see that we are “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37) until we stand up to those things that need conquering! For those who seek spiritual development, the trial of your faith is more precious than gold. Each challenge you complete, each “manifold temptation” you endure, lifts you to a higher place in your Christian walk.

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ....

(1 Peter 1:6–7)

What is greater to you – your troubles or your God? Peter looked at the things that were seen, and “when he saw the wind boisterous,” he lost his faith. For those who desire to stand and not fall, our faith must not be in the things we see but in the invisible God who is, and is a rewarder of all who diligently seek him. Where is *your* faith?

(FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD, SO ADD TO YOUR FAITH...)

Virtue

In the New Testament, there seems to be disagreement between the teachings of Paul and James concerning the very important subject of *justification* – how a man is made right with God. Paul wrote that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

James seems to take an opposing view.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (James 2:24)

This controversy cannot be ignored. Until it is resolved, not only is the reliability of the Bible called into question but our very salvation as well. Is a man justified by *faith* as Paul wrote? Or is it by *works* that a man is justified, as expressed by James? Or is there a third possibility: Could they both be right?

THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul's ministry ranks among the greatest the world has ever

known. It is no small thing that he authored thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. (There are many good reasons to credit him with the anonymously written *Epistle to the Hebrews* as well, including the fact that it was written anonymously. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus made his name an anathema among the Jews. Omitting the byline from the book of Hebrews was one way to circumvent this potential stumbling block.)

Paul's teachings bridge the Old and New Testament and the Jewish and Gentile worlds. His life and times made him perfectly suited for the mission he was born to fulfill. Paul was "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). He was educated in Jerusalem "at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3). "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee," he declared at his hearing in Jerusalem (Acts 23:6). Paul was also a "free born" Roman citizen (Acts 22:28).

Everything that Saul of Tarsus held to be true was shattered when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Still he never waxed nostalgic for days gone by. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord," he wrote in Philippians 3:8. Paul testified in Ephesus that he was ready to die for "the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

As "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:16), Paul proved that both Jew and Gentile stood on equal footing before God. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (v. 23). The only way for man to be justified – set free from the guilt and penalty of his sinful deeds – was by an act of grace through the redeeming blood of Jesus.

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

(Romans 3:24–26)

How could sinful man be justified? There was only one way:
Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without
the deeds of the law. (v. 28)

THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE JAMES

Paul's authority is indisputable. But is not the same true of James? Paul himself grouped James with Peter and John as "pillars" of the primitive (first century) church.

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. (Galatians 2:9)

Paul also referred to James as an *apostle*, noting that he was brother to the Lord Jesus.

But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1:19)

James was the son of Joseph and Mary. Today we would call James the *half-brother* of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew names all the sons of Joseph and Mary, and infers that there were daughters as well.

And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this *man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? (Matthew 13:54–55a)

In many ways, James' first mention in the Bible is even more shameful than Paul's, as he and his brothers (along with their mother Mary) sought to disrupt Jesus from his work, prompting the Lord to distance himself from them all.

There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and

my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. (Mark 3:31–35)

John 7:5 tells the awful truth: “For neither did his brethren believe in him.” Happily, they all had a change of heart after the resurrection of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:7 says, “After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.” Along with his mother and siblings, James joined the apostles for prayer and supplication in the days between the Ascension and the Day of Pentecost.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. (Acts 1:13–14)

By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians, James was settled in the faith. Therefore, when one reads from his epistle, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jms. 2:24), it is nothing less than startling. Does his epistle stand in defiance of the teachings of Paul?

To properly interpret the epistle of James, we must realize its intended audience. James wrote this letter “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Like the book of Hebrews, this letter was addressed to the Children of Israel.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.... (James 1:1–2)

More specifically, this epistle is written to those Jews who have believed on Christ as their Messiah, and who are born again of the Spirit of God.

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (v. 18)

In Romans 9:6 Paul wrote, “They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” There is *national* Israel (“the children of the flesh”), and there is *spiritual* Israel (“the children of the promise”).

That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not

the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. (Romans 9:8)

Both Isaiah and Paul testified that a remnant of (national) Israel would be saved.

For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. (Isaiah 10:22)

Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.... (Romans 9:27)

Spiritual (born again) Israel is the Israel of God.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:15–16)

Jewish-born Christians are the natural branches grafted into their own olive tree.

For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree? (Romans 11:24)

The epistle of James is specifically addressed to Christians who are of the generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because Gentile-born Christians have been grafted into the same olive tree, this epistle is applicable to all Christians.

But what is the theme of the book of James? This epistle does not concern the unsaved man, or what a man must do *in order to be saved*. Rather, James teaches how a man should live *because he is saved*. This is an important distinction.

A jailer in Philippi asked Paul and Silas the question of the ages: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30–31). On the other hand, Peter asks the question asked of every one who accepts Christ as Lord: “Seeing then that all these things [of earth] shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought

ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11). This is the question addressed by the book of James as well.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

James writes at length of keeping the law. But the law of which he speaks is not the Law of Moses with all its ordinances and commandments. James speaks of the *royal law*, the *law of liberty*. This law dictates our duty to God and man as described in the two great commandments.

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

The royal law was not eradicated by the cross of Christ. To the contrary, it is only because of the cross of Christ that one is able to fulfill it.

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (James 2:8–12)

Jesus is “the King of saints” (Rev. 15:3). God has “delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). As citizens of that kingdom, Christians have an obligation to obey its laws. This is the central theme of James’ epistle. James writes that a Christian’s life should reflect his profession of faith.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the

devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:17–20)

Faith without works is dead. You cannot separate one from the other. Any true proclamation of faith will be accompanied by corresponding behavior. This was the example given by Abraham.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (v. 21)

Abraham was justified by works *after* he was first counted righteous, long before Isaac was born.

And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:4–6)

When James speaks of Abraham's justification by works, he is not referring to his salvation. James is commending Abraham for his conduct *after* he believed. James is not speaking of the justification of the sinner, but rather, the justification of the Christian. There is more to Christianity than being saved from eternal damnation. Salvation is our beginning, not our end. Faith without works is dead, but by our works, our faith is perfected.

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:22–26)

As we see, the epistles of Paul and James are not discordant. Paul and James speak in unison and one accord. Paul writes of salvation faith and James writes of walking in faith. Add the words of Peter and the divine song is voiced in three-part harmony: "Add to your faith, virtue."

VIRTUOUS CHRISTIANITY

In the words famously – though inaccurately – attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words.” (St. Francis did say that men should “preach by their deeds.”)

If doing the right thing were easy, everyone would do it. Unfortunately, it is the nature of fallen man to prefer what is easy over what is right. Those who go about “doing good” are rare.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. (Acts 10:38)

Virtue is doing the right thing instead of the easy thing. According to the *1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*, “Virtue is nothing but voluntary obedience to truth.” Those who lead a virtuous life do so because they want to, not because they have to. Their obedience to God is the fruit of God’s goodness dwelling in them. We were created unto good works.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Christianity begins with faith toward God. But faith without works is dead. We have *living* faith when we add *virtue* to our faith. Virtuous Christianity comes by faith and good works.

Naomi called her daughter-in-law, Ruth, a virtuous woman.

And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou *art* a virtuous woman. (Ruth 3:11)

Ruth exemplifies the voluntary obedience to truth and moral excellence that marks a virtuous life. Her husband was dead. She was free of obligation to her mother-in-law. “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth,” says 1 Corinthians 7:39, “but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” Naomi herself tried to persuade her two widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to leave her behind and start a new life.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with

me? *are* there yet *any more* sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? (Ruth 1:11)

But Ruth would not abandon Naomi. “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee,” she said, “for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (v. 16). Ruth’s pledge to Naomi is often quoted in Christian wedding vows. It speaks volumes to us who have been bound by the laws of marriage to the one who was raised from the dead.

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. (Romans 7:4)

The “virtuous woman” of the Scriptures is not a measuring stick by which Christian husbands can criticize their wives. The proverb of the virtuous woman personifies an ideal relationship between the church and her Lord.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates. (Proverbs 31:29–31)

Men and women both are a crown to the Lord when they live virtuously.

A virtuous woman *is* a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed *is* as rottenness in his bones. (Proverbs 12:4)

God forbid we should be “rottenness in his bones.” Jesus did not liberate us from the powers of darkness so we could live in lawlessness.

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:14)

We were called to show our faith by our good works.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable

unto men. (Titus 3:8)

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (James 1:22)

There is no deception as powerful as *self*-deception. One of the most powerful deceptions swaying church-going Christians is the notion that there is virtue in simply attending church. To celebrate *hearing* the Word without *living* the Word is to commend yourself even as you fall. Jesus declared that it is by the hearing and *doing* of the Word of God that our house will not fall.

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:47–49)

People have a great capacity to hear what they want to hear. This parable has been retold as a fable of a believer and an unbeliever. In the fable, one man hears the Word and the other does not. The flood completely bypasses the believer's house but annihilates the unbeliever's house. This fable of the untouchable Christian is widely believed today, despite its unscriptural basis.

In the true parable, both men hear the Word. The difference between the two is that one "heareth my sayings, and doeth them," and the other "heareth, and doeth not." The flood rises against both houses, but only the house built upon the rock stands.

We build our lives upon the rock as we hear and do the Word. "Add to your faith, virtue," said Peter, for "if ye *do* these things," – and not hear about them only – "ye shall never fall."

(ZEAL CAN BE MISDIRECTED, SO ADD TO VIRTUE...)

Knowledge

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. But faith without works is dead, so we add to our faith, virtue. Now, in our continuing pursuit of a fruitful and steadfast Christian life, we must add “to virtue knowledge” (2 Pet. 1:5).

One might have guessed that knowledge would be first on the list, surpassing virtue and even faith in priority. However this is not the case. Without the key of knowledge, the door to truth stays closed.

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. (Luke 11:52)

The key of knowledge is faith in God. Without faith, one can know every word of every verse of the Bible and still not enter into the knowledge of God. The Word of God does not benefit those who do not believe it.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. (Hebrews 4:2)

The pursuit of *knowledge without faith* is an exercise in futility. Like a caged mouse running on a wheel, such a quest leaves a

person “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). On the other hand, *faith without knowledge* has its own dread consequence. It is not for lack of faith that man is destroyed. In Hosea 4:6, God says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Isaiah 5:13 says, “Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge.” Faith cannot compensate for ignorance. That is why God wants all men to “come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3–4)

The Word of God contains knowledge of “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). Such knowledge will enrich our lives in every way.

Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. (Proverbs 24:3–4)

ZEAL, IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

Faith without works is dead, so we add to our faith, virtue or good works. But what constitutes a good work? Enthusiasm is a wonderful thing, and Christians should be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Paul said, “It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing” (Gal. 4:18). But what constitutes a good thing? Man’s personal opinion is unreliable. Proverbs 16:2 warns, “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.” Proverbs 12:15 says that even “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes.”

Paul knew – as very few men have known – the pitfall of religious zeal that is not yoked to knowledge of truth. Undoubtedly there were times when he was haunted by the painful memory of his past.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. (Galatians 1:13–14)

Without proper knowledge, zeal for God is empty. Furthermore, history proves that religious zeal alone is often *dangerous*. Christian zeal must be *according to knowledge*, in one accord with the truth of God's Word.

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (Romans 10:2-3)

Paul understood what it was to have "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." It was not hatred that drove him to persecute the early church; it was ignorance. Saul of Tarsus thought he was defending the true faith.

Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. (1 Timothy 1:13)

All learning begins with discovering where we have been wrong. By the knowledge of the Law, man learned he was guilty of transgressing against God, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Our wicked condition was exposed, not so we should wallow before God in self-condemnation and guilt, but so we would repent.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.... (Acts 17:30)

In his love, God rebukes and chastens us to the end we should be zealous to repent.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

God has never considered ignorance to be a legitimate excuse for sin. In the Old Testament, special sacrifices were offered for sins committed through ignorance. We learn in the fourth chapter of Leviticus that such atonement was required whenever a "sin through ignorance" was committed by the whole congregation, by a ruler, or by one of the common people.

And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they

have done *somewhat against* any of the commandments of the LORD *concerning things* which should not be done, and are guilty; When the sin, which they have sinned against it, is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring him before the tabernacle of the congregation.

(Leviticus 4:13–14)

When a ruler hath sinned, and done *somewhat* through ignorance *against* any of the commandments of the LORD his God *concerning things* which should not be done, and is guilty; Or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish.... (vv. 22–23)

And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth *somewhat against* any of the commandments of the LORD *concerning things* which ought not to be done, and be guilty; Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned. (vv. 27–28)

Sacrificial atonement would not be necessary if ignorance negated the consequence of sin. Just before he died on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). If ignorance excused sin, Jesus would not have needed to give his life for you and me.

I WOULD NOT HAVE YOU IGNORANT

Of the many things that God wants you to know, there are six things listed in the New Testament of which he gives special notice that he “would not have you ignorant.” Let us examine these six truths in the order in which they appear in the Bible.

First, God wants us to know that the work of the ministry does not always go according to our own design. Though we have faith and a zeal for good works, we will nevertheless face obstacles along the way.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. (Romans 1:13)

Second, God wants us to know that the grace shown the Gentiles to believe on Christ gives them nothing to boast about to the Jews. In times past it was the Gentiles who had neither eyes to see nor ears to hear the truth. The day is coming when all Israel shall turn to the Lord.

For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.... (Romans 11:25–26)

Third, God wants us to know that the miracles that accompanied the Children of Israel in their exodus from Egypt foreshadowed the accomplishments of Christ.

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 were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1–4)

Fourth, God wants us to have correct knowledge concerning the gifts of the Spirit.

Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. (1 Corinthians 12:1)

Fifth, God wants us to know that though our faith be unyielding and our zeal resolute, we may still battle despair as we labor to advance the gospel.

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.... (2 Corinthians 1:8)

Finally, God wants us to know that even in times of great sorrow we have reason for joy.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

THE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

It is through the knowledge of salvation that God is able to bring repentant man out of the shadow of death and into the way of peace.

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:77–79)

Through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we “escape the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20). Through knowledge, grace and peace are multiplied unto us.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.... (2 Peter 1:2)

These are just some of the reasons Peter encouraged all believers to grow in knowledge.

But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

Without faith, it is impossible to please God. But faith without works is dead, so we must add virtue to our faith and become zealous of good works. However, misdirected zeal has done great damage to both church and society. Therefore we must add to virtue, knowledge.

(KNOWLEDGE PUFFETH UP, SO ADD TO KNOWLEDGE...)

Temperance

As we read the Gospels, it is important to remember that Peter and his fellow disciples were relatively young men when they began to follow Jesus. Peter's unbridled exuberance is typical of a man in his twenties, old enough to choose his own path but young enough to still be rather reckless. Young people are typically more daring than their elders; what young people call adventurous, older people call irresponsible. Too often, such *joie de vivre* (joy of living) is extinguished by the time we reach middle-age, smothered by the setbacks and disappointments we have suffered along the way. It is no small thing that God promises to renew our youth as we walk with him.

Who satisfieth thy mouth with good *things*; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:5)

One thing that youth does *not* have is the wisdom of experience. Inexperience breeds a peculiar kind of arrogance. There is nothing more self-assured than untested theory. Newlyweds swear that they will never argue. Parents-to-be swear they will never yell at their children. Children swear they will not make the same mistakes as their parents. Everything seems so easy until

you try doing it yourself.

The following bit of wisdom is often attributed to the American writer Mark Twain: “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” Obviously it was the young man and not his father who learned the most in those passing years.

We have seen that faith is required to please God. Faith without works is dead, so we must couple faith with good works or virtue. In order to understand what constitutes a good work, we require knowledge. But we dare not stop here. Knowledge alone has a dangerous side-effect. Knowledge “puffeth up.”

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (1 Corinthians 8:1)

Knowledge can fill you with pride, with predictable results.

Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

The puffer fish is a unique sea creature. It has the ability to inflate itself up to three times its normal size, giving the impression that it is much larger than it really is. Of course, it is still just a small fish. The puffer fish could well serve as the mascot of many institutions of higher learning, Bible colleges included. Fresh graduates puffed up with untested knowledge go out into the world expecting their elders to step aside and make room for their brilliant ideas.

Knowledge leads to pride and pride leads to a fall. Yet the biblical promise is, “If ye do these things, ye shall *never* fall.” How do we ensure that the knowledge we gain is an asset and not a liability? “To knowledge,” wrote Peter, we must add “temperance” (2 Pet. 1:6a).

LET EVERY MAN PROVE HIS OWN WORK

Simply having an idea for a new way to do things does not guarantee success. New is not necessarily better. The worthiness of an idea is revealed by its strength under testing. Knowledge

must be proven in the fires of experience. It must be tempered.

In the production of metal or glassware, raw material is tempered – hardened or strengthened – by the application of heat and/or cooling. The prophet Ezekiel used the picture of a wall daubed or coated with “untempered mortar” to describe the deceitful assurances made by false prophets.

Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and *there was* no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered *morter*.... (Ezekiel 13:10)

And her prophets have daubed them with untempered *morter*, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. (Ezekiel 22:28)

What seems powerful in theory can prove impotent in application. Potential is an overrated commodity. Men and their ideas must be proven before they are relied upon.

But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. (Galatians 6:4)

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

(1 Thessalonians 5:21)

Untested knowledge is only theory. This is the folly of the novice. He confuses theoretical knowledge with expertise. But reading a book about building a house does not make you a carpenter. The road to mastery is deliberately and slowly traveled. Time and experience are essential to the maturation process.

We begin every new endeavor as a novice. In order to develop expertise, we apprentice ourselves to someone who has already mastered the skills we desire. That is God’s way for family, society, and church: “Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder” (1 Pet. 5:5). In due course, the younger becomes the elder to a new generation.

God wants his church governed by people who have proven themselves over time. A man shows his fitness to lead a congregation by the life he leads outside of it. If he is negligent to attend to the needs of his *own* household, he will certainly ignore the needs of an *assembly* of households. How backwards it is when we consider it *noble* for a man to forsake his duty to his family in

order to serve the church. This is not God's way! In actuality, such a man serves neither God nor his family.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. (1 Timothy 5:8)

How many problems in the church would be avoided if we simply followed God's plan!

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:4-6)

Calling a novice an elder is like calling a boy a man. Changing the name does not change the reality. Still, it is the person who *appoints* a novice to a position of oversight who is most to blame. Giving a man too much too soon all but guarantees his failure. That is why Paul advised Timothy, "Lay hands [in ordination] suddenly on no man" (1 Tim. 5:22). Like fruit on the vine, men must be given time to mature.

TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS

We answer our calling by fulfilling the demands of our calling. Otherwise we are salt without savor, of no use to God or man.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. (Matthew 5:13)

When Paul sent instruction to Titus concerning the ordination of church elders, he told him to look for men who were "sober, just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1:8). Temperance "in all things" is one of the demands of the Christian calling.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.... (1 Corinthians 9:25a)

Temperance is self-control. We will submit to Christ's mastery only to the extent that we master our own bodies.

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. (v. 27)

To “keep under your body” is to “possess your vessel in sanctification and honour.”

That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.... (1 Thessalonians 4:4–5)

Temperance is evidenced in self-restraint over our appetites and passions. It is moderation.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. (Philippians 4:5)

Self-restraint begins with a bridled tongue.

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion *is* vain. (James 1:26)

Our words should be few and carefully selected.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice *is known* by multitude of words. (Ecclesiastes 5:2–3)

When we lose control over our disposition, we say we lose our temper. A temperate man *keeps* his temper. He is slow to anger.

He that is slow to wrath *is* of great understanding: but *he that is* hasty of spirit exalteth folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

He that is slow to anger *is* better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

People who are unsure of their own beliefs often feel threatened by those who express a different point of view. People expect me to get angry when they say they don’t believe in Jesus. I don’t get angry; I feel sorry for them. I remember what life was like without Christ. But there is no virtue in arguing the point. Our mission is to preach the gospel, not triumph in debate.

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging

of the truth.... (2 Timothy 2:25)

Sometimes your best option is to walk away.

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10–11)

A WARNING TO A LUKEWARM CHURCH

The road of temperance is not extreme. It veers neither to the left nor the right. Proverb 30 teaches us much about the boundaries of temperance:

Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*. (Proverbs 30:7–9)

A temperate climate is neither hot nor cold. But this does not mean we are to be *lukewarm* concerning the things of God. This was the sin of the church of Laodicea:

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 spue thee out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16)

The Christians of Laodicea had amassed considerable material wealth. Unfortunately, the warning of the Proverb – “Lest I be full, and deny thee” – was ignored. Their indifference toward the things of God foreshadowed their spiritual decline.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.... (v. 17)

Lukewarm believers do not warm those who are cold and damper the fire of those who want to further the cause of the Lord. They are a stumbling block to the rest of the congregation. This was the sin of Gad and Reuben.

And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from

going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?
(Numbers 32:6–7)

Because the cattlemen of Gad and Reuben were content to settle in Gilead outside the land of Canaan, they wanted to be excused from the campaign for the Promised Land. Moses showed them their error and they repented of their selfishness. Leaving their families and cattle in Gilead, the men joined their brethren in battle, vowing to return only when “the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance” (v. 18).

There is always more at stake than our personal well-being. This is no time to be lukewarm concerning spiritual matters. Every day people are being destroyed for lack of the knowledge of God that you and I take for granted.

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame.
(1 Corinthians 15:34)

In many societies procrastination is a way of life. The Kenyan hip-hop group *Boomba Clan* pokes fun at East African culture in a hilarious music video called “African Timer.” Mexicans laugh at themselves for their tendency to do everything *mañana* (tomorrow). But of course, it is difficult to see the humor when you are depending on someone for help. Paul needed immediate assistance from Apollos for the church in Corinth, but Apollos sent word that he would come at a more “convenient time.”

As touching *our* brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.
(1 Corinthians 16:12)

A ministry is not like a winter coat that you can keep in storage until the cold weather arrives. There is no “convenient time.” Those who strive for the mastery must be faithful and steadfast year in and year out.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
(2 Timothy 4:2)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable,

always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Temperance is often manifest in our stewardship of time. Every great achievement in life was accomplished over periods of twenty-four-hour days and seven-day weeks. No one gets “extra” time.

And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Romans 13:11)

The Master is sure to arrive when we are least expecting him! Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. (Mark 13:35–36)

If you want to stand and not fall, you must be temperate. Your knowledge must be tempered by experience, lest that knowledge only serve to puff you up. You must bridle your words, your appetites, and your emotions so that your passions do not lead you astray. You cannot be hot-headed, easily offended by those who disagree with you. You cannot be so impressed by your latest spiritual insight that you do not thoroughly test that notion before touting it as gospel truth. You cannot be given to rash decisions, running to and fro hoping to find the will of God, rushing off into battles that the Lord has not called you to. With temperance, you couple the passion of youth with the wisdom of experience, taking the best of both worlds. To have passion for the things of God without being ruled by your passions – this is temperance.

(IN DUE SEASON WE SHALL REAP IF WE FAINT NOT,
SO ADD TO TEMPERANCE...)

Patience

For almost three and one-half years, Simon Peter rarely left the side of Jesus of Nazareth. It is hard to imagine what it was like to fellowship daily with the Son of God, sharing moments of intimate conversation and watching him minister to great crowds. There must have been many times Peter considered himself the most privileged human ever to live, hearing and seeing the things he did. It is also reasonable to assume that this experience was not always pleasant. On a daily basis, he saw both the love and the hatred directed towards God's only begotten Son. And for three and one-half years, Peter was continually challenged, reprov'd, and chastened both privately and publicly by someone who was *never* wrong.

It was during a time of intimate instruction when Jesus taught Peter the value of patience.

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

Hear the Word of God, keep it and bring forth fruit with patience. It would be difficult to find words that better describe the purpose of Christian life. Certainly this valuable lesson was

brought to Peter's remembrance when he dictated his epistle to the church of Jesus Christ, saying, "And to temperance [add] patience."

YE HAVE NEED OF PATIENCE

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, his apostles asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Acts 1:6–7). There is a divine timetable for the fulfillment of prophecy that no man can know or alter.

But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

(Mark 13:32)

As God said to Abraham, so could Jesus have rightly proclaimed, "At the time appointed I will return unto thee" (Gen. 18:14). Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "To every thing there is a season." Not all seasons are for harvest. There is "a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted" (v. 2). Between the time of planting and the time of harvest is the season of growth and development. We do not immediately reap what we have sown. This is also true spiritually. That is why we need patience. Patience bridges doing the will of God and receiving the promised benefit.

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:36)

In our fast-paced modern world, we expect instant satisfaction for our cravings and a quick solution to our problems. This attitude has seeped into our religious mind-set as well. We expect to hear the Word of God, keep it, and bring forth fruit *immediately* – Chop! Chop! Small wonder the Bible tells us, "Ye have need of patience."

It is important to realize that it is not through faith alone, but through faith *and patience* that we inherit the promises of God.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:12)

Only a fool would plant a seed in the morning and expect to

eat its fruit by evening. Just as the farmer must wait patiently for the day he reaps the reward of his labor, even so we must wait for the day when all of God's promises will be fulfilled.

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. (James 5:7–8)

BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING

The *1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* defines patience as “a calm temper which bears evils without murmuring,” distinguished by “the act or quality of waiting long for justice or expected good without discontent.” It is also “the quality of bearing offenses and injuries without anger or revenge.” These characteristics are an integral part of fruitful Christian living.

Walking in faith, virtue, knowledge and temperance ensures us a rich reward in Christ. However, we will not fully reap that reward until Jesus returns. In the meantime, living as a Christian in this world does not necessarily make your life any easier; in fact, quite the opposite is often true. The world promotes a hostile attitude towards Christianity and will do all it can to belittle our devotion to God. This situation will not change until evil is eradicated once and for all, and ungodly men answer for the wickedness they do.

Knowing how things *could* be can make it more difficult to live with things the way they *are*. We wring our hands in frustration saying, “If only.” If only more people would humble themselves before God; if only more people would pray; if only our society would adhere to a strict Christian code. Of course, it is our preoccupation with the transgressions of *other* people that compounds the problem. If only we would mind our own sins as much as we mind the sins of others! Nevertheless, it is easy to see how much better life would be if we all walked honestly before God.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked

ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

It has been said that for unbelievers, this present life is the closest they will ever come to the joys of heaven; for Christians, it is the closest we will ever come to the torments of hell. As we await the return of Christ, our great challenge is to get from now to then without losing our faith along the way. We accomplish this by remembering how our story ends. The end of our story is much better than the beginning!

Better *is* the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit.
(Ecclesiastes 7:8)

A theatrical production is presented in several “Acts” that are further divided into “Scenes.” The famous line from William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” is found in Act 2, Scene 2. But even before the story begins in earnest, a short “Prologue” introduces the audience to this tale of two “star-cross’d lovers.”

The Bible story spans the creation of the temporal universe to the genesis of the eternal paradise. But this portion of man’s history is only a short introduction to a never-ending story. If the history of God’s people were made into a theatrical production, all that happens on this earth would occur in the Prologue! The *real* story – Act I, Scene I – would begin on the new earth.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:1–2, 4)

The Bible concludes at the best part of the story! Our eternal life in paradise is the real reason that Jesus died on the cross. This is the secret of patient endurance as exemplified by Christ and

the prophets. They saw the *end* of the story. Jesus looked beyond the cross to “the joy that was set before him.”

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Hebrews 12:2–3)

The prophets found the strength to endure because they saw “the end of the Lord.”

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. (James 5:10–11)

Though Job suffered a season of misery, his ending cannot be compared to his beginning.

So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. (Job 42:12–13)

Romans 8:18 gives us a hint of what our end will be like, saying, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Even the temporal joys of this present life are incomparable to the good things that God has prepared for us.

For since the beginning of the world *men* have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, *what* he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. (Isaiah 64:4)

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

One day we may need to read the Bible just to remember what life was like before we came to paradise. In the meantime, we wait in patience for the promise to be fulfilled.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Jesus warned his disciples that they would suffer for his name while living in this world. “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” he said, “but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The world is at enmity with God’s children because the world is at enmity with God.

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:18–19)

Jesus told his followers to rejoice for the privilege of being persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:10–12)

Years later, Peter comforted the persecuted church with this same truth.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4:12–13)

You and I may find it difficult to accept that we should be “happy” when we suffer. But this is not an isolated theme in the Scriptures.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. (v. 14)

Perhaps the words of Leah explain it best: “Happy am I,” she said, “for the daughters will call me blessed” (Gen. 30:13). We do not find happiness in the pain of suffering. We are happy because we will be called blessed. As we read, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Blessed are all who gain

entrance into “the fellowship of his sufferings.”

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death... (Philippians 3:10)

Whether we suffer ridicule, hardship, or violence for the sake of the gospel, we can be gladdened by remembering that it is an honor to belong to this sacred fraternity with our Lord.

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK

It is one thing to suffer without complaint when we are punished for wrongdoing. It is quite another thing to suffer without complaint when we are punished for doing the right thing. When we can suffer injustice for the sake of righteousness without feeling sorry for ourselves or lashing out in verbal or physical retaliation, we can begin to say we are living as the followers of Christ.

For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God. (1 Peter 2:19–20)

Following the Lord’s command to “resist not evil” may be the most difficult challenge we face.

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matthew 5:39)

Lest we think that such a request is beyond reason, we must remember that Jesus was merely telling us to follow his example.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously.... (1 Peter 2:21–23)

How did Jesus endure such “contradiction of sinners against himself” (Heb. 12:3)? He “committed himself” to him that judgeth righteously.” He knew that God would avenge the evil committed

against him. That is how he was able to turn the other cheek.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

The wicked will not escape their due punishment. "God is not mocked," says Galatians 6:7, "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "The Lord is a God of judgment," says Isaiah 30:18. His day of vengeance was foretold long ago.

And I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.... Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. (Isaiah 13:11, 13)

Those that "obey not the gospel" will be "punished with everlasting destruction."

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.... (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9)

You and I must be content to leave the punishment of the wicked to God at a time appointed by him. We must forsake any impulse to answer evil with evil.

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. (Psalm 37:7–8)

No man can return evil for evil without being overcome by evil.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:21)

See that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*.
(1 Thessalonians 5:15)

Know that the Lord is not pleased when we celebrate the downfall of our enemies.

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be

glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see *it*, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. (Proverbs 24:17–18)

Jesus said, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). God takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” His desire is that “the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). That is why he alone can be trusted to be the administrator of his wrath. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. (Hebrews 10:30)

Only the Lord is capable of administrating perfect justice. That is why we must wait on him.

Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, *even* all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. (Zephaniah 3:8)

For how long must we wait? It will only be “a little while.”

For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Psalm 37:9–11)

There are times we all grow weary of waiting. As John the Revelator wrote, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 2:20). Even the Lord himself must wait patiently until the fullness of time to execute his judgment upon the earth.

And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him. (Isaiah 30:18)

PATIENCE TO ENDURE

The challenge facing Christians living in this present evil world is to endure its afflictions, pains, and disappointments without

growing faint in our heart. God gives us strength to be patient. Patience gives us strength to endure.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness....

(Colossians 1:10–11)

Jesus Christ was made perfect through sufferings.

For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (Hebrews 2:10)

Patience will do a perfect work in us through the trying of our faith.

Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:3–4)

Christians can glory in tribulations knowing that it is through weathering life's storms that we grow in patience and hope. With each victory we are better equipped to face the next struggle.

And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:3–5)

We find the strength to endure the sufferings of this present world by looking to the glory world to come. We must remember, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning." It is in the *end* of God's plan that we see "the glory which shall be revealed in us." Until then, we patiently await those things we have not yet seen.

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

(Romans 8:24–25)

As we patiently wait upon the Lord, our strength will be renewed in him.

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

A Christian labors for the Lord in patient endurance, knowing that all will be recompensed according to God's perfect judgment. Our time is in his hands and his justice will ultimately prevail.

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:10)

Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

To our faith we add virtue, lest our faith be dead. To our virtue we add knowledge, lest our zeal carries us away. To our knowledge we add temperance, lest our knowledge puff us up. Each exhortation grows in significance as we grow in understanding. Now to our temperance we add patience, lest we grow weary in well doing as we await the coming of the Lord.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:9)

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

(WE ABIDE IN AN EVIL WORLD, SO ADD TO PATIENCE...)

Godliness

What compels a Christian to stay on the path of righteousness *after* he is saved? For many, it is the fear of losing their salvation that drives their daily devotion. Like men struggling to tread water in the open sea, they fear they must maintain a certain level of uprightness or else drown in perdition. When such people learn that salvation grace is freely given and freely received, they are delivered from their fear of eternal damnation, but all too often lose their resolve for righteous living.

There are pastors who wholeheartedly accept that salvation is of grace and not of works but are hesitant to promote this truth to their congregations. They reason – somewhat correctly – that the fear of hell is a much stronger deterrent to sinful behavior than the worry of disappointing a forgiving God. Their predicament is made worse by those who teach that the grace of God makes sin excusable.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1:4)

Paul asked the rhetorical question, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). Is the purpose of grace that we claim the benefits of the cross while living as though we belong to the devil? “God forbid!” said Paul. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (v. 2). The grace of God does not decriminalize sin. To the contrary, it compels us to turn away from ungodliness and live rather in holiness.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.... (Titus 2:11–13)

We have learned that Christians should be patient unto the coming of the Lord. But how should a Christian conduct his life in the here and now? The answer is found in *godliness*, the sixth component in Peter’s admonition to the church. Godliness is the holy response to grace. It is wholesome devotion to God that is not driven by fear of dread consequence but by reverence, love, and thanksgiving. Godliness clarifies a believer’s relationship to this present, sinful world. Though he is *in* this world, he is not *of* this world.

THE COUNSEL OF THE UNGODLY

God said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). In that instant our world became a place of high contrast. “I form the light, and create darkness,” said the Almighty. “I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things” (Isa. 45:7). There is no opposition more distinct than light and darkness. This is true in both the natural and the supernatural realm.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Setting two things in contrast helps define them individually. Stating what something is *not* clarifies what it is. Knowing what is slow helps you know what is fast. Hot defines cold; loud defines quiet. Definition by contrast is a literary tool frequently used in the Bible. For example, the righteous are contrasted with the

wicked, and a wise man with a fool.

The labour of the righteous *tendeth* to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. (Proverbs 10:16)

A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident. (Proverbs 14:16)

Psalms One clarifies the meaning of godliness by setting it in opposition to ungodliness. Before we learn a single thing that a blessed man does, we learn three things he does *not* do.

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (Psalm 1:1)

This verse speaks of the “counsel of the ungodly.” There is a difference between the ungodly as a people and the *counsel* of the ungodly. The ungodly as a people are the unsaved, those who are without Christ. At one time we all belonged to this sordid fraternity. Romans 5:6 says that “when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

The counsel of the ungodly is worldly wisdom, counsel that is not rooted in Christ. “This wisdom descendeth not from above,” says James 3:15, “but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” The counsel of the ungodly stands in defiance to the counsel of God. Those who promote this wicked counsel refuse to submit to the Lord’s sovereignty. They consider his commandments an infringement on their freedom – a band to be broken and a cord to be cast away.

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. (Psalm 2:2–3)

Ironically, it is those who reject the counsel of the Lord who are truly bound.

Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High.... (Psalm 107:10–11)

When a man calls liberty *bondage*, and bondage *liberty*, it is a “turning of things upside down.” It is also upside down when he

thinks he knows better than his Maker what is good for him.

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? (Isaiah 29:15–16)

Men are prone to misinterpret God's mercifulness as weakness, which only inflames their arrogance. Little do they realize, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). But God has never used his vastly superior strength to enslave man to his service. Instead he condescends to *request* man's submission, all to the end that he can use his great power to bless and protect his people. Listen to God's pleading with Israel when they rejected his counsel in favor of their own:

I *am* the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: *and* they walked in their own counsels. (Psalm 81:10–12)

The Lord grieved over what might have been.

Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the LORD should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever. (vv. 13–15)

Christians today are no less arrogant and self-willed. What God said to his people then speaks directly to his people now.

But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. (Jeremiah 7:23–24)

Whether you go forward or backward in your walk with God depends upon the counsel you heed. God will not make you

obey. The devil cannot make you disobey. The choice is up to you. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Josh. 24:15).

SANCTIFIED LIVING

Vladimir Lenin, architect and first premiere of the USSR, famously said, “A lie told often enough becomes truth.” Of course, this is not entirely accurate; a lie told often enough is believed. The same could be said of social morals and customs – behavior repeated long enough becomes a way of life. In worldly society, acceptable behavior is however the majority of people behave. When immoral people establish the moral code, it is as though the inmates are running the asylum.

For a fact, the world is a sinister place. When Paul wrote to the Christians of Philippi that they shined as lights “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil. 2:15), he was not referring to ancient Greece alone but to the world at large. Sadly, the health of our society will deteriorate more and more as we approach the Lord’s return. Along the way we will see a marked increase in ungodliness.

How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. (Jude 1:18)

As the deception grows, Christians will be persecuted for the supposed crime of leading godly lives.

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:12–13)

A Christian’s instinct for self-preservation might compel him to isolate himself from worldly society, bunkering down until he hears the trumpet of the archangel. But Jesus left us with an important mission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). We must go *into* the world to preach the gospel to the people *of* the world.

Probably the one thing we fear more than persecution by the world is contamination by the world. “Because iniquity shall abound,” said Jesus, “the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12). Thankfully, the condition of the world does not have to

dictate the condition of our hearts. For good or bad, our surroundings do not control our spirituality. Adam and Eve corrupted themselves while living in paradise. Elijah kept his faith during the terrible regime of Ahab and Jezebel.

Keep in mind that we are learning about the things we must add to our Christian faith so we do not fall. With godliness, it is always possible to “keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). We do not need to be taken *out* of the world in order to remain not *of* this world. We can be sanctified by the truth.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. (John 17:15–17)

No matter our environment, we can lead sanctified lives by living “according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Titus 1:1).

Exodus 2:22 tells us that Moses called his firstborn son “Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.” As Christians, we can well understand this sentiment. We too are strangers in a strange land. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote of living as a believer in an unbelieving society.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. (1 Corinthians 5:9–10)

In order to complete our mission, we cannot be hard-hearted against the sinners of the world. We must guard against a *holier-than-thou* attitude, becoming quickly scornful of those who do not measure up to our standard of acceptable behavior. In fact, the only sinners that Paul gave us emphatic command to shun were the unrepentant sinners in the church!

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. (v. 11)

It is not the job of Christians to police those who are outside

the household of God. That burden falls exclusively on the Lord. Our duty is to watch over the flock of God.

For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth... (v. 12–13a)

We can and should avoid Christians who govern their lives according to the counsel of the ungodly.

... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (v. 13b)

MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

Many of the Jews living in the time of Christ believed that if Jesus were truly the Messiah, he would reclaim the throne occupied by Herod and liberate Israel from Roman annexation. Political independence for Israel was particularly important to the sect of the Zealots. It is quite possible that they were instigators in the plot to make Jesus a king (see John 6:15). But, as Jesus testified to Pilate, his kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. (John 18:36)

In the days leading up to the ascension, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They too were looking for the resurgence of the throne of David. Jesus let them know that such events would occur at a time appointed by God. Now was the time to give witness to the gospel.

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:7–8)

Today, man’s impatience to see the kingdom of heaven established on earth (combined with a gross misinterpretation of both

God's command to Adam to exercise dominion over the earth, and the Lord's covenants with the Children of Israel), has given birth to so-called "kingdom" or "dominion" theology. Certain sects within Christendom assert that it is our Christian right and duty to exercise dominion over worldly society to the end that, whether or not people believe in Jesus, they should live according to Christian values. The zeal of the "dominionists" is further inflamed by the erroneous belief that Jesus will not return to earth until it has been sufficiently conquered in his name.

Kingdom theology is a false representation of biblical truth. We do not need to claim the world for God; it already belongs to him. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," said David in Psalm 24:1, and Paul twice in 1 Corinthians 10. God's kingdom is "an everlasting kingdom," and his dominion "endureth throughout all generations" (Ps. 145:13). It is God who "removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Dan. 2:21). This power is firmly in his hands. He requires no assistance from us!

We have no duty to Christianize our society – as if such a thing were possible. No law of the land can impose holiness. Even in their proper context (to the Children of Israel during the dispensation of the Law), the Ten Commandments could not put an end to sin.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.... (Romans 8:3)

The Law was given to expose man's unrighteousness to the end that he would turn to Christ.

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

Righteous law governs righteous people. The laws of righteousness cannot govern unbelievers because they are "free from righteousness" (Rom. 6:20). The carnal mind "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

The only way to affect meaningful change in worldly society is by leading individuals to Christ. We preach Jesus in the hope that men will repent from their evil deeds and turn to God. Our obliga-

tion to society is to preach the gospel, pray for our civic leaders, and do all we can to live peacefully among all men.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (1 Timothy 2:1–2)

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:17–18)

LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE RIVERS OF WATER

We have read three things that a blessed man does not do.

Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (Psalm 1:1)

Now we read what a blessed man *does*:

But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (v. 2)

To live in godliness is to live a sanctified life in recognition that your life is not your own.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

(1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

It is to forsake the counsel of the ungodly and walk in the counsel of the Lord.

The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. (Psalm 33:10–11)

It is to be not of the world, though in the world.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

(John 17:16)

It is to seek treasure in heaven, and not upon earth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
(Matthew 6:21)

Gain is not godliness, “but godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). God “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). In both the life that now is, and in that which is to come, godliness enhances every aspect of our existence.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (Psalm 1:3)

Once more, we are reminded what godliness is not:

The ungodly *are* not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (vv. 4–6)

If you desire to be this man likened to a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season, whose leaf does not wither; if you would like to prosper in everything you do – you must walk in godliness. “Let us have grace,” says Hebrews 12:28, “whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” As we await the Lord’s return, let us be sure to add godliness to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, and patience.

(THE BODY IS NOT ONE MEMBER BUT MANY,
SO ADD TO GODLINESS...)

Brotherly Kindness

I once met a man who told me that when he was a baby, his American Indian mother tried to drown him in a river. (Someone intervened, of course, or else he could not have told me his story.) He explained that in his tribe, what was best for the society took precedence over what was best for the individual. In his mother's mind, killing her child was a simple, practical, and guilt-free solution to her problem. I am happy to say that in later years this same man led his mother to Christ.

In many societies, what is good for the many outweighs what is good for the individual. True Christianity distinguishes itself from the crowd. There is no religion or philosophy that places more importance on the individual. We see this in Jesus' parable of the lost sheep.

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:4–7)

The inclusion of the ninety-nine does not compensate for the loss of the one. No member of the church is disposable or unnecessary. At the same time, no individual is more important than the collective whole. Each Christian is a member in particular.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.
(1 Corinthians 12:27)

But each Christian is a member still.

For the body is not one member, but many. (v. 14)

“No man is an island entire of itself,” wrote John Donne, a poet of sixteenth-century England. “Every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.” What Donne wrote of mankind in general is especially true of the Body of Christ. Each Christian is both an individual and a part of a greater whole. For better or worse, our lives are indelibly intertwined.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. (v. 26)

Thus far in this study, we have considered Peter’s admonitions concerning faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, and godliness. By and large these charges are to the individual believer, to his personal edification and the strengthening of his relationship with God. We now come to the seventh of Peter’s charges and the first to speak specifically to the individual Christian’s relationship with other members of the Body of Christ. To godliness, we must add brotherly kindness.

Boy meets girl, and it is love at first sight. But how can this be? They hardly know each other! Such is the power of infatuation, the sum of one part fact and ninety-nine parts fantasy. We fill in the missing details with words like *wonderful*, *amazing*, and maybe even *perfect*. The real test of love comes with time, when facts replace fiction. All too often (in the words of Aesop’s fable, *The Fox and the Lion*), “familiarity breeds contempt.”

Close examination of God magnifies his perfection. With people, the closer the scrutiny, the more glaring the flaws. “Mountains appear most lofty the nearer they are approached,”

wrote Lady Marguerite Blessington (1789-1849), “but great men resemble them not in this particular.”

When Peter wrote of *brotherly* kindness, he was referring to our spiritual kinsman, our fellow believers born into the family of God. Of course, of all the Christians in the world, the ones that most impact your life are those with whom you fellowship.

Maintaining good relationships within a church fellowship is a unique challenge. The more we congregate together, the more familiar we become. The more familiar we become, the easier it is to take each other for granted. The more we take each other for granted, the greater the likelihood that someone will say or do something that will anger, hurt, or offend someone else. Perhaps this is why Jesus spent so much time teaching his disciples how to resolve conflicts and foster reconciliation within the church.

JUDGE NOT, CONDEMN NOT, AND FORGIVE

In civil society, a transgression against the law is resolved in three steps. Upon the presentation of evidence, a verdict or *judgment* is made concerning the accused one’s innocence or guilt. If he is found guilty, the next step is to sentence him for punishment, or *condemn* him. Finally, either his punishment is carried out or he is pardoned – *forgiven* – of the penalty assessed him.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged,” said Jesus in Luke 6:37. “Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” These three truths are essential to Christian living. However, they must be understood in light of the overall Christian message. If Luke 6:37 qualifies as “instruction in righteousness” (which it most certainly does), it must be compatible with 2 Timothy 3:16:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.... (2 Timothy 3:16)

Have you ever tried to help someone face the error of their ways only to have them fire back at you, “*Stop judging me!*”? No words can put a Christian on the defensive so quickly, especially if he misunderstands the essence of the Lord’s command. To *judge*

not is not to abandon God's standard for right and wrong. Good is good, and evil is evil, no matter what current attitudes dictate.

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20)

One of my pet peeves is the American catchphrase, "It's all good!" In essence, this idiom is a variation on "It's cool," or "No problem." But whenever I hear someone say "It's all good!" I want to scream "*No, it's not!*" There is consequence to sin that is unaffected by contemporary notions of right and wrong. Furthermore, the instruction to "the watchman" shows that anyone who does not sound the warning will be held accountable for his silence.

But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. (Ezekiel 33:6)

To *condemn not* is not to condone evil. When we withhold necessary reproof, we misrepresent the damaging effects of sin and despise the judgment of God.

They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:17)

To *forgive* is not to disregard man's accountability for his sins. Forgiveness is the gift of a second chance. We offer forgiveness in hope that the offending person will "go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

JUDGE NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE JUDGED

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment," said Jesus in John 7:24. It is not judgment for itself, but *unrighteous* judgment that is denounced by God. Unrighteous judgments are made "according to the appearance" – that is, according to man's own notions of right and wrong.

Sinful man is inherently hypocritical. He has an amazing ability

to overlook his own faults while obsessing over the faults of others. Perhaps this is because our eyes only see outwardly. No one has ever looked at his own face. We only see an image – a photograph, or a reflection in a mirror. We never see ourselves the way other people see us. Right now you could have a bright blue star painted on your forehead and be entirely unaware of it. But if that star were on someone else, you would notice it right away. We see what is out of place in other people’s lives long before we see our own faults. This is a fact of life we must all realize.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye. (Matthew 7:1–5)

The hypocrisy is plain. Faultfinding is a fault in itself. As someone said, whenever you point your finger at someone else, you point three fingers back at yourself. Each time you judge another person, you pronounce judgment on yourself as well.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. (Romans 2:1)

The biblical precept “judge not, and ye shall not be judged” confronts man’s love for a double standard. Romans 12:9 tells us to “let love be without dissimulation” or hypocrisy. The remedy to hypocrisy is not to make allowance for all things. The remedy for hypocrisy is to hold yourself to the same standard you hold others. As 1 Corinthians 11:31 says, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”

CONDEMN NOT, AND YE SHALL NOT BE CONDEMNED

Upon the weighing of the evidence, man was judged and found guilty of sin.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men,

to see if there were any that did understand, *and* seek God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:2–3)

Romans 5:18 says, “By the offense of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” Along with the judgment came the condemnation to death, for “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20). God sent his Son to save us from the condemnation we deserved.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:17)

Jesus did not come to lower the standard for righteousness so that more people could reach it. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets,” he said. “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:17). Jesus saved us from condemnation by transferring our judgment upon himself.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.... (Galatians 3:13)

The condemnation of death remains on those who reject the Savior.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

When the Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, they had already proven her guilt. “This woman was taken in adultery,” they said, “in the very act” (John 8:4). The Law had already established the penalty for this sin. The only thing left to do was carry out the punishment. But first they wanted to test Jesus. “Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned,” they said, “but what sayest thou?” (v. 5).

His response completely dismantled them. Jesus did not dispute the validity of the Law, or the fact of the woman’s guilt. He questioned whether the Pharisees were *qualified* to condemn her. “He that is without sin among you,” he said, “let him first cast a stone at her” (v. 7). The Pharisees realized that in their eagerness to condemn the woman they had only condemned themselves.

Being “convicted by their own conscience” (v. 79), the would-be executioners slithered away.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:10–11)

The adulterous woman was worthy of death, but by the same measure, so were her accusers. “Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned” reminds Christians that but for the mercies of God, we would all be damned. Even as Christ himself “ever liveth to make intercession” for his brethren (Heb. 7:25), even so we should be quick to show mercy, and slow to condemn those for whom Christ gave his life.

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Romans 8:33–34)

It is evidence of our wickedness that we seek the mercies of God for ourselves, but hope our errant brethren get what they deserve. Who among us is able to stand before God on his own merits? The Psalmist wrote, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). Truly “our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve” (Ezra 9:13). How much more we should emulate Paul, a man who would have gladly sacrificed his own eternity in exchange for the salvation of his lost brethren.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.... (Romans 9:3)

FORGIVE, AND YE SHALL BE FORGIVEN

Forgiveness is a hallmark of our faith, and there are stern words of warning to Christians who harbor an unforgiving heart. At the same time, we must understand forgiveness for what it is, and not for what people say it is. Forgiveness is not an emotion. It is not the opposite of bitterness. Forgiveness is the relinquishing of a debt, whether the payment owed is financial or “life... for life,

eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:21). To forgive is to pardon. Forgiveness does not restore innocence – this is the job of justification. Forgiveness releases a man from the debt he owes.

Because of “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1), it is certain that each of us will upon occasion injure a brother or sister in Christ. When unresolved problems have separated you from another Christian, reconciliation is the first priority.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

The goal of forgiveness is not justice. Forgiveness forgoes justice in favor of a greater cause – reconciliation. But forgiveness cannot be bestowed upon a man like water is sprinkled on a houseplant. Forgiveness is an act of mutual understanding. You cannot forgive someone who does not seek forgiveness. In order to have reconciliation, the person who caused the offense must seek reconciliation. He must acknowledge his transgression as did King David:

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. (Psalm 51:3–4)

Repentance – godly sorrow for sin – precedes forgiveness. Remember Peter’s words to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost: “Repent... that your sins may be blotted out.”

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.... (Acts 3:19)

AS GOD FOR CHRIST’S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU

When people suffer violence, the injuries they incur are often just the beginning of their pain. They can be further traumatized by the memory of their suffering. Believers who have been victimized can be saddled with additional anguish as well – the guilt that

is heaped upon them when they are told it is their *Christian duty* to forgive their assailants. In the name of forgiveness, battered wives are sent home to their abusive husbands only to suffer further harm. In the name of forgiveness, wolves in ministerial clothing are given further opportunity to rampage.

In Ephesians 4:32 Christians are told to be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” This has been misconstrued into the belief that we *owe* forgiveness to those who offend us. The offender is given the upper hand in the negotiation! But consider this: does God *owe* it to you to forgive you? God forbid! When did (and does) God forgive your sins? 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When you confess your sins, the Lord is ready to forgive. As he is with us, so are we to be with others.

For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. (Psalm 86:5)

When reconciliation is needed in the church, the first option – and the ideal solution – is to resolve the matter privately. “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone,” said Jesus in Matthew 18:15. “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” You tell your brother his fault in the hope that he will acknowledge his sin. If he confesses his sin, he can repent, opening the door for you to pardon him.

Jesus said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). That little word *if* makes a big difference. “*If* he repent, forgive him.” “*If* he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” He must confess his sin, acknowledge his condemnation for that sin, and concede that his punishment is deserved.

Unfortunately, some people will not easily admit their wrongdoing. When private confrontation does not produce an answer of peace, others must get involved. You must now speak to your brother in the company of two or three witnesses who can confirm

your allegations against him.

But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (Matthew 18:16)

The number of witnesses alone does not make the allegations credible. The Jews assembled many witnesses against Jesus, but their accusations contradicted each other. “For many bare false witness against him,” says Mark 14:56, “but their witness agreed not together.” It is the *agreement* of the witnesses that confirms the veracity of the charges.

If your brother still refuses to acknowledge his sin, and you have exhausted the possibility of handling the matter privately, you must alert the church to the situation and forsake his company.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (v. 17)

People who will not accept responsibility for their actions make excuses rather than amends. Such people will never seek forgiveness because they charge their misdeeds to someone or something else. The prodigal son returned home seeking forgiveness. He fully acknowledged that he had caused his own undoing.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. (Luke 15:18–19)

This young man did not greet his father with a tall tale of ambush. He did not go home expecting things to be as they were. He certainly did not think that his father was obligated to either reinstate him or replenish the inheritance he had squandered away. The son went home hoping for nothing more than employment. Compare him with Esau, who “found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Heb. 12:17). Esau blamed Jacob for his situation even though it was he “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” (v. 16). Esau would not repent because, as far as he was concerned, the injustice had been done to him.

Repentance requires more than apologizing, more than shedding tears. You have not truly repented until you realize that you do not *deserve* another chance. If I have stolen from you, it is not enough that I say, "I am sorry." There are many reasons to be sorry. Some people are only sorry that their sin was discovered. I begin to make things right when I confess my crime. "I am sorry for stealing. I was a thief, and for this crime I deserve to be punished. Although I no longer deserve your trust, please let me do whatever is necessary to repay my debt." Any Christian who would not freely offer forgiveness after hearing such a sincere confession has reason to doubt the sincerity of his own faith.

UNTIL SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

As we have seen, forgiveness requires mutual understanding between the one who was abused and the one who did wrong. Without confession of sin, forgiveness cannot be granted. That is why the same Bible that teaches us to judge not, condemn not, and forgive, also commands us to disassociate ourselves from Christians who walk in darkness.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us... Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother. (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 15)

It is your Christian duty to forsake such a brother's company, leaving God to look after those who cheat their brethren. You cannot render evil for evil and expect to stay clean.

That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4:6-7)

Things do not always turn out as we wish, and problems are not always resolved. This is when a Christian may be tempted to allow bitterness into his heart. Bitterness feeds upon our desire for retaliation and our fear that justice will not be properly served. Christians never need to succumb to bitterness. God is still on his throne.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31–32)

Forgiveness is not owed; it is granted. But even to the unrepentant, it is our obligation to be *ready* to forgive, walking in mercy and compassion toward our brethren.

Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother.... (Zechariah 7:9)

Most people can feel gracious in wiping the slate clean once, or even twice. The third or fourth time, they may not feel so charitable. Peter may have thought seven acts of forgiveness in one day bordered on the excessive. Imagine his surprise when Jesus suggested that four hundred and ninety acts of forgiveness were scarcely adequate.

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21–22)

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. (Luke 17:3–4)

It is a blessing to be able to offer forgiveness to those who have wronged us. It is a blessing to be able to accept forgiveness from the people we have wronged. As members of the family of God, we will have more than sufficient opportunity to enjoy both these blessings!

LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE

Faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience and godliness are key components of the individual Christian's walk with God. But though we were singularly called, we function as members of the Body of Christ. For this reason it is singularly important that

each Christian does his utmost to promote harmony in the fellowship of believers.

That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. (1 Corinthians 12:25)

How can each member “have the same care for another”? The answer is found in brotherly kindness, the seventh component in Peter’s admonition. Brotherly kindness is putting your fellow Christian’s needs ahead of your own.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.... (Romans 12:10)

It is considering your fellow Christian as better than you.

Let nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

(Philippians 2:3)

Brotherly kindness is helping a brother in his time of need.

But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (1 John 3:17)

We do well to remember the words of our Savior:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

(Matthew 25:34–40)

The other side of the story is just as true.

... Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. (v. 45b)

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

Hebrews 13:1 says, “Let brotherly love continue.” How could we possibly expect to have a fruitful Christian life without it? To godliness, we must add brotherly kindness.

(WITHOUT CHARITY WE ARE NOTHING,
SO ADD TO BROTHERLY KINDNESS...)

Charity

A revelation of truth is always a marvelous thing, regardless of the circumstances surrounding its initial presentation. When Jesus gave the people of God a new commandment, it would have been a glorious occasion whether it was proclaimed before multitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, or in the wee hours of the night as he spoke with Nicodemus. The *subject* of this new commandment – and the fact that Jesus declared it only minutes after Judas Iscariot left the Passover supper to betray him – make it all the more amazing.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (John 13:34)

A lesser man would be overwrought with thoughts of self-pity or retaliation. But the Son of God used this low occasion to make known the highest manifestation of Christian discipline.

By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (v. 35)

But in what way was this commandment new? Jesus had taught about love before. When previously asked to name the greatest commandment in the Law, he had reiterated the words declared by Moses.

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

We call it the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. (Luke 6:31)

But with this new commandment, Jesus declared a standard of love that superseded the old, a standard that could only be fulfilled by someone walking in the fullness of the Christian spirit. No longer was it sufficient to do for your fellow man “as ye would that men should do to you.” The new standard for love was the perfect love of Christ.

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. (Ephesians 5:1–2)

In the waning hours of their last fellowship together before his death, Jesus taught his eleven remaining disciples more about this new commandment.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12–13)

This is the best that the human spirit can produce – to sacrifice your life for your friends. But Jesus did this and more. He gave his life for us “while we were yet sinners.”

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7–8)

Jesus told his disciples to “love your enemies” (Luke 6:27), and gave them an example to follow. “When we were enemies,” declared Paul, “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom. 5:10). This is love perfected.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

This is the love that epitomizes the Christian faith.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.
(v. 11)

SIMON, SON OF JONAS, LOVEST THOU ME?

At the conclusion of the fellowship of the Last Supper, Jesus led his eleven remaining disciples to the Mount of Olives.

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. (Mark 14:32)

This seemingly simple request proved too much for any of the disciples to bear. Three times Jesus went off to pray, and each time he returned to find Peter, James, and John fast asleep.

And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand. (v. 41–42)

At precisely that moment, Judas arrived “and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders” (v. 43). Jesus was arrested and taken into custody by the Roman guard. “Then,” says Matthew 26:56, “all the disciples forsook him, and fled.”

But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. (v. 58)

From a safe distance, Peter followed the mob all the way to the high priest’s palace. He watched in horror as the soldiers mocked and tortured Jesus and the high priest hurled outrageous accusations. Whatever courage Peter thought he had now wholly abandoned him, swept away by his acute awareness of his own vulnerability. When the attention of the crowd suddenly turned toward him, Peter panicked, swearing three times that he did not even know Jesus. Then, “immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:60–62).

The next time Peter spoke to Jesus was after the resurrection. For all his joy, Peter was undoubtedly still stinging with shame for his cowardice, hardly able to look the Lord in the eye. His full reconciliation with his Master came in an event that they both knew mirrored their earliest experience together.

There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. (John 21:2–3)

As the fruitless night turned to day, the fishermen were shouted advice from a stranger standing on the shore.

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. (vv. 4–7)

As soon as the stranger was identified, Peter launched himself out the boat and swam to shore to meet him.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt *his* fisher's coat *unto him*, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. (vv. 7–8)

This spectacular catch of fishes brought Peter back to his beginning with the Lord. And wonderfully, this time the nets held!

As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. (vv. 9–11)

For the first time since their initial introduction, Jesus called

Simon by his family name, “Simon, son of Jonas” (that is to say, Simon Barjona).

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son* of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?... (John 21:15a)

This question must have cut through Peter’s heart. He knew he wasn’t the same man that he was before he met Jesus. But how could he say “Lord, I love you more than I love anyone” after he had denied him three times? I suspect that his response came without hesitation, but also without a trace of his customary assuredness.

... He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. (v. 15b)

When Jesus asked the same question again, Peter probably took longer to answer, somewhat puzzled by the repetition. But this time he spoke with a little more conviction.

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. (v. 16)

When Jesus repeated the question a third time, Peter may have wanted to shout out his answer, distraught that the Lord did not seem to believe him.

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. (v. 17)

Three times – once for every denial – the Lord asked Peter, “Lovest thou me?” Three times Peter affirmed his love for his Master. And each time, Jesus showed him that the only way to prove that love was in service to the people Jesus gave his life for.

“Love one another,” Jesus said, “as I have loved you.” As Peter contemplated his final letter to the church, his heart must have rejoiced with the memory of this encounter with the Lord. You can almost sense his delight as he completed his list of the things a Christian must do to stand for God. “And to brotherly kindness,” he concluded, you must add “charity” (2 Pet. 1:7).

WITHOUT CHARITY, I AM NOTHING

Yes, a Christian must have faith. To faith, he must add virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness. Finally, he must add one more element – charity, the divine love of God. Without charity, all of our good works are meaningless.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1–3)

In its modern usage, the word “charity” describes acts of generosity to the poor. But since I can “bestow all my goods to feed the poor” and still be lacking in “charity,” there is obviously a deeper significance to this word. In its truest sense, charity characterizes the pure and selfless benevolence of Christian love. Charity does not love for what it might get in return. Charity loves for what it is.

The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:2–17 and are commonly abbreviated as follows:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. Honour thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

Eight of the Ten Commandments told the Israelites what they could *not* do. However this does not mean that a dead man (who cannot do anything) could fulfill these eight commandments. The way to fulfill the “thou shalt not” commandments is not to do nothing, but to do the right thing.

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:9–10)

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Galatians 5:14)

In similar form as the Ten Commandments, the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians lists sixteen characteristics of Christian love. Nine qualities are stated in the negative: what love is *not*. Six are stated in the positive: what love *is*.

Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth.... (1 Corinthians 13:4–8a)

Once again, knowing what something is *not* clarifies what it is. Knowing what it *is* clarifies what it is not. Charity “suffereth long.” It is not quickly frustrated. It will not easily give up on people.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

(2 Peter 3:9)

Charity is “kind.” It does not answer evil with evil. It is perpetually benevolent.

And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your

enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil.
(Luke 6:33–35)

Charity “envieth not.” It fosters contentment.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; *and be* content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5)

Charity “vaunteth not itself.” Love shines its light on God.

He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. (John 7:18)

Charity “is not puffed up.” It is humble.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
(Matthew 11:29)

Charity “doth not behave itself unseemly.” The love of God is always proper, an adornment to every occasion.

As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, *so is* a fair woman which is without discretion. (Proverbs 11:22)

Charity “seeketh not her own.” It seeks to benefit others.

Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s *wealth*.
(1 Corinthians 10:24)

Charity “is not easily provoked.” It is slow to anger.

The LORD *is* gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. (Psalm 145:8)

Charity “thinketh no evil.” It is filled with thoughts of peace in the expectation of good.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Charity “rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” It delights in the things of eternity, not in the sordid things of this present world.

I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. I hate and abhor lying: *but* thy law do I love. (Psalm 119:162–163)

Charity “beareth all things.” It is not a talebearer.

A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter. (Proverbs 11:13)

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Charity “believeth all things.” Even in difficult times, it does not question the sovereignty of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Charity “hopeth all things.” It is never despondent or fearful.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance. (Psalm 42:5)

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)

Charity “endureth all things.” It cannot be extinguished.

For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the LORD. (Psalm 117:2)

And finally, charity “never faileth.” Like the Word of God, it will live forever.

But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Peter 1:25)

Charity is the sum and substance of God’s perfect will for man.

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned....

(1 Timothy 1:5)

Therefore, “Let all things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:14).

THE BOND OF PERFECTNESS

In this world there are doctrines of God, men, and devils. The great assortment of factions among those who call them-

selves “Christian” bears witness to this truth: the very nature of a doctrine is to divide. Every doctrine separates people into two camps: those who believe it and those who do not. As it is said, “birds of a feather flock together.” Doctrinal differences have split the church of Jesus Christ into isolated sub-groups of like-minded people, thus affirming the truth of the Proverb, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes” (Prov. 21:2).

Only charity transcends doctrine. It is charity that compels a Christian to intercede for his errant brother rather than watch him reap the evil he sows. It is charity that constrains a believer to forgive a man’s four-hundred-and-ninetieth transgression. It is charity that allows us to see that all men are sinners, but all men deserve our best service. And only charity can knit the hearts of Christians everywhere together in love.

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.... (Colossians 2:2)

Charity alone is a perfect bond.

And above all these things *put* on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. (Colossians 3:14)

For all these reasons – though not for these reasons alone – charity is the greatest of all.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Epilogue

Soon after Peter completed his second epistle, he died a martyr's death in Rome. According to John Fox, author of Fox's Book of Martyrs, "he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was."²

Many years have passed since the death of this wonderful servant of God. Yet, as if in answer to Peter's supplication, we continue to keep his words in remembrance. Peter's words, born of the Spirit of God, continue to edify, to exhort and to comfort Christians everywhere.

Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. (2 Peter 1:15)

One can almost be excused for idolizing Paul. His unflinching courage and his single-hearted dedication to his ministry are amazing to the point of seeming superhuman. But this is not the case with Peter. Simon Peter is perhaps the most *human* of all the notable men of the Bible. And in the life of this simple Galilean

² Fox's Book of Martyrs, edited by William Byron Forbush: Zondervan Publishing House, Third Printing 1969, pg. 4.

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

fisherman we see the magnitude of God's grace, his power to foreordain, and his loving concern for his people.

Peter's epistles were not given to us so we could simply admire Peter or his handiwork. God gave us these words so that we could live triumphantly for him, bringing glory to his name. Do these things! Do not hear them only. Do them. For if ye do these things, you shall never fall!

About the Author

Rev. Tim Sullivan is the founder of Workers Together With Him, an international Christian ministry established in 1999. He is the author of several books and seminars on practical Christian living that speak to Christians of all denominational, cultural, and academic backgrounds.

Tim was born in 1957 in Worcester, Massachusetts, of American and Japanese descent. He has been married to his beautiful wife Nelly since 1994, and together they have raised three much-beloved children, Jessica, Michael, and Brandon. The Sullivans live in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in the United States.

If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall was first presented as a series of teachings in 1997. The first edition of this book was published in 1998. Since then Tim has presented his seminar to appreciative audiences in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Africa.

This second edition was written to correct errors found in the previous edition while striving toward a clearer representation of this marvelous promise of God. Your comments would be most appreciated, and can be sent to timsullivan@wtwh.org.

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

About the Artist

The artwork that graces the cover of this book was produced by Rev. Stephen Kingsley, a longtime friend and colleague of the author. He is the pastor of two churches in rural Idaho: Craigmont Community Church and Reubens Community Church.

Stephen's inspiration for the painting on the cover of this book comes from its title, *If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall*. "I've often thought of the Christian walk as staying true to God's grace," he writes, "like walking up a path on a ridge top. We should take care not to fall off into legalism on the one side or license on the other. Legalism tries to improve on what Christ completed on the cross. License uses grace as an excuse for living in sin. Tim's book is a great discipleship manual about staying on track, adding to your faith, and pressing towards the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Pastor Kingsley is the author of *The Easter Answer*, a logical reconstruction from all the gospel sources of the events from the resurrection of Jesus to his ascension forty days later. (For more information, visit www.easteranswer.com.)

IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL

BY TIM SULLIVAN

What can we do to ensure the longevity of our service to the Lord? Peter said, "If you do these things, you shall never fall." Could it be so simple? For the Christian who desires to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus, this promise is like finding a treasure map to untold riches. This is not theoretical mumbo jumbo that may or may not prove helpful. This is the answer straight from heaven!



Rev. Tim Sullivan is the founder of Workers Together With Him, an international Christian ministry dedicated to the furtherance of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has taught his seminar *If Ye Do These Things, Ye Shall Never Fall* in nations around the world. Tim lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with his wife Nelly and children Jessica, Michael, and Brandon.

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