

PLAIN TALK
ABOUT
REAL CHRISTIANS

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1

The REAL Christian

Because of present day conditions in the world at large as well as in our families and in our personal lives, it is vitally important for all of us who count ourselves as Christians to look into what we really have in our faith.

Perhaps it would be best to let you know at once that I grew to manhood without being a Christian. When I was in my second year of teaching school, I did not believe that there was a God. I was not a vicious man. As far as I knew I was in favor of every good thing. When I taught morals, I had my students memorize the Ten Commandments because I believed them to be the best moral code the world has ever seen. And if anybody had chosen a way of life based on the Golden Rule, I might have thought it could not be put into practice, but I certainly would have encouraged following it. I wished everybody would want to live by the Golden Rule, for then we would have a nicer world in which to live.

In those days, my greatest criticism of the church was that there was so much talk and nothing else. Just talk. It seemed as though the fellows who could talk the most eloquently were considered the most honorable. Remember now, this is what I thought in the days when I was an unbeliever.

Then I met a man, a farmer, who really believed. I had known another farmer in my boyhood days who seemed to be a real believer. That is, he acted like he believed; but I never could understand his reasoning. However, this new farmer friend was not only a believer, but he also knew what he believed and could talk about it. I do not mean that his thoughts were organized into a systematic theology; but he definitely believed that God was real, that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that Jesus Christ was alive, and that he personally had dealings with Him. He would pray to get help from God, and he claimed that God helped him. I will admit that while I thought he was a nice old man I also thought he was a bit balmy. I was sure he didn't know what he was talking about. It was only after weeks and months of talking with him that I understood and God in His providence led me to believe.

Now I know that some people *are* Christians. That may sound like a simple statement to make: "There *are* real Christians in the world." Not everyone is a Christian, and not everyone even pretends to be a Christian. There are people who *claim* to be Christians, but show no evidence of it. There are people who *associate with* Christians, but that is no criterion. There are people who may try to *imitate* Christians when it suits them, but they fool no one. There are also those who *think* they are Christians, but their neighbors can tell that they are not. Nevertheless, there are some *real* Christians.

In those days when I was skeptical, I doubted the *real* Christians because I confused them with the other kinds of people I have just mentioned. My skepticism was right out in the open, but I was not brash about it. I did not try to offend anyone. I was very careful, for there was no point in disturbing other people's dreams. I thought this was a poor world to live in, and if someone's dreams would help him, let him have them. But I didn't want to hear about dreams, because I didn't believe in them. I was a very empty-hearted, lonely young man. Someone may think, "You must have felt very free." Not at all; I was under an intolerable burden.

I have a vivid memory of what I felt as far as this world was concerned. People would tell me that God is the Creator of the world. I can remember asking them, "Do you mean somebody made this mess?"

"Yes."

"Can He do anything about it?"

They told me God is almighty.

"Do you mean to tell me that somebody who is almighty made this world as it is? Well, he must be a devil."

"Why do you say that?"

"Look around and see the poor people suffering, look at the innocent people being hurt, and look at the wicked persons getting away with it. I've heard that you can 'Be sure your sin will find you out,' and all that kind of thing, but I want to tell you right now that there are plenty of people who get away with a lot of stuff."

I didn't realize that the Bible deals with this problem, or that the day is coming when all will be straightened out. I didn't know that David had written many hundreds of years ago, "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb" (Ps. 37:1, 2).

I would return to my earlier statement: "There are some real Christians." The Bible states in Acts 11:26, ". . . the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The word *Christian* is primarily a noun. Nowhere in the Bible is the word *Christian* used as an adjective. There is no such thing as "a Christian act" recorded in the Bible. There are accounts of Christians, and *they* acted.

We use the word *American*. The noun *American* refers primarily to a person who lives in America and follows the American way of life. First the person is an American; the American way of life follows. The word *soldier* may also illustrate this point. Who is a soldier? A man may be said to be soldierly or to act like a soldier, but who, after all, is a soldier? He is a man who is a member of an army. I remember the day I joined the Canadian Army during the First World War. When I walked into the recruiting office, I was not a soldier. In a few minutes they showed me a document. I did not bother reading the fine print, for I knew what it meant: I was going to live in the barracks. They showed me where to sign, and I signed it. I do remember that I signed for the duration of the war and six months thereafter. By putting my name down, I became a soldier. When I sat down in the chair, I was not a soldier; when I got up, I was one. I did not know how to handle a rifle, I did not know how to march, I did not know how to pack my kit, but I was a soldier. There are good soldiers and poor soldiers, strong soldiers and weak soldiers, but everyone who has signed up and committed himself to the service is a soldier .

The word *Christian* does not identify someone who has lived a good life for thirty years, and who thereby becomes a "real" Christian. Some people are not going to live long enough to complete thirty "good" years. There must be some other way. And, thank the Lord, there is another way. When the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, they were still learners. The word *disciple* means *learner*. The word *Christians* is like any other word that is used as a noun. Who is a farmer? A person who is farming. Who is a student? A person who is studying. Who is a Christian? A person who is believing in Christ.

We would probably all agree that the apostle Paul was a "real" Christian. I do not call him a real Christian, however, just because he was a great one. I would use the words *great*, *strong*, *godly*, *holy*, *effective*, or *industrious* to describe Paul's character; but he was a Christian because he came to put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing is certain: Paul surely was not born a Christian. When he was a young man, he was dead set against Christians. He thought they were off the beam, way off, and he wanted to stop their foolishness. But in the midst of his endeavors, he became a Christian. It happened in one blinding instant on the Damascus road. When he started out on the way to Damascus, he was not a Christian; but before he reached Damascus, he was one.

Conversion does not have to happen to you or me just like that. However, it *did* happen to me that way. I am one of those people to whom it came in a flash. And then I began to wish that everybody could come to know the Lord the way I came to know Him, because then they would have no doubts about Him.

It was not my intention to become a preacher, but I began to try to lead other people to Christ. It was a

wonderful thing to understand that God would have dealings with a human being. I began to realize that He would come into my heart, would live with me, would forgive me and keep me, would bear my burdens, would guide my steps, would strengthen me for my task, would watch over me, and would never leave me nor forsake me. Then, when I have lived my life, He will take me to Himself. He would do all that out of grace and mercy, not because I am good, but just because I put my trust in Him.

It was so wonderful that I just had to share it. I knew exactly why other people were not Christians; they had not seen what I saw. If they had, they would believe as I believed. And if they believed as I believed, they would have the joy I had. I wanted to share my belief with them. And, generally speaking, people listened.

I remember one young woman, a school teacher. Many times I sat and talked with her. I tried to get her to tell me about her religious life. Was she a Christian? Yes, she was a Christian. When did she become a Christian? She didn't know. I asked her what it was like when she was not a Christian. She said she couldn't remember any such time. I would patiently go over my own experience, how I had been in darkness and had come into light. She would listen attentively and sympathetically, and I think she really tried to think of a time when maybe she did not believe; but she simply could not remember a time when she did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There was another difference between the two of us. My family did not know the gospel. My father was a good, God-fearing man; but his trust was not in Christ. He believed that the Ten Commandments were the law of God, and he believed that when you broke the law you would be punished. Punishment would be the matter of going to hell, and my father expected to go to hell. He tried to do right. He tried to do good, but he did not think that was going to make up for the wrong that he had done. He just hoped that his punishment in hell would not be quite so bad if he lived properly here on earth. For that reason, he would keep trying to do good, and he was as honorable a man as I ever knew.

Before he died, my father was not only a believer, he was also a deacon in the Presbyterian Church. He had been elected as an elder, but refused to take the office because he was too old to be active. Both he and my stepmother died in the faith. But during the time when I was a young boy, none of us really knew about the importance of faith – saving faith. We believed there was a God, and we believed God was holy. We knew we were not holy. And so, we were just walking around waiting for the axe to fall because we expected to get it in the neck. We thought it was coming to us, and that was all there was to it.

When I found out that God gave His Son for me, that I could be forgiven, that I could have fellowship with Him and He could have fellowship with me, and that He would be with me any place I was, I wanted to share this knowledge with everybody.

As I talked with that young woman school teacher, I used this illustration: I was far away in a field, but I came across the plowed furrows, through a hedge, over a ditch, and finally found the road.

Then I asked her, "When did you come across the plowed field?" She could not remember any plowed field. I asked, "When did you get through the hedge?" She could not remember any hedge. I said, "You must have stepped over some obstruction to get on the road." She could not remember any. The only thing she could remember was being on the road.

I pressed further with the question, "When was the first time you ever thought of the Lord Jesus Christ?"

She said, "I don't know. I don't have any idea. It seems to me that as long as I can remember, I have known about the Lord Jesus Christ."

"What do you know about Him?"

" 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.' This is all I know about Him."

That brought us even. But because I was a young man, I got mad. And because she was a young girl, she cried. It didn't do either one of us any good, but one day I up and married the girl. I could see that her faith was genuine even though she didn't come to Christ in the same way I did.

God saw fit to bring into my life and into my home a woman who could not tell when she became a Christian. (I will let some former students tell which one of us is the better Christian. It will not embarrass me.) Everyone who knows her, knows the blessing that she is. She was brought into Christianity in her parents' faith. There were some people who came out of the land of Egypt who never knew it. They were carried out in their parents' arms.

Let us look again at Paul. It is interesting to notice that what happened to Paul on the Damascus road is reported three different times in the short Book of Acts. Paul himself writes of his experience in I Timothy 1:12-15:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

When the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, wrote that Jesus came to "save sinners; of whom I am chief," he did not have his fingers crossed. He did not have his tongue in his cheek. He really felt that he was the chief of sinners. That doesn't mean that he stole more chickens than anybody else; it simply means that he sensed his own inner tendency to deviate from the will of God. The closer one comes to the Lord, the more he realizes that he is not worthy. Remember how Job, at the end of his long experience, cried out, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). When one comes closer to the Lord, he feels the depth of his own need. When he turns to Him and receives the fullness of His grace, the amazing thing is that he is made strong and confident.

Paul continues writing to Timothy,

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy [this is why God did it to me], that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (I Tim. 1:16).

No wonder so much emphasis was placed on Paul's conversion. He was a pattern for those who would believe in Jesus Christ.

The story of the experience of Paul on the Damascus road is a familiar one. What happened to this man who was traveling on his way in all good conscience, yet was wrong all the time? He was doing what he thought was right, but he was mistaken. He did not know any better; he said himself that he did it "ignorantly in unbelief." The actual physical thing which happened to Paul was that a light brighter than the noonday sun shone round about him and then he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Paul was shocked, shaken beyond anything he had ever experienced. He had a real communication from a realm beyond this one. He asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the reply came, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The great truth expressed here is not so much that Jesus is God. It is that God is Jesus. Paul heard *God* say, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" But the reply to his question, "Who art thou, *Lord*?" was, "I am *Jesus*, whom thou persecutest."

The first big element in a *real* Christian experience is a conviction about God – a conviction that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." That means that while a man is living in this world, he must become aware that there is another world beyond this one.

I often wonder how many people have been scared away from this line of thought by someone's sneering attitude about the other world. I appreciate the fact that there are impractical people on the earth, but for a human being living in this world to be conscious of the reality of another world is not a bit

impractical. This reality happens to be the truth of the matter, and it has a bearing on this world so far as man is concerned. When a man becomes a Christian, he becomes conscious of God. He becomes aware of the reality of God, the reality of heaven, the reality of the soul. His awareness of these things is essential. The result is that he is easier to live with in the house, easier to have as a neighbor, and a better citizen to have in the community.

Sometimes people say to me that these Christians who are always talking about the other world and about heaven have their minds in the clouds. May I say that the people who believe in and think about heaven do more than anyone else to bring a little bit of it here to earth.

If you shut up human beings, allowing them only their physical life, you get only a physical response. If you shut up a man so that he is aware of the world only to the limits of his senses, all you will get out of him is a sensuous response. What really lifts, delivers, and sanctifies a man is that he is able to see that this body, which is made of dust, will return to the dust, but that the spirit which God put in his soul will return to God who gave it to him. The Christian, just as Paul, becomes conscious of the fact that God *is*. With this awareness of God {and Paul was not only conscious of the fact that *God is*, but also that *God was in Jesus of Nazareth* – God was in Christ), immediately one becomes conscious of the presence of God. Every feeling of responsibility which now surfaces can be shared because now one is not alone, and from now on will never be in the dark. "Thou, God, seest me" (Gen. 16:13).

The Christian lives his life in the very presence of God at all times, and his life is an open book. I can imagine someone asking, "Doesn't that make you feel uncomfortable?" It *does* make you feel uncomfortable. It is worse than having a doctor treat you. A doctor examines you, finds out what is wrong, and then simply tells you, "This is it." But when God looks into your heart, He looks much deeper. And here is a wonderful truth, as Saul and every other Christian finds out: The light from heaven that reveals the soul is the light that heals the soul. The same light that comes in from God brings God's great message of mercy and grace to the soul.

When the Lord Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead, He spent days with His disciples showing them by many infallible proofs that He was really alive. It was first necessary that they know this without doubt and then they could act on it. So far as Christian experience is concerned, it is not that we are ever going to be able to judge first on the basis of what a man does. Actions will follow. Just now, I want you to see that a Christian life is based on what the man knows, of what he is conscious.

The Christian person who is conscious that God is real and personal and cares about him has quietness and peace in his soul. He is confident that God will neither leave him nor forsake him. He knows God will forgive him and walk with him, bear his burdens, guide him in his trouble, comfort him in his sorrow, encourage him in his aspirations, keep him throughout all his days, and finally take him home to be with Him. In the Christian's consciousness and being, there is a joy in the Lord that will be his strength. Real Christians have a quietness about them so far as this world is concerned. The world did not give them this quietness, and the world cannot take it away, because Almighty God is eternal.

When you look into the face of Almighty God, death itself loses its sting and the grave loses its victory. Thus, Christians can walk "through the valley of the shadow of death, [and] fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4). Although no Christian likes death, because death is an enemy, he does not fear it as his conqueror, because our Lord Jesus Christ walked through it into the very presence of God. And He is the One who has spoken peace to our hearts:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

All that I have been saying amounts to this: On the road to Damascus that day, Saul met one who was to become the friend who would never leave him, never forsake him. And that friend won Saul's heart.

Saul fell in love with his Saviour, and from then on walked with Him. Later, as the apostle Paul, he could say,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I [I am not doing it] , but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh [the way I do my business and go about my work] I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

But there were two questions. Paul first asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the voice said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Paul then asked the second question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" There was no hesitation in Paul, and there should not be any hesitation in us when we see Him. We ask, "What do you want me to do?"

When Isaiah was in deep contemplation in the temple, he beheld the holiness of God and felt his own sinfulness. An angel took a coal off the altar and put it on Isaiah's lips to purge his iniquity and to cleanse him from his sin. Then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah replied, "Here am I, send me" (Isa. 6:8). That reply comes naturally from a man who has been freed, a man who has been forgiven, a man who has been cleansed, a man who has had the sensation of having the load taken off. In gratitude, he says, "I will do anything for You."

Samuel, though only a boy, was told by Eli, "When you hear the voice again say, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'" That is the frame of mind of the real Christian. When a person believes the precious and gracious truth that he is forgiven, that he is cleansed, that he is free, there is a vast relief. There is such growing elation, such inward joy to think that there is nothing held against him, nothing to fear, and he can have fellowship with God, that his response is "Anything You want me to do, I will do, if I possibly can." This is a normal expression of the Christian today, as it was with Paul. We will call this "committal," as contrasted with "conviction." We are not our own; we have been bought with a price.

The real Christian knows these things to be true: God cares for me now; God gave His Son for me; He has taken away my guilt and sin; He forgives me. He does these things for me because He loves me, and because I trust Him and turn to Him often. Because He gave His Son to die for me, I give myself over to walk with Him.

If one has not lived a Christian life, and then he comes to believe these things, there will be certain results. Years ago I heard about a dear old lady who had not lived a Christian life. When she did hear and believe the gospel, her heart was blessed. She was simply filled with joy that God would do these things for her. She felt that she must tell someone about what had happened to her, but she had never talked to anyone about such matters. She asked some of the Christians she was with, "How will I ever let my family know?" One long-time Christian replied, "You won't have to tell them. Everybody will know. Even the cat will know."

The story is told of an unfortunate person who in his waywardness had allowed himself to fall back somewhat. A friend asked him, "How are you getting along in your spiritual life?" The man had to answer, "Not so good. Once everybody knew I was a Christian; now I have to tell them."

When Dwight L. Moody was holding meetings in London, England, he overheard two men speaking about a third man who had been with them and had walked away. The two were not very well acquainted with the third person. One knew him only slightly and the other not at all. One asked the other, "What about him? Is he a Christian?" The second answered, "Yes, he is." Then the first man asked, "Is he h and h, or o and o?" On their way home, Mr. Moody said to the man who had been asked the question, "What did that fellow mean by saying h and h, or o and o?" Mr. Moody's friend explained, "He meant, Is he half and half, or out and out?"

If you would walk with only the good people, you will not walk with anyone. There is none good, no, not one. One of the most marvelous truths I have discovered, and I found it out for myself, is that God will have dealings with a sinner. I found out that the Holy Spirit will come to a sinner and that a sinner can be

sanctified. I am not speaking of a rebellious sinner, or a willful sinner. I am talking about one like Paul who even as an apostle, said that he was the chief of sinners.

I want you to realize that one of the glories of the gospel is that God came down to the ground level. There is no threshold to step over to come to God. Anyone may come to Him. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

2

The WORSHIPING Christian

We are living in a world where Christians have always been in the minority. We need to remember that the world is not ready to accept the Christian message. We must keep in mind that most people do not agree with the convictions we cherish in our hearts.

In my youth I thought that the world was pretty much in darkness, that Christians had the light, and that it was important for the light to shine so that people might see. In more recent years it seems to me that the word *darkness* hardly suffices to describe the world. It may be in darkness, but more than that, there are *powers of darkness*, and they are very much at work today. The whole world is becoming sensitive about the thrust of the Christian gospel. As a result, it is being shunted about and shut out of many places. In the United States our generation has seen the day come when even the mention of the name of God in a classroom of our public schools has become suspect. We no longer have the privilege of preaching and teaching the gospel in the public schools. And many new and strange ideas have taken root in what we commonly think of as the church.

Let us consider what it means to be a Christian according to Scripture. Among people who know anything about the New Testament, I imagine most would agree that the apostle Paul was an outstanding Christian. And, concerning himself, Paul wrote these words:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecuter, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acception, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth an long suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to live everlasting (I Tim. 1:13-16).

The apostle understood the work of grace in his own heart. The Lord Jesus Christ had saved him in a special way to make him a pattern for others. I propose to study this pattern. I want to do it on the basis of Paul's description of himself in Acts 24:10-16. The apostle is on trial:

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand that there are let but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

In the last three verses, we have Paul's complete sketch of himself in mind and heart. Consider that this is an unusually complete description of the mind and heart of a Christian:

. . . After the way which they call heresy, so *worship* the God of my father believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have *hope* toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience

void of offence toward God, and toward men.

One of the first marks of a Christian is *worship*. Worship is something one does. He does it consciously. Worship is a mental, personal exercise. There is an inward, conscious action in worship, directing one's attention and awareness in the form of an appraisal which leads to a personal choice and commitment.

Worship is an English word. It seems to be derived from the idea of "worth-ship." In English we speak of sportsmanship, fellowship, and penmanship. The essence of worship is a matter of worth. Its meaning is largely a matter of contemplation and attention to the element of estimation. "How important is this one?" Undoubtedly this is the ground out of which faith, hope, and love originated. Obviously, worship – "How important is God?" – is the trunk from which the branches, faith, hope, and love grow.

In the matter of worship, there are at least three elements that we can consider. When I worship, I *esteem*. To worship God is to inwardly esteem my personal relationship with God to be the most important aspect of my life. I *prefer* Him: I *appreciate* Him. Unless there is this element of esteem, all the rest that we do in so-called "acts of worship" is purely formal.

Language sometimes fails to convey the full meaning. When I speak of esteeming my personal relationship with God I mean that no business, no pleasure, no person, no thing, is as important as my relationship with God. I mean that it does not make any difference which football team wins; it does not make any difference what happens in the space world; it does not make any difference what the Communists say. I mean that the most important thing for me at this moment is my person-to-person, individual relationship with the living God. Then I am getting ready to worship Him.

Another element in worship is adoration. If the word *adore* is broken down into its linguistic origin, we find that it has in it the idea of "giving a gift." No one adores without making a movement toward the person adored. When one adores he gives himself.

Scripture speaks of gifts to God as sacrifices. When I would bring any sacrifice to God, even if it is the sacrifice of my lips – praise, songs, or prayers – God looks on my heart. Long ago a poet wrote the line, "The gift without the giver is bare." Concerning Israel, God said, "With their lips [they] do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isa. 29:13). And so, God shut His eyes; He pushed them away.

The New Testament has a stern word from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Himself about people who are "lukewarm." These people merely go through the exercises of worship. To say a person is lukewarm is to describe a condition of the heart. God looks on the heart, and the lukewarm one "I will spue thee out of my mouth." A man can be preaching; he can be praying; he can be singing; but if he is lukewarm in his heart, his worship is nothing to God. When the heart is sincere, the most humble action, the most blundering words, and the most fumbling conduct are understood.

Jesus could say to those critics of Mary, "Let her alone. . . . she hath wrought a good work on me." Why was it good? Was it good because it was perfume she used in anointing His feet? Was it good because it was a box of costly spikenard? No. Mary loved Him. Her heart was right, and God looks on the heart.

Paul commends the giving of the Macedonians when he says this about them: "first [they] gave their own selves to the Lord." Yes, then our gifts count with God. We would do well to remember, when we are bringing gifts to God and have our hands full of something to offer Him, that God is not primarily interested in what is in our hands; He wants our hands themselves. What we bring in our hands is just a gesture; He wants us. In worship, *adore* means much more than just *like* or *prefer*. It is "commitment." It is feeling toward Him that He is "the pearl of great price," for which one would give up everything – one would sell all that one has to own this gem. He is precious to the worshiping heart, not only because He is wonderful, but because He is one's own and one belongs to Him. "So worship I the God of my fathers."

Being a Christian is primarily a mold of consciousness. It is a structure of the will in which one basically commits himself to God in Christ Jesus, and lets God work in him. Then you have a Christian.

The element of *adoring* Him leads on to *enjoying* Him. I have never seen a miser enjoying his gold, but when I was a boy I used to read about it. I didn't have any gold, but I have always felt that I could understand the man who would sit and let the coins sift through his fingers. I have seen a young girl enjoy a jewel, especially one gem. There never was a ring in the world like it. She wants everybody to see it, but in addition she enjoys it alone. Some girls admit that when they wake up at night, they check to see if it is still there. If they did not, I would be sorry for them, because that feeling is a part of having something precious. That is *contemplation*. One focuses his attention upon the exercising of his judgment about what is most important to him. He commits himself to it; and it is his.

Some people feel the same way about a sunset. They love to look at one. Others feel the same way about a sunrise. Perhaps in your youth you might have tried to climb a mountain or high hill to be there at sunrise. Halfway up you may have twisted an ankle, or maybe it was cloudy that morning. But you remember what it was like. You ate the wieners half-done, you went home bedraggled, and it took you two days to get over that climb. But it was a tribute to your delight in the sunrise.

Perhaps you will recognize the relationship between the words *adore* and *enjoy* when you think of the various feelings people have about a picture. Permit me to share with you a little personal incident. When I went to New York City for the first time, I had a whole sheaf of suggestions and directions from friends who had been there, telling where I should go and what I should see. Among other things, my itinerary was worked out so that I was able to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As I walked through the museum, I saw statues with arms off, legs off, and heads off. They were all supposed to be wonderful pieces of art. I saw these marvelous things and I tried to be impressed, because I felt that was the proper response. As I walked along I remember coming to a certain room which seemed to be unfurnished. There was only a little bench along one side and one picture on the wall. As I looked in I thought, "Well, they haven't finished this one." I looked in the next room and it was the same as the previous one. None of the rooms in that entire section was "finished," so I walked on around and looked at some of the other wonders, trying to appreciate what people "ohed" and "ahed" about.

Then I came back to what I had thought were the unfinished rooms and happened to see someone sitting in one of them. My first thought was, "Well, her feet hurt. She is resting and that is a nice place to rest." I noticed, however, that she had a pencil and pad and appeared to be making notes. For a moment I thought, "It is a nice place to meditate." Then I noticed that the person was studying the picture. I was suddenly glad that no one I knew was there, for it was one of those times that have come often in my life: I had such a great sense of embarrassment. Here was a person who had entered into the spirit of the painting; she was sitting on the carefully placed bench for the purpose of seeing that picture. Here was someone who was trained and prepared to appreciate the forms, the shading, the color scheme, and all the qualities that make up a picture. The reason there was nothing else in the room was a very practical one: when the onlooker focused his or her attention on that work of art, the person didn't want anything to distract.

I saw there, in an artistic setting, a very good, practical description of a situation of worship. That is the way Paul would do it. He would set himself before God and would put everything else out of his mind while he worshiped God.

Something similar could happen with a parent as he looks into his baby's face. We had five babies in our home. I think that a sleeping baby's face is one of the most wonderful things in the world. I sat at the cribside of our first baby and marveled that I had any relation to that sweet thing. When I looked into the face of that baby, my feelings were pretty close to worship.

There are other occasions which portray the idea of worship. One occurred when I was in Winnipeg, Canada, on a rare return visit, after having served there years ago as a student pastor. In my church there was a man who had been blessed under my ministry. God had opened this good man's heart to see the Lord, and he had always identified his great joy in the Lord with me, which was gratuitous. I understood

that the man was actually responding in gratitude for getting to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the years, this man, Mr. Hyde, thought a great deal of me, for I was the messenger boy who had brought the message of the gospel. At the time of this visit he was on his death bed. He lived for several more months, but he never got off that bed. Ordinarily, I would not have had the time to do any pastoral work on such a short visit and I also tried to avoid interfering in the work of the local pastor. But when someone told me that Mr. Hyde was in the hospital, I felt led to visit him. I walked into the room where this emaciated man lay and have never been more humbled in my life. There was a look of enthralment on his face. Once more he could look on a face he loved. I must repeat that I never felt worthy of it. I knew that I had had a glimpse into a heart that was completely, totally adoring the Lord Jesus Christ through His messenger. *Worship is like that.*

Worship in itself – the concentration of the heart and mind, the esteeming, the preferring, and the devotion – has no special saving quality; it has an absorbing quality. The saving quality depends on whom one worships. Paul's worship was the "worship of the God of my fathers." We should worship the God of the Bible.

Worship is that which prepares a heart to accept Jesus Christ. Worshiping any god will not do. I am sure there are people who worship a concept of philosophy. But not Paul. Some people worship a complex of ideas brought together in theological cogitation. But not Paul. Others worship some idea of God such as human religion would project. But not Paul. Paul did not worship or prefer a synthesis of all the best ideas in Roman, Greek, and Hebrew culture. He knew them all, but that is not what he had in mind. Fortunately, he indicated plainly to us that he worshiped "the God of my fathers."

An interesting thing about the Old Testament is that it never argues the existence of God. You can read the Old Testament from one end to the other and you will never find any argument for the reality of God or His intent and purpose. Isaiah upholds His prestige and argues that He is greater than any human god. But there is never an attempt to argue His reality. Nowhere is an attempt made to describe God. He is not so tall; He is not so wide; He is not of this or that particular type; but God is indicated in Scripture as being known by His acts. "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel." He is known by His mighty acts – the things He does.

When Paul says that he worships "the God of his fathers," he is worshiping the God who acted with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses in the ways reported in the Old Testament. Paul esteemed, adored, enjoyed, and yielded himself to the God of Adam. Who is He? He is the one who creates and the one who judges. Paul certainly did not have any ideas about the origin of this world other than that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." His only idea about the origin of man was that God had said, "Let us make man in our own image." Paul would have had no other idea about the responsibility of man than to obey Almighty God, who made him and sent him on his journeys, who judges him, and who has him in His hands – the God of Adam.

Paul worshiped the God of Noah, the God who judged mankind. God saw that man's thoughts were only evil continually, and He moved in judgment to destroy man. Yet, while moving in judgment to destroy, He prepared an ark for the saving of those who would believe. God is to be seen as the one who judges sin and saves the believer.

Paul worshiped the God of Abraham, the God who called Abraham to walk with Him and who talked with Abraham as a man talks with his friend, so that Abraham could be called the friend of God.

Paul worshiped the God of Isaac. Isaac had found that God was faithful to His promises and could be trusted and depended upon.

Paul worshiped the God of Jacob. Jacob learned to know God especially that night when he wrestled far into the morning hours with an angel and pleaded, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Jacob found that Almighty God would hear and answer prevailing prayer.

Paul worshiped the God of Joseph. Joseph could say to his brothers, ". . . ye thought evil against me;

but God meant it unto good." Joseph had discovered that God could overrule the evil purposes of mankind.

Paul worshiped the God of Moses, the God who said, "I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel . . . and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians"; the God who told the Israelites, ". . . ye shall be holy; for I am holy"; the God who led them with the cloud by day and with the pillar of fire at night. There was never a time when the Israelites were apart from His personal presence.

Paul worshiped the God of Joshua, the God who arranged it so that Joshua would do the impossible, in order that he might learn that "victory belongs to God." Victory is not wrought by the good men one might have, not by the many men one might have, not by the military wisdom one has, but it is of God. Gideon also learned this lesson. And Samuel found that God would guide him.

These are the people with whom God dealt, and this is the God Paul worshiped. This is the God who had Paul's whole heart. Paul did not know any of these persons, but he read Scripture. And he read about the mighty acts of God. These were mighty acts of the God whom Paul esteemed, preferred, adored, and rejoiced in above all else. Paul read of the God who was David's refuge and strength, the God of Elijah whose almighty power was always available, the God of Daniel, the God who sets up, who puts down, who rules, and overrules – Almighty God.

Christians today have an advantage that Paul did not have. We have the record about the Lord Jesus Christ. We can ask ourselves, "Do you and I want to know God?" Then hear Him who says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." We do not know what Jesus of Nazareth looked like. That is not important. But it is important that we see Him as the leper saw Him: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Jesus answered the appeal with, "I will; be thou clean." Many souls have been cleansed for no other reason than that they believed the word of the Lord Jesus Christ when He said, "I will; be thou clean."

We must recognize Jesus as the blind man recognized Him: "Thou son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus asked, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" His reply was, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." He touched him and he saw.

We must see His compassion to the woman with the running sore. She had spent all that she possessed for cures and she was not helped. When she saw Jesus she said, "If I could just touch the hem of His garment." As her hand pressed against the cloth she was cleansed immediately. He turned and asked, "Who touched me?" When she was discovered among the crowd, she admitted she had touched Him. Jesus said to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace."

The rich pages of the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – set before us this gracious person, Jesus of Nazareth, who moves in this world today, saying, healing, restoring, and declaring, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The Christian is one who in heart and mind focuses consciousness upon Jesus of Nazareth as set forth in Scripture. This is God – our God. Him we adore. In Him we rest and trust and rejoice. He is ours, we are His, and He is precious. This affects a person's whole consciousness. Everything in life is to be seen in this perspective. There is no amount of money, there is no pleasure, there is no learning, there is no work, there is no wisdom, there is not anything good, anything bad, or anything else in the world that can be understood properly except in the person of Jesus of Nazareth – Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior. The apostle Paul was totally committed to Him. Paul could say, "So worship I the God of my fathers."

3

The BELIEVING Christian

A second mark of the Christian grows out of worship. Having focused attention upon the being of Almighty God as set forth in Scripture, the apostle Paul makes this simple statement with reference to his own action: "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

Let us consider the matter of *believing*. The noun is *faith*; the verb is *believe*. The verb *believe* is used in two senses in our ordinary English language.

Scholars speak of believing as a matter of cognition – when the mind reaches a conclusion about some proposed fact. One may say, "I believe it is two miles to Black Mountain Post Office." That is his judgment. Anyone could go out and measure the distance. But without having measured it accurately, he concludes that it is about two miles. One could see a person walking across the street, point him out, and say, "I believe that is Dr. So-and-So." That is what he concludes in his own mind. In these instances one's judgment could be tested and proved.

There are many people who imagine Christian faith to be merely a matter of accepting certain facts. There are others who think that "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" is a matter of accepting Hebrew history as true or accepting Old Testament statements as accurate. Paul would have accepted the statements as accurate and he would have accepted the history as true. But that is not the sense in which I understand the word *believe*.

I would use the word *believe* to describe a matter of volition, as when one voluntarily commits oneself to a proposed course of action as the result of one's belief. I believe in insuring my house; thus, I proceed to do it. I believe in obeying traffic signs and I do it for that reason. I believe in my doctor; for that reason I take his medicine. When you say, "I *believe* in someone," you expect that person always to act in a trustworthy way and you commit yourself to that person by aligning your actions to that belief. It is as though a promise has been made to you.

It is in this sense that I understand Paul when he says, "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." This is more than an expression of knowledge about what is contained in the law and the prophets; this is more than an expression of confidence in the historicity and accuracy of what is recorded, or in the veracity of the men who wrote it. This is a matter of believing in the promises that are there. It is accepting, and holding as true and valid, the will of God revealed in the written Word. Scripture actually reveals to us certain proposals which God *will make* and *does make* in Christ Jesus. God promises certain things.

I am *not* saying that it is a matter of faith when I put a grain of wheat in the ground and expect a wheat stalk to come up. That is a natural process. If I avoid running into a stone wall, it is because I believe that if I ran into the stone wall, the wall would stop me. That is not spiritual; it is a matter of having a knowledge of facts and it is using the word *faith* in the cognitional sense. When a person says, "I believe in the natural processes," that means he expects the sun to rise tomorrow morning. He expects the day is going to be about so many hours long and certain things are going to happen in a natural way. God made the processes of nature, and their regulation – consistency, uniformity, procedure, and action – is due to the integrity of God.

The gospel reveals, however, that beyond, over, and greater than the realm of nature is the realm of grace. God often goes beyond natural processes and what naturally could be expected.

When Paul says, "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets," his faith

involves knowledge of Scripture; but it is not a matter of knowing the outcome of every promise. It is not a matter of foreseeing God's plan and then working toward it. It is a matter of hearing God's call and responding in obedience to the living God.

If we rightly understand the Bible, we will find again and again, first in one passage, and then in another, the outstretched hand of the living God calling us to trust in Him. The rest is not written in the Book; it is in God Himself. He wants us to come and put our trust in Him, and He will do things known only to the person involved.

One of the ways in which this idea is stated in the Book of Revelation is, "To him that overcometh . . . [I] will give him a white stone and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." God does something for me which nobody else on earth knows; but I know. It is the precious part and the strong part in me. Over and over, Scripture holds out to me an unfinished portion, a promise from God that is like an outstretched hand. The rest of the promise follows when I put my hand in His, and He leads me to a new experience which is not written in any book, but which God effects in me. When the apostle Paul said, "Believing all things which are written," he implied that one must be ready to commit oneself to the promises of God which are to be found in Scripture.

Believing in anyone or anything is committing oneself to the consequences of the promise made by the person or thing, and accepting them as true and valid. In order to see the whole picture, let me define the term *believing in* by disposing of certain concepts. Believing in something does not make that thing become what you think about it. Believing in something does not make it true. Believing in something *takes* it as true. I take it as true for me. Thus, I believe in it.

Believing, as a spiritual experience, is very much like swallowing as a physical experience. In our English language we use those words somewhat interchangeably. Has someone ever told a story in your presence and afterwards someone else turned to you and asked, "Can you swallow that?" You know exactly what he means; he means "Can you believe it? Can you take it to be true?"

Consider the word *swallowing* in its literal meaning. Swallowing something does not make it good. Swallowing it means only that one is committed to it. One has taken it into his body; it is operative in him. One of the tragedies of life is that a man can swallow poison. The fact that he thought it was milk does not change one molecule of the poison. He was wrong all the time, even though he thought he was right. In other words, sincerity in the person who believes in a certain thing does not change the thing in which he believes. Believing in it only fastens him to it. Believing anything does not make it either true or valid; it simply commits one to the consequences.

It is necessary to emphasize this, to warn about this: A person can sincerely believe a lie; but it is still a lie, no matter how sincerely he believes it. *You can believe error*. That beacon light has not flashed often enough over the Christian community.

I grew up as an agnostic. I lived as an agnostic in a Presbyterian community and I was undisturbed until I was a grown man. Nobody bothered with me. There was a Presbyterian church and I went to it. I won a prize for regular attendance at Sunday school, which really was a tribute to the fact that I had good health. I had no objection to anything that went on in the church, so I thought I might as well go there on Sunday. I couldn't do anything else and that was where I met my friends. No one seemed concerned that what I was swallowing was chaff. Even I knew that it was.

I was not a rebel. I actually thought I was honest. Maybe I prided myself too much on this, but I frankly thought I was more honest than the members of the church. I'm sure they did not believe, either; but they said they did. I at least admitted I did not believe. Then God in His providence led me to my old farmer friend who did believe. He believed that God was a Person and that God wanted to have personal dealings with him and with me. I spent months trying to understand and believe this. The church in which I had grown up was supposed to have believed this also!

One thing which gives me cold chills today is that some people think they simply need to believe the

historical record – believe that what is written in the Bible is true as history – and then they are saved. Oh, no! That could be compared to believing what is in the bottle is really medicine. Good! Now *take it!* Until one takes it, the medicine will do no good. One could own all the good, true medicine in the world; but if he left it in the medicine cabinet, he could die on his feet. He must take it.

When the apostle Paul said, "Believing all things that are written," he meant: I take the Word into my life, and I live my life on the basis of the promises that are recorded there. I am counting on these things being true, and I am living my life "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

One of the most misleading ideas I have ever heard is that *it doesn't make any difference what one believes; just so he believes something*. That idea has just as much sense in it as telling a mother with a little baby that it doesn't make any difference what the baby swallows, just so it swallows something. Such thinking is most ridiculous!

Believing in something does not mean that you know the outcome. An element of venture into the unknown is involved. Abraham, when he was called of God, "by faith . . . obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." Peter, in the boat, saw Jesus walking on the water and said, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee." Christ said, "Come." Peter stepped out of the boat. He walked on the water. But when he saw the boisterous waves he began to sink and he cried out, "Save me!" Christ reprimanded Peter, saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" With faith he could walk; without faith he began to sink.

On another occasion the Lord told Peter to take his boat on the lake and let down his nets for a draft of fish. Peter said, "Master, we have toiled all the night. [The fish aren't running. There aren't any fish out there. Fishing is my business; I know about this. They just are not there.] Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." That is an example of an act of faith, faith without much confidence. Peter did what the Lord wanted him to do because he trusted in the Lord even though his knowledge of fishing told him he was a fool for doing it. However, he was wrong, and the Lord was right. When Peter returned, he fell on his knees and in effect said, "Lord, You'd better leave me. I am no good." Why? Because he didn't believe Jesus. He didn't have any confidence in the very thing he was doing, even while he was doing it. But Peter had obeyed.

A similar experience happened with Martha when Lazarus was in the tomb. When they came to the grave the Lord Jesus said, "Take ye away the stone." Martha said to Him, "Lord, . . . he hath been dead four days. [It's too late.]" But they opened the tomb.

This is the area of believing in which there really can be doubt. Doubt, however, as it arises in believing, is not so much doubt about the Lord, nor doubt in His ability, nor doubt in what He has said. It is doubt about oneself. Do I think I can do it? One may have doubts about his ability to obey. Hear that poor man who cried out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The Lord can understand that kind of doubt. One can have doubt as to the practical outcome, doubt about the consequences. With Peter we can say, "I am not sure it will do any good; but if you say so, I will do it." In other words, there is a possible area of doubt that is rooted in our limited wisdom and strength. When we consider our part in believing we do not see how it is going to come out; but when we consider His part in it we may go ahead and invest in it to any extent. In his "believing all things which are written," Paul was sure, but never boastful.

The reason why you teach your children Scripture texts and Bible stories is that you personally, deep down in your heart, believe these are of God, and that God wants you to teach them to your children. You may very well have misgivings as to whether or not your child will come to have faith. That is why you can pray and continue praying. But faith comes from being obedient; it is the believing part. Remember that in believing you must commit yourself.

I have a doctor and on occasion he tells me what to do and gives me medicine to take. I do not know enough about medicine or drugs to know what he is giving me, but I know him and I can read his instructions. I do what he wants me to do because I trust him. Later, I will be able to tell you the

consequences, but at the time I take the medicine, I do not know the results. The doctor, being a human being, could have made a mistake. However, one will never make any mistake in trusting God. Paul stated his confidence in God when he said this: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him. . . ." That does not imply that Paul knew what any day will bring forth. But he is absolutely sure that tomorrow is in the hands of Almighty God. Paul may have to die tomorrow. The apostle does not know about that and we have evidence that he did not care much about it. He knew that God knew and he put his trust in God.

Believing in this manner is properly preceded by cogitation, reflection, appraisal. In believing anything that God calls us to trust Him about, we may recognize that there are serious handicaps. But we are impelled to believe that God can do according to His Word. The Bible says of Abraham, "He considered not his own body now dead, . . . neither the deadness of Sarah's womb, . . . being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he was able also to perform." In my judgment that is the classic description of faith – not considering the natural limitations, but being fully persuaded that what God has promised, He is able to do.

In this matter of uncertainty, consider the account of how the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she was going to have a child before she was married. What did Mary say to him? She said the most natural, sensible thing a person could say: "How shall this be?" The answer she received involved no description of the biological process. It was simply, "With God nothing shall be impossible." That was all she needed.

Do you remember how startled Nicodemus was when Jesus told him that he had to be born again? Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? [What you are saying is naturally incredible.]" But Jesus answered, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. . . . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." The Lord Jesus did not explain it any further; He simply called on Nicodemus to have faith.

After hearing the Lord explain how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, the disciples asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With men it is impossible; but . . . with God all things are possible. The promises contained in the Word of God transcend the natural processes.

Permit me to refer to a pathetic tendency in Bible teaching today. I will be as gentle as I know how. When we read a portion of Scripture that records some exercise of almighty power, and something is said to have happened that would never occur by natural processes, there are certain well-meaning people who will undertake to tell us that the Bible does not mean what it says. They have other ways of explaining it.

Take, for example, the story of the feeding of the multitude. One boy's lunch was made enough for all, with twelve baskets full left over. These well-meaning "explainers" maintain that the lesson of that story is that the boy's example in giving his lunch was so effective that everyone shared his lunch with his neighbor and thus all had enough. That kind of restatement of the passage shatters Scripture. We no longer have a Holy Bible. Now we have a nonsensical story and that is all we have. It is perfectly all right to be impressed by other people's kindness if one wants to be, but that is not the lesson in this story.

When someone interprets Scripture for you in a way that enables you in your unbelief to understand it he has violated the Scripture. When somebody takes any passage of Scripture and interprets it in such a fashion that you in your ordinary, natural mind can understand and believe it, he has ruined the Bible. What he gave you was something you could understand as a man even though you stay in your sins. Such understanding will never save your soul nor resurrect your spirit. Why not take Scripture as it is written? You will be confronted with this fact: *Almighty God can raise the dead*. And unless you believe that Almighty God can raise the dead, you will die in your sins, no matter how nice or how intelligent you may be. .you will die and you will stay dead, unless while you are yet alive you let God overcome the natural dying process with His almighty power.

That is what the Bible will tell you. Paul included that in "believing all things which are written in the

law and in the prophets." Paul did not mean believing what was written after he edited it and fixed it up so he could swallow it. He meant taking the passages as they are, being confronted with them, staggered by them, shocked by them, and challenged by them to look up into the face of God and to understand that God indeed can raise the dead.

God is able to overcome more than there ever was wrong in the world, and that is what we trust in. Faith may be challenged by an unfavorable, natural situation as Abraham's faith was challenged by his own and Sarah's physical age. But Abraham did not consider these natural limitations final. Instead he gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Another instance in the Bible of the exercise of faith, where a person is sure but not boastful, is portrayed in the person of Esther. When Mordecai sent word to his niece, Esther, telling her that she would have to go to the king and tell him of the danger that the Jewish people would be slaughtered, she sent word back to her uncle that by going into the presence of the king without an invitation she would be risking her own life.

Mordecai replied that Esther did not have the right to choose. She was not to think that she was altogether safe simply because she belonged to the king's own household. She already was included in this thing, because she herself was a Jew. It was not a matter of running a risk; it was a matter of following a chance. Esther might be saved, if she did what Mordecai said. Stay where she was and she probably would be killed. Mordecai believed that help would arise from Israel from another quarter in such a case, but Esther and her father's house would be destroyed. Then Esther comes to the tragic, desperate realization: I am not free to do or not do. I am in danger myself.

When Esther sent word out again, she asked Mordecai to call all his people together and fast and pray. She intended to call her maidens together to fast and pray, and after three days of fasting and prayer, she would go to the king. "And if I perish, I perish." What is she saying? "I do not know for sure that it will work. I do not know for sure what the outcome will be, but if this is the way for me to go, it is the way I will go." That is what believing means.

Believing is opening your mouth, swallowing the medicine, and taking the consequences. I am glad to tell the whole wide world that if a person will take the gospel into his soul, he will save his soul.

Here is a brief summary of those things which Paul believed and "which are written in the law and the prophets."

God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He was Paul's Creator. Almighty God is righteous and holy. Paul believed that. God judges sin. Paul believed that. In judgment, God will destroy. Paul believed that. Paul believed the flood took place. In judgment, God will remember mercy. The ark was real; Noah was saved. Paul believed that. God will bless those who believe in Him and follow Him. Paul believed the covenant with Abraham. God will curse those who disobey Him. Paul believed that.

Paul understood the promise to the Jews in Egypt, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Paul believed that. He understood that one can be reconciled to God in the atonement which is possible through the vicarious sacrifice of an innocent substitute. Paul believed that. He understood that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Paul believed that. "God will himself provide a sacrifice." Paul believed it. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed." Paul believed those things.

Paul believed that God would send a Messiah; he believed that God would send a Savior; he believed that God would send a Governor. The time came when he believed that this Messiah, the Savior, was Jesus of Nazareth. He understood from what was "written in the law and in the prophets" that God is merciful and God is gracious. But he understood, too, that the resurrection is real and that God's plan is not to be completed in this present world. It is worked out in this world and into eternity. He understood and believed these things in his heart.

There is no record that the apostle Paul ever questioned one word when he quoted Old Testament

Scripture. He never modified the interpretation of any passage of Scripture because of who wrote it or when it was written. He took the words of Scripture as they were written, and he indicated throughout his writings that these things are the promises of God. He did not seek the underlying processes which we could count on happening among us here today. The apostle Paul, in accepting the Old Testament Scripture passages as they were written – receiving them, taking them to be true, and committing himself to them was doing exactly what his Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, had done before him. Jesus is reported as having quoted and used Scripture, but He never once modified or questioned Scripture, or indicated anywhere that one needed a special way of understanding it. He took it as "thus it was written," and that was final.

Very humbly and simply I would suggest to you that I believe the promises of God will be rich to anyone today who will do as the apostle Paul did: accept as true those promises as written in the Bible. When I think of the things that I believe, this is a promise that I love to trust:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Throughout the two thousand years since Jesus said these words Christian people whose hearts believe "that which is written" have been comforted by this promise of Jesus.

4

The HOPING Christian

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they [his accusers, the Sadducees] call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:14-16).

These words were spoken by the apostle Paul at a time when he was on trial. He was not standing before theologians, for this is not the kind of statement that properly would lead to refined, philosophical investigation. Rather, it is the kind of defense that Paul would make before pagan listeners to account for his manner of life.

He had been accused of creating a disturbance in the city of Jerusalem, and was now at the governor's court at Caesarea, testifying in his own behalf. In answering his accusers, Paul pointed out that he had not been in Jerusalem long enough to create a disturbance. He had been in the city only a few days, and he had not engaged in any public debate or controversy.

Then, in the simple statement quoted above, he shows four aspects of the character of a Christian. *He worships the God of the Bible.* When the apostle Paul said, "the God of my fathers," he was not referring to a deity worshiped only in antiquity; he referred to a deity whose works were recorded. They could be checked; the people to whom he was speaking knew about them. These people understood Jewish history and testimony, so Paul in effect said, "This is who I am. I worship the God of my fathers."

Today such a man might stand on a college campus and simply say, "I worship the God of the Reformation. I worship the God of the Presbyterians." But if he would speak in broader terms, he might say, "I worship the God of the Bible – the one whose exploits are there recorded. That is the one to whom I personally bow down, whom I adore, whom I most highly esteem, whom I personally commit myself to, and in whom I rejoice. That is my God."

And then Paul shows the necessity of *belief*. When he said, "Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets," his words were understood in that courtroom. Everyone there knew what the law and the prophets meant to the Jews, just as today people know what one means by the Bible. They might never have read it, but they would understand what it is. As Paul stood in court he said in effect, "I take this to be true for me." He not only meant that he accepted the written record as being accurate and valid, but he also meant that he lived it; he committed himself to it. It is as if he were saying, "I take these things which are written in Scripture, and I accept them as being God's propositions to me, which I personally accept and respond to."

He then gives expression to the third characteristic of the Christian – his *hope*. "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." What a tremendous thing that is to say in this world.

One truth of life, about which everyone agrees, is that every living thing will die. Even the pagans thought that. If one reads classical literature, he understands this about Greek tragedy. The thing that the Greeks found so tragic was that no matter how beautiful a flower was, it would wilt; no matter how lovely a maiden was, she would die. Death comes upon all that lives, and there is no escape from its common judgment upon everything on earth. The Greeks, with all their love of beauty, were depressed by this feeling of certain tragedy.

Into that background, Paul thrust his testimony, "And have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." Such a statement was a new note in his hearer's ears.

Having noted that the primary characteristic of the Christian is that he *worships* the God of Scripture – the God who can do the things which are written there – and that on this basis the Christian *believes* what is written, we are now ready to ask ourselves this question, "What difference does it make if a Christian believes these things?" We shall see that there is a twofold consequence. First, there will be an entirely *different outlook and expectation* in daily living, and second, there will be a *new and different mode of living*.

Paul describes this new outlook with the words, "And have hope toward God." This is not a Pollyanna attitude that everything is going to turn out all right. This is a Christian attitude that God *will* do it.

Let us examine the word *hope*. I could be mistaken, but it seems to me that perhaps no word in common English has been so misused.

We commonly use the word *hope* to indicate a *wistful nostalgia* for something we wish were true. For instance, a person may say, "I certainly hope we have a fine day for the picnic." What is meant by that is that "if wishing could bring it to pass, I would surely bring it to pass." You say you *hope* it will be nice, but what you mean is that you *wish* it would be nice. That may be all right for conversational English; but it is poor for Scripture, because it does not imply what Scripture means by *hope*.

A student will say, "I certainly hope I get my homework done before Friday night, because this Friday night is a big night." This is said wishfully, as if in some strange way the act of hoping will get the work done. There are times when we all like to have this happen, but we recognize the foolishness of such thinking.

The Scriptural use of the word *hope* is that of *confident expectation*. For example, if I say I hope to give a lecture tomorrow morning at 9:45: that is not just wishful thinking, for I will lay my plans accordingly. I will go out today and get a road map to find out how I will get to my destination. I will allow time for the trip. I know what I intend to do, and what I expect that car of mine will do, and what I think the highways will allow me to do. I am ready to say that I expect to be there at 9:45. Those who wish to attend may count on my presence, for I confidently plan to be at the hall at that time. That is the Bible's meaning of *hope*.

I want to emphasize Paul's hope of the resurrection. It was because Paul *believed* "all things which are written" that he confidently expected what was promised: God would raise the dead. If he had *not* believed "all things which are written," he never could have had such hope. He would have been without God and without hope in the world. *Believing* means not only that he *mentally accepted* the historical data in Scripture as true, but he also *spiritually responded* in obedient commitment of himself to the promises of God that were *implied* in what was written.

Paul believed that Israel had a tabernacle in the wilderness in which she worshiped God; but Paul also believed that the pattern in the tabernacle showed the conditions under which a sinner, namely himself, could come to God. Paul believed the story, he believed that Jesus Christ was in the grave three days as Jonah had also been in the whale three days, the way the Lord had stated it. Paul also believed that the same God who brought Jonah out of the whale was the God who was going to bring him out of himself into newness of life. All of that he believed when he believed what was written in the Old Testament. His belief included more than the historical data; he believed the implications of the promises involved.

Paul's concept of the resurrection was a consequence of his believing "all things which are written." His concept included the resurrection of the body similar to what happened to the body of Jesus Christ, but it included much more. Let me refer you to Philippians 3:7-21. There Paul speaks of himself and describes his own spiritual attitude. After he has said that he counts all things but loss that he might win Christ and be found in Him, he says these words:

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection [that I may know in personal experience the power

of His resurrection], and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

For many years I wondered if that implied that Paul did not expect his body to be raised from the dead. Could this be a case where the man who wrote I Corinthians 15 was now doubting what he wrote there? These thoughts were due to my limited grasp of the matter.

Paul is expecting his body to be raised from the dead, but he is expecting more than that. Paul is expecting that, after he dies, when the trumpet sounds and the Lord Jesus Christ returns, the dead in Christ shall rise first. But Paul is expecting more; he believes that the power of God, working in him, will raise him from the deadness of his own spirit and the deadness of his own body. Paul wants to attain the resurrection which is possible in Jesus Christ, and this resurrection includes this transformation of himself to where Christ will be living in him, "to live and to do of his good will." That is when he is confident.

Paul wants to attain to the resurrection in Jesus Christ; therefore, he counts everything but loss that he might win Christ, might know Him, and that he might know "the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means [if by any means of yielding to the will of God in his life] he might attain [in personal experience] unto the resurrection of the dead." Paul wants this dead body to be alive in God in Christ Jesus.

He continues:

Not as though I had already attained [this is obviously not the kind of resurrection that is going to come after Christ Jesus returns . . . when the world is at an end, and God will raise all people, as he certainly will, and that I think this includes], either were already perfect [complete].

This matter of the resurrection which Paul wants is something that is going to mature him in Christ Jesus, so that he can grow into the fullness of the life that is in Christ Jesus. Paul's desire is to grow "into the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ," and for that he yields himself to God, puts everything aside, throws everything away, and seeks to know Him and the power of His resurrection if by any means, by yielding to God, by letting God have His way in him. God might effect in him the newness of life that is in Christ Jesus.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended," says this humble man, "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul doesn't waste time patting himself on the back. Rather, he looks forward to the day when he shall be in God's presence. Paul Wants to be sure that his body shall be raised from the dead according to I Corinthians 15. He is *now*, as he lives in this world, to have the upward calling of God n Christ Jesus, and *now* he is to have fellowship with Him – the living Lord. It was toward that goal that the apostle Paul set himself. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect [complete], be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Paul goes on to describe fellowship with God more fully, saying "For our conversation [our manner of life] is in heaven." What does "our conversation" mean? It means our daily living. In Galatians 2:20 Paul describes it like this:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, [it is not the old Saul, the Pharisee] but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh [people see me and call me Paul the Apostle, and treat me this way and that way] I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Paul is telling us that our conversation, our manner of life, our way of living is in heaven. That is not a million miles away. It is right here where we are *now*, in something other than the physical. It is our spiritual relationship with God. God is present.

One day someone asked me very earnestly, "Where is heaven?" That is a good question. I wish that I had been Gabriel himself so that I could have answered it properly, but I don't know that Gabriel would have said it much differently. The best I could say then and the best I can say now is that heaven is where God is. "Our Father, which art in heaven " does not point a million miles or a million light years away. It is right here where you are right now, in the presence of God. The Lord Jesus Christ said that He was the Son of Man who came from heaven, returned to heaven, and even now is in heaven.

It is a human gesture to point upward when referring to heaven. Heaven is other than this world, other than the flesh. Our conversation, our manner of life, the way we have of interpreting things, the way we have of seeing things, the way we have of evaluating things, the way we have of actually experiencing things is in heaven. It is not in the flesh, not according to what we hear, see, taste, smell, or touch. It is the presence of God. It is in believing in Him.

"Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." We are expecting the Lord Jesus Christ to minister to us right now. I am expecting the Lord Jesus Christ to be with me tonight. Is not Christ in you the hope of glory? Should I not exercise my faith to have the Lord Jesus Christ actually with me and operating in me?

"From whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body." That is an unfortunate translation. A better translation would be "the body of our humiliation." God will change the processes of our physical and psychological constitution, "that it [our body] may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself." That is, through the working whereby He was able to raise Jesus Christ from the dead, and He can also perform this miracle in us.

Paul's public affirmation in the courtroom is this: I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I believe in the transformation of the human personality. I believe I can actually be a different man than I am, naturally and physically. I believe in the power of God in changing men's lives. *I believe in the resurrection of the dead.*

Please do not misunderstand me. The physical resurrection of the Lord really took place; the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven really happened; His body is now in the presence of God where He is at God's right hand. He is now interceding for me until the day Almighty God sends Him back to this world. He *will be* manifested in this world and "every eye shall see Him," just exactly as the Bible says. And there will be a resurrection of the body, as is told us in I Corinthians 15.

Something of what Paul had in mind can be seen in Romans 6:4-8. There he states, ". . . that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." We can rejoice and look forward with every confidence to seeing Him one day, and when we see Him, we shall be like Him. That is a wonderful, gracious expectation which we cherish. No doubt the apostle Paul had it in his heart and mind and it was involved in his witness. Paul believed in the resurrection of the body; and he believed that in the resurrection our bodies would be changed into the likeness of his own glorious Lord by the power of God. The apostle John says, ". . . it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2). The hope of glory in the heart of a Christian also has an immediate, contemporary, faith that is wonderful.

The whole natural world is under the sentence of death. That is true concerning me as well as the world around me. The hymn writer has said, "Change and decay in all around I see." The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, and so does everything of the flesh. The impending doom of death casts a shadow across every happy moment we have in this world. "It can't last" is a classic expression of dread. A poet writes, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." That is this world's experience, and not a little of the gloom that haunts the hearts of men rests in the feeling that we ourselves, individually and collectively, are to some extent responsible for these decaying things.

No matter what the explanation for the course of affairs, everybody – the pagan as well as the person who has heard about God – is naturally challenged, but depressed by the consciousness that the end will come. However, Paul's affirmation gives us the beginning of a life in the hope of a Christian: there shall be a resurrection of the dead. This will not simply be another chance. We will have a second life, but in a Changed, glorious, triumphant fashion. When we are raised from the dead, we will die no more, and we will be completely delivered from the result of sin.

It is tragically true that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," but Paul would affirm it to be gloriously true that "death is swallowed up in victory." Death has lost its sting; death is not permanent; death is not eternal. It is not the end of everything. As Christian people, we should encourage each other to face death with the sure knowledge that we are not passing out into the dark; we are not falling off a cliff; we are not even crossing a great river. We will merely be absent from the body, present with the Lord. Scripture speaks of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and the hymn says it well: "Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast."

In the course of placing the emphasis upon the resurrection, we do not want to lose sight of this fact: *There will be a literal, historical, actual resurrection of the body, and in the process of resurrection the body will be changed.* I Corinthians 15:52 states, "For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Paul, writing in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 says, "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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." We Christians should not hesitate to comfort each other with these words. We should encourage each other to live in the confidence we express when we bury our dead.

Many times it has been my privilege to conduct the funeral service of a departed one. When we commit the body to the ground, we do so in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead. It is our privilege to look forward to this.

We Christians have forgotten to say to each other, "There is a better land far, far away." But it is true. "There is a bright day coming by and by." It is true. We would be many times a happier church if we would sing again and again, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be." That is true. There is not a person who does not have loved ones who have left this world. They are not obliterated; all who have trusted in the Lord's salvation are "safe in the arms of Jesus, asleep on His gentle breast." As we look forward in expectation to the time when we will join our loved ones, we can rejoice in singing,

"When all my labours and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore,
Will through the ages be glory for me."

This is our confident hope and expectation. We should not wait until we are old and sick and weak to believe it. We should live in the joy of it. We should bring up our children in it.

When the time comes for death, there is far more to Christian faith and hope than soothing each other the afternoon of the funeral. We Christian people have the confident expectation that those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will go to be with Him eternally. I feel there is some way we should nudge each other once in a while. Let us keep death in mind. Non-Christians don't think this way. That is why they feel as badly as they do. But we know these things to be true. We sorrow, but we sorrow not as others which have no hope; for we have this confidence that as Jesus Christ died and rose again, even so will God bring our Christian loved ones with Him.

Tennyson, the poet, wrote these ever-familiar words, "I hope to meet my Pilot face to face, when I have crossed the bar." Certainly this is the *blessed hope* – to see Him. There are aspects of that blessed hope

that have to do with the coming of the Lord; but when Paul says he has "hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead," I personally feel that he is not referring to the second coming of the Lord, but that he meant there is an actual, spiritual resurrection to be shared now. Here and now we can pass from death to life. We need not live at this poor, dying rate; we can walk now in the newness of life. I feel that when the apostle Paul was standing in that pagan court, he was telling those people that he believed in the total resurrection of spirit, soul, and body – a quickening of the dead.

To understand better what is meant by a quickening of the dead, let us examine the physical side of death. When a person dies, his body still has eyes. There may be light in the room in which his body is placed and the light falls on the eyes but the optic nerve does not respond. The body has ears and eardrums. There are sounds in the room, and those sounds fall on the eardrums; but the auditory nerve does not respond. The body has hands, and perhaps you have caressed the hands of some loved one that has gone. You may have kissed them, and your tears fell on those hands; but you will remember they did not feel anything. Being dead means that the body is totally unresponsive.

When God says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," He is really describing a deterioration of the soul's constitution. The soul that sinneth will become unresponsive, too. It will become callous. It will become disconnected from God. In that state of being unresponsive, unrelated, it will deteriorate. It has the seeds of decay in itself. Decay is going on all the time. The soul will spoil, it will deteriorate, it will decay because of the process of death. However, in the resurrection there is a quickening, a being brought back to life, a being made responsive to God.

A great problem in our ordinary life is that we judge by what we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. The things our senses can observe are all around us, and they belong to this body of ours. The gospel does not specifically tell us how we can arrange things in this world to make them perfect. The gospel tells us how we can live with God. Thus it gives us eternal life.

Eternal life is not human life, not biological life, not this human life extended forever. Eternal life is the life of God which comes into the soul and which we share with God through His Word. He gives us exceeding great and precious promises, and by these we are partakers of the divine nature.

As I was preparing this chapter I realized, "I will have to admit that I have not finished." And when I think of Paul, I realize he did not finish this matter either. We just have not finished; we are on the way. As Paul said, "I count not that I have apprehended. I press on." Let us all press toward entering into a close fellowship with God and letting God have His way in us.

I would like to recommend that you interpret every circumstance in your life as being in the hands of a great Master Architect who is working on you. Trust Him. He is not leading you to anything He does not know about. As He is leading you through these experiences, He can open your heart and show you Himself; and you can yield to Him and have Him living in you. You can grow in grace and knowledge in the very experiences that you are having. Certainly, we do not like sorrow and suffering. We do not like loss; we do not like pain; we do not like bereavement. Death is an enemy; but we need not be frightened, for it has lost its sting.

This world is not extremely important to us, for heaven is now our home. We are here on earth as tourists, and nobody knows how long our journey is going to last. No man living knows what any day will bring forth. Christian people in this bewildered world have a quietness and an assurance concerning life. The world might blow up. So what? Is the result any different from what you are expecting anyway within the next so many years?

Is there one single soul who does not expect to pass out of this world at any time? How long do you think you have? Some of you may be asking, "Why do you bring that up?" Because Scripture teaches us "to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." That is a Christian privilege. We do not have to shut our eyes about the future. Open them! One of these days will be our last day in this world, but there will never be a day that is the last day with God.

I am not primarily concerned with Christian people. I am thinking of all those people among whom we Christians live. Once and for all, let us show these people who have looked through the hollow shell called this world and know it for the temporary situation that it is. We are going to leave it behind us. We are going on to something better. I do not want to be facetious and light about death. I personally do not like death, but we Christian people do not need to be afraid of it. Many a Christian person has learned to speak of the day of death as a day of release when he will be going home. That is what the Word says, and that is what our hymns say.

I have always been intrigued with the testimony of John Wesley. In his early career he came over to this country as a missionary to the Indians, and he was a failure. His bishop back in England had to call him home because his parishioners said, "Take him home. He is not doing us any good." On the return voyage to England Wesley was traveling with a group of Moravians when a terrific storm arose. Everyone was shocked, and burdened, and troubled, because the storm was liable to sink the ship. Wesley wandered among the Moravians, and he discovered that they were at peace. The parents were not disturbed. They sang hymns and went about their ordinary living on the storm-wracked ship. Even the children were not frightened. Wesley was astonished. He finally asked the parents, "Why aren't you people frightened? Don't you know this ship might sink?" Their answer was something like this: "We understand the ship may sink, but it is just as close to heaven from here as it is from shore." I have cherished that thought in my heart through the years.

Space does not permit me to argue every facet of this subject. However, I can imagine that someone might possibly feel that when one takes that attitude, he is not doing the world any good. I want to tell you that there is not anyone who is going to be able to do this world much good. Keep that in mind. There have been a lot of good people who have tried it. But this world is going to go its own way regardless of all your goodness. Most of the way it goes is not going to be good, and that was not your first problem. You may think I am careless about the world, but I have every confidence that the world is in the hands of God; and He is much more capable of taking care of it than I am of worrying about it. I will trustingly leave it in His hands.

Someone may say, "That preacher talks just like a child." I wish I could. The Bible states that except you "become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Now someone will say, "With that kind of attitude you are not too interested in living." Wait a minute. It is the people who expect to go to heaven who do more to bring a little bit of heaven here on earth than anybody else – and they do a whole lot more good than the scared souls.

All of these things were included when the apostle Paul spoke of the resurrection. The Christian has this wonderful expectation: it is not only true that one day his body will be raised from the dead, he will meet his Lord face to face, and he will be in heaven, changed into the likeness of Him; but it is also true that while the Christian is living in this world, he is actually going to be changed by the operation of the grace and power of God, as he grows in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All this is because the Holy Spirit is at work in him.

As surely as you live another week, by the grace of God you will be a better person than you are today. Just let God work in you, and you will be kinder, you will be gentler, you will have more faith. As you yield yourself to Him, you can rejoice in the hope that the glory of God will actually work within you.

May the Lord draw us all near to Him and help us to quietly, inwardly rejoice, in confident expectation that God can raise the dead in us.

5

The LIVING Christian

The apostle Paul's defense before the Roman governor Felix has been the basis for our meditation in the preceding chapters. Remember these words were not spoken by the apostle Paul in some conference on theology, nor in the presence of Old Testament scholars. He spoke in a courtroom as he would have spoken to the world, to society. Among his hearers there would have been some people who believed in the Lord God, some who did not believe in any god, and some who believed in a god of their own but not in the God in whom Paul believed. There would have been people in the courtroom who tried to live their lives as Paul lived his, and there would have been people who lived their lives as they saw fit (and who perhaps thought that was what Paul was doing). To such people Paul gave his testimony. It is among the same kind of people that you and I live.

I have ventured to, suggest to you that this description which Paul gives of himself would serve very well as a description of the way we, too, might aim to live by the grace of God.

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship [and so, it is impossible for me to have created all the disturbance of which they here accuse me]. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city [no one can establish the fact that I have created any disturbance]: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. [But while I plead not guilty to the things of which they accuse me, I will take the situation at hand now to tell you about it.] But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy [they think I am all wrong], so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets; And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:10-16).

We now come to the fourth trait or characteristic of what I "the real Christian." This comes properly after the first three. We have noted that a man's Christian experience is rooted in his outlook on God in worship, which is an orientation of values. Paul says in effect that most important thing in his life is his awareness of God. Any god? No, "the God of my fathers." For Paul, that meant the God of Scripture. And for us today it means the God of the Christian gospel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of the Bible.

True, God is the Creator of the heaven and the earth. And Mohammedans, the Buddhists, and all the pagans in the world can that "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shew his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Anywhere on earth, any man who is not a fool knows that God is God, writes Paul; but "whom they ignorantly worship," Paul would come to declare to them. Without any hesitation, the apostle Paul identified the God whom he worshiped as "the God of my fathers."

This God is to be known by His great works, His mighty acts, such as the acts of God with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, and Elijah. This is the God in whom we believe. He is not only Creator of the heaven and the earth, not only the Judge of all men, but also the Savior of men and the one who saves by His Son. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He is the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

The apostle Paul did not hesitate to tell anyone anywhere, regardless of what might happen, that only through the Lord Jesus Christ would salvation come. They could create their disturbances and arouse their mobs, shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28) if they wanted to, but Paul would never concede to anyone that there was any salvation other than that which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. This was basic; this was the way he felt in his soul, and he worshiped this Lord. This was the greatest fact of his life. God was the greatest one of all, said Paul, and to Him he gave all honor, all praise, all glory . . . and himself.

Because he so worshiped the God of his fathers, it was most natural that he would "believe all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." I am not referring to Paul's confidence in historical accuracy. That question was never raised. The point is that Paul read in the law that God would judge sin and he believed it. When Paul read, "The soul that sinneth it shall die," and he believed it. When he wrote, "Without shedding of blood [there] is no remission [of sins]," Paul believed these words. Paul believed that God, "when he saw the blood, would pass over." Paul believed that Christ Jesus was the Passover Lamb sacrificed for us. He believed that God would come to the sinner and he believed that God would save those who put their trust in Him. These things "are written in the law and in the prophets" and that is what Paul believed.

Because he "believed all things which are written in the law and in the prophets," this man had a confident expectation. He was looking for something to happen. God could and would raise the dead. Not only would God ultimately raise the dead, which He surely will, but God will also even now raise the dead among us – the unbelievers – when the "dead" individual believes in Him. A newness of life is possible; a man can be born again; he can be a new creature in Christ Jesus. Man need not live forever at this poor, dying rate. It is possible for a human being on earth to have God working in him "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

While Paul was very clear in saying that God works in nature – the sun shines because He makes it shine, the rain falls because He makes it fall and the events of history are under God – that is not the grace of God. That is nature and in nature one rule prevails: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." On the basis of that law of the harvest no man living could stand before God. "There is none righteous, no, not one . . . for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But over, beyond, greater than nature is the grace of God. Beyond the natural process and beyond the historical process is the grace of God.

I do not mean that the grace of God is something which takes place only in heaven. One manifestation of grace here on earth was when God became incarnate and came into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. Another instance was when He "gave himself a ransom for many" so that souls might be saved through Him. Through the Lord Jesus Christ God will do more than one can ask or think. He will save the sinner. The angels were astonished to learn that the Son of God would die. All heaven will sing His praises throughout all eternity, because the grace of God was so great that "he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is what Paul believed from the bottom of his soul and this is why he had hope toward God for the resurrection of the dead. God is able to do it. It is not done by the natural process; it does not come out of the historical process; it is not going to happen anywhere except in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul triumphantly, gloriously, joyously believed in every fibre of his being; and this wonderful belief gave Paul the strength to stand before the governor, before the world, before the Romans and the Greeks, as well as the Jews of his day, and give a simple utterance as to how he lived: "And herein do I exercise myself [because this is so, because I am confidently expecting God to work, because God is operative in me, because I have working in me the very grace of God and because it is Christ in me who is the hope of glory, I put myself to this task], to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

However noble that may sound, even to a natural man, there is no man living who has the ability or

strength in himself to be able to attempt that kind of thing. How afflicted we can be with our consciences haunting us because of things we have done wrong! How helpless we are in ourselves! How many of us have members of our own families, our own flesh and blood, whom we know are helpless because of their human weaknesses! What we need to be able to speak of buoyant confidence is the indwelling grace of God, "grace that is greater than all our sins." This grace of God in Paul, erupting in Paul, coming out of Paul as it were, would move him to where all he had to do was direct himself. And he directed himself along one line: Paul wished "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

If someone had said, "Paul, would you mind giving us an outline of what you are going to do tomorrow?" I think Paul would very likely have answered, "I do not know what is going to come up tomorrow. Only God knows; but while I live through tomorrow I am going to live with a sensitive conscience. I am going to watch the gauges of my conscience and I am going to see to it that I stay on the beam so far as Almighty God is concerned. I do not know what the details will be, but when the situation arises, I will know inwardly how God is leading me. And I have set myself to one thing that I am going to keep: 'A conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.' "

Perhaps you object, "That is just living according to his conscience." I say that when the unbelieving man lives according to his conscience he is living according to an unbelieving conscience. If you want to be sympathetic with him, you may be; but if you can help him, do so, because that unbelieving conscience is not going to be good enough. If the pagan person lives according to his conscience, he is living according to a pagan conscience. If you want to give him any human credit for it, that can be just as you please; but there is something far better than that. There is the glad news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once one knows the truths of the Lord Jesus Christ, once a person understands that God gave His Son to die for him, once he knows that he has been purchased with the precious blood of the Lamb – blood that is more precious than anything in this world – once he knows that he is not his own, but that he belongs to Christ, something happens to him inside. That which happens to him is through the grace of God and after that he does not have to blueprint of what is going to happen tomorrow. All he needs is for the compass in his heart to point true North, into the presence of God. Living so that he is constantly facing Him, we will trust him as to what he does with his neighbor's chickens. We will trust him as to what he does in the dark.

The easiest, simplest life there is to live is a life that is dependent upon the grace of Almighty God. And He is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, "who loved us and gave himself for us." Turn yourself over to Him and, do not belong to anyone else but Him alone. The Holy Spirit will guide you more sensitively than any set of rules you can put together in any book. You will be guided from within by God, for it will be God "working in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

The fourth characteristic of a Christian is described by the word *love*. This word, however, needs to be understood the way it is used in Scripture.

If I had a chance to rewrite the English language, I would have about six words for *love*. There are at least four ways in which this word is commonly used, and maybe a few more that are not so common. The varying use of the word *love* is one of the most confusing aspects of present-day idiomatic speech.

But we do not need to be confused, if we go by Scripture and see the way *love* is used there. The Bible tells us what the love of God looks like. Love is an action verb, telling not so much *how we feel* but *how we do*. Feeling is very important, very real, and I think it is involved in love. However, it should properly be called *sentiment*. Love is the direction of purpose in any conduct or any action I may take. Frankly and simply put, it is love when I act on behalf of others.

Try it out in any direction you want to. It is love when I am doing what I am doing because of someone other than myself. In I John 3:16 these words are written: "Hereby perceive we the love of God [Wouldn't you like to get a real look at it?] , because he laid down his life for us."

I do not want to do any injustice to Scripture by smearing it with my own ideas, but I feel that I must

step forward for a moment and point out to you what this does *not* say. "Hereby perceive we the love of God," because He feels so good about us? No. "Hereby perceive we the love of God," because He is so sentimental about us? No. "Hereby perceive we the love of God," because He thinks I am such a nice person? No. "Hereby perceive we the love of God [This is really it . . . it is not His feeling that is involved] , because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

The words *love* and *like* are sometimes used interchangeably, but love and like are two different activities. When I like someone or something, that is the result of an appraisal on my part. It is a judgment about the object. The English verb *like* is derived from the same root as the preposition *like*. What we really mean when we say, "John likes Jim," is that John is aware of something in himself that is like Jim. Jim is the kind of fellow John feels he is like. "Birds of a feather flock together." That is the "like" element. But this is not at all the meaning of the love of God.

When I read, "God so loved the world," I do not understand it to mean that God so liked the world. This passage does not refer at all to God's feeling about the world. He had a feeling about the world, but it was not that He liked it. This passage clearly refers to the purposes of God's action. He "so loved the world [not as though some measuring element could show you how much He loved], that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Now look again at I John 3:16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." In verses 17 and 18, John goes on to explain this very point about love. "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?"

The emotion and feeling which you will have in love is compassion, sympathy. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." There can be emotion or feeling in love. In Matthew 9:36, we read of our Lord: "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." He had a sense of their plight. When we talk about loving souls, it is not that we know the individuals and like them. We might, but that is not the point. The point is that we are conscious of their danger; we are conscious of their darkness; and we feel toward them a sympathy that may move us to the ends of the earth. The love of God is not inspired by judgment of the person, but by a sympathetic recognition of the need of that person.

The classic illustration that our Lord Jesus Christ gave about love is found in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). When Jesus affirmed, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" as part of the law, His questioner asked, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus then told the story of the good Samaritan. How different the story would be if we would read that when the Samaritan saw the injured man, he took out his pencil and pad and wrote down his case history. "What have you been doing? What does your family do? What happened to you?" What if, having gained this information, he then tried to estimate what this man was worth, what the prospects were that he would turn out all right and whether he would ever do this kind of thing again? Instead, notice how the Lord told the story. Be instructed by it! The Samaritan looked on this man and had compassion. Then he took of his own and gave to him as he needed. That is love.

There are probably times in the life of every family when, if the children are normal and healthy, the parents simply *do not like them*. We had five children and they were sweet little things . . . when they were asleep. I can honestly say, humbly, that so far as my heart was able I loved those children. But I would not even begin to tell them that I liked them all the time. Every parent would understand that.

The opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is selfishness. If I look on what a man owns and my mind begins to scheme as to how I can get some of it for myself, that is the opposite of love. When I look on a man and note what he needs and I begin to think about how I can take what I have and give him what he needs, that is love. When I think in any situation, "What do I get out of it?" that is the opposite of love. When I think, "What can I give to it? that is love. Why am I laboring this point? Because that is one

way we can imitate the love of God. Expressing the love of God is what Paul did when he "exercised his conscience to be void of offence toward God, and toward men." He expanded himself on behalf of those who had need.

From a practical point of view you can see here the meaning of the phrase, "Love your enemies." It would not be practical to tell a man to *like* his enemies. "Liking" is personal; it is instinctive; and it is not a matter of the will. But you can love your enemies. Loving them does not mean that you like them. It does not mean that you approve of their nefarious schemes or their wicked designs; it does mean that you would do anything you could for their welfare. Sometimes that will mean putting them in jail, for that is the best place for them. Actually, when you work in your community on behalf of the common welfare, you are acting in love – as the Bible means and understands it – and you will have "a conscience void of offence."

Now you could ask this question: "Why would one ever want to do that?" Why would any man ever want to give himself away to others? We come immediately to the Christian basis: Because God gave Himself for me; Christ Jesus gave Himself for me. Paul's words to Christians are, "Be ye kind one to another [not because people are so nice], tender-hearted [not because they like you], forgiving one another [not because they forgive you], even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Let me emphasize that point: God has forgiven you. Do not be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, in order that God may forgive you. That is not the point. Be that way because God *has* forgiven you. The fact of God coming into the heart never fully blesses unless you let it out to other people.

There is a very interesting symbol in the geography of Palestine. At one time or another perhaps you have been asked to draw a map of Palestine. That is a very simple thing to do. Begin at the north and follow the Jordan River down until it comes to the Sea of Galilee. Make a little round place to represent the Sea of Galilee and then follow the river somewhat further and draw the Dead Sea, which does not have an outlet. To the left draw the Mediterranean Sea, and you have a simple map of Palestine. I want to call attention to the Jordan River. The waters of the Jordan River run through the Sea of Galilee. Because the Jordan River runs in and runs out, the water in the Sea of Galilee is fresh and teeming with fish. The Jordan River runs on down the valley and finally flows into the Dead Sea. Only where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea is the water fresh and some fish are found there. The rest of the Dead Sea has the saltiest water on earth because it has no outlet.

We can almost consider the comparison of the Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea to be a parable. It is a symbol of our spiritual experience. Just as surely as we let the grace of God into our hearts and let it out again, it will be sweet. But if we let the grace of God into our hearts and keep it, there it will turn sour.

Water soaks into the ground, and as it comes out in springs it is sweet. But if this water is allowed to collect on the surface of the ground in pools, it will become stagnant. Our spiritual experience is very similar. To receive the blessing of God again and again, to exploit it, enjoy it, keep it, and have it only for ourselves is to ruin it. It will spoil. It will be like the manna which the people gathered ahead of time and tried to save. It will breed worms. However, if the blessing of God is shared – if, as it comes in, we give it out – it will bless us and make us a blessing to others. Every person who has had the experience knows that there is no joy so great as that which you feel when you are sharing your joy with other people. So it was with the apostle Paul when he kept his "conscience void of offence" by sharing his joy with other people after he had received blessing from God.

Love flourishes in an atmosphere of good common sense. It is not so much by overpowering feelings that love gets stronger, but rather by good, practical wisdom. In Philippians 1:9 the apostle Paul writes these words to the Christians in Philippi: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Some years ago when I began to study this I thought it was the strangest thing that love should abound in knowledge and in all judgment. Have we not commonly considered, because of the popular notion of the various aspects of the word *love*, that when a fellow falls

in love he loses all good sense? When you love scripturally, when you love domestically, when you love your wife and your children, and when you love your neighbor, a little good, common sense won't hurt. Do the things that are obviously needed in the situation. Paul prayed that the Philippians' love might abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, so that they might "approve things that are excellent."

Seldom do I take the translation of a passage of Scripture and analyze it a bit for my readers, but I want to in this case. In the clause, "that ye may approve things that are excellent," I would suggest that a good translation might be "that you may distinguish, that you may note with appreciation the things which differ." The word *excellent* implies excel – that you may approve the *better* things. That is part of love, and it means seeking the welfare of other people. Essentially, it is this practical thought: If the love of God is in my heart, I will look upon other people and wish them good.

As long as you are consciously seeking good things for other people, you are "exercising yourself" in that which will leave your "conscience void of offence." You can have a favorable judgment on anything you do. Did you do a certain thing with the idea that it will be better for them? Did you do thus and so because it would be the better thing to do? If you do not do it because it is a better thing, you will have a conscience that will bother you; because, if you are to have a "conscience void of offence before God, and before men," you must seek the best you possibly can for other people.

As Paul describes his own mode of action, he says "I exercise myself [I direct my actions, I put myself in this line of behavior], to have always a conscience void of offence [that is more than not doing wrong]." Let me underscore this: your conscience will not "be void of offence" if you just don't do anything wrong. If you have any Christian insight and understanding at all, your conscience will not be "void of offence" unless you do what is right. It is more than not doing wrong any more, but that is not what we mean. It is doing what is right. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Why?

I can hear someone who knows his catechism saying, "I thought that sin was any lack of conformity to or transgression of the law of God." True. Look at the first phrase, "any lack of conformity to," and you know why it is a sin. If you know what is good and do not do it, it is sin. If the Lord Jesus Christ was in a situation where good needed to be done, He did it. If you know what is good and do not do it, you are not as He is; and anything not like Him is sin. He is the standard and we will be judged by the righteousness of that Man whom God has ordained. *The love of God* is to *do for others*, and unless you do for others there is a "lack of conformity to" the law of God. To be "void of offence," you must do good, if you know what is good.

Here is another statement made by Paul: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." If I am not acting in conscious response to the revelation of the will of God insofar as it has been shown to me, then I am not "void of offence." I am actually doing something wrong. The Lord Jesus lived His life in this manner: "I do always the things which please my Father. I do nothing of myself. My Father worketh hitherto and I work." That is our standard.

In order that he might be "void of offence toward God," the apostle Paul praised God regularly for what He is. He thanked God for what He had done. Paul recognized that he was not his own; he was bought with a price. He would trust God in his daily affairs, and he would seek to please God daily in everything that he did. He would read the Bible. He would pray to God about all things. He would witness at every opportunity and he would give of his own to the work of God and to the poor.

So that he would be "void of offence toward men," the apostle Paul respected those who were over him and in authority. He had consideration for those who were his equals, and he exercised himself in charity to other people. That is Christian living.

If we could ask Paul why he would do these things, his answer would be, "Because He gave Himself for me; He died for me; He is going to take me to Himself; I belong to Him and He belongs to me. His grace is operating and working in me, moving me to do these things."

It is a marvelous thing to live and to work in fellowship with the living Lord. One not only has the sweetness of companionship with Him, but every now and then one does something worthwhile in the world. It just happens when one is interested in helping other people.

6

The SPIRITUAL Christian

Read I Corinthians 2:9-16 and note how Paul makes use of the word *spiritual*. Keep in mind that this Epistle to the Corinthians was not written to theological professors. It was not written for their type of study at all, although it has been subjected to all sorts of theological analysis ever since. This letter was written to people who had been won over to the Christian faith. If some of the things stated here seem strange, just remember that they are not past your ability to learn and understand.

Eye hath not seen [a way of saying that it has never been noted through scientific observation], nor ear heard [no philosopher has ever said it], neither have entered into the heart of man [no poet, artist, or sculptor has ever perceived anything like this], the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. [This is not to say that the word *Spirit* refers to a peculiar mentality of man. This is not the same inward dreaminess of the human consciousness. The word *Spirit* is spelled with a capital "S" in the Bible and directly refers to the Holy Spirit of God. God has revealed the things which He has prepared for them that love Him – to us who believe his Holy Spirit – for the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God.]

Then Paul reasoned:

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? [The Bible has a small "S" here, because it refers to the consciousness of man, the human view] even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. [The Spirit of God knows these things]. Now we [believers] have received not the spirit of the world [the mentality of the world, the frame of mind of the world, the inward thrust and push of the world], but the spirit which is of God [we Christian people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have received from Him that which we speak of as the Spirit of God, which brings into our consciousness the inward meaning and mind of God]; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth [in the Greek, that means *not in the word of human philosophy*; when Paul was speaking he was not arguing on the basis of rationality, he was arguing on the basis of certain things that had been revealed in Christ Jesus, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. Here you find the English term *Holy Ghost* used one time and *Holy Spirit* another. In the Greek it is the same word; the translators of the King James Version of the Bible used the words interchangeably to avoid monotony; comparing spiritual things with spiritual].

But the natural man [a human being as he is by nature] receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them [this word know gets beyond an intellectual acquaintance: it has in it the idea of 'esteem and appreciate; means the natural man cannot appreciate or evaluate the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned not mentally or by any of the sensory organs].

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

In order to become a little better acquainted with Paul's language, let us refer to Romans 8:5. Here you will find Paul using the words *flesh* and *spirit*. Remember that when Paul says *flesh*, he is not referring merely to avoirdupois, muscles, or nerves. He is referring to everything human. He is referring to all that which is human as over against all that which is from God, which he calls *Spirit*.

For they that are after the flesh [such persons as live their lives as they are led by their human natures] do mind

the things of the flesh [they have their eye on human things, some good, some bad, some cultured, some vulgar, some refined, some decent, some indecent but human things]; but they that are after the Spirit [those who have an inward relationship to God through the Holy Spirit] the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded [to have one's mind controlled by human considerations] is death [separation from God]; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind [the word carnal does not mean immoral or vulgar; it means of the flesh as Paul uses it; it is the human mind which creates art and music as well as dirt and vice] is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh [the persons who are actually motivated and guided by human considerations] cannot please God.

Paul goes on to say,

But ye are not in the flesh [that is, Christian people], but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you [being controlled by the flesh is not true of you, if the Spirit of God dwells in you] .Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his [Paul made it very clear that he was not referring here to everyone who uses the name *Christian*; but a person truly has the Spirit of Christ – the Holy Spirit of God – in him, he will be free from the control, influence, and effect of human considerations; if he does not have the Holy Spirit of God working in him, he does not count, in terms of what Paul is talking about]. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; [it always is and always was; it is true for everyone, Christian and non-Christian; as far as the body is concerned, it is dead because of sin] but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." [The word *quicken* is an old English word which we seldom use in this sense today. It means to make alive, and Paul is saying that the Christian can have that experience in him when the Holy Spirit is operative in him. In his ordinary human responses, in his usual way of doing things which would normally lead him away from God because of his selfishness, pride, and vanity, he will actually be raised from the deadness of carnality, from being dead spiritually and made to respond to God by the grace of God working through the Holy Spirit in him. It is the same power that God used when He raised up the physically dead body of Jesus Christ on the third day.]

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh [we Christian people are not obligated and are not under any kind of responsibility or bondage to live according to human standards and humans ideas]. For if ye live after the flesh [if you live like an irreligious being], ye shall die [with reference to God, you will find that you will be led away from Him]: but if ye through the Holy Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

These are the words of the apostle Paul and are what we want to ponder in the course of our meditation.

The word *Christian* is used rather loosely in our culture. We use it, for example, to mean we are not Mohammedans, we are not Jews, we are not Buddhists; *we are Christians* refers primarily to the kind of society in which we live.

The word can be used to refer to *character*. "There is a real Christian," one may say, meaning that the person referred to is acting in a decent manner.

The word *Christian* can be used to refer to an ethic, a Christian way of doing things. In almost any given culture, there will be a certain way of doing things that you could call a Christian ethic.

And then one may speak of the person who is really a Christian, namely, the man who is personally acquainted with Jesus Christ and trusts in Him for his salvation.

The word *spiritual* is a helpful adjective in describing Christians. Perhaps it will be helpful in following my line of thought if I tell of the first time this was brought to my mind.

I must emphasize again that I grew to manhood without being a Christian. I became a Christian after I had been teaching school for some time, but never in the wide world did I dream of preaching or being a missionary. Yet I greatly enjoyed the grace of God that was in Jesus Christ. That the Creator of the universe would make His power available to anybody on earth who would trust in Him – if only the person would yield himself to Him and take advantage of what He had prepared for him in Christ Jesus – was the most tremendous thing of which my human consciousness had ever become aware. When that had been made clear to me I rejoiced in it.

I had left school teaching and started working in the law office of Colonel A. W. Morley in Winnipeg, Canada, when a strange conviction came to me that I should give up this profession, too, and devote myself to propagating the gospel.

I left the law office and was two years on my way to becoming a missionary before I would let anybody call me a preacher. I made it very clear that I was going as a *teacher*. I would not be a preacher for anything. I have learned better, but that is the way it was with me in those days.

The first work I did after I left the law office was temporarily to represent the British and Foreign Bible Society. This is similar to the American Bible Society, and requires the solicitation of funds. I, who had never asked a person for a dime in my life, was given the job of going out and asking people for money. (To this day I have never learned how to do it). I was to ask people for money to support the translation of Scripture.

I had never driven a car before in my life, but I acquired a Model T Ford and started out to make my first contacts as a representative of the Bible Society. It was getting pretty late in the afternoon of my first day out when I drove into the yard of a rather wealthy farmer whose name was in my book. He was the leading man in the community and I was to see him and work out my plans with him. I went in to talk to him, but he gave me only as much time as was necessary to make arrangements for a meeting the next night.

It was just about supper time and contrary to all the ordinary courtesies of country people and farm folk, he didn't issue any invitation. He knew I was a long way from town, that it was supper time, and that I didn't have any place to stay. I was a stranger, he had a big house, and I supposed that if I had asked him to let me stay, he would have let me.

I thought I was a humble man, but begging was more than I could stoop to do. I decided in my heart that I didn't have to do that in order to serve the Lord. And so, I said to this man (and I really didn't mean anything snide by this question, nor did he appear offended when I said it), "Is there a Christian in this part of the community?" He answered, "Yes, there is. He lives down the road. Two miles down this way and one mile over that way, you will find a man by the name of Jack Adams. He is a Christian."

The farmer to whom I was talking was an officer in the church, but he didn't see anything odd about that question. It was years later before I realized what happened in that conversation. But I really was interested to find one Christian. I knew I wasn't talking to one, for it never occurred to him to share what he had with me. He would have given it to me as a handout if I had asked, but he wouldn't give it to me like a brother.

I drove my Model T down the road two miles one way and one mile over, and I came to a rather humble place. When I drove up into the yard and saw a man there, I said, " Are you Jack Adams?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm staying here tonight."

"Come right in, brother," he said. "How come you're here?"

I explained that I had been up the road at a certain man's home. I had asked him if there was a Christian in the community and he had directed me to this house. I said, "Brother, if you're a Christian, this is where I'm staying."

I knew he was a Christian by looking at him. I don't know how, but I just knew. And then he remarked, "Yes, by the grace of God, I am a Christian. But I am not living a *spiritual* life." At the time he said that, I didn't have any idea what he meant; but I learned later, and now I know much more about it.

It was nearly midnight when we went to bed. Do you know what we talked about? We shared with one another what a wonderful thing it was to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I told him how I came to faith, and that farmer just glowed. Then he told me about his early days as a Christian. He told me, too, about his discouraging experiences; and then he sorrowfully admitted to me what a terrible thing it was to live in a community where no one else seemed to be interested in the things of the Lord. "You just kind of

dry up," he said. We talked and talked and talked about the Lord. But that was the first time I'd ever heard the expression, "I am not living a *spiritual* life."

Paul referred to this condition in two of three adjectives in the passage from Romans. He speaks of a fleshly or *natural* man, a *carnal* man, and a *spiritual* man.

When he speaks of a natural man, he means anybody at all who is following his own nature. *He is not talking about a Christian.* When he speaks about a Christian, he means someone above nature, someone who has come to know God and the grace of God. Such a man has a relationship with the Spirit – not through natural processes, but spiritually with the Creator Himself. And, thus, the man comes to know God.

Paul speaks of a Christian as being either carnal or spiritual. These terms simply refer either to the Christian whose consciousness is dominated by his *human* considerations (and there are such), or the Christian whose consciousness is dominated by spiritual considerations (the things that come from the Holy Spirit of God).

Let me restate this. Everything offered in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of God, is provided for us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came into this world, lived a human existence, and suffered in His human experiences. He obeyed God all the way through and that will cause a human to suffer. If one does God's will in this world, he will do it only by denying his human nature and denying himself. In the course of this suffering, Jesus died on Calvary's cross; but God raised Him from the dead in that body He ascended into heaven where He is now.

In so doing, Jesus Christ established a *pattern*. He lived life through, once for all, and made a pattern which is shared with anybody who believes in Him. I may link in with Him at that point, He lives in me, suffers in me, dies in me, is raised from the dead in me, and brings me into the very presence of God. These things take place in me as a Christian. The person who goes through life linked with Christ has the glorious experience of being conscious that he is in the presence of the heavenly Father every minute of every day. He can sing, "Moment by moment I dwell in thy sight."

The agent who applies this pattern, who effects this formula of procedure and activates all this in the believer is the Holy Spirit. God gives the Holy Spirit into our hearts to prompt this very thing in us.

I do not know medical terms well enough to make good use of this illustration, but I suggest that there is a sense in which the work of the Holy Spirit is like an inoculation. In such a procedure a substance is put into the blood stream which changes the character of the blood so that it can throw off certain types of disease germs. An extract from the blood of a creature in which the processes of his body overcame the disease, for example, diphtheria, is actually inserted into the arm of a human being and this substance enters the blood stream. It gives to the white corpuscles the capacity to overcome diphtheria germs, and it is as though the human being had diphtheria and overcame it. When you have had such an inoculation or "series" then you are immune. In other words, the germs may attack you, but the blood has a substance in it which is able to overcome the effect of these germs and you do not become sick with diphtheria.

The Holy Spirit has a way of bringing into our spiritual life an injection, a certain element from the living Lord Jesus Christ, that so affects us that we thereafter do not respond in the same to the world. It is a wonderful thing to be spiritually inoculated by the Holy Spirit, so that the appeals of the things of the world do not get to us in the same way. We become immune to much of the appeal.

Of course, there are things of the world that still appeal to one's vanity, but they come just so far and do not take root. There are sometimes even ungodly and immoral things that appeal to one's passions and desires. It will humiliate a Christian to think he is even interested in such things; but if he is a genuine Christian, his experience (to the glory of God) will be that there is something in him that throws off evil. There might be a day when he has evil in his heart and if he were caught at that time and compelled to speak, he would, in embarrassment and shame, have to admit that he was actually thinking of evil. But on the next day, or in three days, or a week from then, he does not do these things because of an inward

something which has overcome the power of evil in his heart. Give God the glory! That is the indwelling effectiveness of the Holy Spirit of God working. Am I describing something that should be appealing to a man? I am and I feel like shouting. It is the most wonderful thing in the world.

I used to think that being a Christian was a matter of clenching one's fists, gritting one's teeth, jutting out one's jaw, and just being so strong that you would not fall. But the bigger you are, the harder you fall. Just making up your mind that you are going to walk is not going to hold you up on a slippery road; and many a person, whether man or woman, has found this out, with great distress. But if "underneath are the Everlasting arms," if He takes hold of you by the hand, even if your feet do slip, He will not let you go. It is not just an outward, external thing. *He is in you*. It's "Christ in you, the hope of glory." This is what is made possible by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When I speak of the spiritual Christian I do not mean someone who is poetic in his consciousness, fanciful in his imagination, able to see aesthetic values in all the things around him, and is altogether a dreamy sort of person. Nor do I mean one who is sternly ascetic, one who disciplines himself, denies himself everything, will not do this or that, and does not go here or there. I am not sure that that is spiritual. If you were dead you would not do any of those things; but that would not necessarily mean you were spiritual. Being spiritual is a matter of having such close fellowship with God that the light of God's presence chases the darkness out of your soul. It is having the health of God's own being so strongly in you that the evil germs don't have a chance. It is having the indwelling Holy Spirit of God live the life of God in you and thus give you the victory over things which, in their human appeal, would have tempted you away.

One could ask, "What will the indwelling of the Holy Spirit produce, if it is effectual?" It make Christ Jesus as He lived His life on earth, real and effectual in you. Because Christ died for your sins on Calvary's cross, the Holy Spirit will take the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ and, by bringing it into your consciousness, will give you the inward conviction that you are free from your sin.

When, for the first time, I realized that I was free from my sin, I felt overjoyed. And, by the grace of God, to this day I still feel that way. The first conscious realization of being saved came to me in the assurance that I was not going to hell. You can imagine that I felt good about that. I still feel good about it. But I discovered something more. It is not only true that I am not going to hell; it is equally true that I am going to heaven. That is a sobering thought, for I am not sure I have my suit clean. I would like to be rightly clothed when I arrive.

But God would not have had to send Jesus Christ to die for me to keep me from going to hell. A simpler way of doing that would have been just not to have made me. But if God had not made me, I would never go to heaven; and the Lord Jesus would never have me among those who are to be there, and their presence in heaven is to the glory of God. But God did make me, and the risk was run. I was in danger of being lost, but the Lord Jesus Christ died for me and saved me. And I will be in heaven throughout all eternity by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the glory of His name. These things will be effected.

When the Holy Spirit shows me this, it means that on any given day, as I live my life, my soul rejoices to remember that by the grace of God I am free from guilt so far as my sins are concerned. This does not mean that I never do anything wrong. But by the grace of God, I truly believe that I will not do as much wrong as I would if He had not been working in me. This is no credit to me and I will give Him the glory.

I know I am not what I ought to be; yet if anybody who knows me were to say, "You are not much now," I would reply, "No, but you should have seen me before." I know what things He has done for me and what He is still doing for me.

The Lord Jesus Christ's body was raised from the dead, and when that same power is activated in us, we actually have the experience of feeling ourselves lifted up so that *we too are raised from the dead*. It is an astonishing thing to have an inward buoyancy of spirit, to know and admit in our own consciousness

that our thoughts are not the thoughts we used to have and that we really and truly would like to be pleasing in the sight of God. These things are effected in us by the fact that the Holy Spirit brings into our consciousness, into our very well being, the will of the Lord Jesus Christ which is controlling us and moving us toward Him.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was here upon earth He could look up and say, "I do always the things which please my Father." When the Spirit lives in me I find my amazement that I do things that the Lord wants to have done. Some of these things are not what I want to have done. I have been in situations where I have found myself reaching into my pocket, taking out money, and giving it to certain persons when I had intended to use it for something else. I have looked at a five dollar bill and asked myself, "Is this foolish?" Then I have thought about the Lord and it was not foolish, even though there was something else that I had intended to do with the money. I then have quietly thanked the Lord that I was not left to myself; He moved me in these things.

Those experiences may sound fantastic to some people, for the natural mind will think that what I am talking about is foolish. But every Christian will know what I am talking about, because he will have been aware of that characteristic in himself moving him to action. This is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Why will this happen? The working of the Holy Spirit making Christ real in our consciousness, and especially making His presence real through these results, will affect us because we are made that way. We are made so that the people we associate with affect us. If we walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, He is just going to affect us.

Once in a while you may meet a person who says, "Well, I am not impressed by people. I am what I am, and that is just the way it is. It doesn't make any difference to me whether there are people present or not." Whenever you hear that you know that a person is just talking; if he is normal, that would not be true. In the event that you wonder whether or not the presence of another person affects you, let me suggest that you test it this way: Suppose you left your house earlier tonight to go to a meeting. You were the last person out and you shut the door. As far as you knew the house was empty. When you returned home, you were the first person to go into the house. At the end of about five minutes you suddenly heard knock, knock, knock in the room, near you. Would it affect you? If it wouldn't you had better go see a doctor; for no response would hardly be normal. Even if you knew who it was, the knocking would scare you; if you didn't know who it was, you would probably faint.

Picture a classroom of thirty children. Do you think that it makes any difference whether or not the teacher is present? Suppose the teacher has to go out and she writes on the blackboard all the things her pupils ought not to do. Normally speaking, if she is gone for a half hour, they will have found a good many things to do that were not written on the blackboard. But suppose that, instead of just leaving the room unattended, the teacher goes down the hall to the principal and says, "I am going to have to be out of my room for a half hour. I wish you would come and sit at my desk." The principal has some reports to get into the mail; therefore, the teacher tells him that he will not need to teach the class. The children have their instructions; they have their work to do; the principal has only to come and sit there. If that principal is the kind of person school principals usually are, all he will have to do is come and sit at the desk. Nothing will have to be written on the blackboard. The children will know to behave.

Maybe it has been a long time since you were in school, so let me suggest another illustration. Years ago, the first new car my wife and I ever owned (we had always bought second-hand cars) was an Oldsmobile. They were cheaper then. I can recall driving along with my wife and she would raise an interesting question: Just how does a Presbyterian minister justify matters to his conscience when the law of the land sets a forty-five-mile-an-hour speed limit, and the car we are riding in has a sixty-mile-an-hour cruising speed? (I don't *know* what that really means, but I *think* it means the car runs more efficiently when it is going sixty miles an hour.) That car of mine would simply fly. The first thing I knew, the forty-five-mile-an-hour limit was passed.

My wife would say, "Now, how does this happen?"

I would answer, "Well, we must be going down hill."

But that was in Texas where there are no hills. Sometimes we would be traveling along nicely, but presently the car would slow down. My wife wouldn't even look up. She would say, "How far behind is he?" And most of you know exactly what had happened. In the rear-vision mirror I had seen a patrol car coming. Even to this day, when one of those patrol cars drives up behind me, something happens to my foot. It just comes up, a natural reflex action. When the patrol car finally gets tired of following me, pulls out from behind, and goes past, I experience a grand and glorious feeling of relief.

But maybe some people have never driven too fast, so let me give one more illustration: Have you ever had a sick child? You didn't send for the doctor until you absolutely had to and the baby was really sick. Then you stood at the door, looking and looking, waiting and waiting for the doctor. Finally his car pulled up in front of the house and he got out. You know what I mean when I say that with every step he took toward your house, you felt better. When he stepped inside the door you felt better still. He went right past you, asking, "Where is the baby?" He went to the child's room. You were not allowed in the sickroom, but you felt good. The doctor hadn't done anything yet; it was his presence.

Something like that is what God wants us to have. Of all the various ideas that I want to put before you, let me stress this one: God never intended to Show some smart, clever way of living so that we could follow it and "arrive." He did not plan life that way. You will never be able to walk in the ways of God in your own strength. You are not expected to. He didn't even give you a map: *He gives you a companion.* He gives you the Holy Spirit who will be your comforter and walk with you. He is not going to leave you to try to find your way; He is going to take you. *He is going to take you home.*

Perhaps you are thinking, "How can I have this? How can I do this?" I would say "Receive Him." What you need to do is receive the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Ask God for Him. I will tell you what I understand from Scripture: . . . as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given His Holy Spirit to you; but it will be necessary for you (and for me) to recognize Him, to appreciate Him, to welcome Him, to acknowledge His presence. And that will make the difference.

Let us suppose that your church is providing accommodations for the delegates to a statewide meeting of the women of the church being held in your town. People have been asked to offer rooms. A young woman who has just had her house done over and her guest room redecorated volunteers, and the chairman of the committee says, "Why, yes, Mary, I understand you are ready now to entertain. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll have the state president stay with you."

The young woman is delighted, yet scared, too; and goes home thinking what a wonderful thing it is going to be to have the state president stay with her. The president is to arrive on Monday. You know very well that if she were to come in on a Monday, by the preceding Wednesday that room is clean, and by Thursday or Friday it has been dusted. But then there is the weekend. On Monday morning, after her husband has left for work, the young housewife still has the Sunday dishes in the sink, and the breakfast dishes are there, too. She hasn't done her hair and she has a dirty dress on and a soiled apron over it. Right about the time that she starts into work her little five-year-old girl comes tripping in from the front room: "Mama, Mrs. So-and-so is here." That's her delegate, the president. What is she going to do?

The first thing she thinks of is that the little girl is playing a joke. She says, "Now listen, how many times have I told you not to make fun about a thing like that? She couldn't be here. It's too early." "Yes, she could," says the child. "I let her in." What is the young woman going to do? The president is already in the house. She has to go in there and face her. What should she do with that apron? Should she take it off and go in there and receive her guest and welcome her?

She will probably greet her cordially and take her across the hall into the guest room, thinking to herself, "Well, at least the room is clean." And she will tell her to make herself right at home. I have been entertained by a good many lovely people and I have been well trained by my good wife. So I understand

that when they tell you to "make yourself right at home," that means "open no doors and pull out no drawers. Just be a nice guest and stay in your room until I'm ready for you."

Let us suppose that this is not the president of a statewide organization but the young woman's mother, the little girl's grandmother. The young woman goes to welcome her, and she says, "Oh, Mother, I am not ready for you. You weren't supposed to come until this afternoon." Do you think she is going to take the grandmother off into the bedroom and say, "Now, you stay here 'til noon"? You can just hear that grandmother say, "Mary, what's the matter with you? Have you gone daft?" The young woman explains that her kitchen is a mess and her mother says, "What's so new about that?" She knows that girl; she knows how it has always been with her. So she says, "Where is an apron?" She puts that apron on and she goes to the kitchen with her daughter. And while they are discussing all the affairs of the family, the relatives, the in-laws – and the neighbors – that kitchen gets the best "readying up" it ever had. And as long as Grandma stays the kitchen will never get in the same mess again.

I think this is pretty close to pointing out how it really is with God. We do not really understand the gospel until we know what David meant when he said, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." He is kinder, gentler, more understanding, more sympathetic than your best human friend could ever be.

7

The PRAYING Christian

An examination of our faith and our relationship to God is healthy and wholesome for everyone. For this study of the praying Christian, I would like to remind you of a sentence written by the apostle Paul to the young preacher Timothy. In I Timothy 2:8, Paul says, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

"It is not only my wish but my purpose to promote this," the older preacher in effect tells the younger one: "I try to get all men everywhere to pray reverently, feeling no anger toward others and no doubt toward God."

The praying Christian is simply a Christian who has put his faith into practice. I might say in passing that some people pray as a matter of duty. They feel they have to pay an entry fee, so they pray. I have no objection to that, just so they pray. Then there are people who pray when they are scared. What they pray is, "Oh, my!" and "Oh, my goodness!" That is all right; I appreciate that. It is a fine thing that they can pray when they are scared. No doubt, some of us pray when we are hurt and our praying is, "Ouch!" That is all right, too, because it is a good thing to be able to say "ouch" when we are hurt. It is a good thing to be able to pray in all these ways, and I have prayed in all these ways myself. Do not think for one moment that I underestimate them. I think that they are wonderful.

But apart from any emergency, I want to say something about *praying as a practice*. The Christian whom we have been considering knows that he, as a human being, has his life to live just like everyone else. Tomorrow is coming up and he is going to have to live through it. But the average Christian (one who has some understanding) does not know for sure what to do tomorrow. He has a routine to take care of the usual matters; but if any difficult issues come up, he will find himself wondering. The average Christian realizes that he is not good enough in himself always to want to do the right thing. He knows, too, that he is often not strong enough in himself to do the good that he really would like to do. We average ones simply do not have it. If we will be honest, deep down in our hearts, we admit it.

Some people feel their inadequacy so strongly that they do not attend church. The reason they do not go to church is that they do not want to feel guilty all the time. I am sorry for them, because there is something about the situation they have not understood. The church is actually the place for them. It is like a man saying he does not want to go to the hospital because he is sick – "After all, why worry the people in the hospital?" The hospital was erected to house the equipment and people who could minister to the sick of body. Likewise, the church is the place for the sick of soul.

Everything I have described to you, if you want to use a good Bible word for it, can be summed up in the word *repent*. The whole frame of mind wherein one evaluates oneself as not being adequate or good is properly called *repentance*. One feels in himself, "I haven't got it. Woe is me. I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. I am in the presence of God, but I am just not good enough." Paul states it something like this: "The good that I want to do, I cannot do; and the evil I do not want to do, that is what I do. What I want to do, I cannot get done; and what I do not want to do, I do. I do not know what to do with myself. Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul later answers this question: the Lord will deliver him.

The Christian is not only aware of the situation which I have described, but he is also aware of the world around him. This fact can be worded in various ways, but if one looks at the world realistically, not as a poet, but in the daylight and on the level, it has both good and evil in it. If anyone says that there is no

good in the world, he is overstating the case; and if anyone says that there is no evil in the world, he, too, is overstating it.

Both good and evil are in the world, which is a way of saying that in the world we will find both food and poison. There are things that we can use to build life and there are things which will bring death. Both are within reach of the average person. The world holds out before us promises of joy and promises of sorrow. We don't usually refer to the latter as *promises* of sorrow; we call them threats. Still, the world holds out before us on an ordinary day opportunities for both gladness and pain. We get to choose concerning some of them, while others simply fall on us.

It is a tricky thing to live in this world. The honest man or woman knows, sometimes with depressing conviction, that he does not have what it takes to get through a miserable situation. A lot of us feel badly all the time. It is no wonder some people go out and get drunk. They do not want to think, and that seems like the best state to get into – a state of stupor.

Others get into "busyness" of one sort or another. Some people say that they are going out to enjoy themselves, but all they want to do is fill their hearts and minds with so much noise and racket that they cannot think. They hope that when they've had as much as they can stand they will be able to drop into bed and fall dead asleep. But when they wake up the next day they do not feel refreshed. However, they hope something will stir them up so they can go through with it again. Life, for the average person, is terrible to face. My sympathies are with him.

The Christian knows that God exists. This world is true, but so is another world true. The things we see are real; but there is a God whom we cannot see, and He is more real. The Christian believes that God is able; He is strong. God is good; He is benevolent. God sent Christ Jesus to save. The person who is a Christian is any humble, sincere, honest man who is trusting his soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. His destiny is as sure as the promises of God. Almighty God will save anyone who will put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is true.

Does this saved person need, then, to go through this world on his own, or does he have some help for living each day as it comes? The Christian knows that the same God who eventually will save his soul in heaven and raise his dead body to be joined with Him forever, can and will help him on earth, in answer to prayer. That is what the Bible says; and it is not hard for a Christian person to understand and grasp the idea that God can and will do more in answer to prayer than He can or will do when no prayer is offered about a specific thing. If someone were to ask me why that is, I would admit that I do not know. That is the way God has set it up. I can, however, give you an idea of how it works.

Praying on the part of any of us is *the heart responding to God's will*. It is receiving from God what He offers us in His promises. What we are saying is that a doctor can do more for you if you take his medicine. The doctor can examine you, diagnose your case, know the truth about you, and give you the right medicine; but if you do not swallow the medicine, he will not be able to help you. Almighty God can actually do more for you on any given day, if you will pray, than he can do if you do not pray. The world is just fixed that way.

No one is going to have salvation pushed on him. Of all the various things we say about people going to heaven there is no suggestion that anyone is going to be taken by the scruff of the neck and pulled in. It is an invitation: "Come unto me." "Whosoever cometh, I will in no wise cast out." The invitation is to come and to receive the promises of God.

Let me compare this invitation to what a taxi can do for you. A taxi can take you where you want to go in town, if you get into the taxi. But the taxi cannot take you, if you will not get in. Really, it is like that with reference to praying. Let us say that a hostess prepares coffee, that you are her guest, and that she offers some of the coffee to you. Your hostess was glad to make and offer you the cup of coffee, but there is no hostess in the world who can hand you a cup of coffee, if you will not take it from her. She cannot give you a cup of coffee to drink if you refuse it, whatever may be your excuse.

So it is with praying. God offers us certain benefits out of His grace and mercy, which are to be received on our part by responding to Him and believing Him. This belief in Him is exercised when we meet Him face to face and respond to Him in faith to receive from Him what He has promised.

In coming to pray, the first step a Christian will take is to turn the face of his heart and mind – his consciousness – directly toward God, and look up into God's face. If you have trouble with that, I suggest that you visualize for yourself Christ Jesus on the cross, because He was God Incarnate and this was an event that you can picture. See Him giving Himself for you, because that would suggest so many things that are involved.

Perhaps you may say, "But I don't feel like praying." That could very well be. I have been so sick that I did not feel like swallowing; but somehow when that medicine is held in front of me and I am told to drink it, I manage to get it down. Perhaps I keep saying I don't feel like taking the medicine; but they work on me until I do. Because I don't feel like it, doesn't mean I ought not to swallow it. The smart thing for me to do is to take what is good for me.

The Old Testament relates a complaint from God about His people at a certain stage in their career. This is what God said: "No man stirreth himself up to pray," and He held it against the whole nation. How am I going to stir myself up? I think I can use an easier expression than that for you since Christ Jesus came into this world and since He became incarnate. "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Gaze upon Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross, dying for you. Gaze steadily on Him. Turn your face to the face of God. Look to Him, person to person. Hold still. Something will happen to you.

We can liken that experience to what happens to the luminous dial of a watch if it is held in the sunlight. The figures on the watch dial begin to glow. If you will turn your heart and mind to Christ on the cross, something will be etched into your consciousness that will stay with you all day long. You will not get away from it. In the darkest moment of the day, the cross will glow in your soul and will move you to trust Him. If He gave His own Son to die for us, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

If by chance you are thinking, "Why, I have known that for years," I want to tell you something about that mind of yours. No matter how much you may feel that you have known something for years, your mind can forget something in minutes that it has known for years. It is the easiest thing in the world to forget. That is the reason we surround ourselves with all sorts of little mementos when we really want to remember. Why do you have the pictures on the wall of the people whom you love? You want to remember them. Why do you have little trinkets of your loved ones on your dresser top? You want to remember them. Why do you carry the pictures of your children or your grandchildren in your pocket? You want to think about them; you want to remember them. Why do you wear that ring? You want to remember the occasion when you received it. It is a good thing. These reminders are important. Why? Because we are so prone to forget.

When our Lord Jesus Christ left this world, He told His disciples (He was not speaking to unbelieving sinners, not to a wayward world, but to a group of disciples who had dined with Him), "This do in remembrance of me." You need to help yourself to remember. What am I going to do on a given day, when I cannot get to the church for a communion service? What can I do? I can take time to call to mind that God gave His Son to die for me. That will never be old, never be out of date. Every day we need to remind ourselves of Christ's death, because every day we sin and every day we need the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse us from our sin. That is the basis, the beginning of our start with Him.

When we look up into the face of God and think about what God has done for us until our hearts glow, from God's presence will come some promise to us. It will be in terms of what Scripture we know, and the more Scripture we know the quicker it will come. The promise to us will become something we can reach up for in faith and receive. That is prayer. God will do for us what He is able to do and has promised to do, if we will receive it from Him.

When I say "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," I could expand it a little by

saying this: *More things of the will of God for you are done through prayer than this world dreams of.* Praying is not a case of bringing the attention of a wayward, absent-minded God to what is going on. He knows what we have need of before we ask Him. Prayer is not a matter of twisting God's arm to get Him to do something He does not want to do. He is too wise and too faithful for that. No. Prayer is a matter of bringing ourselves into the presence of God, waiting before Him and letting His Word, His Spirit, show us what His will is in this given situation and then asking Him to do it. Remember that His will is good. What He gives will be rich enough though it will not always be what my human heart would wish for.

When James speaks about this, he has two things to say that we Christians might well carry in our minds. First, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." That really pinpoints a problem in many of our lives. Many a time when I am engaged in some problem I bring myself up very quickly by asking myself a simple question, "What did you ever ask for, concerning this?" Nothing. "What did you get?" Nothing. So, the board is clear. I asked nothing, so I got nothing. That is fair. The chances are that I got more than I deserved. God has already done some things for us which we did not ask, but He could do more, if we asked Him.

Secondly, James says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your own desires." The King James Version reads "lusts" and that makes you think "evil." Some of you are not evil; therefore, you do not pay any attention to that particular verse. But your human desires are not necessarily evil.

To illustrate this truth, let me relate the experience of a woman for whom my sympathy went out. On one occasion when I was a pastor a hospital superintendent called me and asked me if I could come to a certain hospital in Dallas, Texas. There was a man there who was very ill and his wife wanted to see me. They were from out of town and had no pastor in the community. Immediately I went over. I was directed to a room on the third floor. The nurse introduced me and the woman looked at me. I do not know when I have ever had anyone look at me with such pathetic longing and such eager confidence and expectancy. Everything was going to be all right. Here was a man of God whom she could ask.

Before I went up I did what I expect many a pastor would do. I stopped and asked the head nurse what the man's condition was. She had said it was hopeless; he was dying. His wife said, "He is in here. I want you to come and pray for him." I went in and, from what I have seen of people who are sick, he looked like a man who was dying (and, may I say for the sake of the story, he did die within six hours of that particular time). He was unconscious, but I went in under those circumstances and I prayed. I do not remember my prayer too well but, knowing my heart and mind, what I prayed for was that God would be gracious to this sick child of His, and to his wife, and that He would strengthen her for whatever His providence would bring into her life.

The only way I can describe this woman's attitude when we came out into the hall is to say that she turned on me with fury. I was startled.

"You didn't pray that he would get well!"

"No."

"I asked you to!"

I knew then that, if she was a sister of mine, she needed to be told something. Gently I asked her, "Why did you call me?"

"I thought you were a preacher."

"I am. Now, why did you call me?"

She said, "I wanted you to pray."

"To whom?"

"To God," she answered.

"Does it occur to you," I said, "that if I were going into the presence of God to pray, I would not go in with what I thought or what you thought? Does it occur to you that I would talk to the One who knows all

about your husband and knows all about you and right now supports you with His arms? I was talking to our heavenly Father. I wouldn't even tell the doctor what kind of medicine to give your husband, so I certainly wouldn't tell Almighty God what to do with your husband. I would ask Him to comfort you."

She said, "Well, you didn't ask if he would get well."

"No, I didn't."

"But I wanted you to."

"I am sorry," I replied. "I didn't come here to pray what you wanted. I came here to talk to God on your behalf."

That was quite a discussion in the hall outside a dying man's room, but I have often thought of it. I sympathized with her. This woman's thinking typified what so many people think praying is.

Many people, and perhaps you, too, think praying is a matter of going in and pressing a button and saying, "Please, God, give me this; and if You don't give it to me, I will hold it against You. I prayed and You didn't answer me." Wait a minute. You wouldn't let children do that. If a child saw you handling a sharp knife and asked you for it, you wouldn't give it to him. You have more sense than that. Wouldn't our Heavenly Father be wiser than that? We reduce prayer and put it in a place where people lose confidence in it, if we imagine that praying is a matter of my writing the ticket and getting it, or going into the presence of God and writing the prescription and assuming that He will give it to me. A doctor or a druggist wouldn't do it on the human level. Why should God do it? And what promises do we have that would lead us to expect such answers from God?

Perhaps you will say, "We have the promise that what we will ask, God will do." What was that promise? "Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, I will do it." What does "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" mean but in His will? How did our Lord Himself pray? When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He cried out to His Father, "Father, all things are possible to thee . . . If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

What do we have in that prayer? Christ's own request: If it be possible, let this cup pass from me that I drink it not; I would be glad to avoid being separated from Thee, my Father. But if there is no other way to get the work done, no other way for souls to be saved except for me to be shut out from Thy presence and be put into darkness, if there is no other way but that Thou must forsake me on Calvary's cross, then not my will, not my wishes, not my human nature's desires, but Thy will be done.

That is the kind of praying that we do in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the kind of praying that I suggest can be practiced every day.

The text which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter was, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and without doubting." "Lifting up holy hands," let me suggest without prolonged discussion that means *committed to serve Him. Hands that are entirely yielded to serve Him are the only kind of hands that can pray.* I cannot pray if I am willful. I cannot run into the presence of God and say, "Give me five dollars, so that I can go out and spend it." That is not praying. Praying is a matter of turning over to God hands that are yielded to Him without wrath – no ill will. If I have iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If I will not forgive my brother his trespasses, neither will my heavenly Father forgive me mine. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," without wrath. If a Christian person goes into the presence of God to pray, wanting God's will to be done and meaning no ill to anyone – not doubting, but with a confident, basic trust in God – that kind of praying will actually bring things to pass that are the will of God. There may be many things the person does not understand, but he trusts himself to God.

In the Bible there are a number of illustrations of prayer. For instance, let us recall a time when prayer was made for someone who was in personal danger. Let us go back in the Old Testament to the Book of Genesis and the instance of Abraham and Lot.

Remember that Abraham and his nephew, Lot, had become separated. Lot had made a selfish choice,

living in the fruitful valley of the Jordan amid worldly pleasures. Abraham had, in obedience to God, gone up into the mountains to be alone with Him. Although they were separated in their ways, Lot was not out of Abraham's heart. This is a very important thing for us to remember. We may not go the way of worldly Christians, but that does not mean we cut them out of our hearts. We will still pray for them, even if we do not join them in the way in which they live.

God comes to Abraham up in the mountains and gives him to understand that Sodom is going to be destroyed. Lot is living in Sodom. This means that Lot is in danger. Many an uncle as well as father and mother, knows exactly what Abraham went through when God sent him word that the city where Lot was living was going to be destroyed. Most of us would be concerned with our own flesh and blood. The situation to which they have given themselves, and in which they are participating, is doomed by God and they are in danger of being destroyed. These circumstances will bring a man to prayer. They did bring Abraham to his knees.

Abraham offered what in many ways could be considered a classic instance of intercessory prayer. When it is read superficially, one may not understand it. Abraham, turning to God, says in effect, "O Lord, Thou art righteous. I understand about Thy greatness and Thy holiness and Thy justice and Thy righteousness. Peradventure there are fifty righteous men in Sodom. Would You destroy the whole city and let those fifty men be destroyed with it?" The word from God says, "No, if there are fifty, I would spare it."

Abraham says, "Peradventure there lack five of the fifty, and there are only forty-five. Would You destroy the city?"

"No, I would not destroy it, if there were forty-five."

"Well, peradventure there lack five more and are only forty. Would You destroy the city, if there were forty?"

"No, if there were forty, I would not destroy it."

Abraham humbly said, "Do not mark it as evil, if I keep on talking to Thee, but suppose there were lacking ten more and there were only thirty. Would You destroy it?"

"No, I would not destroy it, if there were thirty."

And Abraham says, "Now I am not one to talk to God, but under the circumstances I will have to ask You, suppose it lacked ten more and there were only twenty. Would You destroy it?"

"No, I would not destroy it, if there were twenty."

Again, humbly to Almighty God, Abraham says in effect, "I do not want to presume on God, but I just must ask You, suppose there were only ten. Would You destroy it?"

"No, I would not destroy it."

I have heard some people say at that point that if Abraham had just had more faith, the city of Sodom would not have been destroyed – which is like saying, if I had a million dollars I could do a lot of things. It doesn't mean a thing. I would recommend that you read the passage in Genesis 18. You will find that what happens is that Abraham did not quit praying, but rather that the Lord departed from him. If you feel your way into that, you will find that Abraham had not voiced a single offer in which God had not enabled him or encouraged him; and when he got down to ten, God did not encourage him further.

Abraham had other considerations in life beside Lot. Let us remember that Abraham loved God. Abraham was concerned about God and he was concerned about the honor and glory of God. There comes a point beyond which one does not go in asking God to be gracious. If you would ask God to be so good that He will never punish evil, you are interfering with something extremely vital. You are cutting, knifing, right into the very heart of the control of the universe. You cannot do that. God in His graciousness had permitted Abraham to come up to where he could ask for ten, but there were not ten righteous souls in Sodom.

Prayer is not a spiritual muscle. Faith is not some willpower on our part. Faith is a response to what

God is showing us and when God shows us what we can have, we can ask for it. If God does not show us what we can have, we cannot ask for it. I can imagine someone saying, "I could ask for anything." Just try it. The Bible says that God can do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." In the days before I was a believer, I thought, "Well, look at that. Nobody could believe that." Have you ever pinned yourself down? What can you really ask for? I am astonished at how empty I am and how meager is my expectation when it comes to what I can really ask for. Specifically, for just what can I ask God tomorrow morning? Thank God that He can do more than I can ask. I cannot do much; I am limited. I can ask God to show me what to do that will glorify Him. If God were to do what I would glorify Him, I sometimes think it would glorify Him to wipe me out.

I can hardly go before God with an open heart and an honest mind and ask Him to bless me; I am not good enough. But when I come to Him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am able to ask Him to honor that name and do for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ what will praise Him. Then, humbly, and with an astonishment that is fresh even as I write this, I have to remember that Jesus Christ shares Himself with me and takes me in with Him. God does far beyond what I would ever deserve, because Christ is my Savior. That is the kind of thing that happens when I get close to God. I can open my heart and say, "O Lord, I do not know what to ask for." But the Holy Spirit does know, and He will ask for me. You, too, must open your heart to Him and call upon Him and say, "Lord, I do not know what to ask for. Do for me according to Thy will." It will be good.

Chapter 19 of the Book of Genesis relates what happened when Sodom was destroyed. "It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot from out of the midst of the overthrow." Many young men and women are being spared again and again and again because of faithful fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts who continue to pray for them. Only God knows how many are saved in this way. And it will be recorded in the eternal records of all heaven itself that God remembered this man and saved his son; God remembered this woman and saved her daughter. There are men today enjoying the blessing of God in their lives because of godly fathers and grandfathers, long since gone from this earth, who offered a prayer in the presence of Almighty God; and Almighty God heard that prayer and is fulfilling it. People who may be even unworthy to receive blessings are today being blessed on all sides, because of faithful parents and grandparents and friends who have prayed for them, asking God to do these things for them. That is a tremendous and wonderfully encouraging thought. We can do it.

I remember an old Negro spiritual that perhaps you have heard: "You tell that liar he keep on lying, and he is gonna reap just what he sows. And you tell that deacon to keep on what he is doing, and he is gonna reap just what he sows." It goes on, and has one verse I love: "You tell that mother to keep on a-praying, reap just what she sows." It may be that there will be parents who are thinking on a child of theirs, some son or daughter, whom they have not even heard from for weeks and months. You do not know where that person is, but Almighty God knows. You can go into the presence of God and call upon Him to glorify Himself in the name of His Son and to hear you as you pray. God can remember you in your faithfulness and can spare someone.

There is an important passage of Scripture that says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (I John 5:14-16).

Of course, that raises in your mind the question of what "a sin unto death" might be. I will just suggest that most of the sins you are concerned about with your children and your grandchildren or your friends are not that kind of sin. The chances are that you are concerned with sins of appetite, imagination, vanity, personal pride, and things of that nature, all of which are sinful in the presence of God. But, "though your

sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

I personally have the idea that the sin for which one cannot ask forgiveness is the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. For that I know of no cure; but apart from that I do not know of a single sin that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is not able to cleanse. Here, then, is an amazing challenge. We can pray for those whom we carry in our hearts and minds. We can pray for other people in the presence of Almighty God, and God will hear our prayer and will forgive and cleanse and keep, if we continue to pray. God can and will answer you as you call upon Him, if you will "exercise yourself" in these ways: first, look into His presence: second, feel in your heart what He wants you to ask for: and third, ask trusting in Him.

I want to add a word for anyone who has difficulty in praying. I cannot help but feel that there are some people who, despite all their good will and intentions, have not once prayed in their entire lives. Those who know me have heard me speak often about my children. I mention four—two boys and two girls. As a matter of fact, we had five children. The fifth, a little boy, came along later. The first four were close together and twelve years later the fifth little fellow came. We always called him our second crop, but we had him for only seventeen months. He was the darling of the seminary campus, and so far as we parents were concerned, our children, who were then in high school, took him over in such a way that they made us feel he was our grandchild. He belonged to them. I saw something I never believed I would see — two high school boys, his brothers, actually contending with others for the privilege of taking care of that baby. We had to keep a chart in order to stagger their opportunities to sit with him, because they would fuss with each other to get a chance to stay with the baby. We all loved him so.

However, God in His providence laid His hand on him and took him from us. He was ill only three days. It was the most shattering experience I have ever had. He died on a Sunday morning. On Saturday night we knew he was dying and my heart was breaking. The older children were crying themselves to sleep. I did not know that a person could have as much grief as I felt in my soul and still live. I had no objection to offer to God; it was all right. It was in God's hands; but it hurt so.

While I was thinking about it, trying to help myself over the grief, I asked myself why I loved my child so — why did he mean so much to me? First of all, he meant so much to me because he belonged to me. I had the feeling that, if I understood why I loved that baby so much, maybe I would know why God loved me. To look at it realistically, during his seventeen months, my child had not done anything for me. In that time he had even broken many a night's sleep. Why did I love him so? He had been a lot of work, but he never seemed troublesome. Many times that baby didn't do what I wanted him to do, but I loved him just the same. I concluded that that must be the way it is with God.

I began to realize how my little boy had become so close to me in the last few months of his life. We had gotten to where we had little "dealings" with each other. He and I had a little game between ourselves. We were in cahoots with each other in a way that no one else in the family was. When something was going on, he and I could merely look at each other across the room, and he would giggle like anything. And I cherished all those things. That was why I loved him so. This realization really made me feel badly in my heart, because I had done that so little with my Heavenly Father. I had looked at Him so little. It bothered me, but it was good for my soul to think about it.

I remembered, too, that my baby son and I had little ways of communication. At his young age, he could not talk. We figured out afterward that he had about twenty words in his vocabulary. He could say no sentences, but he could get almost anything he wanted. Our family was somewhat experienced, having had four other children. We knew a little about what to do with a baby at mealtime. (In case you do not know what to do, you feed him before anyone else. Then you let him sit in the high chair beside you and you give him a crust of bread or something he will enjoy while you are eating your supper. This is what we had often done with him.)

The time came, however, when there were things on the table he would like to have. He always wanted to have his chair next to me and I liked that very much. At that time we had no idea that our days together

were so short; we just liked each other. When he wanted something, he had a way of reaching over and tapping me on the shoulder. He did not know what the word was for what he wanted; therefore, when I looked, his little finger would uncurl and stretch out and point. I didn't like to tease him, but sometimes I would pick up something near the thing he had pointed to. When I would start to pick up this thing he would shake his head and keep on pointing. After a bit I would reach around and pick up something else on the other side, within six inches of what he was pointing at. I wouldn't do this too much, but I just loved to see the way in which he would stiffen that arm of his and show his impatience. He knew I knew what he wanted. There was no need for words.

Do you have any concern in your life? Is there anything at all that bothers you? Is there something in your family life that worries you? Have you a child or relative whom you are anxious about? And you do not know how to pray? *You can point.* When you get by yourself, consider what is bothering you. Is it inside you? Point! God knows about it. He knows what you have need of before you ask. He wants you to point. He knows you really don't know how to ask in words. But you *can* point.

8

The TWILIGHT Christian

A person may say, and perhaps even think, that he belongs to the Lord, when actually he is not *doing* anything about it.

We may compare him with a person who prepares plans for a garden. You may ask him, "Do you have a garden?" "Yes," he says, "I have a garden." True, there is the land; but where is the garden? He even may have bought the seeds, but he has never broken the ground and planted them. Then there are people who go ahead and plant a garden, but they do not irrigate it or cultivate it. They simply do not take care of it. If you were to ask yourself, "Do they have a garden?" the answer would have to be, they have a garden, and yet they do not have a garden.

Various apostles write about this situation in regard to Christian experience. First, let us consider the words of Peter. In his Second Epistle, Peter writes: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [that is, self-control]; 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."

Note that last sentence. Peter is saying that *it is possible for a person to be barren and to be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But he [the believing person, the professing Christian] that lacketh these things [virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity] is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:5-11).

Many different things come to our minds as we reflect on these words, but I think in general we would agree that the Apostle Peter is underscoring the thought, *If you have a garden, brother, you should work it.* If you want to get any fruit, if it is to be worth anything to you, work it.

I want also to turn your thinking to some selected words from James. In the Epistle of James we read: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." There is such a thing as hearing the word with your ears, assenting to it in your mind, agreeing that it is so, saying that it is so and then assuming that you have it. All you really have is the knowledge that you know where it is and what it is. Privately, I put in the margin, you will not fool anybody else, even though you may fool yourself.

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer [this does not mean doing with your hands or doing with your feet primarily. This is doing with your heart and spirit. It is to say that, if you hear the word, doing is responding to it. It will affect your hands, feet, head, and everything else; but first you respond to it], he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." [He looked in the mirror and saw that his face was dirty, but he didn't wash it. Give him how long? Half a day? He wouldn't need half an hour. He will forget altogether what he looked like, if he does not do anything about it.]

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein [you operate it; you work it] , he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. [And James goes on to give us an example:] If any man among you seem to be religious [he will seem to be that way, if he talks a good religion], and bridleth not his tongue [unable to control his speech and his outward conduct], but deceiveth his own heart [fools

himself], this man's religion is vain (James 1:22-26).

James further writes:

What doth it profit, my brethren [he is talking to Christian believers], though a man say he hath faith, and have not works [if his faith doesn't operate; if he doesn't function]? can faith save him [just saying he has faith]? [He goes on to argue:] If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? [What good will it do if you see a fellow who is hungry and say, "Well, you just go ahead and have a good meal," and then you walk off and leave him alone? James is making it very obvious. He argues that that is just what this business of faith is.] Even so faith, if it hath not works [if it is not operative], is dead, being alone.

James is developing the idea like this: You do not have faith except in action. You merely have ideas until you put them into operation and he would not accept such as being faith.

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 [by the results] (James 2:14-18).

Let me illustrate what I mean. Two men are talking about Scripture and each man says that he believes the Bible. One man says, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover." The other man also says, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover." One of these men never reads the Bible. The other man not only reads it, he also studies it, and tries to apply it in his daily life. James would say "Now, which one of these men really believes the Bible?" It is a matter of works. James would not consider the first man a believer, for what he believes of the Bible is empty. He is doing nothing with it. The Bible is a manual of performance; it is for living by. When a man says he believes in it he should live by it.

My favorite illustration of this matter concerns a man who says that he believes in insurance. I will say that I do not believe in insurance. The man argues with me that I ought to be insured, and finally he persuades me. I then ask him with which company he is insured. He tells me he is not insured! My immediate reaction is, "Well, what is your big argument about, if you don't do it?" That is what James is getting at.

Will you agree with me that these men – Peter and James – would not have written in this way if there were need for a working faith? The need is just as great today. We are not talking about the world outside; we are talking about ourselves. There is a great danger of self-deception in the idea that because we agree that something is true, we assume we live by it. We can believe in certain medicine. Then we leave it in the medicine chest. What good does it do us? If we believe in it, we must take it. That is the only way it can do us any good.

A man says he wants to get across a canyon. He looks at a certain bridge, wonders about it, and studies it. Finally, he says he believes that he will be safe on it. However, he will stay on this side of the canyon unless he drives onto the bridge or walks onto the bridge – puts his weight on the bridge in some way – and moves on over the bridge. He believes *in* the bridge – and he believes *on* the bridge.

I am trying to be plain, but you will see that James is downright blunt. I am not saying James is not right, but I would rather he say it than I say it. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble [believing that there is one God will not get you anywhere]. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works [faith that doesn't operate] is dead?" You cannot put faith over here and works over there, but you must combine faith with works, faith with results. Don't you know that having a vegetable garden without any vegetables is of no value to you? Don't you know that having a fruit tree that does not have any fruit on it is no good to you? That is what these men are discussing, something that is spiritually, dangerously, profoundly true. It is possible to have a whole lot of faith in your mind and yet not use it; and if you do not use faith, you will not get any benefit from it. Having faith

in your mind without doing anything about it will only increase your condemnation.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? [The word *perfect* means mature. The actual performance of Abraham when he exercised his faith brought faith to its completion. Then it was made mature; it brought a result.] And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness (James 2:21-23).

Wonderful! But believing God led Abraham to follow God's instructions to offer up his son, Isaac. That is what God saw. Believing God led to leaving the land of his forefathers and coming over into the land of Canaan. It led to separating from Lot. All this was trusting in almighty God. These were acts of faith which caused God to say they would be accepted as righteousness. God counts as righteousness and will make righteousness out of all action and performance" on our part when we actually lean ourselves on and move in His will.

Let us now focus our attention upon the apostle Paul. In Galatians, Paul writes:

Be not deceived [he is writing to believers]; God is not mocked [nobody will make a fool out of God]: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. [Do not be surprised nor dismayed at the words. There is a function to be performed; there is an operation in the matter; there is a certain yielding of oneself to God, and that is what will clinch the results.] And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (6:7-9).

Also consider the words of Paul in Philippians:

(For many [of their own company] walk, of whom I have told you often [I warned you about this], and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly [a rather inelegant way of referring to the human body; they are interested in the things of the flesh], and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things) (3:18-19).

Thus far I have brought you words of Peter, James, and Paul. I am going to turn now to Revelation as recorded by the apostle John. These words were written to a church: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot . . ." (Rev. 3:14-15a).

That is precisely what I am talking about, *the person who is "neither cold nor hot"* as far as God is concerned. Such a person I call a "Twilight Christian." By "twilight" I mean "half night and half day."

Recall, if you will, several illustrations I have used previously. I want to remind you of that honest man who when someone asked him, "How are you getting along in your spiritual experience?" had to think for a moment, and then answered, "Not very well."

"Why not?"

"Once, everybody knew I was a Christian: Now I have to tell them."

One time a man was asked whether or not he had faith. He said, "Yes, some."

"How much?"

"Oh," he said, "just some."

"Are you getting anything out of it?"

"No, as a matter of fact, my faith is about as much use to me as a sore thumb. It's forever getting in the way."

Some people have just that much faith. They believe in God, but they do not enjoy their faith because they would like to go and do everything everybody else does. But they find it uncomfortable to go and sin. On the other hand, they do not find it comfortable to go and pray. They are in a mess because they are

neither one thing nor the other.

John goes on: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot [Now comes, in my mind, the hardest line in Scripture. I do not know any word in Scripture that sobers my soul like this], I will spue thee out of my mouth." That's the Lord Christ speaking. Who is He going to do this to? Will it be to an out-and-out sinner? No. Will it be to some fanatic who doesn't know which side is up? No. It will be done to a Christian who can either take his faith or leave it, one of those people who calls himself Christian, but who isn't a bit concerned about God's will. If something is good, it is good; and if it is bad, well, he hasn't anything invested, anyway. He is neither this way nor that; and the Lord Jesus cannot stand that attitude."

Scripture further says,

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 [He was speaking to a church that was rich and had much of this world's goods, but spiritually it was poverty-stricken]: I counsel thee [I advise thee] to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent [and right there we have the clue to the cure for lukewarmness].

These people are not really unbelievers, but they are not thorough-going Christians, either. They are in a state similar to adolescence at which time human beings are not children and they are not adults. You, no doubt, know what it is like to live with an adolescent, and the same situation exists when one must live with "adolescent Christians" in the church. There are many wonderful things about young people, but one of the things that is very hard to take is, *they know so much and do so little*. They are so smart that there isn't anybody in the family who knows as much as they do; and they do so little that, if it were left to them, we would all starve to death. The house would not be cleaned; the car would not be washed; the yard would not be mowed; nothing at all would be done if they were allowed to do as they pleased. But when it comes to argument, to criticism, to telling what is to be done, and to knowing what ought to be done, they know far more than their parents, grandparents or anyone in the community. We say that they are young, that they will outgrow it; but some of us feel that we will not be here that long.

When such folk are in the church, then you can feel sorry for the pastor. But as for the person himself, you are to start praying for him. When a person knows so much and does so little he is in danger, because such a person, although claiming to believe the Bible, will listen to anybody who doubts it. Such people would feel great resentment if anyone intimated that they were not loyal to Scripture, but they will listen to every critic who comes along and call him "real smart." They will say that he has some very good ideas. He will tear the Bible apart: it doesn't worry them at all. In fact, they will approve of this person and give him a high rating because he is advanced, he is progressive. He is intellectual. And the man who doesn't criticize the Bible is old-fashioned; there is nothing to him. However, if you were to criticize the critics, confronting them with their unbelief, they would say that you were just mean.

Now let's consider people who say they believe in prayer. If anyone were to tell them that they did not believe in prayer, it would hurt their feelings; but from morning until night, day in and day out, they never pray. Do I sound as if I am scolding them? I am very serious about it, because it is so dangerous. I do not mean to scold them. If pitying would do them any good, I would pity them. These same people may say that they believe in church, but they seldom go; and if they do attend, they never take anyone with them. They believe in missions, but never give any more than a token amount. They are exactly like a man who claims to be a farmer, yet never plows nor sows.

Why is this attitude so dangerous? We have an illustration given us in Scripture. Recall to mind Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Scripture is kinder to him than I would be. Abraham and Lot came out of the land of Ur of the Chaldees and went over into the land of Canaan. They traveled together for a length of

time, but due to contention between their servants it was necessary for them to separate. Abraham explained to his nephew that it was not good for them to be quarreling. It would be better for them to be separated, for they were setting a poor example. Abraham, therefore, suggested that Lot go one way and he would go the other. The best way to end a quarrel is for you to go out the front door and I will go out the back door and then we won't fight.

Having been given this alternative, Lot made an unwise choice. He lifted up his eyes and beheld the well-watered plains of the Jordan River. He was a rancher, with cattle and sheep, and over by the cities would be a good place to market them. Lot chose what was to his advantage. He was the younger of the two men, but Abraham graciously gave him first choice. Lot chose the best, the ground which would suit him most. Up in the mountains is not a good place for ranching, but this was what he left for Abraham.

The Bible relates that Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. In due time we find that he was sitting in the gate of Sodom. "Sitting in the Gate" is the place of a man who has responsibility, such as a member of the town council. Sometimes Lot has been called the mayor of the city of Sodom. I do not know whether or not he had been elected to that office, but he evidently had an important office in the city of Sodom. The Bible doesn't say that Lot himself did evil, but he associated with these people for money's sake. Abraham went up into the mountains and the Bible says that there he built an altar to God. There is no indication that Lot ever built an altar in Sodom. The people of Sodom would probably not have approved of it and Lot was there for business reasons.

When the angels came to Lot and told him that the city would be destroyed he believed them. He was a man who really believed in God, but he wasn't working at it. What happened to Lot then is one of the saddest experiences recorded in Scripture. He went out and talked to his sons-in-law, warning them that God would destroy Sodom and "he seemed to them as one that mocked." Why do you think his sons-in-law thought he was mocking? It is a reflection on the way in which Lot had lived. He had been among them all those years and had never opened his mouth about God. Can you picture some member of Abraham's family thinking he was mocking when he would talk about God? God said of Abraham, "I know that he will bring up his children in my fear." That could never be said about Lot. The sons-in-law laughed at Lot and stayed in Sodom.

As Lot and his family – his wife and two daughters – were leaving Sodom, his wife looked back and he lost her. While living alone with his daughters he lost them, also, as far as their characters and morality were concerned. Lot himself was saved, to use a New Testament description, "so as by fire." He lost his sons-in-law, he lost his wife and, in a certain sense, he lost his daughters. Why? He acted the part of the Twilight Christian. He claimed to believe, but he never worked at his belief. He lived such a life of compromise among sinful people that when he tried to tell them what he really believe about God and tried to warn them about the judgment of God, they laughed at him. They thought he was ridiculous to talk about these things. It is dangerous to be a Twilight Christian.

I want to say quickly that there is a cure. With reference to the passage in Revelation concerning the church of Laodicea, whose plight was lukewarmness, the cure for their dilemma was to set the place on fire: "be zealous, therefore." You may have heard that when people become zealous, the result is all kinds of extravagance. Well, there are some Christian people who really need to get extravagant, once and for all. Many a home would be better if it had a father who took it into his mind that he was going to read Scripture at a certain time of the day whether it looked good or not. I do not know any family that would not be better off, if the father and mother insisted that at certain times of the day they were going to read the Bible whether other people liked it or not. They might be called silly, crazy, or narrow; but they would be respected. On the other hand, the tragedy is that we have people who are thought well of: they are so suave and genteel, they do the proper thing so nicely, they never offend anybody; and they never think about the things of God. And that is living dangerously!

And now I want to propose something to you. Remember, we are talking about the cure for

lukewarmness. I suggest that we lift up our hearts and minds to think concerning the needs of our city, our county, our state, our nation, and our world as of now. There are problems everywhere. What we need on a dark night is a bright light. What a ship needs when it is in a storm at sea is a lighthouse. If there is anyone thing a church should be in a community, it is a place where faith in God is actually cultivated, nurtured, and strengthened.

What do you think would happen in your city if a turnout of Christian men should be asked for? How many would you get? I hesitate to make it ridiculously small. Could you find a hundred? You might be able to muster five hundred men. What do you think would happen in your community if five hundred Christian men made it a point to gather once a week and for a half hour got on their knees and prayed Almighty God to bless the churches, the preachers, the homes and the young people of your community? There would be no speeches, no preaching – just praying. If they were to do that for one winter, what do you think would happen? I have a feeling that it would shake the entire situation in a wholesome fashion. And would a result like this be any less than what you believe?

What strengthens me to propose the above idea is that several years ago I had occasion to be called to preach in a certain Presbyterian church in Florida. I arrived by plane early in the morning and was driven to the motel where I was to stay. As we rode along the highway, I saw a big sign for the church. I was attracted to it and made a comment to the men in the car to the effect that that was a great sign. They remarked concerning the size, but I explained that I was concerned with the wording on it. The second line was: 6:30 in the morning, Monday through Friday, Men's Prayer Meeting. In a Presbyterian church in Florida? Was I seeing double? It was real; they did it.

I saw engineers, doctors, lawyers and other men meet at 6:30 in the morning. The pastor joined them and gave each one a slip naming something to pray for; and when the time came to pray they went to praying – no speeches, nor anything else. They greeted each other at the door and then they went to praying, every man praying for a specific need. At the end of half hour they got up, shook hands and went to their several places of business. They did it five days a week.

Here and there and elsewhere sparks are flying and flames are starting up. It can be done. You do not have to do anything big and spectacular. You do not have to solve theological problems. You do not have to end all the ecclesiastical wars. All that's needed is to join hearts together to face Almighty God and humbly ask Him to bless your families, your homes, your churches, your communities, your land. God tells us "blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord," because He will certainly be with it.

The passage from Revelation concerning the church of Laodicea comes to one of the most wonderful portions of Scripture when it reaches this point: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The cure for lukewarmness, as I have already indicated, is zeal. To get zeal, open your heart, let the Lord Jesus in, and let Him have active charge in your life. Don't be ashamed to live for Him, walk with Him, and talk with Him during the day. He will heat up your heart so that it cannot be said that you are "neither hot nor cold."

This cannot begin on a church-wide basis, on a congregational basis, or with the whole community. It must start with the individual. "Behold, I stand at the door" refers to the door of the *individual* heart. The Lord Jesus is talking to the whole world, but the response is on a person-to-person basis. "If any man [that is singular] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him [singular] , and he with me." I love to say that God is not proud. He will come in anywhere. He even came into my heart, but only after I opened the door.

An artist was painting a picture depicting this verse: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. . . ." He showed the side of a house and an arched doorway in front of which stood a figure, arm and hand up, knocking on the door. When the artist had the picture nearly ready to put on public display he called in a friend and asked him to look at the painting and tell him if he had missed anything.

The friend looked at the painting a few moments, stepped back and, hardly knowing how to break the

news to the artist, said that he supposed sometimes the simplest things are missed, and he drew attention to the fact that there was no latch on the door. The artist quickly answered, "I didn't miss that. There is no latch on that door because it cannot be opened from the outside. That is the door of the heart; if the individual doesn't open it from the inside, no one will ever get in."

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." It is for you and for me to open our hearts and He will come in and He will sup with us.

9

The ALMOST Christian

No one ever ordained the apostle Paul. So far as the church is concerned, he was a layman. He had no church in which to preach; he had no choir supporting him. The only church buildings in his day were synagogues and Paul was about as welcome in them then as I would be now, if I got up and preached in a synagogue. Wherever he went he was treated as an "off-brand" Jew.

This man had been caned to the ministry by God, however, and he was one of the little band of believers who was said to have turned the world upside down when he talked about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 17:6).

Are you aware, too, that Jesus was a layman? He was not a priest. Do you realize that in the group of men He gathered about Him and with whom He associated, not one was a church leader? One was a banker; several were fishermen. They were businessmen; they were laymen. I have nothing against the ministry. I am a minister and I am helping to train men for the ministry; but a man in the ministry does well to remember that when he made up his mind to go into the ministry he was a layman. And it would be a very good thing for a clergyman to keep in mind at an times, as he observes the functions of the ministry , that he is a layman so far as God is concerned. God recognizes him only as a saved sinner, no matter what title men may give him.

Consider Paul's conversation before King Agrippa. It is recorded in Acts 26:1:

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee [I was a thorough-going Jew].

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? [That was the promise which the Jews held and Paul now believed.]

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

What we are reviewing here belongs to another world; but it is just as real as this world and it is essential for your Christian conviction. You need to sense deep down in your heart and soul, in your very bones, that God *is*: that you can have dealings with Him; and that He can have dealings with you. It is not often that He breaks through in physical manifestation, but He has given us His Word and by His Holy Spirit He gets into our hearts. No man reading Scripture and looking into the face of God will long be left without that touch from God Himself that will make God real to his soul. This man, Paul, had it.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who are thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. . . .

That is our great mission. Wherever we are, whether we are in the ministry or sharing it as members of churches in the community, it will be significant to translate our church activity and understand our personal testimony and ministry as ministers and laymen. Everything that is being done in the Sunday school, young people's work, and the entire church program is to *open the eyes of the people* of the community "and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." So said the Lord to Paul.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentile, that they should repent [they should judge themselves as inadequate; they should feel the limitations of human capacity; they should sense the weakness of human nature; they should judge themselves as evil] and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

We have a message. Many people look at the church and say, "Will you tell us what to do in this community? Will you tell us what to do with ourselves? Will you tell us how to direct our businesses?" There are so many things human beings do not know and so many things honest human beings wish they could find out. If the church has it to tell, people would be glad to know. But, with all the things that we may do in good will toward all people, let us keep the thrust at this point: Above all else, let people be given to understand that God sent His Son into the world to suffer, to rise from the dead, and to show light unto the people. The biggest thing in the Christian gospel is that God will share with man. The almighty, living God will come into one's soul, one's life, one's home, one's family, one's school, one's city, one's nation, one's age. God is available. And He will come in answer to prayer.

As Paul spoke thus in his own defense, Festus, one of the other governors, who was sitting with Agrippa, said with a loud voice,

Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad [which is a nice old English way of saying, "You are so educated you have gone crazy; you are so educated you have become unbalanced"]. But he said, I am not mad [I am not crazy; I am not unbalanced; I haven't lost my orientation with reality], most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. ["What I am talking about," Paul says, "is real!"] For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

How I have rejoiced in that statement ever since the day when out of agnosticism I came to faith. What a marvelous thing to be able to stand boldly before the whole world, anywhere, anytime, and declare that there is nothing hidden about Christian experience.

I had a normal college career, majoring in psychology for my bachelor's degree. I went on to major in psychology in my master's work; and I took psychology as my minor, with philosophy as my major for my doctorate. I chose the Philosophy of Education in America as the subject for my thesis, for the sole purpose of finding out what is considered important for men to think and know. My professors sent me through the sciences – biology, sociology, geology, psychology and philosophy. I have studied at topnotch

universities in this country. I know exactly the disposition toward unbelief that is on the campuses of our American universities today. I have actually been there and faced these men. I never caused a disturbance in class when I could avoid it, but I spent hours in the offices of the professors, discussing these things with them. It is my sober and restrained conclusion that I have not come across a single man who has been able to give one valid reason for doubting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I would like to strongly affirm that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ does not need to be restated in such a way as to put it on a human level. The gospel simply stems from the fact that the Almighty God, who created the heaven and the earth, is able and willing by His grace to enter into the inner experience of an individual. He can transform a man by His power; He can make out of a weak person, a strong person, and out of a wayward person, a faithful person. That is what happens when a man "gets religion," when he is "converted." That is the old-time way of saying that a man can "get right" with God. God is a living Being; and we can have actual dealings with Him. It's true!

I love to repeat with Paul, "This thing was not done in a corner." We need not be the least bit afraid of anybody. There's no need to trim our testimony. We are not accusing people. We are not finding any fault with men as they are. We take no pleasure in the weakness of other people. We wish they were all saved. Those of us who know the gospel know what it is to stand on the Rock of Ages and we know that there is room for everybody. We desire that anybody and everybody should come over with us to where we are standing, trusting in the Living God.

Paul continued:

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. [I don't particularly want them to be in jail, but I wish they had what I have].

Becoming a Christian is not a matter of a single, unprepared instant. It is not accomplished in just one overwhelming moment. There may be moments of special significance in Christian experience. There are certainly crucial moments when important things are settled in the twinkling of an eye. There are vital moments, different from any others, which are very important – precious moments. One outstanding moment in Christian experience may be the accepting of the Lord Jesus Christ. But some people have never had a specific, identifiable experience of accepting Him, because they were brought up in the faith; their mothers laid their baby's hands in His hands and they have walked with Him ever since. They never knew when it happened. Those who walk with Him know that there are times and moments in one's experience when God deals with one in a special way. But these moments derive their meaning in a process of God working in one to "will and to do of his good pleasure."

Paul had the Damascus road experience. But remember, Paul said that from a child up he had tried to do the will of God. He had been trained in all the Old Testament material. Paul had witnessed the stoning and death of Stephen. Paul had seen the testimony of other Christians. He did not understand them then, he persecuted them, but he saw them. All of those things are to be understood as acting together in that one blinding flash when Paul suddenly saw the truth and his whole life was transformed. Do not think that such an experience would happen to a man who had not even thought of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. It happened to a man who had been studying the Scripture, who was concerned about his salvation, who had prayed, and who had thought he was serving God by being opposed to this man Jesus and His followers.

I happen to have had an experience of Paul's sort. I am one of these people who, in a single moment, quicker than a flash of lightning, suddenly came to believe. But back of that were weeks and months of argument, of reading, of discussion, of talk. And that was not the last thing that happened. That was a long time ago; yet the process goes on as I grow in grace and in knowledge. Because this is so, and because it is a long process, it can happen that a man starts out, is carried a long way along the road to becoming a

Christian, can see the Promised Land right there before him – and still fail to make it. That is the thought which I want to leave with you as a final warning.

An ordinary comment from everyday American experience is helpful at this point. In our great American game of baseball a player is not given any credit for getting to third base. I always thought I was lucky just to get to first. But the first and second and third bases payoff only when the player scores by getting "home."

The same principle applies in football. The fellows may struggle all Saturday afternoon trying to win a game. But no matter how many times they have gone up and down the field – they may have made 200 yards rushing and 116 yards passing – if they didn't score, they didn't win the game. We may say that that is just a game. But it is close to life. In business, no matter what sort of contact one makes with a man, trying to sell him on a deal, it is not until his name is on the dotted line that the deal is closed and one's efforts have their results.

It is just like that so far as the Christian life is concerned. There is a passage in Scripture that I use very gently, because it could be frightening. But it is plain as day and used over and over again: "Many are called, but few are chosen." Remember, though, *this does not mean that there is anyone who cannot come who chooses to do so.*

I could illustrate the problem in another way. In some parts of the country many apple trees bloom in the spring of the year. Every single apple blossom on the tree is a potential apple, but not all turn out to be apples. A lot of the blossoms just fall off. So far as we humans are concerned, let us not be fooled into thinking that, because we got started and we have gone a long way up the road, we have it made. We must come all the way through. We do not have to be great preachers. We do not have to be missionaries. We do not have to be queer persons. But we *are* going to have to have dealings with God. If we do not have dealings with God, we cannot claim the promises.

Let us consider a number of such instances in Scripture. One is the case of Herod, the king. His preacher was John the Baptist. Herod was so impressed by John the Baptist, that he called him in just to hear him preach. John the Baptist would tell him the truth. Herod was a sinner; John told him so. And Herod was greatly affected by this preaching. We read that Herod actually feared John the Baptist, but instead of repenting, the king put him in prison and later beheaded him.

Think of the rich young ruler. This young man came to the Lord Jesus Christ and asked, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The Lord Jesus tested him and, after further conversation, looked on him and loved him and then told him the real truth. Jesus gave him the inside information concerning what it would really take to have eternal life: transfer the ownership of everything you have, recognize that you are not your own, yield everything to the service of other people, "take up the cross, and follow me." The young man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He was very close. All he needed to do was just do it. But he had great possessions. Perhaps you would not ordinarily think about him in a very sympathetic way, but he deserves more sympathy than we usually give him.

The man Judas was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. For three years he had the opportunity of hearing and seeing the Lord in various circumstances. Judas evidently discharged the responsibilities of an apostle. In the apostolic company he was made treasurer. If we stop to think who those apostles were, it is safe to say that the person chosen to be treasurer must be considered as having been fairly competent and reliable. That is a realistic point of view and this man enjoyed that position of trust. We know, however, that despite of all his advantages, Judas missed being a true disciple. As soon as he realized what he had done he went out and hanged himself.

I have oftentimes said that of all the men in the New Testament probably the biggest fool of the whole lot was Pilate. The story does not picture him as a very bad man. Maybe he was, but Scripture does not portray him as such. The picture is of a man who just did not want to be bothered with the whole problem. He did not want to have the Lord Jesus brought before him. He did not want to be responsible for judging

either for or against Him.

That is a typical attitude of men today. There is hardly a man living in America who does not have the Lord Jesus Christ pushed right in front of him. There is scarcely anyone who does not know what our churches stand for. He knows perfectly well, whether he attends or whether he does not attend the services. There is many a person who says, "I don't mean anything against religion. I haven't got anything against the Lord Jesus Christ. I just don't want to get involved in these things. I don't want to get mixed up in any controversy. I don't want to have any fuss. I just don't want to be bothered." But the Lord Jesus puts before us (through Pilate) the question, "What will you do, then, with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Pilate's wife had some discernment. She said, "Don't do anything against this good man." But because he was caught in the middle, between the Jews and the Romans, Pilate could only say weakly, "I find no fault in this man." He really didn't want to go through with it. He knew better; but because he was looking for a way to come out of this with a whole skin himself, he allowed himself to be tricked into becoming in many ways the world's prize fool. He allowed the crowd to condemn Jesus to destruction.

Any man or woman who stands in our community today and lets life go by, not bothering with the Lord Jesus Christ, turning his or her back on spiritual matters, is in the place of Pilate. Almighty God sees it happen. The tragedy for Pilate was that he thought he was letting the crowd condemn Jesus Christ. He did not know what he was doing, for what he really did was condemn himself. The Lord Jesus, standing there before Pilate, could not be condemned by him or anyone else. He was God in Himself. What you do with Jesus Christ is actually what you do with yourself. The ticket which you write out for Him is your ticket and the day you turn your back on Him, God turns His back on you. That is the story: Pilate was so close. He had the Lord standing right there before him; he examined Him, and then turned away.

I am happy that I can draw your attention to another person. This is a man who in many respects thrills me probably more than any other man in that period of the Lord's life. He was a businessman, a layman, a rich man, and a secret believer. He did not come out for Christ openly, but he found in his heart that he believed in Jesus Christ. He did not want to create a big disturbance among his people, so he let time go by, until the day when the Lord Jesus Christ was put to death. People rejected the Son of God; they turned their backs on Him. That was the day when Joseph of Arimathaea came forward. Everybody else had turned away, but this layman came forward and said, "He is mine. That is my Lord. Let me have Him." He took His body down from the cross and tenderly laid it in his own tomb.

We ministers can take that very seriously to heart. The man who probably performed, in some sense, the most honorable deed of anyone you can think of, who carried the body of the Lord Jesus Christ and laid Him in his own tomb, was a layman who came forward at a time when everybody else turned against Him. Even the leaders of religion in that day and time actually led in condemning the Lord Jesus Christ. It took this man who had no relationship at all to so-called "organized religion" to come forward and say, "That is my Lord."

I believe that today the Church again and again, in every community, will be revived and strengthened when laymen rise up out of their silence and say, "Let us honor our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in some way in this community. Let us honor Him among ourselves." I cannot help but think that Almighty God looked down with particular favor on the businessman who stepped up in front of everybody and said, "That is my Lord."

It may sound sentimental, but when I think about heaven (and I expect to be there by the grace of God) I'm sure that we will see some of these people. And if we do get to see them, one man I want to see is Joseph of Arimathaea. I want to look at the face of a man who, when everybody else agreed to ignore Christ and everybody else by common consent pushed Him aside, broke the ranks, stepped out and said, "That is my Lord. Give Him to me. I want to honor Him." No one will ever have to do that in a civilized community now. No man needs to stand alone in America today. There are good Christian men, both among the ranks of the laymen and in the ranks of the ministry. There are good Christian men and women

active in the church and out of the church – people who actually believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But these are days when we need to encourage each other to "come on through" in open commitment to the name and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us move along and not fall into that tragic situation of making it nine-tenths of the way and then dropping out – getting around to third base and dying there – moving the ball ninety-five yards but not over the goal line. Let's not be "almost" Christians.

Let us do this: Turn ourselves over to God. Honor Him. Start going to church regularly. Take part in prayer meetings wherever they are. Begin reading and studying the Bible. Join in with people who worship God. We only have one time to go through this life. We have only one opportunity here on earth to line up with the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to share in these things. Almighty God in heaven will bless us personally as we do commit ourselves to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. God will bless our families. He will bless our children. He will bless our congregations. He will bless our communities. He will bless our nation. He will bless our world. For it pleases God to bless those who put their trust in Him.

Our Lord is real. His promises are ours; we can have them. The gospel will work, right in your community and in your home. We can look into our Lord's face and come to Him.

If we do this, God has given us His Word: He will bless us, now and forever.