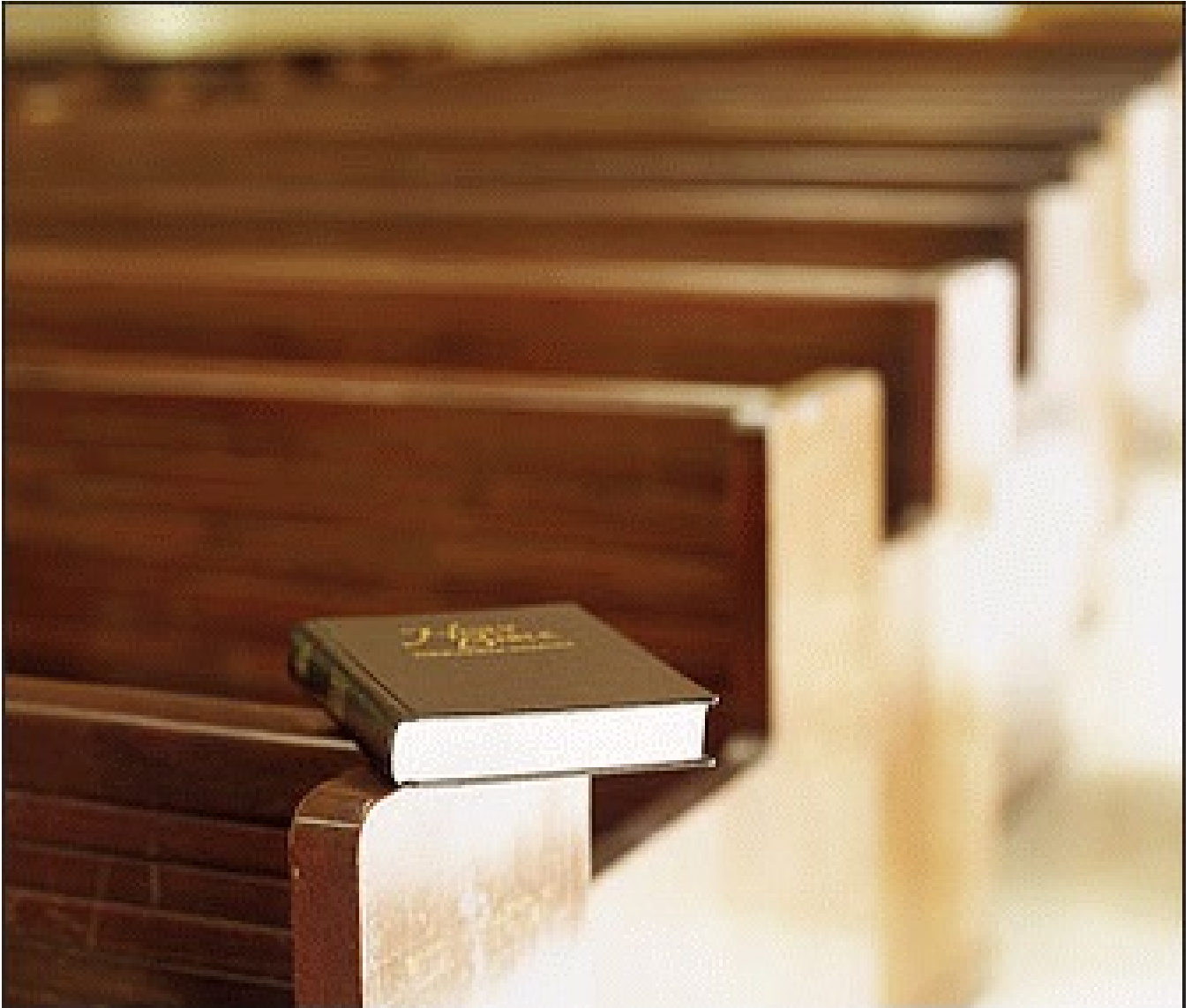


My Responsibility



Forum Terrace Church of Christ

Sunday Morning Teen Bible Class - Fall Quarter 2026

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My Responsibility to My Soul

Having been baptized into Christ to wash away your sins and arisen out of the water to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16) demonstrates that you care about your soul. The fact that you come to Bible study and worship also implies the same. Once the soul has been saved, how can we make our "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 2:10)? Below are several things all who love their souls need to consider.

NEVER GIVE UP!

Ever found yourself uttering or muttering "I give up" or "I quit". Perhaps you have lamented: "What's the use?" or "Why should I?" The defeatist attitude cries for you to toss in the towel.

The true key to success is never giving up in a world where its "three steps forward, two steps back." Calvin Coolidge once wrote, "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not ... Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts." History is replete with examples of his observation. Consider William Wilberforce's forty year struggle against slavery in England. He learned of his success only upon his death bed. Gibbon labored twenty years on his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Marcus Morton ran sixteen times for the governorship of Massachusetts. At last he was elected by a close majority - a single vote. Dr. James A.H. Murray was the first editor of the great *Oxford English Dictionary*. He spent over sixty years of his life on this one project and still did not live to see its completion. Ronald Reagan lost his first bid for the presidential nomination. He did not give up. He tried again.



Biblical history is also filled with those to never gave up. Noah preached 120 years while preparing the ark and yet only saved those who were of his immediate family. Joshua and Caleb wandered in the wilderness for forty long years with the murmuring Israelites before they realized their reward. If we are to save our souls it will be done by perseverance and patience. Jesus told His disciples, "In your patience possess your souls" (Luke 21:19). While it is true that excitement and enthusiasm are needed in doing the Lord's work, being steadfast is more important.

The first Christians were able to share the Gospel with the known world against much opposition and with limited means, because they were steadfast or persistent. Their endurance, perseverance or patience served them well. Modern Christians could learn a lot from their "never say 'die'" attitude.

We Overcome the Desire to Quit by...

■ Continuing Steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine

From Acts 2:32; Galatians 1:8; and 2 Timothy 1:13 we learn that the apostles' doctrine is no less than the Gospel or the Word of God. It contains the milk for babes to grow has well as meat for those who can discern (Heb. 5:12-14). They were to "hold fast the word of life" (Phil. 2:16) which would require diligent study (2 Tim. 2:15). To follow the doctrines of Christ one must surrender his own will and always be willing to embrace the revealed will of God.

The teachings of the apostles kept the church sound and pleasing to God. However, Paul warned that many would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1-3). Everyone who has fought the good fight against

false doctrines can tell you the value of steadfastness to the Word.

■ **Perseverance in Persecution**

Paul was stoned and thrown out of the city of Lystra and left for dead. What did he do about this ungrateful audience? He got up and went right back into the city to preach (Acts 14:19). When a stamp gets a licking, it doesn't give up. It carries the message far and wide. When carrying out the marching orders of the Great Commission we are to endure hardship as good soldiers of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3,4).

A primary reason Christians are tempted to give up is those other people whose major role it is in life to encourage others to toss in the towel. Anne Mansfield Sullivan had a host of folks telling her that the blind, seven year old brat wasn't worth it. Nonetheless, Helen Keller graduated cum laude from Radcliffe College. James Michner was told that if he hadn't written a book by age thirty-five he never would. He was almost forty when he began to write. When the great Polish pianist, Ignace Paderewski, first chose to study the piano, his music teacher told him his hands were much too small to master the keyboard. When the great Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso, first applied for instruction, the teacher told him his voice sounded like the wind whistling through the window. Benjamin Disraeli, the great statesman of Victorian England, attempted to speak in Parliament for the first time, members hissed him into silence and laughed when he said. *"though I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear of me."* Henry Ford forgot to put a reverse gear in his first car. Thomas Edison spent \$2,000,000 on an invention which proved to be of little value. So you should hang in there. You are working on something more important than all of them: your soul's salvation.

Remember, that in all your persecution you have probably never had to endure people spitting in your face. Or dressing you up, mocking you, and cursing you. It is presumably safe to say that you have never been stripped, scourged and had a crown of thorns beaten upon your head. Finally, in all probability you have never been crucified.

■ **Triumphing Over Temptation**

While we live, we will never come to the point when all temptations cease. Since we will always be tempted, why should we adopt a lifestyle of continual struggle? A crown of life awaits those who overcome (James 1:12).

From the beginning, temptations have been the tools of Satan to destroy the souls of men. He has had thousands of years to refine and become greater skilled in their use.

For the Christian to do battle, he must have Divine help. First, put on God's Armor to withstand the assaults of the Devil (Eph. 6:10-18). All good soldiers should memorize the battle plan as did Jesus when He faced Satan with *"It is written"*. Remember to communicate with headquarters in prayer to obtain wisdom and strength. Jesus told His three disciples in the garden of Gethsemane to watch and pray, so that they enter not into temptation. Therefore, one must also set a watch. Know the battle schemes of the enemy (2 Cor. 2:11) and study the Bible to learn how the great warriors the past defeated the Devil. Don't forget to fortify your faith. Sometimes it is important to know when to retreat as did Joseph with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:12). Whatever you do, never give up and sign a treaty of compromise with the enemy. Victory through negotiation with cost you the eternal peace of your soul. Finally, after the last battle is won it will be like the song we sing: "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield. Down by the riverside. Ain't gonna study war no more."

■ **Fight to the End**

It is important to start right, but it is imperative to end well. In the northwest a highway project was begun. Nothing short of the best materials and workmanship was employed. Yet, the money ran out and the highway ended too soon. One long off ramp extended out over a ravine leading to nowhere except a several hundred foot drop off.

Getting a project started is easy. Beginning strong with enthusiasm comes natural. Finding the motivation to put on the finishing touches at the end of a tiring week can be the biggest challenge. Packing the car doesn't put us at our destination. Many have lost hundreds of pounds in their lifetime, only to put them on again. They all started well.

The early Christians were to persevere (Acts 11:23; 14:22; 13:43). They were instructed to be

faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). Like Jesus who cried out on the cross *"It is finished."* Paul at the close of life declared that he had finished the race (2 Tim. 4:7). It is not enough to begin the Christian race, you must finish the course. We are told that when John Huss was arrested and informed that he would be burned to death for his faith, he purposely practiced holding his hand over fire to prepare for his final test. He burned himself in preparation. He wanted to be faithful to the end.

Harry S. Truman said, *"If you don't like the heat, get out of the kitchen"* However, for those who must never give up: If you don't like the heat, stay in the kitchen until you finished cooking supper and have cleaned up the dishes. Remember, no one is going to heaven by accident and no one is going to get there by giving up.

EXAMINE YOURSELF

A young boy walked into a drug store and asked if he could use the telephone. Upon receiving permission to he took the receiver dialed and said, "hello, Mr. Anderson? ...Do you want to hire a boy to cut the grass, milk the cow, and run errands for you? Oh, you already go a boy? Mr. Anderson, are you perfectly satisfied with the boy you've got? ...OK then. Good-bye sir?" As the boy thanked the druggist and started out the door, the druggist called to him, "just a minute son. If you are looking for work I could use a boy like you." "Thank you, sir" said the boy, "But I've already got a job." "Didn't I just hear you trying to get a job from Mr. Anderson?" "No, sir," replied the boy, "You see, I'm the boy who is working for Mr. Anderson now, I was just checking up on myself."

Every occupation needs a job evaluation. Christians are commanded to evaluate their efforts to work out their own salvation (Phil. 2:12). It is our responsibility to be right in the sight of God. Self-examination is the means to give our souls a daily check up. *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you are disqualified"* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Procedures in Self-Examination

➡ **Use The Right Standard**

You cannot make yourself a saint, by comparing yourself to sinners. To say, "I'm just as good as another" does not prove you to be as good as you ought to be. We do not examine a car by looking at a manual on psychology. So we need to examine the soul by the spiritual manual. The only way one is approved of God is by a study and application of the Word of God, the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15).

➡ **Consider Self**

Jesus announced to the twelve disciples *"one of you shall betray me,...they were exceedingly sorrowful and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?"* (Mt. 26:22). They did not ask, "Lord is it Peter? James? Judas?" They each examined self.

It is impossible to examine self without looking to self. A mirror is designed to allow a person to examine his physical appearance. If someone looks into a mirror and finds a spot on their clothes, they usually remove the spot or change their clothes. In James 1:21-25 the Bible is compared to a mirror. Unless we are *"doers of the word,"* we are like those who look in the mirror and do nothing. A stain on our clothes may not ruin our lives, but a stain on your soul will cause us to lose our lives eternally.

➡ **Take Responsibility For Our Own Actions**

Many try to blame sin on someone or something else. Passing the buck is as old as Adam and Eve, when they fell to temptation. When man sinned in the garden and God inquired concerning it, the man blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:11-13). The Bible places the responsibility for sin upon the individual, not his environment, race, education, etc. (Rom. 14:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:15). Noah and Lot lived surrounded by a very wicked generation of men, but this did not give them reason to act irresponsible for their own behavior.

Confession makes us stronger (1 Jn. 1:8). Like the publican we are exulted and acceptable by

crying "God be merciful to me the sinner." Like the Prodigal son: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight" (Lk. 15:18). Like David, "I have sinned" (2 Sam. 12:9-14) and "For I know my transgressions" (Ps. 51:1-3).

→ **Do it Regularly**

We are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Th. 5:17) and to be "searching the scriptures daily" (Ac. 17:11); therefore we need to also examine ourselves daily. Salvation of the soul does not depend upon how one's spiritual condition was yesterday or how it will be tomorrow. Salvation is determined on our present spiritual condition.

BE PREPARED

The motto for Boy Scouts of America is: "Always Be Prepared." Jesus taught several parables showing the necessity of preparedness: the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1-13); the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:16-21); the parable of the good and evil servants (Lk. 13:35-40; 41-48); and the parable of the unjust steward (Lk. 16:1-13), etc.

◆ **Save Your Soul, Now**

No one will make it to heaven by accident. Preparation enables us to acquire that which we desire. Since no one knows for certain when their life will end. All need to be prepared. Life is short (Job 7:6; Js. 4:14). Death is an appointment which all must keep (Heb. 9:27). Furthermore, the Second Coming of Christ will be like a thief in the night or a woman with child (1 Th. 5:2,3). Judgment is certain. God is ready to judge (Ac. 17:31). We must be ready to meet our Maker. "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Be ready TODAY not yesterday or tomorrow, TODAY.

◆ **Keep Your Soul Saved**

The doctrine "once saved, always saved" is not a teaching of God's Word. Therefore, we must make sure that we maintain the salvation of our souls. To help Peter, James and John to overcome temptation Jesus told them on the night in which He was betrayed to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation. Watching and praying are siamese twins preparing the soul for eternity. Studying the scriptures can also help keep us prepared for "perfect unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The word "perfect" means complete, adequate. Everything that man needs to know on how to prepare himself is revealed unto him in the New Testament. It is only through the Bible that we can be prepared for every good work (Tit. 3:1).

◆ **Prepare to Meet Thy God**

Amos was a country preacher from Judah who tried to reform Israel. God made every effort to persuade the children of Israel to repent and to return unto him, but they refused. After every recourse God finally states: "Prepare to meet thy God Israel" (Amos 4:12). Are you prepared?

An amusing story is the one about the new golfer whose ball landed atop an ant hill. He took a swing, missed the ball, but killed a thousand or more ants. The golfer took another swing, again missed the ball, but killed a thousand or more ants. The golfer took another swing, again missed the ball, but killed a thousand or more ants. After his third swing, and third miss of the ball, only two ants remained. One said to the other: "If we are going to be saved, we'd better get on the ball!!!" If your soul is to be saved through out eternity, you too need to get on the ball.

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Noah preached a) one year b) 120 years c) 500 years while the ark was being prepared.
2. Joshua and Caleb waited a) 7 years b) 40 years c) 120 years to enter into the promise land.
3. Steadfast means a) never give up b) endurance c) perseverance d) all of these.

4. Paul was stoned in a) Antioch of Syria b) Jerusalem c) Lystra.
5. Those who overcome temptation will receive a) a crown of life b) health and wealth c) the applause of men.
6. The Christian soldier communicates with headquarters in a) study b) prayer c) talking to the Holy Spirit and Mary.
7. Christians are to be faithful a) when convenient b) to their conscience and feelings c) till death.
8. The standard for self-examination is a) God's Word b) the current customs of men c) how well one does compared to sinners.
9. The Bible compares itself to a) a calendar b) statue c) mirror.
10. Self-examination should take place a) daily b) weekly c) annually.

True/False

1. ____ The "blame game" or passing the buck began with Eve in the Garden of Eden.
2. ____ God went easier on Noah and Lot because they lived in a very ungodly society.
3. ____ The parable of the mustard seed teaches us to always be prepared.
4. ____ The Second Coming of Christ is discernable to those who study the Bible.
5. ____ The Bible teaches "once saved, always saved."
6. ____ The Bible does not contain information on every good work.
7. ____ Amos was a prophet of Israel who commanded Judah "Prepare to meet Thy God."

Discussion

1. List ways we can hold fast to the apostles' doctrine.
2. List the pieces of armory in the Armor of God.
3. Give examples of those who were good examples of taking responsibility for their sins.

Home Work: Make a daily or weekly check list to assist you an your daily self-examination.

*For example...*I read from my Bible today Yes No

My Responsibility as a Fisher of Men

When Jesus came to recruit disciples from among a group of lowly fishermen He said, *"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:18-22). He chose this figure because both He and His hearers were well acquainted with the fishing industry of Galilee, where most of His ministry took place.

Disciples are the fishermen, human souls are fish, the world is the sea, the gospel is the net, and eternal life is the shore where the catch is destined. This call came from the greatest fisher of men. He could show them how to catch men with the Gospel.

THE CALL OF FISHERS OF MEN

▶ **Special Call**

Jesus was not a stranger to these men. Up to this point they had not received a formal call to leave all and follow Jesus permanently. They probably had returned from time to time to their occupation. Yet they, along with others, had probably witnessed Christ's first miracle of turning water to wine at Cana in Galilee. As disciples of John the Baptist they had heard his witness of Jesus (Jn. 1:35-42). This call came after their trip with Jesus to Jerusalem. Back home in Galilee they were fishing again, perhaps while Jesus visited His old home in Nazareth.

▶ **A Call to Common Men**

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew and others to be with Him, they were not men with special gifts and accomplishments. They were not famous people or noted scholars. James and John before they became tempered by Jesus' influence were nicknamed the *"sons of thunder"*. Just ordinary men, but no one believed more in the ordinary man than did Jesus. Yet, ordinary fishermen plus Christ equals extra-ordinary fishermen.

Christ, Himself had worked in Nazareth as a carpenter. The Greek word here for carpenter is *"tekton"* meaning one who worked with wood and stone. A craftsman or builder who could do any job that needed to be done. The Son of God as a man called mere men to do God's work.

▶ **A Call to Busy Men**

God or Jesus never called a man while who was idle. Moses and David were called from keeping sheep. Gideon from threshing wheat. Elisha from the plow. God has honored humble, yet honest labor, from the beginning. Thus, Christ called men who were busy. Saul was persecuting Christians. Matthew was busy at the tax table. Peter, Andrew, James and John were busy fishing. God calls the busy to His business. He did not call men by saying, "Hey, you don't have anything better to do, you are not busy, why not come along and kill some time with Me."

▶ **A Call to Leave All**

They left all: business, property, homes and families. Their nets were the means of their living. By leaving all, they gave every evidence of sincerity. James and John's father, Zebedee, is not mentioned among the disciples of Jesus. There is the mention of hired servants (Mk. 1:20), of the two vessels employed (Lk. 5:7), and the subsequent allusion of John's acquaintance with the high priest (Jn. 18:15) which seem to indicate that Zebedee was a wealthy and well-connected man. His sons, however, left all for a bigger prize. They began to seek men for the Christ. If only men today could perceive the greater value of the spiritual, many more would leave their material pursuits and serve Christ alone.



PREPARATION OF FISHERS OF MEN

Jesus hand picked men to train to become fishers of men. The word "*become*" implies that the men Jesus chose needed further growth and training (Mark 1:16,17). Jesus chose them not so much for what they were, but what they could become under His influence (Mk. 3:14). They were to be with Him so they could grow spiritually. So He could send them out to preach. The order of these two events is significant. He must first spend time with Jesus praying and meditating on His Word. Then they went out to preach.

What if a man studied about fishing all the time but never went fishing? Too often people think that the ability to speak smoothly and fluently is necessary to being good at teaching the lost. One should not think that he cannot reach out for others until he has become an expert on the Bible. True, a Christian must be a serious student of the written Word, but he must avoid always preparing and never going. Remember, most fishermen learn by experience.

There was a tribe in Africa whose very name struck fear into the hearts of neighboring tribes. They had a reputation for being murderers. They killed in order to rob, they killed for hire, and they killed for revenge. Missionaries came and converted a few. Later a man who was reputed to have murdered at least a dozen people was approached by a Christian from another tribe. "I am glad you have changed your occupation". "Oh, but I haven't changed my occupation." came the surprising answer. And then he quickly added, "I've just changed my tools, I used to catch men with knives and guns. Now I catch them with the Bible and the love of Christ."

Are you a fisher of men? Or are you just standing on the banks of the river talking about fishing while merely chopping bait?

SEVEN TRAITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE FISHERMEN

During one of his sermons to the populous, Christ chose Simon Peter's boat to be His pulpit (Luke 5:1-7). The water then provided a barrier between Jesus and the press of the crowd. After speaking he told Simon to go out and cast the nets into the deep. They had engaged in exhausting toiling all night and caught nothing. Fishing was their profession, and empty nets meant that their livelihood was endangered. They were tired and furthermore they were experienced fishermen, and Jesus was not. Night was the time for fishing, and the proper place to cast the net was near the shore. Nonetheless, Peter sacrificed his own practical knowledge as a fisherman to the authoritative word of Jesus; he had a spirit of obedience. The result of his faith was a huge catch. Peter had to call a second boat for help. They probably ran a second net under the one which enclosed the fish and by thus doubling the strength of the net were able to draw the fish up between the boats.

❖ Faith

Today, fishermen must fish out of faith. When he casts the hook he does so not by sight, but by faith. The fisherman normally cannot see the fish in the water, at least the ones he is desiring to catch. He doesn't know if he will be successful, but he believes he will.

In like manner, soul-winning is an unpredictable venture. One never knows for sure if the lost soul will be receptive to the message, but with Jesus's help we can reach the unreachable. This miracle had the purpose to produce the faith in them to fish for the great catch starting on Pentecost. The Lord challenges us to launch out into the deep, but our experience causes us to reject such counsel.

Later, the fish became a symbol of early Christian art, almost a code word. Because the Greek word for fish is "ichthus" it was used as an acronym which spelled out the initials of a simple creed "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior." Even today it is used as a symbol of the Christians' faith.

❖ Patience

Fish seldom bite the moment the bait hits the water. Many a fisherman spent a long day waiting for his catch -- which never came. He knows by experience that his efforts will finally pay.

Likewise, fishers of men must be very patient. They cannot force the issue or try to push the other person along too fast. Teachers must listen and never get into a hurry. Take time to explain the meanings

of the words unknown to people familiar with the Bible: husbandman, dispensation, mercy-seat, and propitiation, remission, redemption, etc. Many a saint has never caught a sinner for the Lord because they give it a quick little try and gave up.

❖ **Selective**

The successful fisherman knows what kind of fish bite, when they bite, and the bait they like. Some fish will bite on worms; others prefer minnows, bugs, or flies. He goes where they are. He will cast in one spot and then another and another. He will not be plunging the bait down their throat, so he must learn to be selective. He might make it look easy to those sitting on the bank, but it's mentally intensive work.

The Christian must be selective in what he teaches, to whom, and how and when he teaches. There are many doctrines which a prospect needs to learn, but not all at once. Jesus had to be selective in teaching His own disciples. *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"* (Jn. 16:12).

❖ **Persistent**

Real fishermen get up early and stay out late. They don't quit when the weather changes. The good fisherman does not want to quit until he makes his catch. They will let the sun blister their faces and mosquitoes eat them alive. He will lose some, but win others. He seems perfectly content if he takes one fish every one hundred casts.

"Catch" means to take alive. Fish are not caught because they choose to be. When the synagogue was shut Jesus took the open road. Rejections will come, doors will be slammed in your face. Once in Niceville, Florida I was out door knocking with a fellow "fisherman" and before we could reach the front door of one home a man stepped out and declared, "you're wasting your time boys I'm an atheist." My reply was, "Oh, no sir, you are just the man we came to see." Well, I would like to say that he invited us in, but a few houses later we procured a Bible study that lasted over six months.

❖ **Courageous**

The fisherman of fish must have courage. The water is not always shallow and calm. Sometimes the tempest is raging. However, the best fish have been caught in deep water or among crashing waves. Galilee is stormy, owing probably to the high hills by which it is surrounded. A fisherman may find himself far from shore. As an old Greek prayed long ago, "my boat is so small and the sea is so large." Just remember *"...he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"* (1 John. 4:4).

❖ **Alert**

A good fisherman knows the best time to fish. He knows that there is a time to cast and a time to look for better fishing spots. He watches for opportunities to teach and he is prepared to teach when it comes. The greatest fisherman of men, Jesus, had a keen eye and saw where the fish were. Successful men must be alert to the opportunities around them. Many people saw steam raise the lid of a kettle; only James Watt went on to think of a steam engine. Many people saw lightening. Only Ben Franklin saw the power of electricity. Many people saw an apple fall; only Isaac Newton went on to think out the law of gravity. If we wait for a perfect set of circumstances we will never begin at all. It depends on making personal contacts and establishing personal relationships. One of the best ways this can be done is by inviting friends to dinner. Hospitality disarms shyness and even prejudice. It is possible to use lunch times, break times, and after work hours to speak to others.

❖ **Takes Care of His Catch**

A good fisherman does not quit when he has landed his catch. He carefully preserves his fish. Once a fisherman left his prize catch unattended and a hungry turtle had helped himself to a tasty free meal. All that was left were bones and fish heads. If you don't care for the catch when it is brought in, then remember Satan like a roaring lion (or hungry turtle) is there seeking someone to devour. Each person we teach is worth more than the whole world Mt. 16:26). People are won by love. Loving care for them will keep them in the ark of safety. Neglect will cast their souls back out into the sea of darkness.

Have you been developing these traits of highly effective fishers of men? In far too many congregations they have ceased to be fishers of men and are now content just being keepers of the aquarium - taking fish out of one bowl and placing them into another.

MAKE DISCIPLES, NOT EXCUSES

A college professor told his little boy to stay in the yard. While the boy's father was gone, the youngster stole away. Busying himself with his forbidden liberty he completely lost track of time. When he ran into the house, his father bellowed, "Why did you get out of the yard, David Sinclair Burleson!?" David replied in a frightened voice, "But, Papa, the wind blew me out!"

Vain excuses are as old as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Many of them are just as inane as Aaron's explanation to Moses about the origin of the golden calf. He informed Moses that after he cast the gold from the people into the fire *"this calf came out"* (Ex. 32:24). As a wise man once quipped, *"Nobody grows fat on excuses, but everybody gets fed up with them"*. No doubt God does not acquiesce to all the lame excuses given by Christians for not fulfilling their duty to reach the lost.

Many of the excuses used for shirking the work of evangelism appear on the surface to be logical reasons. However, a cursory analysis will reveal their hollowness.

♦ **"I'm Too Busy"**

Every Christian has 24 hours per day 168 hours per week. The difference between those who work and those who shirk is often merely a matter of priorities (Mt. 6:21,24). Many Christians are too in love with money, therefore too busy for the Lord's work. Consider, how much time could you make for the work if you were given \$10,000 for every convert? If you are too busy to share the Gospel than you must be too busy in the wrong things. It is more important why we are busy, not just that we are busy. Remember, the busy bee is praised while the busy mosquito is swatted.

♦ **"I Do Not Know Enough"**

It is quite true that too many older Christians are still babes in the Word (Heb. 5:12f). Saying "I cannot do personal evangelism because I'm ignorant" is like saying "I cannot pay my bills because I am too lazy to get out and work". We are still liable for our responsibilities no matter how many excuses we may come up with. Begin now to meet God's approval by diligently pursuing the Truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Remember, it is not so much what you know, but who you know that makes sharing the Gospel. Some of the hardest working and most successful workers I have known have been novices. Both Andrew and Philip were busy bringing people to Jesus before they were even called to be fishers of men.

♦ **"It's The Preachers Job"**

Some Christians think that if they give to support a local evangelist than he does the work for them. This promotes religion by proxy. If we can have someone teach for us than can we hire someone to do our singing, praying, partaking, and even giving for us? It was New Testament Christians who *"went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). Furthermore, *"every man must bear his own burden"* (Gal. 6:5). True, an evangelist should be an example and in many cases take the lead in the work, however, no preacher can do your work.

♦ **"Nobody Is Being Converted"**

First of all, that is not true. The problem isn't that the Gospel has lost its power to touch the souls of the lost, it is the failure of us reach the lost with the Gospel.

If times are hard, than we need to work harder, not less. When the harvest is small farmers plant more, not less. In 1970 the corn belt was hit by a blight, and the crop was inferior to typical harvest. Even worse was predicted for the 1971 crop. So, expecting a poor yield the farmers planted more! Because the blight did not strike as hard as expected in 1971, the national harvest was a record breaker. The fundamental law of nature and of the spiritual realm is that we reap as we sow. If we sow sparingly, we will reap sparingly (Gal. 6:7,8; 2 Cor. 9:6). Less seed planted, less working in the field, will equate to less reaping at harvest time. Farmers who fret over future failure find further forfeiting of fortune. Likewise, Christians should plant more, water more, hope more, and pray more. Even pray to the Lord of harvest to send forth more workers into the harvest (Mt. 9:36,37).

When Christ commissioned the disciples to go into all the world preaching the Gospel, He commanded them to make disciples. No where did he command us to go out and make excuses.

How Good Will Your Excuses Be?

How good will your excuses be, the day our Lord returns?
Will He find you watching there or filled with vain concerns?
How good will your excuses be to friends lost in sin?
Could it be that you would teach them, if you could live again?
"I'm sorry friend," the Lord might say, "I'll have to pass you by,
It's for the faithful saints I've come to live with me on high."
How good will your excuses be? Only time will tell.
A poor excuse is all it takes, to guide a soul to Hell.

— Phyllis Drew

A game warden once approached an old fella to investigate his fishing habits that had been rumored to be illegal. Early one morning they both went out in the man's boat and the warden observed that the old man pulled out some dynamite lit it and threw it out into the water. KA BOOM!!! Floating up to the surface came dozens of dead fish. The warden yelled, "Now, Jake you cannot fish that way! It's illegal!" Jake did even look at him. He just lit a short fuse of another stick of dynamite and tossed it into the warden's lap saying, "Warden, are you going to talk or are you gonna fish?"

It is time for us to stop just talking about fishing for men and pick up God's Dynamite, the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) and start fishing.

REVIEW

True/False

1. _____ Peter, Andrew, James and John were all fishermen.
2. _____ When Christ called men to become fishers of men, He did not know them at all.
3. _____ God rarely bothers busy men, but uses those who are idle.
4. _____ There was no real lesson to be learned from the miracle of the great catch of fish.
5. _____ Christ did not have to train His disciples to be fishers of men.
6. _____ Fishermen only try to catch those fish they can see.
7. _____ The "ichthus" or fish symbol became an acronym for faith among early Christians.
8. _____ If one cannot catch men with the Gospel in his first couple of tries he should give up.
9. _____ We should catch men for Christ in the same way, same place, same age etc. every time to go fishing for men.
10. _____ Persistence in teaching the Gospel will always pay off.

Multiple Choice

1. Our courage to face opposition from the lost comes from a) God b) our ability c) their ignorance.
2. After one catches someone with the Gospel he should a) immediately turn his attention to catching more b) care for the new born in Christ c) just wait and see if their baptism is going to take.

3. If one is too busy to teach the lost, he should a) examine why he is so busy b) get his priorities straight d) all of these.
4. Fishing for men is a duty for a) only the preacher b) only those well studied in the Bible c) all saints.

Discussion

1. Being alert to opportunities is essential to fishing for men. What opportunities are their around us to teach the lost?
2. Where can one find time to reach the lost?
3. Is it true, that the preacher does not have a greater responsibility to reach the lost than the average Christian? Explain.
4. How should we react if we are not being very successful in saving souls?
5. Those who are constantly making excuses for not fishing for men have deeper problems hindering them. What are the real reasons behind their neglect?
6. What is the best way to learn how to fish for men?

Homework: Make a list this week of the lost people you know that you can catch or help bring to Christ.

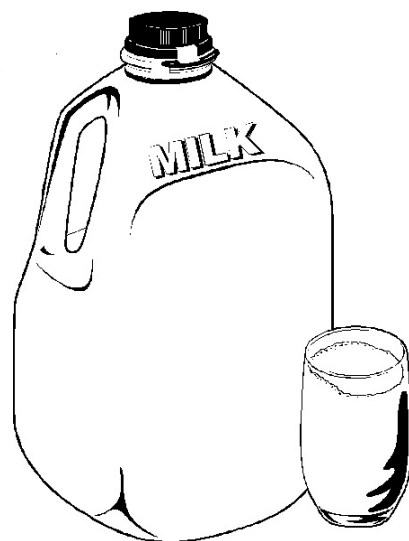
My Responsibility to New Converts

Oh, the joy of having a new born baby in the house. However, babies can be a lot of responsibility. Before marriage, the man and woman both think themselves to be the "boss". After marriage, the "boss" problem is pushed around. When their first baby arrives, there is no question who is boss.

As in the physical realm, babes in Christ are both a joy and a big responsibility. Whether aged, middle-aged, or a teenager, the new convert is a "babe in Christ." They are "born again" (Jn. 3:1-8) or "new creatures" (Rom. 6:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:17). God is their Father (Rom. 5:12-16). Fellow Christians are their brothers and sisters and rejoice with the angels in heaven over their repentance (Lk. 15:7; 10:17).

Today, we struggle with a very high "infant" mortality rate in the Church. Observing this problem, Falvil R. Yeakley, Jr., in his book *RESEARCH ON EVANGELISM* wrote, *"In the two decades following World War II, the church of Christ was reputed to be the fastest growing religious group in the United States. Since the mid-1960s our growth rate has declined dramatically"* and *"One of the principal findings of this study is that our major problem in evangelism is our very high dropout rate"*. As in the Parable of the sower (Lk. 8), some seed would never germinate. Some would spring forth to life, but quickly die for lack of moisture. Some seed would sprout and begin to grow, only to be choked out with thorns and weeds - *"the cares of this world, and deceitfulness of riches"* (Mt. 13:22). Some seed would germinate and bear fruit. Observe that only one in four brought forth any fruit.

Perhaps, the biggest reason for losing our new converts is due to them being neglected by maturer Christians. Many babes are left standing there "dripping wet on the baptism steps" as members wait to see if the baptism is going to take or not. If we treated our babies like that, the infant mortality rate would be appalling. We abhor crimes against babies abandoned and neglected. How do you feel about neglected novices? Christ gave strong warning against harming *"these little ones"* (Mt. 18:5,6).



IT TAKES A CONGREGATION TO RAISE A NEW CONVERT

Hillary Clinton wrote a book entitled *IT TAKES A VILLAGE* which promoted the need for a community instead of parents to take the lead in raising the next generation of children. Although I disapprove of the main gist of this book, it does take a congregation to edify a new convert (Eph. 4:11-16). Most seem content to leave this responsibility to a few "specialists." However, the church is a family (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6). Is it the work of preachers? elders? teachers? parents? experienced disciples? Yes! Furthermore, the growth of the body of Christ is a product of *"what every joint supplies"* (Eph. 4:16).

Today, we hear about quite a few multiple births. Having twins, triplets, quadruplets, or even quintuplets can be more than a dream come true, but a nightmare. Just think of having seven newborns like the couple in Iowa. Multiple births can also present problems for congregations. When a small congregation without elders and deacons is blessed with several new converts the follow-up obviously is not going to keep pace with the personal work. At the small congregation in Texas where I preach we had seen eighteen souls obey the gospel in the last three years. Although this is wonderful its also a huge duty

to tend to their needs when there are only fifty members in all.

An avid sportsman was away from home on a fishing trip even though his wife was due to deliver any day. He caught a big fish, the biggest he had ever landed in his long and busy life. He was elated. He was crazed with the joy and telegraphed his wife, "I've got one. Weighs seven pounds and it's a beauty". She answered with: "So what. I've got two! Each weighs over 6 pounds! Not a real beauty. They take after you. Need help. Come home now."

No one should really have to be asked to help with new babes. They should easily be able to see the need and also, want to help out.

WE ARE COMMANDED TO KEEP THE SAVED SAVED

Helping with the new born in Christ is not an option. Various commands demand all to be involved. The last part of the great commission commands us to teach "*them to observe all*" that Jesus has commanded (Mt. 28:20). This is not to be done just collectively and publicly, but personally and privately (Ac. 20:20). We are commanded to care for the weak (1 Th. 5:14) and rescue those in sin (Js. 5:19,20).

Remember, the Devil wants them back. When the kingdom of God increases, the kingdom of darkness decreases by that one. If New Testament Christians do not assist the new convert who will?

The preacher alone cannot tend to all the needs of several novices. It does indeed take a congregation, the whole congregation, to raise a new convert.

In the first part of this lesson we observed that it takes the whole congregation to help raise a new convert, but how can this be accomplished? At home, when the baby starts to cry the parent immediately takes note as to what the child needs whether it is a bottle, a cover, a nap, new diaper or just to be held. In caring for the novice Christians need to care for them by noticing their needs and finding a scriptural means of provide for those needs.

BABES IN CHRIST NEED...

♦ A New Family and Friends

Often after one obeys the Gospel they experience opposition from family and friends. They are bombarded with "wasn't the ??? church good enough for you?" or "Do you believe that only those who are members of the Church of Christ are going to be saved?" or "Are you going to teach your children that their grandparents are going to hell?"

Often they are torn between loyalty to Christ and hunger for group approval. Unless they already had friends within the church their feelings of isolation may be excruciating. Babes in Christ need to know they are loved and "belong" to the family.

So just what can you do? Start by showing hospitality by having them in your home for a meal or a cookout (Rom. 12:10,13). Find a place in the Family and give them something to do. They should be used as soon as possible. Encourage them to bring others. Call or write one of them in the congregation each week. Have someone in your home each month. Mail them the bulletin when they miss. Visiting the new convert will help him to feel a closer kinship. In short, find way to integrate new members into the local family.

♦ Love and Encouragement

According to a British doctor, unloved babies do not grow normally. At an international conference of family doctors held in Toronto. Dr. G.C. Jenkins said nurses caring for unloved babies were taught to look at them and talk to them until the babies fixed their eyes on the nurses' faces. When the babies become aware of the nurses' faces, they will start to gain weight and grow. One reason unloved babies do not grow normally could be the effect their unhappiness has on the digestive system. Dr. Jenkins said that a happy baby's stomach is producing the hydrochloric acid necessary for digestion, whereas the acid production is shut off if the baby is upset.

Because of the strong backward pull of his old life the novice wonders: "Will I be able to hold out?"

Unfortunately some will lament: "I failed as a Christian. I knew I could not do it, and I was right. There is no sense in me continue to come to church. I'd just be a hypocrite." They need to know they are not going to be able to live a sinless life (1 Jn. 1:8,9). Like Simon the Sorcerer they may quickly fall back into their former life and have need of repentance. They also must be made aware of the fact that God promises to provide a way of escape out of every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). A radical change in their life calls for constant assurance. Lydia seemed to feel this need (Ac. 16:15).

◆ **Special Consideration**

A little girl asked her grandfather, "What makes our new baby at home cry so much?" He answered, "If your teeth were all out, your hair off, your legs so weak that you couldn't stand up or walk alone. You couldn't talk and you were wearing a wet diaper with a fresh load in it. If all these happened to you, you'd cry too!"

Becoming dead to the world, sin, and our former life style can be a traumatic experience. Sometimes pain is associated with growing and the novice is soon aware of his growing pains. The new converts experience a form of culture shock. The religious terminology he has been accustomed to is often frowned upon. Like the American preacher in Australia who explained that his wife was not at services because she "was under the whether." The congregation roared with laughter. You see "under the weather" in Australia means that a person is suffering from a hangover. The new convert will need to be informed as to the differences between: Mass and the Lord's Supper; Reverend, Pastor, and Preacher; or shown that a Bishop and an Elder are the same office in the New Testament.

A new convert not only needs help breaking their former habits, but assistance in replacing them with new habits such as attendance and Bible Study. Remember, babes don't come to the table by themselves. You can't just ring the dinner bell and expect them to come running. A baby doesn't know where to get help from others. He just cries out.

◆ **Plenty of Proper Nourishment**

One doesn't bring a new baby home from the hospital and immediately begin to feed him steak or pot roast. Newborn babies and new Christians both require milk (Heb. 5:12-14). When Peter wrote that Christians as "*newborn babes*" should desire the milk of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2) he wasn't necessarily addressing new Christians, but was encouraging all believers to maintain a naturally strong desire for the pure (incorruptible) truth. However, this appetite is acute for the new Christian. His spiritual appetite is a great blessing (Mt. 5:6). As the early Christians continued steadfastly in Apostles teachings, fellowship, breaking of bread, Lord's supper, and prayer (Ac. 2:42).

They will need to be taught: how to study the Bible; how to establish Bible authority; the meaning of the Lord's Supper; the necessity of attendance (Heb. 10:25); how to pray (Lk. 1:11); the need and joy of giving; how to lead a moral life and stay clear of gambling, immodest clothing, improper recreation, fornication; and most importantly maintaining a personal relationship with God.

Here are just a few things that might help. Start a new converts' class. In business, in government, in the Armed forces, new members are given special indoctrination courses. Why not have a special class to put the doctrine in the new convert? Take them to a Gospel Meeting. It is a great way for them to meet other Christians. Correspondence courses, tracts, reference books, a good Bible, etc. are also valuable tools that should be employed.

◆ **New Priorities**

Discipleship costs. The new Christian must deny himself ungodliness and worldly lust (Tit. 2:11,12). Jesus was constantly encouraging his disciples to count the cost and rearrange their priorities in order to be a true disciple (Lk. 9:59-62; 10:38-42; 14:25-33). He demanded that His disciples should "*seek first the kingdom of God,*" (Mt. 6:33). This restructured life will manifest itself in the place he gives to his job, money (Mt. 6:19), material possessions (Lk. 12:14), associations (1 Cor. 15:33), recreation, family, etc. It will not be easy for him to love God with all of his heart, mind, and soul. Instead of making God another part of his life, he must make God the master of his life and put all these areas "under new management."

◆ **Time to Grow**

Why is it that some people can grow anything and other people can kill Johnson grass? Well, some are willing to put in the time and effort necessary. They learn how through trial and error like playing a piano. If you love someone's soul enough you will learn how and find the means to help them.

Time is a very precious commodity these days. Time has come to be more precious than money

to most. We had rather pay for something to be done. Yet, we can't always "pay" others to do our teaching for us, it is a personal responsibility.

Caring for babes is very time consuming. Parents have to be available twenty-four hours a day. One doesn't expect a baby to mature into an adult overnight. Remember, our Lord selected twelve men and worked with them for three and a half years. It also required the time and patience of others while you were growing in Christ.

Unfortunately, not every new convert will survive. Some new converts will die even when the elders and members do everything possible to help them thrive spiritually. Nonetheless, let us do our part to provide for their needs knowing our labor is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58).

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. The number one problem with growth in the Church according to some research is a) a lack of effort b) loss of new converts c) atheism.
2. Christ explained the problem with a very high drop out rate in His parable of a) the sower b) the lost coin c) the mustard seed.
3. The duty to care for new babes is Christ belongs to a) elders b) preacher c) the whole congregation.
4. The Great Commission commands us to a) teach the lost b) baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit c) teach disciples all things commanded d) all of these.
5. Which new Christian fell away shortly after being baptized? a) Simon the Sorcerer b) Elymas the Sorcerer c) Philippian Jailor d) Lydia
6. Christ worked with the twelve for a) 3 and a half years b) 52 weeks c) seven years.

True/False

1. ____ In every temptation God provides a way of escape.
2. ____ Our spiritual appetite for God's Word must be like a baby's desire for meat.
3. ____ New Christians need special help understanding New Testament terms and how they are used.
4. ____ New converts automatically should understand the necessity of faithful attendance.
5. ____ They need to be reminded of the high cost of discipleship.
6. ____ They need to know the minimum requirements of being a Christian.
7. ____ It is not unreasonable to expect all new converts to remain faithful.

Discussion

1. What are the problems associated with a small congregation having a large number of new converts?
2. What are some things we can do to help new converts feel like that are a part of the spiritual family?
3. How can we show them love and encouragement?
4. List things new converts need to be taught soon after they become Christians.
5. What means can be utilized to teach them these things?
6. List the priorities that a new convert must have and explain if there must be a proper order to these priorities.
7. How much time should a new covert put in each week to study and worship?
8. What kind of sermons do new converts need to hear?

Homework: Find a new convert in the congregation and find a way to assist them in their growth in Christ.

My Responsibility to My Brethren

Modern man tends to view the church as an institution of men like that of a business or corporation. The terms used clearly expose the fact that many have molded the local church into a business-like structure, for example, "Associate Minister"; "Superintendent Of Education"; "Director Of Music"; and "Senior Pastor", who is like the CEO of the congregation.

In contrast, the Bible does not model the church after the image of a business, but instead it compares it to a family (1 Tim. 3:15). Christ's church is like an army, marching to war. It is a body, each part dependent on the other. It is a kingdom, with Christ as its king. He viewed it as a "family" who would be doing the will of His Father in heaven (Mt 12:46-50; cf. 7:21). The apostles referred to the church, as a "brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17) and as the "house (family) of God" (1 Tit. 3:15; 2 Cor. 6:17-18). As the popular song of the 1970s - "We are Family."

The church is God's family. God is the Father (Eph. 3:14; 4:6; Mt. 23:9; 1 Cor. 8:6). Christ is Son over God's house (Hebrews 3:6). Christians are children of God. In relationship to the Father we are sons and daughters. Thus, we are brothers and sisters to one another.



As Members of God's Family We Must...

FELLOWSHIP ONE ANOTHER

The basic concept of fellowship is joint participation in that which is spiritual and scriptural. Being a Christian involves being a part of a community, family, temple of living stones, army of soldiers, a kingdom of fellow-citizens, etc. Families love to spend time with each other. They spend holidays together. They eat together and they have family reunions.

As in all families, sometimes Children of God do not always get along. They will even bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15). In the early church contention soon arose over the neglect of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1). At times certain sisters, such as Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:1-3) did not get along. Even contention arose between Paul and Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15:39). Today, we will often hear the common complaint: *"The work is going slow. The congregation seems to be dragging its feet".*

Not only is being able to fellowship important in accomplishing the Lord's work on earth, it is essential for those desiring to enter eternity with each other. Remember, if you can't get along down on earth, don't expect things to be different in heaven.

The early church had fellowship in the Lord's Supper every Sunday. We should like to be together. Why? So that we can have security and love. Fellowship means "joint participation". As a congregation we do things together, such as, sing, pray, share the Gospel, study God's Word, etc. We are commanded to attend to exhort each other (Heb. 10:25). All this togetherness is ultimately aimed as preparing us to spend eternity together.

The cost of discipleship can be great. Our spiritual family-relationship should bind us closer together than with our earthly families. For some, it may even mean forsaking their earthly family. Christ has promised a hundredfold in replacement (cf. Mk 10:28-30). Especially for those away from home (e.g.,

college students) and for those who never had a family at all, or an incomplete one (e.g., orphans or those with single parents).

WORK TOGETHER

In order for a family to be able to function it must share responsibilities. The Household of God must all work together. Paul informs us the church works together like the parts of the body: *“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:16).

Herman Ostry's barn floor was under 29 inches of water because of a rising creek. The Bruno, Nebraska, farmer invited a few friends to a barn raising. He needed to move his entire 17,000 pound barn to a new foundation more than 143 feet away. His son Mike devised a lattice work of steel tubing, and nailed, bolted, and welded it on the inside and the outside of the barn. Hundreds of handles were attached. After one practice lift. Three hundred and forty-four volunteers slowly walked the barn up a slight incline, each supporting less than fifty pounds. In just three minutes, the barn was on its new foundation.

United in the work for the Lord any local family of believers can accomplish far more than any one Christian could ever accomplish on his own.

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

We support our family, both spiritually, morally, financial, and physically. We sorrow with one another when we are sick and rejoice when one receives recognition and reward, because we have a strong desire to see one another succeed. Family members desire to help and encourage one another to meet goals. In a church, a newborn babe in Christ might be fifty years old. Yet they still need someone to guide them and feed them the milk of the Word. Are communities of believers expressing a sense of concern for one another or are they simply groups of "anonymous" worshipers? For all believers a local church should be a home away from home (heaven)!

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A younger woman searched for several years for her real mother only to find out that the older co-worker she hardly liked was her real mother. Upon this discovery, she was able to get to know her mother and love her. If we recognize one another as family we will love as a family. One of the true marks of discipleship is found in those who love one another. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34,35).

Lee Iacocca once asked legendary football coach Vince Lombardi what it took to make a winning team. "There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: If you're going to play together as a team, you're got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I don't block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his." Perhaps the local church could be a winning team if we were to practice this "third" rule or *"new commandment"* as Jesus put it.

SHOW HOSPITALITY TO ONE ANOTHER

The Bible is replete with examples of hospitality. Abraham in showing hospitality entertained angels unaware. The benefit of his kindness was the promise of a son. Lot also entertained angels and as a result was saved from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. By showing hospitality to the Israelite spies Rahab and her family were spared in the destruction of Jericho. Salvation came to the home of Zaccheus the day he invited Jesus to dine with him. Jesus often used cases of hospitality in His parables:

the Good Samaritan; the marriage of the king's son; the friend at midnight; and the great supper. This not only shows what a significant role hospitality played throughout Bible lands and times, but its importance in true religion.

Showing Hospitality is necessary...

☺ **To Obey God's Commandments**

Those desiring the office of bishop were to be "*lovers of*" or "*given to*" hospitality (Tit. 1:8; I Tim. 3:2). It is required of a widow indeed (I Tim. 5:16). Christians are commanded to "*Be hospitable to one another without grumbling*" (1 Pet. 4:9).

☺ **To Show Our Love (Rom. 12:9-16)**

The Greek word "philoxenos" means "to love strangers". The recipients of Gaius' hospitality bore witness to his "*love before the church*" (3 Jn. 5,6).

☺ **To Assist the Spreading of the Word**

Hospitality was instrumental in spreading the truth throughout the first century. The early church met in one another's homes and as a result there was growth (Ac. 2:46,47). Saul of Tarsus was in the house of one Judas when Ananias came to him (Ac. 9:11-18). Peter was at the home of Simon the tanner when Cornelius sent for him to teach the Gospel.

☺ **To Build up the Church**

There is a custom from Bible times where the host dipped a bit of bread in some grape molasses and gave it to the guest for him to eat. Then he said to him, "we are now brethren, There is bread and salt between us. We are brothers and allies." Thus, when we show hospitality to each other we prove we are brethren.

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Blood is thicker than water. In the physical family we have a blood tie that more often than not will keep a family together through many problems that otherwise would split friends. In every family we find a certain amount of conflict among the growing children. Some strife in a family is virtually inevitable. Parents intervene, minimize, and hopefully keep the amount of conflict under control, yet rarely does it totally go away.

We are to keep in mind how our Father has forgiven us. Forgiveness is to be automatic upon repentance (Mt 18: 21-22). Our forgiveness by God is contingent on our forgiveness of our brethren! (cf. Mt 18:23-35). As the saying goes, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother!"

In March 1995, The New England Pipe Cleaning Co. Of Watertown, Conn. Was digging twenty feet beneath the streets of Revere, Massachusetts, in order to clean a clogged ten inch sewer line. In addition to the usual materials one might expect to find in a clogged sewer line, the three-man team found sixty-six rings, vintage coins, eyeglasses, and silverware, all of which they were allowed to keep. Whether it's pipes or people, if you put up with some mess, sometimes you find real treasure.

DISCIPLINE EACH OTHER

Sorrow comes upon a family when one of its members is prodigal. We need to be more concerned with the one who strays, than we are with the one who continues in the fellowship (Mt 18:10-14). If the brother in error is not responsive we are to take advantage of the family relationship which we have enjoyed by depriving the erring brother of it! Indeed, the failure of much discipline is due to the lack of proper fellowship to begin with! Even after corrective and punitive discipline has been exercised we must continue to treat the one disciplined as a brother, not an enemy (2 Th 3:15).

How does a group of Christians become an intimate family of God's Children. First, by spending more time with each other. Being less self-centered and more willing to become involved with the concerns of others! Next, we may need to become more involved in the work of the Church Family. Such is not accomplished by turning the Body of Christ into a "social club", but by saving souls, restoring the erring, and edifying the saved. The song "will the circle be unbroken" deals with physical families that have been separated by death. What great joy we will have when the family of God, the great spiritual "circle" is reunited in heaven. What a day of rejoicing that will be!

REVIEW

Matching

- | | | |
|------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1. ___ | Kingdom | a. Children of God |
| 2. ___ | Army | b. Christ its King |
| 3. ___ | Christians | c. Soldiers of Christ |
| 4. ___ | Family | d. God |
| 5. ___ | Father | c. Household of God |

True/False

1. ___ The church is often compared to a business in the New Testament.
2. ___ Encouragement means "joint participation".
3. ___ The Lord's Supper is the only fellowship meal the Bible teaches.
4. ___ New Testament Christians were always able to get along.

Multiple Choice

1. The ability of the church to work together as a collective unit is compared to a) a body b) machine c) farm
2. Who showed their love before the church with their hospitality? a) Abraham b) Zacheus c) Gaius
3. Hospitality literally means a) having someone for dinner b) to love strangers c) to love parties.
4. "Be hospitable to one another... a) without grumbling b) with our best dinner ware c) only if you are financially well off."
5. If we do not forgive one another a) God will not forgive us b) we will not be friends anymore c) the unforgiven brother cannot be saved in the end.
6. Someone the church has disciplined should be treated as a) a brother b) an enemy c) best friend.

Discussion

1. What are some scriptural things a congregation can implement to strengthen their fellowship?
2. List times when fellow Christians may need our encouragement the most?
3. Why is "*love one another*" considered by Christ in John 13:34,35 a new commandment?
4. What sins would a person be guilty of if they forsake the assembling of the saints? Are these sins that warrant church discipline?

Homework: List five other "one another" commandments found in the New Testament and list ways you can fulfill these.

My Responsibility to the Church

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As a boy I watched a movie starring James Garner entitled: *"Support Your Local Sheriff"*. In this comedy-western, Garner played a sheriff who came into town and had to deal with the bad guys by himself. However, he could not do it alone he needed the local town's people to help. Likewise, in a local congregation no one person can do it all alone. If we are to fight effectively against the "wiles of the devil" we must work together. Each individual Christian must do his part to support his local congregation.

To support the Local Congregation...

EACH INDIVIDUAL SHOULD BE A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH

Does one have to be a member of a local congregation? Many today are answering "NO!" Yet, an investigation into the scriptures indicate that no Christian can fulfill many of his God given duties without being a member of a local congregation.

You need to be a member of the local church because of Paul's divinely approved example. He *"assayed to join himself to the disciples"* when he came up to Jerusalem from three years of preaching in Arabia (Ac. 9:26). Upon the recommendation of Barnabas, the church received the former persecutor and welcomed him into their membership.

You need to be a member of a local congregation because you have God-given duties toward other members of the Lord's Body which necessitate our membership with a group of Christians (Gal. 6:1,2; Heb. 10:25; I Th. 5:14,15).

You need to be a member of local church because you are commanded to have fellowship in the work of the church (Tit. 3:8-14; 3:1-3; II Tim. 2:21-26; Eph. 4:14-16).

You need to be a member of a congregation of believers because you are commanded to worship with other saints (I Cor. 11:17ff; Eph. 5:19; Ac. 2:42).

You need to be a member of a local body of Christians, because without a "home congregation", we are religious strays without a family of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Furthermore, if you don't need to be a member, I don't, then no one does, then where would the church be? Paul told the Corinthians brethren: *"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit"* (I Cor. 12:12,13).



EACH CHRISTIAN IS TO BE CONSIDERED IMPORTANT

The story is told of a great orchestra gathered for rehearsal under the celebrated conductor, Sir Michael Costa. As the music reached the crescendo every instrument played - except one. Exhausted, the piccolo player had momentarily lost track of the music. He hoped his instrument wouldn't be missed. Suddenly, Costa brought down his arms and stopped the orchestra. "Where's the piccolo?" he demanded.

Even in the resounding echo of many loud instruments, the tiny piccolo was missed! Nobody is a whole orchestra. Each one is a musician, but take away one musician and the symphony is incomplete.

Paul's point in I Corinthians 12:15-22 is not anatomy, but to show how each one of us is important to the whole. No member should feel unnecessary, so long as he is doing his part. Imagine with Paul a person who was just an eye.

If I were just an eye, how would I get by.
I would have to roll down the street, because I had no feet.
I could not eat and run, and that would be no fun.
I need feet to go, and a nose to blow.
Ears to hear singing, and hands for my praying.

So how Important are you to the local church? More than you think. A rooster minus a hen equals no baby chicks. Kellogg minus a farmer equals no corn flakes. If the nail factory closes what good is the hammer factory? What good is a Bible without students, a family without brothers and sisters. God without worshipers. Worship services with empty pews. Christians without Christ. A head with body parts. A groom without a bride. Each one is very important to the whole.

EACH CHRISTIAN MUST DO HIS PART

John Brodie, the ex-quarterback of the San Francisco Forty-Niners, was an "all-Pro" for the year 1970. Sports Illustrated reported a remark he made in answer to the question of why a million dollar quarterback would hold the ball for field goals and extra points. Brodie's answer was simple: "If I didn't, the ball would fall over!"

It involves team work (Eph. 4:16). Nobody is a whole football team. Each one is a player, but take away the quarterback or the center and the game is forfeited. Cars are composed of numerous parts. Each one is connected to and dependent upon the other. Even a tiny circuit, if it burns out in the vehicle computer, can bring the whole vehicle to a stop.

Some members at Corinth were seeing themselves as higher or lower than other members because of the type of spiritual gift they had received from the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:7,12). Each Christian is given collective responsibilities to be done together with other Christians. Each Christian is given personal responsibilities to be done individually. Each individual Christian molds the congregation. Common sense tells us that it is a fact that no local church can be better than the people who compose it. This simply means that if we want to improve the local church where we are members, the best place to begin is with ourselves. The story goes that a young man complained to his preacher about the bad church music. The preacher suggested, "You write some better." The young man was Isaac Watts, and he did. We sing some of his songs almost every service, three hundred years later.

EACH CHRISTIAN IS TO WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

All men in every place in all times have believed in and worshiped something. Not only does man seek to worship God, but God is seeking worshipers. Jesus said, *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23,24).

Does God care how we worship Him? Yes! He seeks those who will worship Him *"in spirit and in truth"* this involves looking to His Word which reveals His truth. God has always required obedient worship even from the time of Cain and Abel. Nadab and Abihu, priests of God and sons of Aaron, were destroyed by fire from heaven because they offered up incense using strange fire which God had commanded them not (Lev. 10:1-3). When man is left to worship according to his own desires, the worship he generally offers is remarkably similar to the things that please him. The only way that we can know the worship which pleases God is for God to reveal it to us through His Word.

Acts of Worship Approved by God

❶ Lord's Supper

In Acts 2:42, the early Christians continued steadfastly in breaking of bread. Luke is referring to the partaking of the Lord's Supper, not a common meal as in verse 46. This example can further be seen by the church at Troas who met weekly to break bread (Acts 20:7). Paul informed the Corinthian church that as often as they observed this supper they proclaimed the Lord's death. Obviously, weekly observance was required. Thus, faithful attendance must be constantly maintained by New Testament Christians (Hebrews 10:25).

The elements specified for the partaking of the Lord's Supper are unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, which is literally "juice from the grape" or grape juice. Christians are commanded to partake of it in a worthy manner (1 Cor. 11:18-34). Remembering what the elements represent. The cup representing Christ blood shed for our sins and the bread symbolizing His body which suffered for us. Remember, the Bible never tells us we must examine ourselves so that we are worthy to partake of this supper. No man can ever be worthy of the blood and body of Christ. However, we must partake in a worthy MANNER.

❷ Giving

Christians are commanded to give on the *"first day of every week"* *"every one"* is to give *"as he has been prospered"* and *"as he has purposed in his heart"* for *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7). No where in the New Testament are Christians commanded to give a tithe or tenth of their income. Instead, each Christian prepares before hand to give as he has been prospered by God. Ten percent is a good starting point for Christians who have been prospered by God with Christ's perfect sacrifice and His kingdom, the church. These are two blessings which the Jews did not have.

❸ Prayer

The first century church engaged in prayer meetings both in worship and in small groups (Acts 2:42; 20:36; 12:5).

❹ Preaching and Teaching

On the day of Pentecost the first church began to preach and teaching the Apostles' doctrine as a part of their worship assembling (Acts 2:42). Paul was found to preach in congregations he visited, even preaching till midnight. It is through such preaching and teaching that the congregation was edified.

❺ Singing

Although instrumental music had been used in the worship of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and in the pagan temples around the world, the early Christians used only vocal music. No where do you find the early church worshiping with instruments but only with a capella music. "A capella" is the Latin phrase meaning "in the manner of the church". Our singing consist of psalms, hymns and spiritual hymns (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). All are to sing teaching and admonishing each other. No choirs or solos for entertainment were used.

You finish the following story: There was once a congregation in which every member was just like you. Each one cooperated and supported every phase of the work just like you. Everyone worked as hard and attended the same services and gospel meetings that you did. The elders, deacons, and preachers were all as interested in the church as you are. They put the same emphasize on recreation, business, and other material affairs that you do. Each member contributed momentarily just like you do. Within a year or so, this congregation....

REVIEW

True/False

1. _____ Paul saw no need to join the church at Jerusalem.
2. _____ The command to fellowship in a local work among brethren necessitates placing

membership with the local congregation.

3. _____ One does not have to join the church in town so long as he worships in partaking the Lord's Supper, giving, singing etc. at home.
4. _____ Each individual Christians is as important to the Church as the various parts are necessary for the human body to function.
5. _____ Each Christian is given collective responsibilities which can only be done with other Christians.
6. _____ Each Christian is given personal responsibilities to be done individually.
7. _____ A congregation is weak or strong; godly or worldly based on the character of its membership.

Multiple Choice

1. God is seeking this kind of worshiper. a) one who worships in spirit and in truth b) one who worships according to the traditions of the church c) one who worships in a way that makes him feel closer to God.
2. Which story shows that God cares how we worship Him? a) Adam and Eve; b) Nadab and Abihu; Ananias and Siphira.
3. Which elements are commanded to be used in the Lord's Supper? a) bread and wine b) grape juice and bread c) fruit of the vine and unleaven bread d) wine and unleaven bread.
4. Christians are to give a) on the first day of the week b) as prospered c) cheerfully d) all of these.
5. A capella is a Latin phrase meaning a) in the manner of the church b) in the manner of the synagogue c) to pluck.
6. The New Testament church sang a) popular songs b) spiritual songs c) patriotic songs.
7. In New Testament worship a) they had solos b) they had choirs c) everyone was commanded to sing.

Discussion

1. How would you teach someone the necessity of placing membership with a local congregation?
2. List several more illustrations from the Bible showing God really does care how we worship Him.
3. Explain what it means to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

4. List some possible reason why a Christian would be exempt from giving.
5. Show where the first century church engaged in prayer meetings.

Homework: List five things you could do to improve the local congregations you are a member of.

My Responsibility to My Family

Ronald Reagan wrote, "The family has always been the cornerstone of American society.... America's families make immeasurable contributions to America's well-being...it is essential that ...each of us remember that the strength of our families is vital to the strength of our nation." The home, which God designed to be the cradle of civilization and the bulwark of nations, has been neglected by husbands, deserted by wives and despised by children. Remember the old adage: "as goes the home, so goes the nation."

What can be done about the decline of the American family? The following suggestions are aimed at assisting us in fighting for the family on the home front.

SAVING YOUR FAMILY IN AN UNSAFE WORLD

✱ Spend Time Together

Every hour of every day there is something to be done. If we breakdown our week of 168 hours into the various things that occupy our time we would find that the average Christian spends 56 hours of his week sleeping, 45 hours working, 20 hours of entertainment, 10 hours of personal grooming, 8 hours eating, (its interesting to note here that it takes more time for us to fix our face than to stuff our face) 6 hours of housework, 5 hours of traveling and 4 hours of worship and Bible studies. Thus, we are left with 14 hours of time to spend. How do we spend it?

Too many people are not spending any of this time with their families. The only family time they have is in front of the TV set. Parents spend too little time with their children, especially in a private, family-circle atmosphere. The following story is lifted from "Saturday Evening Post" magazine, and though it was meant as a joke, it represents a serious circumstance: *"At the dinner table the wife of the inveterate golfer said, 'Junior told me that he caddied for you this morning.' 'That's it!' exclaimed the golf addict. 'I knew I'd seen that kid somewhere before!'"* Raising children is very important. It cannot be accomplished without spending some of our precious time. Some parents say they "can't find time", but they must take time from something they are doing that is less important than the children. For junior to become a "chip off the old block," the "old block" must be around to be chipped on. Remember, *"Train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Pr. 22:6).

A man was once asked, "How long have you been married". "We've been happily married seven years" then he added "and seven out of twelve isn't bad". Husbands and wives are not happy together mostly because they do not spend time together. Husbands and wives need to stop the clock long enough to get acquainted. This is done by withdrawing oneself from the rat race.

The Bible says in Ephesians 5:16 *"making the most of your time, because the days are evil"*. What this is saying is, we are living in troubled times therefore rescue time from waste. The best way to rescue it and invest it properly is to spend more time with the family and less time with work, TV, hobbies, friends,



etc. Remember, families that pray together, stay together.

✱ **Respect the Family as God Made it**

There is a Divine Design of the Home. The home gives honorable birth to children. Illegitimacy is both sinful and shameful as regards to parentage and frequently embarrasses the offspring. Please remember, there are no illegitimate children only illegitimate parents. Parents protect the child and help him to grow strong physically. The family trains the child. As one parent prayed, "God, help me to realize that this is not just a mouth to feed but a living soul to train." Furthermore, God designed it to provide companionship (Gen. 2:18-23). The only honorable and safe place for the God-given desire for sexual relations is within marriage (Heb. 13:4). Try as he might man will never be able to replace the home. All such efforts only lead to unhappiness and the further moral decline of our nation.

✱ **Marriage Is for Life**

A young man came by the church building one day to see the preacher. He said, "Preacher, I came to ask you if it is right for any person to profit by the mistakes of another?" "Indeed, not!" was his instant reaction. "Then, sir," said the unhappy young man, "perhaps you'd like to return the fifty dollars I gave you last October for marrying me."

Marriage may have its problems, but it is by no means a mistake. God said the marriage is honorable. In Hebrews 13:4, He says, *"Let marriage be held in honor among all."*

The reason so many marriages end in divorce today is that they fail to recognize it as a life long commitment. Couples enter marriage with this attitude. "Well, if it doesn't work out we can always get a divorce." God recognizes no such thing as a trial marriage. He designed it to be the strongest and most intimate relationship known to man. *"For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh"* (Eph. 5:31).

There are only two legitimate ways to end a marriage. The first one is rather obvious, death. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7:2,3, *"For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that when is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man."* Surely we are to be married till death do us part.

Although couples today are divorcing for any cause under the sun. Jesus only recognizes one reason for divorcing your spouse. In Matthew 5:31,32 He said, *"And it was said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal, but I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."* Adultery is the only acceptable cause for divorce according to Jesus. The basic rule to remember is: one man, one woman, for life with only one exception.

✱ **Lead Your Family into the Ark of Safety**

Noah's family lived in a very corrupt society (Gen. 6:5). God instituted a plan by which they were to be saved. It involved constructing an ark according to His pattern. Noah did all that God required (6:21) and his family was saved via the ark. We are to imitate his obedience through baptism (I Pet. 3:20,21). Upon baptism we are added to the church, our ark of safety (Ac. 2:47). It is necessary for all parents to lead their family into the ark of safety - the church. National surveys tells us that persons who fit the category of "very religious" tend to be happier, more goal-oriented, and have a higher level of achievement. Children brought up in church are very seldom brought up on charge before a judge. It takes Christ to make a family of Christians. Make Him a part of your family.

✱ **Limit the Influence of Evil**

When Abraham offered Lot the choice of the land for his flocks, Lot chose the best and also made the choice to pitch his tent toward Sodom. Soon his family was living in Sodom, a place so wicked that God chose to destroy it. Lot was only able to save his two daughters by fleeing the cities of the plain. If Lot thought about limiting the influence of evil upon his family he would have chosen a better place to pitch his tent.

The home is a haven for the wicked world. At times no place is nearer to heaven on earth than the Christian home. Nonetheless, one cannot allow the influence of Hell to be given place in your homes and expect a haven. To keep from "pitching our tent toward Sodom" there are several things we can do. 1) Control the TV, VCR, and Cable. 2) Don't go to places with unwholesome atmospheres. Christians who

allow their teenagers to go to the beach or the prom where there is immodesty or a party where there is drinking are placing young souls in danger. This is true even if their children do not participate. 3) Be selective where you live. Certainly, Lot wished he had been more discriminating. 4) Be choosy about what goes into your child's mouth, veins, and mind. A popular ad for a peanut butter says, "Choosy mothers chose Jiff." We need to be "choosy" about many things with regard to your families.

✱ **Provide a Good Spiritual Education**

We are raising a generation of spiritual illiterates. Kids know more about the "Power Rangers" than the power of God and more about Sprung Bob than the Son of God. It is quite true that there are many negative influences and stiff competition for your child's attention. Remember, Timothy lived in a wicked world (Rom. 1:28-32). His father was not a Christian nor a Jew, yet he was taught (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15-17).

Like the prairie bison and the sperm whale and the crane, the family is fast becoming an endangered species. We shake our heads and passively think "what a shame!" Instead we should bow our heads and pray. *"And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* (2 Chr. 7:14).

RESPONSIBILITY OF HUSBANDS TOWARD WIVES

➡ **Provider**

The scriptures do not designate the husband as sole provider of financial income (Pr. 31). However, he has the main duty to care for the physical necessities of his family (1 Tim. 5:8). At the same time he should never be compelled to supply his families' every want, but their every need. Also, he cannot use how good of a provider he has become to prove that he is a good husband and father.

➡ **Lead and Love Her**

To "lead" without loving is cruel and to "love" without leading is a "cop out" on God's concept of husbanding. Paul commanded, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as *"the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,"* (Eph. 5:22-24). Better Homes and Gardens did a survey which asked: "Do you think the dominant role of the husband in the American family is declining in importance?" 79% said "yes". "Would you consider a decline in the husband's dominance to be good?" 71% said "No."

The leadership role does not mean superiority or permit a "tight-fisted dictator". It doesn't mean being waited on or having the best piece of chicken. He must realize that what authority he has is not really his, but all his authority originates in God.

A worldly husband shows love with things. A Christian husband gives the most precious thing he has - himself - even when his loved ones are at their worst. This is the highest kind of love, divine love. God does not say, "Wives be submissive to your husbands when they are loving," or "Husbands love your wives when they are submissive." Two wrongs still don't add up to a right.

Who is your best friend on earth? If your answer is someone other than your wife, it may be a reflection on your marriage.

➡ **Honor Her**

"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

A wife is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and taken from man's rib. To dishonor the wife hinders prayer life because God will not hear a husband who dishonors His special gift: the wife. To honor her is to give her dignity: self-esteem.

➡ **Be Kind And Considerate to Her**

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col. 3:19).

Courtesy is "love in trifles" - it shows we care. One lady said, "it is passing the salt to me first." When people stop being considerate, they start taking each other for granted. Consideration is doing to

others what you would have then do to you (Mt. 7:12). Phoning when you see you are going to be late, calling home in the evenings when you are out of town, picking up after yourself, and never inviting company over without the knowledge and consent of your mate. Men remember, "If a man has enough horse sense to treat his wife like a thoroughbred, she will never turn into a nag."

RESPONSIBILITY OF WIVES TOWARD HUSBANDS

✿ **Be One With Her Husband**

God created man and woman to be one (Gen. 2:23, 24) in the marriage relationship. There are only two reasons to end this relationship: death (Rom. 7:1-4) and fornication (Mt. 19:1-11). A wife must be committed to her husband. Like siamese twins that share the same heart they cannot be separated.

✿ **Be Submissive to Her Husband**

The world's standard is that there can be no fulfillment in being a wife and mother. They are convinced that submission is tantamount to slavery and the victimization of women. Although some husbands and societies are abusive that does not make Paul's command unfair *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything"* (Eph. 5:23).

Different roles and responsibilities do not negate equality. Both man and woman are of the same value to God. Our souls are of equal value. One's responsibilities do not make him or her more important than the other. It takes just as much strength, intelligence, and stamina to be a good mother and wife as it takes for a man to be a good father and husband.

Today many are not content with God's creation of marriage. They wish to mix or switch roles. Men and women differ in every cell of their body. God designed us that way. He also designed us for the roles we are to fulfill. As marriage is a partnership, so must each partner in marriage fulfill their God given roles.

Marriage is not a 50/50 relationship. But a true marriage is where the husband gives 100% of himself and the woman 100% of herself to the marriage.

✿ **Respect Her Husband**

"Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph. 5:33). As Sarah respected Abraham in calling him *"Lord"* (1 Pet. 3:7). After all, he is to honor her and she is to respect him.

✿ **Be a Help - Meet for Her Husband**

This was God's design from the beginning (Gen. 2:18,20). It means that God made her to be compatible and appropriate to her husband's needs. She provides for his needs, not his wants. She is his confidante and companion, not his slave or employee.

✿ **Love Her Husbands**

Older women are to teach the younger women to love her husband (Tit. 2:4). Love can be learned. It is not just a feeling that comes and goes. Marital love is active good will toward the other. Love is finding out what the other needs - and supplying it.

✿ **A Keeper at Home**

This does not mean "keep her at home" (Tit. 2:5). Literally, it means "watcher". She is the watcher of the home. She is not a Housewife, because she is not married to a house, but to a man. She is to watch over and manage the home.

RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN

✿ **Pray for Them**

Being a father is a demanding responsibility. At times fathers are in desperate need of help from someone who understands their difficulties and can give them help and guidance. Therefore, prayer to the heavenly Father is a father's greatest help. Job was a concerned father and spiritual leader of his family.

Job is a marvelous example of the prayerful father. Job said, *"Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually"* (1:4,5). Praying for your children is one of the wisest things a parent can do. After all, the Heavenly Father is perfect and knows best for our children. Our prayers also demonstrate that we recognize that these souls are our responsibility given by God to us.

A Father's Prayer

Dear God, My little boy of three
Has said his nightly prayer to thee;
Before his eyes were closed in sleep,
He asked that Thou his soul would keep.
And I, still kneeling at his bed,
My hand upon his tousled head.
Do ask, with deep humility,
That thou, dear Lord, remember me.
Make me, king Lord, a worthy Dad,
That I may lead this little lad
In pathways over fair and bright,
That I may keep his steps aright.
O God, his trust must never be
Destroyed or even marred by me.
So, for the simple things he prayed
With childish voice so unafraid,
I, trembling, ask the same from Thee,
Dear Lord, king Lord, remember me.

*** Discipline Them**

We are living in a very permissive age where parents rarely say "no" to their children. This isn't just a modern day problem for even David had this problem as a father. It was said concerning his son Adonijah, that David had never displeased him at anytime by asking "why have you done this or that?" It is no wonder that Adonijah later rebelled against his father and tried to take over the kingdom. We read of his story in 1 Kings 1:5,6: *"Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying 'I will be king.' so he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. And his father had never crossed him at anytime by asking, 'Why have you done so?'"* Consider the personal sorrow of David and the grief caused the entire family by his three spoiled sons, Ammon, Absalom and Adonijah.

On the other hand there is great blessings to be gleaned from disciplining your children. Solomon said, *"Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul"* (Proverbs 29:17). Despite this, the greater wisdom of men condemn spanking. The wise Proverbs of the wisest man in the world, not to mention the inspiration of the all-knowing God, commands discipline. This requires corporal punishment with the *"rod of correction"*: *"Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell"* (Proverbs 23:13;14) *"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him"* (Proverbs 29:15). "Rod" is from the Hebrew word "yahsaar" which literally means "a stick, a club, a staff, a weapon". A rod will teach them to respect their father's authority. In Texas "yahsaar" means "yes, sir." Children should be thankful for a father who believes in laying on of hands when they are getting out of hand.

*** Bring Them to Christ**

Jesus does not wish for anyone to hinder the children from coming to Him. The Bible gives us this story, *"Then they brought young children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it'"* (Mark 10:13-15).

Fathers are commanded, *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring*

them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

Motherhood is a great privilege - the crowning joy for most women. There is no greater vocation to which women may aspire. What is more worthy than to be a good mother? As a poet said it so well when he wrote: “The hand that rocks the cradle, is the hand the rules the world”. Mothers and fathers need to take care that they not only provide for their child’s physical needs, but for their spiritual needs as well. The best way to do this is to bring them (not send them) to church.

Mary Had a Little Boy

Mary had a little boy, his soul was white as snow.
He never went to Bible class, cause Mary would not go.
He never heard the tales of Christ that thrilled the children’s minds’
While other children went to class, this child was left behind.
And so he grew from babe to youth, she saw to her dismay
A soul that once was white had turned a dingy grey
Realizing he was lost, she tried to win him back,
But now the soul that once was white had turned an ugly black.
She even started back to church and Bible study, too.
She begged the Preacher “isn’t there something you can do?”
The preacher tried — failed and said, “We are just too far behind,
I tried to tell you years ago, but you would pay no mind.”
And so another soul is lost, that once was white as snow.
Bible classes could have helped, but Mary wouldn’t go.

Parents it is your duty not the preacher or elders, to bring your children to Christ. There is long lasting happiness for those who do.

REVIEW

True/False

1. ___ Families do not have to spend time together in order to fulfill their God appointed duties.
2. ___ Parents of children are not showing disrespect to the family as God ordained when they have their children out of wedlock.
3. ___ There are only two scriptural reasons for a marriage to end death of a spouse and divorce because of adultery.
4. ___ Noah only saved his family in the ark.
5. ___ There is a high degree of Bible knowledge among families in the world today.

Matching: use only once

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| ___ Provider | a. Wives attitude toward husband’s leadership |
| ___ Head | b. Sarah called him “Lord” |
| ___ Abraham | c. A special creation to be compatible with man |

_____ Fornication	d. Lit., “watcher”
_____ Love your wives	e. Supply the needs of his family
_____ Submissive	f. Husband
_____ Help-Meet	g. The only reason for divorce
_____ Keeper at Home	h. As Christ loved the church

Multiple Choice

1. Who prayed for his children continually? a) Job b) Samuel c) Paul
2. The rod of correction a) is commanded b) is a stick or staff c) can deliver a soul from hell if used d) can remove foolishness from a child’s heart e) all of these.
3. a) Preachers b) The church c) Fathers are commanded to bring up the children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Discussion

1. What are some ways families can help limit the influence of evil upon the family unit?
2. What kind of leader/head should a husband be?
3. Explain why the submissiveness of a wife is not disparaging or demeaning.
4. What are some things parents can do to bring their children to Christ?

Homework: List five ways you can help your family grow closer to God and His Church each week.

My Responsibility to Do God's Will

Sir Winston Churchill once said describing the actions of Russia. *"It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."* Some would apply it to God's Will. Can we understand God's Will? Or is it like a deep, dark mystery requiring man to live life playing a guessing game. Paul informs us that we can understand God's Will. *"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:17).

Just how can we understand it? Since the very nature of God necessitates self-revelation, "how to know" God's Will is a study in how He imparts and how man receives information from Him. First, let us investigate the false sources for God's Will.

THE SOURCE OF GOD'S WILL

✘ Not Our Feelings

God's will is not known by the heart -- feelings, inner response. etc. This source would make each man his own "receiver and interpreter." Authority would be determined subjectively, so man becomes his own God. He looks to within himself for God's Will.

✘ Not The Clergy or Creeds

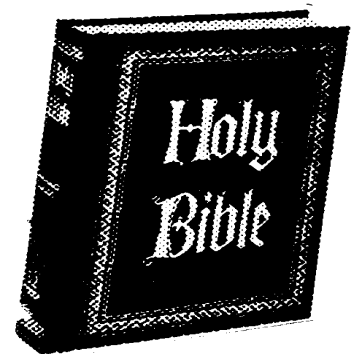
Catholicism is considered the repository of truth. They alone can interpret God's Will for mere men. Their Popes are said to be infallible interpreters. However Peter, the "first Pope" who wrote 1 & 2 Peter, cannot be understood without additional interpreters. I don't know why I should be expected to understand a later day interpreter, if I can't understand the first in line. All such are human standards are the traditions or commandments of men. Human will makes religion vain. *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* (Matthew 15:7-9). Only Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn. 14:6).

✘ Not a Direct Operation of The Holy Spirit

Calvinism teaches that God's Will can only be understood by those who hearts are touched directly by the Holy Spirit. If direct operation of the Spirit must precede understanding, then all must have this operation. If only a few receive it, God would be a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11).

✘ Not The Old Testament

Many still tell us that it is God's Will that we tithe, have a priesthood, use instrumental music, keep religious holidays, keep the Sabbath, etc. A testament is a will, but the Old Testament was God's will for Israel. A will is composed of three components: facts, commands, and promises. The facts are the history - the examples given for our learning (Rom. 15:4). The commands of the law have been annulled. The promises are the prophecies, they have been fulfilled in Christ and His church. Jesus had to die in order for His will to come into force. *"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a*



testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives" (Hebrews 9:15-17). When He died the Old Will was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). To follow it has God's will is to fall from grace. "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

✓ **The Word of God**

Paul informs us that we must read the Scriptures to understand the Will of God. *"How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets."* (Eph. 3:3-5).

Without revelation God's Will is a mystery. God revealed it through His Spirit. Then the Apostles and Prophets who wrote it down. We can read it and understand it (Eph. 4:3-5). The Bible is not a book about God's Will. It is God's Will.

Therefore, the next time you hear someone proclaim "It's the will of God" ask him to produce scripture to prove it really is God's Will and not his assumptions or hope so's.

What is the attitude Christians must have in regard to God's Will?

PROPER ATTITUDES TOWARD GOD'S WILL

* **Be Respectful**

Some believe all bad things come from God's Will. "If the good Lord didn't want it to happen, she wouldn't have gotten pregnant." One would almost surmise that the girl's premarital pregnancy was another case of miraculous conception. The unmarried father and mother were not to blame. The good Lord clearly wanted her pregnant. A soldier is killed on the battle field. A father says, "It's was the will of God." A baby dies. The parents are told: "It's God's Will". A woman is sick with cancer. A man gets drunk, drives his car, kills a family of four in head on collision. All these represent God's Will.

Were these a result of God's Will for the people affected. Every act of God is unmistakably, undeniably good. The death of the soldier was the will of the enemy. Death is an enemy of God (I Cor. 15:26). Did Jesus and the apostles go against God's will then they healed the sick and raised the dead? Does a doctor work against the Will of God in a life devoted to curing illness? Jesus placed the blame on Satan for the infirmities we suffer in the flesh (Luke 13:11-17). Satan uses sin to bring sickness and death. Our prayers for the sick and dying are in harmony with God's Will. Was it God's Will that the fellow get drunk? Was it God's Will that he drive his car in such a condition? In spite of God's Will little children die (Mt. 18:6). Is one saying that God is the cause of these? Whatever happens in the world is within His Will. Yet, it is like the injury our child receives learning to ride a bike, but neither is intentional will. Every incident is not directly related to a specific "act of God." Human will often interferes with what God really wants, because God gave man a free will.

* **Be Obedient**

God would gladly give more of us eternal life if we would only quit trying to tell Him how. Some of us keep forgetting that testators don't call in the heirs when the will is made. Man's will either puts him in opposition to God's or in obedience to his will. If we are going to call him "Lord, Lord" then we must obey Him (Matthew 7:21).

* **Be Submissive**

Christ, as He faced death on the cross, prayed that the cup of suffering could be avoided. As a human being He was saying that if there is no other way, I will to do Your will. Christ wished for God's Will to prevail over that of His own (Mt. 26:39).

This submissive attitude should be present in all we do. *"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas*

you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:13-15). To say, "If the Lord wills" is not a formula but an attitude of heart. "Do I really want to know God's Will or am I seeking sanction to do my own will?" "Do I have the courage to do His will when I learn what it is?" Maybe I am like the rich young ruler and desire eternal life, but if it costs me doing my thing and have my things, forget it.

Three out of four Americans die without a will - they have not planned for their death. The resulting confusion and legal hassles only add to the grief of those who are left behind. Far many more will die without obeying God's will. Now make a decision about God's Will for your soul and God's Will. God doesn't want anyone to be lost. Won't you make God's Will your will today?

REVIEW

True/False

1. ___ We are no where commanded to understand the Will of God.
2. ___ Feelings play an important role in knowing what the Will of God is and whether or not we are in compliance with it.
3. ___ The Catholic church believes the they alone can interpret the Bible through their infallible popes. Peter they say was the first of these popes.
4. ___ Understanding of the scriptures comes today through the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the believer.
5. ___ The Old Testament was just for Gentiles and has been nailed to the cross.
6. ___ The only way we can know God's Will today is through His revelation of it in the written Word, the Bible.
7. ___ Human will often conflicts with God's Will causing tragedies in our lives.
8. ___ Those who call Christ "Lord" and then disobey Him are hypocrites.
9. ___ We sin if we do not include the phrase "if the Lord wills" in our conversations about the future.
10. ___ The rich young ruler who came seeking eternal life from Christ is an example of one who did the Will of God.

Discussion

1. How would you help someone overcome their feelings which are in conflict with what the Bible teaches?
2. Explain the role of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of men in the book of Acts.

3. List some religious practices which some of taken from the Old Testament and applied to Christianity, today.
4. Explain the steps involved in the revealing of God's Will according to Ephesians 3:3-5.
5. Is it God's Will every time a baby dies or an unexplainable tragedy occurs? Explain.

Homework: List some areas where God's Will comes in conflict with your will. How do you plan to resolve these conflicts?

My Responsibility to Study

A certain preacher knew a family of Christians who had a real nice family Bible which they displayed on their coffee table. This fine Bible was always covered in plastic to keep the dust off. During one visit, he noticed the Bible missing from its usual place. When he questioned them concerning the Bible's whereabouts (thinking they might be reading out of it for a change) they told of its disastrous end. "No. You see the family dog was left in the house one day by mistake while the family was away for the day. The little dog evidently wishing to find something to do got a hold of the family Bible. He tore the Bible to shreds. We came home and found pieces of the Bible from the front door to the back, upstairs and down, from the bathroom to the living room, on the furniture and under it. It was totally destroyed." To this story the preacher replied, "It seems to me your little dog got more good out of the family Bible than you did".

As in most things you only get out of Bible study what you put into it. God is more impressed with a well used and worn out Bible than He is a well kept, but unused Bible. The apostle Paul gives us the following piece of advice concerning the proper use of our Bibles. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed but rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). If you want the approval of God you must do is study and use His Word properly.

WHAT DO YOU FIND IN OUR BIBLE?

An old man in New Jersey discovered a large sum of money in an old family Bible. It seems his aunt died when he was a young man, and one clause in her will read, "To my beloved nephew I bequeath my family Bible and all it contains, with the residue of my estate after funeral expenses and just debts are paid." The estate amounted to only a few hundred dollars, which he soon spent. He neglected his Bible and lived as a comparatively poor man for 35 years. While packing his trunk to move to his sons' house, where he expected to spend the rest of his days, he discovered money hidden in the Bible by his aunt. He was several thousand dollars richer.



You Can Find Even Greater Treasures in Your Bible

➤ **You Can Find Salvation**

The Gospel is the "Good News." Everyone should read some good news every day. After all, there is enough bad news in every day. A study of God's Word will save your soul (Js. 1:21) and make you wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Thus, the Bible is not only the World's best seller, but every man's best buy.

➤ **You Can Find Spiritual Food**

For those hungering and thirsting after righteousness the Bible is a real feast (Mt. 5:6). We should *"desire the pure milk of the word,"* that we *"may grow thereby"* (1 Peter 2:2). Yet, if some fed their bodies as little as they feed their souls, they would have starved to death long ago.

➡ You Can Find The Way to Heaven

The Bible is our "road map" to heaven. It is a lamp to our feet to light the path to eternity (Psalm 119:105). Someone has said the B.I.B.L.E. means Basic Information Before Leaving Earth.

A NOBLE APPROACH TO BIBLE STUDY

For 2,000 years the people of Berea have borne the divine commendation for their nobility. The name of the city or its citizens has been given to religious papers, at least one college and no less than seven towns in this country. Yet the ancient city is hardly known. Outside of Ac. 17:20-25 and 20:4, the city is not mentioned in the Bible. The Encyclopedia Britannica does not mention it. The city had no other call to fame. Could it be that this lack of sophistication had something to do with the nobility of the people? The Macedonian city was about fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica on the eastern slope of the Olympian range. An out of the way city. Perhaps it was this obscurity that caused Paul to go there after having been severely opposed both in Philippi and Thessalonica.

What made the Bereans noble? It was their right reaction to God's Word. Their attitude is a glaring contrast to that of the Thessalonians. *"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded (noble) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."* (Acts 17:10-12). Gleaned from this famous text are the various things which made the Bereans the "noblemen" of the Bible.

📖 A Noble Attitude: *Readiness of Mind*

In ancient times noble meant "better bred." Their nobleness did not consist in their birthright, wealth, or position in society. According to W.E. Vine this word "noble-minded" in the King James and "fair-minded" in the New King James Version means "eagerness, willingness, readiness" (p. 250).

True nobility still has these attributes. None are noble who lack this attitude.

Many, today, do not show a readiness of mind to hear what another has to say, but is content to hear only one side. The Word of God is not to be forced upon unwilling minds.

📖 A Noble Effort: *Examined*

God has placed His Word well within reach of us all. He has so formed us and so written it that it is on a level with our understanding. Many would prefer just to follow what their favorite preacher or the elders' teaching, but we must be willing to examine the Scriptures for ourselves to discern truth. Man, generally speaking, is lazy. It is much easier to let someone else do the studying. Some men are wilfully antagonistic, like the Thessalonians; some are intelligently searching, like the Bereans; and some are weakly receptive, like the Athenians (Ac. 17:16-21).

Men today who seek the answer to their own salvation will find that answer the same way the Bereans found it. They, too, must search the scriptures. *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me"* (John 5:39).

Enthusiasm for truth is a noble form of faith; and each who pursues it for himself will enjoy a majestic portion of its rewards.

📖 A Noble Source: *the Scriptures*

They used the Scriptures as the criterion to determine what is truth. Truth should not decide on the basis of friendship, education, social status, or the like, nor can it be determined by man-made denominational creeds. Our feelings, ideas, intuitions, and impressions are not the standard. Only the scriptures which are inspired of God and constitute a basis of authority for religious doctrine and practices.

Spiritual nobility requires the one have enough faith to accept what the Scriptures teach about baptism, one true church, social gospel, social drinking, divorce and remarriage even if it seems as unreasonable as sacrificing Isaac must have seemed to Abraham.

By recognizing the true source of Truth, one immediately gains insight to its great value. One will not soon part with a valuable object. Solomon wrote, "*Buy the truth and sell it not*" (Pr. 23:23). This is the way of saying that truth is so important to us that there is no price great enough to buy it from us, without our being the loser. Truth alone can save our soul and our soul is more valuable than the combined riches of the whole world (Mt. 16:26).



A Noble Frequency: *Daily*

Paul expounded the scriptures daily in Thessalonica, their reaction sent Paul fleeing for his very life. The Bereans, instead of resenting his interpretation, examined the scriptures for themselves. Diligence and serious study are absolute requirements if we are to discern the truth amid conflicting voices. Difficult subjects test our willingness to pursue truth.

Many will argue that they do not have time to study the Bible. Yet, it may take very little time each day just to read it. The whole Bible can be read in 71 hours. If you break that down into minutes and divide it into 365 days, you could read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation in only 12 minutes a day.



A Noble Objective: *Whether so*

Realizing that the preacher was Paul, why would they check up on him? Was it because they suspected he was a false teacher? NO! Yet, they want to make sure that he taught the truth, because it pertained to their eternal salvation. They needed to know whether the interpretation which the apostle put upon the Old Testament Scriptures was the true one. They were not willing to put their souls in jeopardy by taking the preacher at his word.

The doctrine of Christ does not fear scrutiny. The Creator gave us minds and it is high time we started, each of us, to use our own, and not depend on another to do our thinking for us. If every preacher, every church, and every Greek student in the world believed error, one could still know the truth with certainty by following the Scriptures. The more Scripture study and the less poll-taking we do, the more conviction of truth we will develop.

Remember, it is everyone's duty to work out their own salvation (Phil. 2:12).



A Noble Decision: *Obedying the Word*

Obedying Him strictly and carefully is not legalism. Obedience as an intense concern for doing the precise Will of God is a reflection of our faith in God and our love for Him.

Won't you study God's Word in the noble manner of the Bereans and make your decision to obey Him?

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. One can find God's approval by a) reading the Bible b) studying the Bible c) owning a Bible.
2. The Bible can a) give good news b) save your soul c) make you wise unto salvation d) all of these.
3. We are to hunger and thirst after a) fellowship dinners b) the Holy Spirit c) righteousness.
4. The people of Berea were in contrast with the people of a) Ephesus b) Athens c) Thessalonica.

Matching

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1. _____ right attitude | a. Daily |
| 2. _____ right effort | b. Whether so |

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3. _____ right source | c. Obeying the word |
| 4. _____ right frequency | d. Readiness of mind |
| 5. _____ right objective | e. Examined |
| 6. _____ right decision | d. The scriptures |

Discussion

1. What can we do to develop and keep an open mind toward the scriptures?
2. What is the proper procedure in examining the scriptures? Or what steps should be taken when examining the Word?
3. What is the ultimate motive for checking out what the preacher says?

Homework: Keep a record of how much time you spend reading and studying the Bible each week.

My Responsibility to Pray

Could you imagine a life without prayer? What if it were illegal to pray as it was in the time of Daniel? Although we can pray anywhere at just about anytime (except public prayers in school) many have abandoned the power of prayer. In reality there can be no such thing as a prayerless Christian any more than you could have righteous reviler or a sober drunk.

WHY PRAY?

† Prayer Is Commanded by God (1 Tim. 2:8)

God's commands are not optional. All are given for our own good and in our best interest. It is not because God is lonely and needs someone to talk to. He is not helpless without us, but we are without Him.

Perhaps no clearer mandate on the necessity can be seen than the command to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17). It doesn't mean to pray twenty-four hours a day. It doesn't mean to pray to the neglect of other duties. Nor is it to be a mechanical formalism that we perform merely out of duty. Paul meant that prayer should be first in order of importance in the whole life of a child of God. We never get through praying; also, that we cannot pray too much.

Every righteous man of the Bible was a man of prayer. Jesus told two parables to promote the importance of persistence in prayer: the parable of the friend at midnight (Lk. 11:5:10) and the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). Also in His life, Christ was constantly engaged in prayer at various times throughout His ministry (Mk. 1:35; Mt. 14:12; Lk. 6:12; Lk. 23:34,36; Lk. 23:34). Not to be overlooked are the examples of Abraham, Moses, David (Ps. 55:17); Daniel (6:10) and Nehemiah (1:4:2:4,5). Paul often wrote of his unceasing prayers (1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 11:28; Eph. 1:15,16; Phil. 1:3-5; Col. 1:3,9; 1 Ch. 1:2,3; 2:13; 2 Th. 1:3; 11,12; 2:13:15).



† Prayer Is Needed to Find Help and Grace

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15,16). To live without prayer is to live as if we need nothing from God. Prayer presupposes the frailty of the Christian and the unlimited strength of the divine Father. The Christian whose life is devoid of prayer is one whose life is devoid of the sense of the need of and desire for God's help.

No matter how rough the world around us may be prayer brings help and mercy. Too many of us pray for forgiveness today when we should have prayed for help with temptation yesterday. Many times we cannot find the strength to stand on our feet until first of all we get on our knees. When life's burdens seem too heavy and there is a need for rest it is time to go to God. In this manner, each day's burdens should be laid aside each night. Just as the camel at the close of day kneels to have his burden lifted, I too as the day draws to a close should bow and let my Master lift the load and grant rest.

We simply cannot make it without God's help. We can go to God for help and mercy in any problem, at any time, in any place, in any position or condition. With such help there is no need to try going it alone (Pr. 3:5,6). No matter how extensively a Christian may engage in doing good, no matter how diligently he may study God's Word, no matter how energetic and intelligent he may be in the pursuit of the physical necessities of life, he stands continually in need of prayer.

It happened down south. A small boy gave his mother a hard time during services. Finally she gave up and turned him over to his father. The father had no better success and became exasperated. With measured strides he headed for a side door at the front of the auditorium. The little boy looked over his father's shoulder at the congregation as he exited and in a loud plea said "Y' all pray for me." We all need to pray for ourselves and each other.

† **It Is a Sin Not to Pray (1 Sam. 12:23)**

Samuel was addressing and reproving the people at Gilgal. The Israelites want a king like the nations around them. God has provided them one with in Saul. Samuel defended his integrity and God sent thunder and rain to give divine testimony to it. Then, Samuel makes it clear that despite the fact that there is a King he will continue his duty as a judge and pray and teach them. Samuel refused to sin in neglecting his prayer.

When failing to pray as we should we sin in at least three ways. 1) We sin against others. Samuel saw as a primary part of his job was to be an intercessor. Abraham interceded on the behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom. Moses constantly prayed for the Israelites. Elders are to pray for the sick (Js. 5:16). The apostles were not going to neglect their prayers for a mere performance of physical services (Ac. 6:4).

We are commanded to pray for one another. 2) We sin against God. It disobeys a direct command from God. Not to pray is not to be dependent upon God, not to have faith in God, not to be devoted to God, and to deny the existence of God. We rob Him of due thanksgiving, praise, glory, and devotion. We are trying to show God that we don't need His help we can do it ourselves. 3) We sin against ourselves. Prayer is needed for help with temptation, for forgiveness, for food and shelter, for good health, for the neglected and lost. Through lack of prayer we rob ourselves of years of spiritual life. Peter was asked to watch and pray with Jesus in the Garden the night our Lord was betrayed. If Peter had prayed instead of slept, he might not have fallen into temptation and denied the Lord three times.

HOW TO BE PERSISTENT IN PRAYER

■ **Make Time.**

Some will admit, "I just don't have enough time to pray to God." Those who are too busy think that spasmodic prayer will suffice. They squeeze God into their busy schedule, if they have time. If one is too busy to pray he is too busy for God's blessings, promises, and preparing for heaven. If you are too busy for prayer you are perhaps too busy in things that are unnecessary. How busy is not so important as why one is so busy. The busy bee is congratulated and the pesky mosquito is swatted. Christ, no matter how busy, could immediately turn aside for long seasons of prayer. Daniel was not too busy in running the Medo-Persian empire to pray thrice daily. God is not too busy to listen, so do not be too busy to talk to Him.

A father once wrote to his busy son in college: "Let me encourage you not to be seduced into neglecting, curtailing or hurrying over your morning prayers. Of all things guard against neglecting God in the closet".

Martin Luther once said, "I am so busy now that I find if I did not spend two of three hours each day in prayer, I could not get through the day. If I should neglect prayer, but a single day I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith." The person who takes time for prayer will find ample time for all the other things needing his attention.

Don't wait till the end of your life to look back on your failure to pray and lament like the following preacher did as he said: "'Pray without ceasing' has been the sentence repeating itself in the silent thought and I am sure it must be my practice till the last conscious hour of life. Oh, why not throughout that long, indolent, inanimate half-century past?"

The fact is, no man is so busy that...

- he cannot grow old
- he cannot get sick
- he cannot die
- he cannot face Judgment Day

Thus, no man is too busy to pray.

Remember, if one is too busy to pray he is too busy for God's blessings, promises, and making preparations for heaven.

■ **Put Prayer First**

Morning hours for prayer have been utilized in the Bible. David said *"Early will I seek thee"* and *"Thou shalt early hear my voice."* Christ arose before day break in order to pray (Mk. 1:35). We are lazy. In the villages, towns and cities where Islam is the religion, the call to prayer is sounded from the minaret just before dawn. The set time for the Muslims to pray is when they can first distinguish the difference between the black and a white thread in the early dawn light. Edward Bounds served as a Civil War chaplain. He wrote eight devotional books on prayer. He began each day from 4 to 7 a.m on his knees.

■ **Start With An Hour**

We sing "Sweet Hour of Prayer", but have we ever prayed for an hour? When Jesus was praying in the Garden He questioned His sleepy disciples "could you not tarry with me one hour"? Can you not tarry over prayer for one hour?

■ **Shoot for a Whole Day or Night**

Christ prayed all night (Lk. 6:12). The recorded prayers of Moses may be short, but Moses prayed to God with fasting and mighty crying 40 days and nights. John Fletcher stained the wall so his room by the breath of his prayers. When was the last time you spent all day, or even a greater part of the day in prayer. We can spend all night and day at leisure or even sin. Jacob wrestled with God's angel all night and said, *"I will not let you go unless you bless me"*.

MY RESPONSIBILITY TO PRAY PROPERLY

Prayer, in order to be effective, must be made according to the conditions set forth by God. After all, you are communicating with the Creator of the Universe, not a telemarketing representative. Consider carefully the conditions of acceptable prayer.

- ◆ It must be addressed to God (Mt. 6:6,9; Js. 1:5; Eph. 3:14; Col. 1:3).
- ◆ It must be in the name of Christ (Jn. 14:13; 16:23,24; Col. 3:17).
- ◆ It must be according to God's Will (1 Jn. 4:14,15).
- ◆ It must be with a forgiving spirit (Mk. 6:12,15; Mk. 9:25).
- ◆ It must be coupled with godly living (Jn. 9:31; Ps. 66:18).
- ◆ It must be with a desire to be heard (Ps. 27:7; 102:2; 108:6; 143:1).
- ◆ It must be in faith (Mk. 11:24; 1 Jn. 5:15; Js. 1:6).

Prayer is our line of communication with Heaven itself. If you are unwilling to communicate with heaven while on earth for a few years, what makes you think you will have reason enough to spend eternity with God in heaven, for eternity?

No Time for Prayer

I woke up late, no time to pray; I hurried off to school.
 I failed to take advantage of this important tool.
 Throughout the day I ran about; I had no time to kneel.
 When dinner came, I failed again to thank God for my meal.
 When day was done, I went to bed to get the rest I needed.
 But failed the scriptural man again; my need for prayer went unheeded.
 One busy day my soul was called to answer for my deeds;
 And as I stood, I realized I had denied its needs.
 My name was called, I stepped to the bar To hear my sentence quote.
 Yet all I got, to my surprise, was a small paper note;
 And on this parchment God had written A message, oh, so true.
 "You always failed to talk to me. Why should I speak to you?"

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Christ spoke about parables which relate to the necessity of being persistent in prayer, such as, a) the sower b) the ten virgins c) the friend at midnight.
2. This man habit of prayer cause him to be thrown into a lions' den. a) Nehemiah b) Daniel c) Moses d) Samuel
3. This prophet of God said he would not sin by failing to pray for Israel a) Nehemiah b) Samuel c) Moses d) Abraham
4. This friend of God made intercession for Sodom and the cities of the plain. a) Nehemiah b) Moses c) Abraham d) Daniel
5. This busy statesman found time to pray three times every day. a) Nehemiah b) Moses c) Abraham d) Daniel
6. This great King sought God in prayer early each day. a) David b) Moses c) Daniel d) Ahaz
7. These two men spent forty days and nights in fasting and praying to God. a) David and Moses b) Daniel and Samuel c) Christ and Moses

Matching

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| _____ Prayer is addressed to | a. Be answered |
| _____ Prayer is made in the name of | b. God |
| _____ Prayer is made with a desire to | c. Christ |
| _____ Prayer coupled with refusal to repent | d. Not heard |

Short Answer

1. How does the Bible view prayer made in doubt? (James 1:5f)

2. If we refuse to forgive others Christ will not _____.
3. Before selecting his twelve disciples Christ prayed _____.

Discussion

1. Explain the command “pray without ceasing”.
2. Who all do we sin against when we fail to pray?
3. How would you help a brother see that no one can really be too busy to pray?
4. Why can we pray that God forgive someone without their being baptize or to give us a million dollars? (1 John 4:14,15).

Homework: Make a prayer list of all the supplies you need to supplicate from God, all the blessings you are thankful for to God, all the people who you need to intercede for before God, all the reasons God is worthy of praise, all the sins and weaknesses you need forgiveness for and help with from God.

My Responsibility to Attend

How to increase your chance of a long life. Have you heard the news? If you want to greatly increase your chance for a long life, you will be interested in the following: do not ride in an automobile or get in the way of one. They cause 20% of all fatal accidents. Do not stay at home. 17% of all accidents happen in the home. Do not walk around on the street. 14% of all accidents occur to pedestrians. Do not travel by air, rail or ship. 16% of all accidents are the result of this type of traveling. Only .0001% of all deaths occur at worship, and these are related to previous physical disorders, such as heart conditions, etc.

There are many other good reasons for attending worship services.

FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE HELPS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

★ **My Attendance Shows My Love for God**

Obedience is inherent in true love for God (1 John 5:3). *"If you love Me, Keep My commandments"* (Jn. 14:15). If I show love to God by attendance, I show hate by non-attendance! Am I loving God with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength when I refuse to worship Him as commanded? Furthermore, one who truly loves God does not ask if he must attend, his love compels him to attend.

★ **My Attendance Puts me in God's Presence**

Christ has promised to be there whenever we are gathered together in His name (Mt. 18:20). Christ has never forsaken an assembly, but for us to forsake an assembly is to forsake Him. Someone asked Emily Post, "What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House and has a previous engagement?" She answered, "An invitation to lunch or dine at the white House is a command, and automatically cancels any other engagement." The King of kings and Lord of lords deserves first place in your appointment book.



★ **My Attendance Provides Me an Opportunity to Worship God**

Attendance provides us an opportunity to worship God with the worship that He seeks (Jn. 4:23,24). Certainly the Psalmist counted the opportunities to worship God a privilege. *"I was glad when they said to me, 'let us go into the house of the Lord'"* (Ps. 122:1).

★ **My Attendance Demonstrates My Loyalty to God**

In a sense we are making a confession of Christ by our attendance and a denial of Him by non-attendance (Mt. 10:32,33). As Peter and the rest of the disciples did the night he was betrayed, except John.

We betray our allegiance by non-attendance. The empty tomb proves Christianity while the empty church denies it.

★ **My Attendance Expresses My Gratitude to God**

Did you ever experience such joy in life that you wanted to say, "Thank you," to someone? We

reorganize God as the giver of all good (Js. 1:17). When I look at Christ's death for me, I should be moved with a spirit of thanksgiving, which is to be expressed both privately and publicly. Christians should assemble upon the first day of every week and remember the Lord for what He has done for us (I Cor. 11:23-26). However, the empty pew says, "Someone does not appreciate Christ's sacrifice."

FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE HELPS OTHERS

My Attendance Encourages and Edifies Others

"Edify" means to build up. How could a great skyscraper be built if the construction crew does not come to work? How can my brethren be built up if they do not show up? No company has been built up by not making attendance mandatory for its workers.

There are many, many "one another" commandments in the scriptures. Most of these can be fulfilled by assembling together. We are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Everyone present imparts to one another (Eph. 4:16). We are to encourage the faint hearted and support the weak (I Th. 5:14). Teach and admonish one another in songs (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

My Attendance Lovingly Provokes Others to Do Good Works

Attendance helps us to provoke one another in love and good works as we fellowship together. *"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24,25). "Provoke" involves the idea to "sharpen" hence to "stimulate" to greater faith. Deliberate absentees show a disregard for efforts and feelings of the faithful brethren! Forsaking the assembly discourages rather than encourages.

My Attendance Sets a Good Example

By every act of my life I am influencing someone to serve either God or the devil. Let your light shine, putting a spot light on Christ in a dark world (Mt. 5:14,16). Bad examples discourage others from worshipping. It makes some question the reality of religion and others to think the non-attender is a pretender. By forsaking one becomes a stumbling block to the babes in Christ (Mt. 18:6).

My Attendance Helps My Family

Attendance assist parents in training up their children (Dt. 6:4-7; Eph. 6:4), so that they will not depart from God when they are old (Pr. 22:6). A boy brought up in church is seldom brought up in court.

Attendance shows family priorities. It is hard to convince children that the church is the most important thing in the world when you are negligent about attending the services and supporting its work. Absence gives our children a distorted sense of values.

My Attendance Helps the Lost

Attending is a testimony to those outside of Christ. It shows the lost that being a Christian means something to us (Tit. 2:7,8; 2 Cor. 3:2,3). They think, "It really means something to that person. Perhaps I should look into this more seriously."

Attending is an opportunity to invite the lost. When you invite a sinner to services he will look for you the first thing, if he comes.

Absentees make it harder for the preacher to preach to the lost, because it is hard to preach to empty pews. To the non-member the empty pew says: "Regular attendance is neither necessary or worthwhile."

FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE HELPS THE CHURCH

Attendance Helps the Church to Exist and Function

The mission of the church can only be accomplished through assembling. The church has work it

must do therefore it has to exist collectively in order to do that work. This requires faithful attendance on the part of the individual Christian who is a member of the congregation.

Non-attenders undermine the agreement to work together. If some can stay home, all can. If all failed to assemble where would the church be and how could it fulfill its mission? Without "U" an important element is missing in Bible St_dy and there is a vacancy in ch_rch without "U".

† **Attendance Helps the Church Grow**

The empty pew whispers to visitors: "There is no interest here; if I were you I wouldn't come back." Based on your attendance will there be a church in your community twenty years from now?

† **Attendance Encourages Leaders and Fellow-Workers**

Your attendance encourages the elders. They set up the times of the assemblies in order to feed the flock (Ac. 20:28). Each member of the church should participate in the feeding program of the elders. They are accountable for our spiritual life (Heb. 13:17). Non-attendance makes it harder for them to do their job. When we do not attend we disobey them that have rule over us (Heb. 13:17). We owe these men and the church our presence at every service.

To the preacher the empty pew says, "God's Word is not powerful. I do not need it." Empty pews can preach a louder and more persuasive sermon than any man can. It takes the combination of the man in the pulpit and the person in the pew to carry on the services.

If each member followed the "Golden Rule" as Christ laid down, we would have no problem such as absenteeism (Mt. 7:12).

† **My Attendance Facilitates Fellowship**

"Fellowship" means "joint participation" or "partnership". The church is an army (Eph. 6:11-18) joined together to fight a common foe. AWOL's (absent without official leave) and deserters weaken any army and its cause.

Paul taught that evil companionship will destroy good intentions. The opposite of that would be: good companionship will build character and reputation. We ought to attend every service because we need a closer association with other Christians.

By attending and giving (1 Cor. 16:1,2) we have fellowship in the work. By not attending one fails to give as commanded upon the first day of the week.

† **My Attendance Advances the Influence of the Church**

What's the difference between the atheist who supports no church and the member who will not support the one to which he belongs? Isn't your absence from worship a vote to close the doors of the church? Non-attenders cannot pray for the success of the church without being hypocrites. Non-attendance shows one to be a hypocrite.

FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE HELPS ME

⇒ **Attending Brings Me Blessings**

All spiritual blessings in Christ are also in the church (Eph. 1:3). Failure to engage in worship with others in the acts of worship deprives one of many great blessings. Singing that teaches and admonishes. Praying with and for one another. Partaking of a fellowship meal, the Lord's Supper. Hearing the Word which makes one wise unto salvation. Giving cheerfully unto God.

⇒ **Attending Helps Me to Be Fruitful**

Paul said for Christians to *"be ready unto every good work"* and to *"abound in good works"* (Tit. 3:1,8). To fail to do what one knows is a good work is to sin (Js. 4:17). To be unfruitful is not to be a disciple (Jn. 15:8) and to be unfruitful is to be destroyed in the end (Jn. 15:6).

⇒ **Attending Helps Me Grow**

Services of the church are designed to provide spiritual food. If I am hungering and thirsting after righteousness and if I desire the sincere milk of the Word that I may grow then I will be at every service (Mt. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:2,3). Some have failed to grow as they should, the same failed to attend as they should (Heb. 5:11-14).

⇒ **Attending Strengthens Me**

Remember, *"I can do all things through Him that strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13), but if you are separated from Him you are without your source of strength. Show me a one-hour-a-week Christian and I will show you a weak Christian.

⇒ **Attending Prepares Me for Eternal Salvation**

Death might come knocking when we should have been at services. Attending helps me to remain faithful till death (Rev. 2:11). Furthermore it helps me to be prepared for Christ's return. We don't know when He shall come (Mt. 25:36,44). It is safe to attend every service. Dangerous risks are taken by being absent, Christ may return or death come. Remember, "heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people" (Jn. 4:1f). If we don't like attending worship services, we won't like heaven.

⇒ **Attending Helps Me Overcome Trials and Temptations**

The Word is our weapon against temptation. We all need sword practice and to be fortified against falling away. Just remember, when you neglect to attend a service you are playing right into the hands of Satan himself.

⇒ **Attending Assists Me in Forming Good Habits**

Non-attendance is a bad habit. In the first century the *"habit of some"* was to forsake the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25). When you miss one you have made it easier to miss the next and the next and the next... Conversely, by coming once you make it easier to come again and again and again...

Newsweek researched church attendance in America and discovered the 40% attend services of some sort on a weekly basis. Where are the other 60%? Perhaps, they are attending the most popular place of worship in the world: St. Mattress. Hopefully, all Christians will be able to understand the multitude of reasons given in this lesson for them to get out of bed and get to church.

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Loving God means you must a) keep His commandments b) tell everybody that you love Him c) have a warm feeling about Him in your heart.
2. He is the one who never, ever misses a service. a) Christ b) preacher c) someone looking for a handout.
3. He is seeking true worshipers. a) Devil b) God c) preacher

True/False

1. _____ One can show their gratitude to God and still choose never to worship Him or partake of the Lord's Supper.

2. _____ Forsaking the assembling sets a bad example before the world.
3. _____ Parents choosing to be absent gives their children a distorted sense of values.
4. _____ Faithful attendance has nothing to do with our effort to reach the lost in this world.
5. _____ Without faithful attendance the local church could not exist or function.

Matching

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Elders | a. Joint participation |
| 2. _____ Fellowship | b. Forsaking the assembling of saints |
| 3. _____ All spiritual blessings | c. Feed the flock |
| 4. _____ Sincere milk of the Word | d. Found in Christ and in church |
| 5. _____ Time of Christ's return | e. Helps us grow |
| 6. _____ Habit of some | f. Unknown |

Discussion

1. List ways we encourage and edify by attending?
2. How can attending help us in overcome day to day trials and temptations?
3. What things can be done to improve the attendance at this local congregation?

Homework: Make a list of those members were are absent this Sunday and Wednesday and contact them to see why and what you might do to assist them in their attendance.

My Responsibility To Prioritize

A farmer who once told his wife, as he tumbled into bed, "I'll plow tomorrow." "The next morning", as the story goes, "he started to lubricate the tractor. But he needed oil, so he went to the shop to get it. On the way, he noticed that the chickens had not been fed. He started for the crib to get some corn, but he found some sacks there which reminded him that the potatoes needed sprouting. He headed toward the potato-pit. In route, he spotted the woodpile and remember the shortage of kindling at the house. But he had to chop it first, and he had left his axe in the chicken coop. As he went for his axe, he met his wife who was feeding the pigs. With surprise, she asked, "have you finished the plowing already?" "Finished?" the farmer bellowed, "I haven't got time to get started." This farmer first needs to set priorities for his day.

Not only do we all need to see the necessity for a set of priorities in day to day life, but most of all a set of priorities based on our spiritual being.

HOW TO PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

➤ Recognize that God has Always Demanded First Place

When a Hebrew had his first grain at the beginning of the harvest he was required to give it to the Lord (Ex. 23:19). To offer God a sick lamb indicated a sick heart (Ex. 12:5; Mal. 1:13).

Christ's example was always "the Father first". He put us and our needs before His heavenly abode, comfort, and life (Phil 2:6f). He humbly submitted to God's Will putting it first, when he said, "*not My will but yours, be done.*"

Christ commanded that God's kingdom and His righteousness be given first place in our lives. "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33). Let God be first and let God worry about providing us the essentials of life of tomorrow (Mtt. 6:34).



➤ Budget Your Time

Time must be budgeted. Most of us learned this about money a long time ago. Jesus sought time in solitude with the heavenly Father before every important decision and action during His public ministry.

Jesus was not always playing catch-up. John Wesley wrote, "Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry, because I never undertake more work than I can go through with calmness of spirit." Perhaps, this is healthy advice.

➤ Examine Your Current Priorities (2 Cor. 13:5)

Do you often find yourself saying, "I plan to pray and study my Bible more just as soon as I can get my schedule under control, etc..." Ask yourself: What would others say our priorities are? What do we think about?. What do we talk about? How do we spend our time? How do we spend our money? What disturbs you the most? A soul lost in hell or a scratch on that new car?. Missing worship or missing a day's work? Your children late to Bible classes or late to school? The answer to these will help determine where your priorities really are.

➤ **Consider Your Soul's Value**

First place is always given to what is held to be most valuable. Sacrifices are made based on our priorities. An athlete gives up certain things which he values less, in order to gain the one thing which he values most! Your soul is more valuable than all the world. Jesus said to His disciples, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:24-26).

➤ **Choose the Good Part**

Martha is in the kitchen, Her sister, Mary, is sitting relaxed at Jesus feet. Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, *"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."* And Jesus answered and said to her, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:40-42). We need fewer Martha's and more Mary's. Setting proper priorities means we will make the best choices on what is the most important use of our time.

➤ **Choose Necessities**

The pharisees left off the necessities. For this Jesus condemned them saying, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"* (Mt. 23:23,24). They left undone the weightier matters of the law. They had a warped sense of values. It was foolish to devote all their attention to the gnat while ignoring the camel around which the gnats swarmed. Tithing was not wrong. Both should have been done. Both things were good, but what is more needful. If your tire is flat and the engine lacks oil, and the windows are broken out what good does it do to wash it. Some things in God's law are weightier than others. Not more righteous, but weightier.

➤ **Focus on The Goal of Life**

During a great drought a little boy was hear to pray in Bible class on Sunday Morning "Please, Lord send us rain, but please make it after the picnic." This fellow's focus was on the food more than the rain.

Focus is "adjustment for distinct vision." Man and God value things differently. Man focuses on the basis of what is more immediate and on the material merit. God focuses on the basis of spiritual and eternal values. Christians should be setting our affections on things above (Col. 4:1,2). Keep our eyes on Heaven as our goal.

PUTTING YOUR LIFE IN ORDER

⇒ **Material Things**

Jesus warned, *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses"* (Luke 12:15). All things are temporal (Jn. 6:27). As a disciple of Christ was must be willing to sacrifice all for to be a disciple of Christ. *"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:33).

⇒ **Job**

In putting Christ first many have made sacrifice in their jobs. Peter, Andrew, James and John left their fishing nets. Matthew left his tax tables. Luke left his medical practice. Paul left working for the high priest.

Yet, many are leaving God for the American Dream. Today, *"We worship our work; we work at our play; we play at our worship."* A man's work is important; but work is a means to an end, not an end within itself. The workaholic syndrome is finally becoming recognized for the curse it is.

All jobs are second in place to God. If we work upon a house, one day it will crumble. If we get a doctorate, one day the knowledge will be obsolete. If we create a lake, one day it will dry up. If we run a country, one day it will fall. If we save a life, one day it will die. If we fly a plane, one day it will be scrapped. If we build a business, one day it will fold. If we save a soul one day it will greet us in eternity. If we obey the gospel, we will live forever.

⇒ **Family**

Although, the family is important it is not more important than our relationship with Christ. To be a disciple, Jesus commanded, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"* (Lk. 14:26). This means that one loves Christ so much that in comparison it is as if we hate all others.

Our family priorities will show whether or not God is number one in our lives. A boy told the girl he was about to marry that she'd have to take second place in his life because he was married to the Lord first. Children learn priorities from their parent, whether or not the parents intended to teach them. Your priorities today will help determine whether or not your great grandchildren still striving to serve God. In a survey in U.S. News & World Report ranking the top eighteen most important institutions in America. TV came in 1st - religion last. More homes need to focus on the Bible as God's Guide rather than the TV guide.

⇒ **Church**

Christ's body is more important than yours. God's family is more important our family. God's work is more important than our work. God's house is more important than our house. God's budget is more important than ours (2 Cor. 8:5). If we can remember these important facts we will be able to give the church the proper place in our lives.

⇒ **Attendance**

How about starting off your week by giving God the first day. After all, the Lord's Day is the first day of the week? If God is truly first in our lives than how can we refuse Him a few hours a week to worship.

A recent Silver Medal winner in the Olympics recently said that no one focuses on winning second place. All good athletes admit they were going for the gold. Only Christians are content with giving God the silver metal.

Ask yourself, if you knew that \$100.00 was to be given to each person who attended worship services, would you arrange to assemble with the saints? Just where are your priorities on the first day of the week? The answer to that questions may well determine where your priorities are the rest of the week.

⇒ **Bible Study**

During the days of the Pony Express it took fifty men ten days to run the route from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California - a distance of 1,900 miles. To make the trip conserving weight was vital especially since postage was \$5.00 an ounce. Yet, each rider was issued a full-sized Bible joined the pony express and he took it with him despite all the scrupulous weight precautions. Is the Bible too heavy for your busy schedule?

REVIEW

Matching

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Christ | a. Must be budgeted |
| 2. _____ Seek first | b. Most valuable thing in the world |
| 3. _____ First grain of harvest | c. Always put His Father first |

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 4. _____ Time | d. Jews tithed of this |
| 5. _____ Soul | e. Kingdom of God and His righteousness |

Examining Your Priorities

Fill this out for self-examination purposes to see if you are truly putting God first in you life (Matthew 6:33). Please be honest with yourself when answering. Some of the answers will vary do in individual consideration. Just remember, the number one answer reflects who is number one in your life.

- Priorities in what you read. Place in the order of importance:
 _____ Reading the newspaper.
 _____ Reading the Bible.
 _____ Reading your read your mail..
 _____ Reading a novel.
- Priorities in where you go. Place in the order of importance.
 _____ Going to Work
 _____ Going to Church
 _____ Going to a party.
 _____ Going to visit the sick.
- Priorities in spending your money. Place in the order of importance.
 _____ Buying a video
 _____ Paying the bills
 _____ Contributing to God
 _____ Giving to the needy
- Priorities in spending your time. Place in the order of importance.
 _____ Watching a movie
 _____ Working overtime
 _____ Playing checkers
 _____ Worshiping God

True/False

- _____ Mary was busy in the kitchen and upset because Martha was listening to the words of Jesus and not helping.
- _____ Jesus condemned the Pharisees for tithing small seeds.
- _____ Our main goal in life is to reach heaven.

Discussion

- Explain the meaning of the command in Luke 14:33. Is it literal?

2. What made Mary's choice better than Martha's?
3. What job's will have the most lasting effects or results upon mankind?
4. How important is the Church? Why?
5. How can we make time for Bible study?

Homework: Make a list of you priorities for each day of the week and strive to see how well you can follow them in a week's time?

My Responsibility with Money

Author and financial counselor Ron Blue tells the story of visiting a small, rural village in Africa. Ron asked a native there what was the biggest problem facing his village. The man said, "Materialism." Ron was taken aback. He expected it to be the lack of food or medical attention, or perhaps problems with neighboring villages. He was shock at the answer. These villagers didn't have televisions or cars or cell phones - the sorts of things we associate with "the good life." But this villager told Ron, "If a man has a mud hut, he wants one made out of cow manure. If he has a cow manure hut, he wants a stone hut. If he has a thatch roof, he wants a tin roof. If he has one acre, he wants two. Materialism is a disease of the heart. It has nothing to do with where you live."

The love of money or materialism is putting things before relationships with people and God. It is a "disease" that is destroying our society. Our soul's salvation depends upon our ability and willingness to put possessions in their proper place. Here are several rules to remember regarding riches:

PUTTING MONEY IN PERSPECTIVE

→ **Seek Salvation Not Savings**

A prime example of rejecting salvation for possessions is found in the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-22). Here was a young man who came to Jesus with the right attitude and the right questions (17). He enquired of the right Person (18f). From whom he receive the right answer (21). However, he made the wrong decision and "went away grieved" (22), because of his many riches. His love for mammon hindered the Gospel (22-25), choked out the Word (Mt. 13:22) and endangered his soul. If you gain the whole world and lose your own soul you have gained nothing (Mt. 16:26). A true disciple must be willing to sacrifice all to follow Jesus (Lk. 14:33). He who dies with the most toys does not win, he losses everything.



→ **Seek True Wealth**

In I Tim. 6:6-10 We are warned that great wealth cannot be obtained through love of money.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Paul's recipe for great wealth is godliness plus contentment which will result in a great wind fall of gain. By seeking money many have found only misery.

→ **Seek Family Not Fortune**

Peace is greater than great prosperity. "Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full

of feasting with strife" (Pr. 17:1). Luther Burbank once said, "if we cared for our shrubbery as we do for our children we would soon be living in a jungle." A young couple today tries to accumulate in three years what took their parents thirty. Perhaps this is why so many mothers and fathers end up raising materialistic monsters.

→ **Seek to Do Good Not the Goods**

Material blessings are not only for our enjoyment, but for our employment. Rich Christians are commanded to *"be rich in good works"* (1 Tim. 6:18). After all, our riches will not follow us when we die, but our good works will (Rev. 14:13). If you have money do not focus our attention so much on the fine furnishings and toys it can buy, but on the people and souls it can help.

FINANCE TIPS FROM GOD

(Borrowed and Adapted from various authors like Chuck Swindoll)

In a speech Ronald Reagan defined a recession to be "when the man next door loses his job. A depression is when you lose your job and a panic is when your wife loses her job". Many families have reached the place where the wife's working is no longer an optional luxury, it's a necessity. Only a generation ago credit cards were unknown, car loans were a rarity, and mortgages were for G.I.s who were getting their starter homes. Before 1960 there was no such thing as public storage. A young couple today tries to accumulate in three years what took their parents 30 years to accumulate. More than sixty percent of all first-time home loans require two salaries to make the payments.

The Bible does not condemn the borrowing of money. True, some use Romans 13:8 in an effort to prove that all borrowing is prohibited. However, a close examination of the context will prove otherwise. The Word of God does give some firm financial tips to the wise. Most of these Biblical principles of debt and borrowing come from the book of Proverbs.

\$ The Debtor Is in Servitude to the One Who Lends to Him

Even if a debt is current (all payments up to date) the borrower is potentially in a position of servitude. *"The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender"* (Proverbs 22:7). Once upon a time in this country debtors could literally become prisoners. From a debtors' prison log we read: "Sara Wright is sentenced to debtors' prison for an indefinite period of time for habitual indebtedness." The sentence went on to describe her despicable crimes, such as charging food that she could not pay for at a merchant's store, charging dry goods at a department store, and signing for a loan with a local citizen without the ability to make restitution. The laws assumed that nobody was forced to borrow money - that people borrowed money voluntarily. The lender extended honor (money), and the borrower represented himself as trustworthy. Those who find themselves in debt become slaves to the money they borrowed. Many negative consequences can follow: crime, prison, ruined credit, foreclosure, divorce, no family time, etc.

\$ Avoid Surety

Surety means that you have taken on an obligation to pay without a specific way to pay it. *"A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge, and becomes surety for his friend"* (Pr. 17:18; cf. Ps. 37:21). The only way to avoid surety is to collateralize a loan with property to cover the indebtedness, no matter what. Credit car purchases have become the most common form of surety in our generation. In the event of a default, the return of the merchandise does not cancel the debt because the finance company has no interest in the merchandise.

\$ The Borrower Has an Absolute Commitment to Repay

To borrow money is to take an oath to repay it. The Bible warns men often to be careful before making vows. *"Better not to vow than to vow and not pay"* (Eccl. 5:5). In 1978 there were about 50,000 personal bankruptcies in our country. In 1988 there were nearly 600,000 personal bankruptcies in America.

About 500,000 a year choose bankruptcy as a way to avoid repayment. Yet the average indebtedness for couples in bankruptcy is only about \$5,000. In this generation with "situation ethics" being so widely accepted, it is easy to rationalize not paying a debt, especially when one's financial situation seems to be out of control. Many believe like the attorney for a couple in bankruptcy said, "Bankruptcy must be OK, or the government wouldn't allow it." Just because it is legal doesn't make it right. Furthermore, you still gave your word.

\$ Those Who Honor God with Their Money Are Blessed in Return

"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, ..." (Prov. 3:9,10). You can tell much more about an individual's dedication to God by looking at that person's checkbook than by looking at his or her Bible. Christians are to plan to give as they have been prospered upon the first day of each week (1 Cor. 16:2). God should occupy the first line of their budget.

\$ Those Who Make Riches Their Passion Lose Much More than They Gain

"Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Pr. 23:4,5).

When you've worked and worked to gain more and more, you may discover in the end an empty life that's made you really poor.

\$ Wisdom Gives Wealth Guidance

"Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her....How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver" (Pr. 8:10,11; 16:16).

You do not have to be wise to get money. However, wisdom is required if you are going to keep it and use it wisely. Since riches never made anyone more honest or generous or discerning, wisdom is a must.

\$ Increased Riches Bring Increased Complications in Life

Money can give one a false sense of security. *"The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own esteem. Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility" (18:11).* Riches may provide one with a sudden burst of new "friends". *"The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, but the rich has many friends" (14:20).* With increase comes an increased possibility of one becoming arrogant and proud. *"The poor man uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly" (18:23).* Temptations are more prevalent for those with wealth or at least they will experience different temptations. *"Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice, but a companion of harlots wastes his wealth" (29:3).*

\$ Money Cannot Buy Life's Most Valuable Possessions

Money will only buy things that are for sale...and happiness or a clear conscience or freedom is not among them. Priceless things in life are not for sale, such as, peace or love. *"Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (15:16;17),* Also money cannot purchase a good name. *"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold" (22:1).*

Money Can't Buy Everything

It can buy a bed, but not sleep.

It can buy books, but not brains.

It can buy food, but not an appetite.

It can buy a house, but not a home.

It can buy finery, but not beauty.

It can buy luxuries, but not culture.
It can buy amusements, but not happiness.
It can buy medicine, but not health.
It can buy religion, but not salvation.

Remember, it takes some Biblical sense to make good use of your cents.

REVIEW

Multiple Choice

1. Who was unwilling to give up all he had at the request of Jesus? a) Peter b) Judas c) rich young ruler d) all of these.
2. a) money b) the devil c) the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.
3. Rich Christians a) do not exist b) must give all they have to the poor c) be rich in good works.
4. "Better is a dry morsel with quietness, a) than a house full of feasting with strife b) a pocket full of money and a heart full of love c) an abundance of debts.

True/False

1. ____ All borrowing of money is prohibited in the Old Testament.
2. ____ Surety is a specific way to pay back the money you have borrowed.
3. ____ Since it is legal, bankruptcy must be right in God's eyes.
4. ____ Paying your debts should be the top consideration of your budget.
5. ____ Making riches your top priority in life will lead to an empty miserable life.
6. ____ If you are wise you will always have plenty of money and never be in need.
7. ____ New found wealth is often accompanied by new found friends.
8. ____ Money can give you a false sense of security.

Discussion

1. In your own words define "materialism".

2. What are some things money cannot buy?
3. Will there be any rich people who make it to heaven?

Homework: Make a budget.

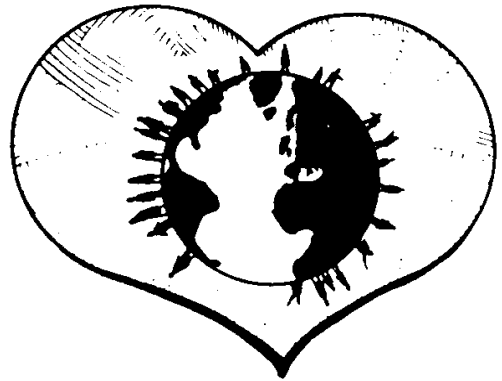
My Responsibility to Love

"Love" is a misused, misunderstood word. It has been commercialized and equated with sex. Robert Frost said, "There ought to be a quota on one's use of it."

The Bible speaks a great deal about "love". It tells us what love is in the great chapter on love: 1 Corinthians 13. We are also informed on who and what we are not to love. Christians are not to love themselves (2 Tim. 3:1,2); love pleasure (2 Tim. 3:4); love money (1 Tim. 6:10); love the world (2 Tim. 4:10); love preeminence (3 John 9); and love the praise of men (John 12:42,43). Our focus in this lesson is on the proper objects of love and how to love.

LOVE GOD

Jesus was in Jerusalem in the final week of His ministry when the events recorded in our lesson text took place. It was Tuesday of that week, the day that has been called "the great day of questions." Jesus dealt with five questions. Matthew records Pharisees and lawyers asking Jesus questions tempting or testing Him. Chief priests, scribes, and elders asked by what authority He worked. He refused to tell them, probably because of their unbelief. Pharisees and Herodians asked Him about giving God what was His, they marveled at His answer. Sadducees asked which of seven sisters married to a man in succession would be his wife after the resurrection. When He said none, they gave no response. A single scribe asked about the greatest commandment.



Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:28-34).

In many pagan religions, the relationship between a person and the deity that is worshiped is based on fear. Anyone who allowed a plurality of gods instantly and automatically set oneself apart from the people of God. Nobody whether scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, or ordinary child of Abram would have quarreled with the first segment of Jesus' answer or with what He said next. The Greek word for "lord" had several meanings. It could mean the owner of a thing; it could also mean master, one who controls another; it also was used to designate a sovereign ruler whose subjects surrendered control of their lives to Him.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4. It is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew word for "hear" and is the first word in the verse. The phylactery, a small leather box that the scribes wore fastened to the head or arm and contained a slip on which the Shema was written. Christ shows this command to love God mentioned in the Law of Moses has not changed just because we live in the Christian Age.

A person's duties begin with an unqualified love for God. We have managed to convince ourselves that we "fall" in love as accidentally as one might trip over an uneven break in the sidewalk. Loving God is a conscious, deliberate choice on our part. We have all seen two dreamy-eyed young people looking longingly at one another. We have all heard of the "look of love." When you love someone with all of your

heart, you think about them almost all of the time. You long to be with them. They are the priority in your life. We call this being "in love" and it is wonderful. With regard to our love for God, *"We love, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

Extent of our Love for God

♥ **With All Your Heart - Emotionally Involved**

The heart was associated with the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Since "mind" is already mentioned, this is dealing with the "emotions". What Jesus is saying is that we are to love the Lord without pretense. Love Him without reservation or just a portion of our devotion.

A young man proposed to his sweetheart as they sat overlooking a beautiful lake. "Darling," he said, "I love you more than anything else in the whole world, I want you to marry me, I'm not wealthy: I don't have a yacht or a Rolls Royce like Johnny Green, but I love you with all my heart." His sweetheart thought for a moment and then replied, "I love you with all my heart too, but tell me more about Johnny Green." In regard to our Christian commitment, how many of us are like this fickle young lady? Do we tell God we love Him and want to serve Him, and then carry on a flirtation with the world? Let us not say, "Tell me more about the world," but, "Tell me more about Jesus."

♥ **With All Your Soul - Eternally Focused**

The soul is one's spiritual essence. It is the part of one that is immortal - the I, the person who controls what one thinks and says and does. Love has been abused and watered down by a liberal mind set as a sentimental, syrupy gush about God. Our love is taking time for the eternal relationship. A. W. Tozer once said that, "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." Charles E. Hummel's *The Tyranny of the Urgent* was written 35 years ago. It says, "Don't let the urgent take the place of the important in your life." How easy it is for us, in our hectic world, to spend so much time dealing with pressing matters that we never take time for what is eternally important.

True love of God involves total commitment. Following a great victory, King Cyrus of Persia took as prisoners a noble prince, his wife, and their children. When they were brought into the leader's tent to stand before him, Cyrus said to the prince, "What will you give me if I set you free?" He replied, "I will give you half of all that I possess." "And what will you give me if I release your children?" continued Cyrus. "Your majesty, I will give you all that I possess." The king questioned him further, "But what will you give me if I set your wife at liberty?" Looking at the one he loved so dearly, the prince replied without hesitation, "If you will restore my wife to freedom, I will give you my life." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he released the entire family without asking recompense. That evening the prince said to his wife, "Did you not think Cyrus a very handsome man?" "I did not notice him," she answered, "Why, my dear, where were your eyes?" exclaimed her husband. She replied, "I had eyes only for the one who said he would lay down his life for me."

♥ **With All Your Mind - Thoroughly Considered**

The mind is the seat of our reason, knowledge, and wisdom. The word "mind" is not included in the passage in Deuteronomy 6:5. Its addition here emphasizes the place of the intellect in conversion and maturity in faith and life. We are not to serve God emotionally, while committing intellectual suicide.

Don't check your brains in at the door when you worship and serve God. You see, love is not just a momentary feeling; it is a logical and specific action. Loving Jesus does not simply mean turning cartwheels in the aisle. This love is not mindless and empty-headed. True love for Jesus manifests itself in every area of life. It is just as wrong to serve God intellectually, but with no emotion as it would be to love Him just out of our emotions.

♥ **With All Your Strength - Fully Lived Out**

Strength represents the whole person. Serve God emotionally and intellectually, but with no actual obedience requiring the exercise of strength (i.e., action) would not be keeping God's commandments and thus a negation of love. Loving God means we are going to have to place His will ahead of ours. It means that we may have to say no to some things that we might want to do. It means that we are going to have

to seek the Lord's Will and make it paramount in my life. It may mean that we can't go places others can go, watch what others watch or what they enjoy. God's greatest desire for us is to love Him. We demonstrate our love for God through keeping His commandments. This is the love of God (1 Jn 5:3). This is evidence that we love Jesus (Jn 14:15)

In sixteenth century England, Oliver Cromwell ordered that a soldier be shot for his crimes at the ringing of the evening bell. But that night at the fateful hour, no sound came from the belfry. The girl who was to be married to the condemned man had climbed up into the tower and had clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. Brought before Cromwell to give an account of her actions, she only wept and showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell was greatly impressed, and he said, "Your lover is alive because of your sacrifice. He will not be shot!" It doesn't take much of a person to be a lover of God - just all of him there is.

LOVE THE BRETHREN

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you a lover of truth? Do you love God? Do you love what is good and hate what is evil? Do you wish for all Christians to improve and prosper in life? Are you motivated to do good for others? If you can answer yes to all of these, then you can truly say you have love for the brethren.

To love fellow Christians involves more than mere lip service. It is interconnected and interdependent with many other things. According to John 13:34,35 you can only prove to the world that you are following Christ if you have the same kind of love for the brethren that He has shown by giving His life for all men. A study of Christ's love for others will reveal what your love should be. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* Christ gives his disciples a new commandment. This is not the first time they were told to love others by God. However, it is the first time they were told to do so in the likeness of Christ's love for mankind.

As a true disciple of Christ you will learn the love of Christ and apply that love to each other. By loving the sinner. By loving those who hate you. By loving in spite of one's health, physical appearances, personality, education, race, etc. Remember, Christ loves them and if you don't love them you are not a disciple of Christ.

According to the great chapter on love you cannot love the brethren, if you do not love the truth. Love *"does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth"* (1 Cor. 13:6). If you love the truth, you will love all others who uphold the truth. We often love those who share a mutual love with us. We love those who love us. We tend to love those who love the same things and same people. That is why it is so important that a father and mother love one another, because it reflects to their children that they are truly loved. Those who share the same faith, the same love for God and Christ, the same love for the brethren, the same love for the Word of God are easy for us to love.

My love goes out to those who stand for the truth and fight error at great cost. My expressions, thoughts, and attitudes of hate toward any brother who stands for the truth would demonstrate a hate for the truth.

Do you love your brother? Then prove it. Mere human testimony is no proof of your love for God's children. Anyone one can say the words: "I love you". *"Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* (1 Jn. 3:15-18). To say, "Why of course I love my brothers!" Doesn't prove it. You must show it. If I say I love my brother, but then, I refuse to encourage him when he is down, make fun and ridicule his personal characteristics, refuse to make friends with him, rejoice when he hurts, and feel hurt when he rejoices, then I haven't shown love. Nor could I show love if I burn with anger when he is honored and leap with joy when he fails, or go talk to others about something he is doing wrong, or said wrong, yet never be willing to go talk to him.

Sometimes we really do love our brothers, but simply find it difficult to show. Dropping your guard is hard. It leaves us vulnerable. There are many personal obstacles we must overcome to express our love to one another. Not to mention, the many obstacles to our love we see in others. Those people who are shy, lack self-esteem, are weak, burdened, or have a special personality, may find it harder to communicate their love for others. Others may find it hard to love them. Yet remember, love begins in the heart, moves through the mouth to the ears, and is planted in another's heart. *"Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones"* (Prov. 16:24). *"A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger"* (Prov. 15:1). Gossip, tactlessness, rudeness, cruel joking, and hard answers stir up hate in the hearts of men, not love.

Do you love your brethren? Then show it. Do you love the idea of going to heaven forever to be with God and fellow saints? Then love the brethren on earth now and you will be blessed with loving them forever in heaven. Think about this: God isn't going to allow two brothers into heaven if they have never learned to love each other on earth. He has reserved another eternal abode for those who hate.

LOVE THE TRUTH

A blacksmith's apprentice learned how to do just everything. Unfortunately, when he started out on his own in a distant village, he could do the simplest thing. Because the blacksmith failed to teach him how to spark the fire. We teach the mechanics of Christianity, but fell to spark the fire of love for God's truth. Paul spoke of those who will perish in unrighteousness, *"because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved"* (2 Thess. 2:10).

♥ **Meditating on the Word**

How long has it been since you have taken time to deliberately and seriously meditate? Maybe the fear of being categorized with the false doctrine of Transcendental Meditation or some Far Eastern idolatry have discouraged this act on the part of Christians. The lost art of the heart in the 20th century in true Biblical meditation. Meditation is not optional. The Psalmist wrote that a godly man's *"delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night"* (1:2). Paul commanded, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things"* (Phil 4:8).

♥ **Reading the Word**

Have you heard about William McPherson, who lost his hands and eyes even his hearing in an accident. He turned to the Bible in his distress, but could not read braille with his artificial hands. He discovered he could distinguish the characters with his tongue, although it took him many hours just to learn to read one letter. But through the next 65 years, with his tongue often sore and bleeding. He read the entire Bible through 65 times in this manner. Thus, putting many of us to shame.

♥ **Obeying the Word (Rom. 2:8)**

On the other hand, the wicked resist the truth (2 Tim. 3:8) and turn away from it (2 Tim. 4:4).

♥ **Speak it in Love**

"...speaking the truth in love...therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:15,25).

LOVE MYSELF

Loving self is not the same as that which Paul condemns in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 *"lovers of themselves"*. These are those who are self-centered and selfish.

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor “as thyself” (Mt. 22:37-39; 19:19). Paul and others taught this same commandment (Rom. 13:9; Js. 2:8). Paul tells us that the law is fulfilled in this command (Gal. 5:14) and that “*husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies, he who loves his wife loves himself*” (Eph. 5:28). The Golden Rule implies a love of self (Mt. 7:12).

To Properly Love Yourself...

♥ **You Will Take Care of Your Body**

You will eat and drink what is good for it. You will keep it clean, so it is less likely to become diseased. You will present your body in service to God (Rom. 12:1-2). Remember, the body was created by the Lord for the Lord and is His temple (1 Cor. 6:13; 18-20).

♥ **You Will Have a Healthy Self-Esteem**

A big difference exists between proper self-esteem and ungodly pride. Pride uses false measurements of self. Proper self-esteem depends on our worth based on a relationship with God. Proper self-esteem depends on humility. According to Micah 6:8 we are to walk humbly before God. Humility is not the same as humiliation or self-contempt. Humility enhances our humanity and makes us Christ-like. Humiliation diminishes our humanity and tempts us to forget we are made in God’s image. Proper self-esteem demands us not to think too highly of ourselves. “*For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself*” (Gal. 6:3).

♥ **You Will Take Care of Your Soul**

This part of self should be the most important part to have our concern. The body will die, the soul goes on. To love self, you will want what is best for the soul. What of this life is worth losing your soul over (Mt. 16:26,27; Rom. 2:6-11).

♥ **You Will Do What Is Best for Self**

God is the Creator of all things, He knows what is best for us, so let us heed His instructions through Jesus Christ.

REVIEW

Matching

- | | | |
|------------|------------------------|---|
| 1. ___ | 1 Corinthians 13 | a. Emotionally in love with God |
| 2. ___ | With all your heart | b. Intellectually in love with God |
| 3. ___ | With all your soul | c. What Jews called Deut 6:4 |
| 4. ___ | With all your mind | d. Great chapter on love |
| 5. ___ | With all your strength | e. Loving God with your eternal being |
| 6. ___ | Shema | f. Loving God with every bit or your effort |

True/False

1. ___ We are to love each other like Christ has loved us.

2. _____ Some people are harder to love than others.
3. _____ Just because someone up holds the truth does not mean you should love them.
4. _____ Meditating on God's Word is optional.
5. _____ Speaking the truth is more important than love.
6. _____

Multiple Choice

1. In the last days (2 Tim. 3:1f) men will be a) lovers of pleasures b) lovers of themselves c) both.
2. We are to love our neighbors and wives as a) God loves us b) as Christ loved John c) as we love ourselves.
3. Humility involves a) humiliation b) a proper estimation of self c) thinking lowly of ourselves.

Discussion

1. List are some things we are not to love?
2. Explain the relationship between love and obeying God's commandments (1 Jn. 5:3).
3. How is one to develop a healthy self-esteem?

Homework: Make a list of those you have trouble loving (or liking) and pray for them. List ways you can go about changing your attitude about them.