

2000 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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Mike@ministerministry.com

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January 4, 2000 CAKE CARE

Slowly the coins clinked upon the bare table as the man emptied his pockets. Next his wife emptied her pocket book. Then they looked under the couch cushions and searched all their dresser drawers but the stack was still a mole hill of coins for their mountain of a problem. Carefully, the husband counted the coins and looked bleakly at his wife as he announced, "Four dollars and eighty five cents."

No words were spoken but each knew the heart of the other. For years they had committed their lives to serving the Lord and confidently told others that God would supply their needs. Now this beggar's pile of coins was all they could muster to buy their groceries for a week. Heart broken, they left the coins on the table and went their separate ways.

As the Husband sat on the porch and stared into the distance, wondering what had gone wrong to make it so he no could longer support his family, his wife suddenly appeared again with a glow in her eyes and determination in her voice. She told her husband that she had been in the bed room praying and God had shown her how to multiply the money they had in order to meet their needs. She told her husband to go into town and use the money to buy the supplies necessary to make a cake. When he returned she immediately baked a cake. As soon as it was done she told her husband to go to town and sell the cake. The Husband then used that money to buy the ingredients necessary to make several more cakes. On his last trip to town that day he sold enough cakes to buy groceries for a week; and they never faced another shortage like that!

(Psa 37:25) "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." No matter how bleak things may look, God has provisions available for His children. Sometimes obtaining that provision is just as easy as baking a cake!

January 5, 2000 THOUGHTFUL THOUGHTS

As I read different books and magazines I sometimes find a sentence or phrase that "jumps out at me". Today, I would like to share some of these thoughtful thoughts with you in the hopes that they will be a blessing or challenge to you also.

- Courage is fear that has said its prayers
- Live so the preacher will not have to lie at your funeral
- When troubles come we can run away from them, fight against them, or soar above them. The question we should ask is not HOW can I get out of this but WHAT can I get out of this?
- Remember that Hope does not eliminate hurt. Even Jesus wept at the tomb of a loved one.
- What is the difference?
 - o between Atheists who support no church and members who will not support the one to which they belong?
 - o between skeptics who do not believe the Bible and negligent Christians who never read it?
 - o between those who do not believe in Sunday School and those who never attend Sunday School?
 - o between the people of the world and church members who live like the world? If it quacks like a duck, looks like a duck, and wants to hang around other ducks; then it has a hard job convincing me that it is an eagle!

January 11, 2000 CROSS LIGHTS

The Doctor said cancer and his heart felt like it would burst from his chest. This kind of thing was supposed to happen to someone else's wife. Surely there had been some mistake. This couldn't be happening to him. Slowly the shock spread across his mind and body. More test and final decisions were scheduled next week

On the drive home not a lot was said. Not a lot could be said. Life went on and day by day brought them closer to their Wednesday appointment when the love of his life would turn from a wife into a patient. Sometimes it did not seem real. Other times it seemed as if it was the only reality he knew.

For a long time he had met some men early each Tuesday morning at his church for a time of prayer. This Tuesday, when he arrived for prayer, no one else came. When he needed them most it seemed as if everyone had forsaken him. And when he went into the church, the lights would not work and he had to grope his way to the altar. Everything, it seemed, was against him.

As he fell on his face before God and poured out his heart suddenly the light behind the cross came on. As he gazed transfixed at the cross, suddenly the light left the cross, went to one side of the church and then slowly swept across the church to the other side. Startled into shock, he watched as the light came back to the cross and slowly faded away.

He didn't remember how long he gazed at the cross but suddenly he realized that it had become daylight outside and the church had brightened enough until he could see objects clearly. He walked up to the cross and gazed behind it. Unknown to him, the cross was being repaired and someone had taken the light from behind it! Now all he can tell you is that the light from the cross was real; as real as the fact that the doctors could find nothing wrong with his wife the next morning!

January 12, 2000 TRASH CAN TRASH

One of the first things I noticed when I began preparing for my new job as Promotional Director was that there were no trash cans to be found. We were in the process of renovating the offices and all the trash cans had been moved. Every time I had something to throw away I had to hunt and hunt to find a place to put trash.

I vowed that when I became the director every room would have a trash can so one of the first things I did on my first day at work was to go by a store and purchase a large number of trash cans. That brought up an interesting problem. When we began putting out the new trash cans we found the old trash cans hidden in a closet. But, after looking at how bad the old cans looked, I decided to trash the old trash cans and keep the new ones.

As I was throwing away the old trash cans a "weird" thought struck me. What turns a trash can bad? These cans were bought to perform a useful function and had done so for many years. Now, suddenly, they were being cast away as no good.

Several factors contributed to their demise but two stand out- abuse and failure to keep clean. Was that what Paul had in mind when he wrote 1 Cor 9:27 "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Don't abuse the temple of God (your body) or allow it to become so dirty until it is only fit for the trash heap. What a horrible end to your life that would be!

January 18, 2000 GOOD ENOUGH FOR HELL

Two men went to the Temple to Pray. One looked up toward God and told God what a great man he was. The other hung his head in shame and repentance as he called on God for mercy. Jesus said this second man went home justified.

That's surprising when you look at the "religious" qualifications the first man had. As a Pharisee, he was good in the Eyes of the average Church, good in the Eyes of his Neighbors, and good in his own Eyes (He was convinced everything was alright). Everyone who knew him thought he was a "good old boy".

Not only was he Good, he also believed in God (Without realizing that the devils also believe in God and tremble- James 2:19). This belief in God caused him to Pray to God, come to Church regularly, Tithe all he had, and even Fast twice a week.

But the Publican, who could only cry out to God for mercy, went home justified rather than this Pharisee. The reason, the Publican came to God with faith in God's Grace while the Pharisee came trusting in his own Goodness. The Pharisee was good enough to meet the standards of the world and the standards of society; but, sadly, he didn't meet God's standards. This made the Pharisee good enough to make it into Hell, but not righteous enough to make it into Heaven.

Being good enough is not good enough. A person is saved by grace through faith and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God. It is not based on the good works you do, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9). Don't get caught boasting instead of believing.

January 19, 2000 GOOD GOALS

By this time many have abandoned that diet they began the first of the year. It was a good excuse to allow them to over indulge during the holidays but it is not so much fun during the bleak first weeks of January. The spirit was willing but the flesh is weak.

Dieting goals come and go but let me share a good goal with you that is obtainable; because it is a Godly goal. It is the goal the Apostle Paul gave his "son" in the faith, Timothy--"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Tim 1:5). Paul is telling Timothy that a good Life goal has a three-fold foundation.

1) Love from a pure heart. This foundation does not take money or talent. It simply means allowing the love of God through Christ Jesus to spring up and take root in your heart. And the obtaining of this goal will delight others as well as yourself.

2) A Good Conscience. This simply means living in such a way that you don't have to worry about anyone looking in the window of your life. Purity of life will bring great peace to your heart.

3) A Sincere Faith. This goal means you actually live what you believe about God, the Bible, and godly living. Christianity is not a religion you have but a life you live.

These are good goals; and if they are put into practice in your life they will change your life in ways a diet never could!

January 25, 2000 CONCISE CHRISTIANITY

If someone ever asks you to give a quick comprehensive explanation of Christianity then take them to Titus 2:11-14- “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

Christianity is God coming to man; not man coming to God. It is not about our abilities but His grace (unmerited favor). Mankind was dead in trespasses and sins and God brought life. Mankind was blinded in iniquity and God sent the light. Mankind hid from God in his nakedness and shame so God became a man in order that we could be clothed in His righteousness.

Christianity is a changed life- It teaches us that ungodly works and lustful living lead to agony, anguish, and animosity while living according to God’s precepts lead to peace, prosperity, and lasting pleasure.

Christianity is hope. Hope that the God who first came to redeem us will soon come to receive us unto himself. Hope that the injustice and inhumanity of this present world will one day be replaced with a righteous rule in which the “good guy” wins and evil is put down.

And, above all, Christianity is Christ; who gave himself for us. Christ is the source of our salvation, the example of our lives, and the goal of our future. We no longer try to live correctly in order to meet the requirement of some law. We live righteous lives because that allows us to maintain unbroken fellowship with Christ; and we have no greater goal.

That is what Christianity is all about; and it only a prayer away from you today!

January 26, 2000 HEAVENLY HOME GOING

Slowly her breathing became more shallow and less frequent. There was no struggle at the end, it just dawned on everyone that there had been an abnormally long time since the last breath. The nurse was called and she confirmed what we all knew, another child of God had finally made it home.

The family all gathered around the bed and we prayed a prayer of thanksgiving for the life of this person and asked God to fulfill His promise that the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) would bring peace and strength to this family during this time. Then a marvelous thing happened. Among the tears of sorrow there began to spring smiles of joy as we remembered treasured moments with this person. We remembered her smile, her “cute” sayings, her companionship, and her strength.

Finally, we began to talk about where she was at right now. The body we knew so well was on the bed before us but the real person (her spirit) had departed to be with the Lord. While we sorrowed, she was walking on streets of gold and viewing wonders beyond the imagination of human minds. And we all looked forward with longing to the day when we could see each other again without pain, sorrow, or sickness.

If you were to ask me why I labor in the work of the Lord I would have to point to times like this. Because of Christ, lives are changed and death is swallowed up in Victory. Glory!

February 1, 2000 THE MISSING ONE

Maybe he was sick. After all, it was the flu season and many were struggling with colds and flu. Maybe he had to work. You know how it is now, more and more businesses are staying open on Sunday. Maybe he had a really good excuse; or maybe he was just plain sorry and slept late! But, whatever the reason, the church I was visiting would have had perfect attendance in Sunday School if just one more person would have come.

I called this person “the missing one” and pointed out some very important information about him. First of all, this “missing one” should be an object of great concern. Jesus told about a man who had 100 sheep but when one turned up missing he left the 99 in the fold and went seeking “the missing one”. Many times we are so happy with the fact that almost everyone is in their place until we never contact “the missing one” and they wander into the wilderness to be devoured by the wolves.

“The missing one” should also be the object of great compassion. I have ten fingers but if one of them hurts then it affects all of my hands; and the rest of my body. When one part of the “body” of Christ is missing it has an impact on every other part of the body. Someone else has to work harder or something in the church goes lacking because of “the missing one”. Rather than scorn them or reject them we should seek to get them back into their place so the body can function as it should.

When services convene at your church this week make sure you are not “the missing one”. And especially make sure that when the roll is called up yonder that you are not “the missing one”!

February 2, 2000 TRANSFORMING TALENT

Don't get me wrong, she was an attractive young lady to begin with. She probably had many invitations for dates and would have been a good “catch” for any young man. But she was not someone you would immediately label as a special beauty.

But then she began to sing; and the transformation was astonishing. Suddenly, her face radiated energy and enthusiasm and she took on a special glow that turned her from a pretty wall flower into a sparkling rose of exceptional beauty. Through some special process, when she began to sing about the Lord, it seemed as if her entire being was transformed from the normal earthly appearance into something quite extraordinary.

The Bible tells of another time when something like this happened. Moses had led the children of Israel from captivity in Egypt on a freedom march into the desert. Then God called him to the top of a mountain in order to meet with God and be given the laws and commandments the children of Israel would need to govern their life and conduct.

When Moses came down from that mountain his face had such a glow until it was recognizable by everyone he met. That is basically what was happening with this young lady. When she began to sing about the Lord and His blessings, her face and countenance were transformed by the Spirit of God. I wonder, do others see this glow when YOU serve the Lord??

February 8, 2000 **WHY CHRIST CAME**

The most important information you will ever learn is about why Christ came to earth. The Bible lists 4 distinct reasons why Jesus would leave Heaven and come to earth:

1) Jesus came to **SHOW US GOD**- (John 14:9) "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" God is no longer a principle we study, or a religion we practice. He is a person we know and love. Jesus showed that God is concerned about our food, our feelings, and our family. He showed that God is more concerned with people than with projects; and, by seeing how God would treat people, we learned how we should live.

2) Jesus came to **SAVE SINNERS**- (1 Tim 1:15) "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Jesus did not come just to show us how to be better; He came to tell us we must be born again. He announced that nothing we could do would pay sin's debt; and then He paid it for us!

3) Jesus came to **DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL**- (1 John 3:8) "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." Jesus has the power to set sin's captives free and to defeat Satan's attacks on God's people.

4) Jesus came to **ABOLISH DEATH**: (2 Tim 1:10) "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:" Death can no longer dominate me. It is no longer the darkness of despair: it is simply a door to be with God.

That is why Christ came to earth. But has He come into your heart?

February 9, 2000 **WRONG LANE**

It all happened right in front of me. The lady in the car pulled out from the school and you could see that she was really quarreling with her children. In fact, she spent more time looking at them than she did looking at the road. And that is where the problem came in.

Because this woman was so engaged with her children, she evidently forgot that she was pulling out onto a four lane road and she started going the wrong way in the fast lane! I blinked by lights and waved at her but she sped past me still busily engaged in conversation with her children. Behind me cars were honking and lights were flashing but the last time I saw this woman she was still lost in her own world of child conversation- an accident just waiting to happen.

I think about that lady sometimes while I am preaching. God has given me a message of deliverance and salvation for people who are going the wrong way. I try my best to warn them that the way they are going will lead to great troubles and eternal pain.

The problem is not that these people are against God or unconcerned with the future. The problem is their preoccupation with something that blocks out the warning I am giving them. Sadly, many will remain preoccupied, ignore the warnings, and continue down the road to ruin; and the results will be horrible beyond words.

February 15, 2000 COMMITMENT'S COST

It is an old story but it is worth repeating. A pig and a chicken were walking down the road together. They met a man who was dying of hunger. The chicken told the pig that they should do something to help this hungry man and suggested a ham and egg breakfast. The pig replied, "For you that would be dedication. For me that means total commitment!"

I fear we have too many chickens in our churches when it comes to the matter of commitment. They see the problems, and they want to make a difference, but they are never willing to go beyond dedication to the place of total commitment. Maybe it is time we redefined commitment for them.

Commitment is not Complacency. Commitment involves active dedication to the work and will of God that requires more than showing up for Church two or three times a week.

Commitment is not Coercion. Commitment is not doing the right thing simply because someone forces you, or embarrasses you, into performing a certain function. Spurgeon said one time that he doubted a man's conversion if the man's will had not yielded to God; and I tend to agree.

Commitment is not Community. Commitment is not doing something simply because everyone else is doing it that way. Christian commitment means denying self, taking up a cross, and following Christ. The broad way that the crowd travels leads to destruction.

Check up your life today. When God shows you a need do you commit to "laying an egg" or do you give everything you have?

February 16, 2000 LIVING ON THE LEVEL

Have you ever seen a washing machine dance? It is not a pretty sight!

My wife and I recently moved into an unfurnished mobile home. When we put our washing machine into place and started to wash some clothes it "danced" all over the utility room. After much investigation and aggravation, we found that the back legs on the machine had become unscrewed during the move and the machine was very unlevel.

Have you ever seen a person dance around righteous living? It is not a pretty sight. And, normally, the reason for their problems is that they have become "unlevel". They need to check at least two "legs" in their spiritual life so they can get back to level living.

First, they need to make sure their life is consistently clean. It is hard to live on the level when your life is a roller coaster of doing right one moment and doing wrong the next. Christlike character in the home and at work, as well as at church, will stabilize your life.

The second leg to a stable life is complete commitment to Christ. As long as you are dedicated one day and lukewarm the next your life will never level up. You must commit to Christ completely or you will spend your days "dancing" around the things that really matter in life- and that is not a pretty sight. I think about that lady sometimes while I am preaching. God has given me a message of deliverance and salvation for people who are going the wrong way. I try my best to warn them that the way they are going will lead to great troubles and eternal pain.

The problem is not that these people are against God or unconcerned with the future. The problem is their preoccupation with something that blocks out the warning I am giving them. Sadly, many will remain preoccupied, ignore the warnings, and continue down the road to ruin; and the results will be horrible beyond words.

February 22, 2000 SHAWN'S MONEY

Shawn had been working and was doing fairly good. Then, can you believe this, a car ran into the business where he worked and it had to shut down. Now he was trying to help his dad on some home repairs while he tried to find something else to do; and things were getting pretty tight.

In the process of repairing the home a set of encyclopedias had been set out on the porch and covered over. Sadly, the cover blew off, rain blew in, and the entire set of encyclopedias was rendered worthless. His dad told him to simply throw the encyclopedias into the truck so they could be carried to the dump. He started to pick them up and throw them away when he noticed the fire out back where they were burning some trash. Since he had a little time he decided to rip the pages out of the encyclopedias and burn them rather than throw them into the dump.

As he ripped pages to throw into the fire suddenly something caught his eye just before he threw it into the fire. He looked and it was an envelope addressed to him. Curious, he saw that it had not been opened. When he opened it he found a ten dollar bill in a card congratulating him on his graduation. Isn't it wonderful how the Lord finds ways to supply our needs!

Now hear the rest of the story. Shawn had graduated from high school over 10 years before and that letter had been in the encyclopedia the entire time. The day he found it was his birthday and it was sent to him by a lady who had just died 5 days before this! He thinks she reminded the Lord about it so it could be used to meet his needs. What do you think?

February 23, 2000 DON'T KNOW; DEPART

Sometimes what they say is not so- "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Mat 7:21-23)

What an awful feeling it must be when you are finally found out! They "played the game" by professing and prophesying and performing wonderful works but they never came to know Jesus Christ as savior. They were religious but lost.

What a warning this should be to us. We see wonderful things happen and we think it is the man. These people preached, cast out devils, and did wonderful works but it all happened because it was done in the name of Jesus. The power was in the name, not in the person.

What an admonition this should be to us to make our calling an election sure (2 Peter 1:10). How earnest we should be to make sure we are in a relationship with Christ instead of a religion with a church. I can't think that anything more horrible could happen to a person than for them to kneel before the Lord and instead of Him saying, "Well Done" He would say, "I don't know you!". I'm glad I'm sure that I'm sure that I am SAVED.

February 29, 2000 POTASSIUM PROBLEM

It has been a long day of travel. I began the morning driving nearly thirty miles to the hospital in Pensacola where a member was having surgery. Following that, I drove over to Mobile, Alabama to see another member. Now, the day that began before daylight was ending after dark in a hospital in Atmore, Alabama as I visited one of my “senior saints” who was hospitalized there.

I was sort of glad this person was the last to visit on this busy day because she was always a joy to visit. In spite of her sickness and her hospital stay she always had a smile and an encouraging word to share with anyone who came by to see her.

We enjoyed some fellowship for a while, had prayer, and I was just about to leave when she said she needed a drink of water. The nurse decided to roll her bed up so she could drink more easily but when she did this lady’s neck rolled over and she went into a dead faint. I really thought she had passed away!

The nurse quickly called the doctors and the emergency staff and told me to call the family immediately. After several phone calls, I paced the hall and prayed as I awaited the family. Just about the time the first family member arrived the nurse came out of the room to tell us everything was alright and the situation was not so serious after all. All that had happened was that this lady’s potassium level had dropped too low and it had sent her body into shock.

That reminds me of what happens when a person’s spiritual level drops too low. Suddenly, a joyful, encouraging Christian can look as if they are about dead! And it brings anxiety to everyone around them. It was amazing to see the difference in this lady when she got her potassium level back up; and you will be amazed at the difference it will make in your life when you bring your spiritual level back up to where it is supposed to be.

March 1, 2000 SEEING EYES

I had taken my car to a car dealer for some repairs and it was taking a lot longer than expected to get it fixed. I brought my Bible and some study material and I spent the morning catching up on some reading and studying. Now it was almost noon and the car was still not fixed.

Right beside the dealership was a wooded area so I decided to walk some in the woods and stretch my muscles. I had not walked very far before I came to a large clearing surrounded by the woods. On one edge of the clearing was an old rusty car and curiosity compelled me to check it out.

As I was looking at this car, suddenly I felt as if I was being watched. I glanced around and did not see anyone at first but the feeling persisted and I looked some more. This time I saw a hunter standing in the shadows directly across the clearing. I waved at him and headed back to the dealership to see if my car was ready.

As I was walking back through the woods it seemed as if the Lord spoke to me. Many times I go about my daily duties without consciously thinking about the Lord. Sometimes, however, I suddenly “sense” His presence and it stops me in my tracks. Nothing “physical” happens but, just like I felt the stare of this hunter, so I feel the Lord’s eyes upon me. What a joy, and a comfort, it is to “feel” His eyes watching and caring for me. And what a constraint to avoid evil to know He sees all I do.

March 7, 2000 YOUR PART IN THE PLAN

I could not use my mobile phone the other day. The battery was almost dead. The battery was low because I could not charge it. I could not charge it because my battery charger had a broken wire. I could not repair the wire because I had loaned my solder to someone and they had not returned it. And so I could not use my mobile phone to make a call I needed to make.

Sadly, this same scenario is played out in many churches week after week. The choir would have been a tremendous blessing to the service but all the Altos decided to miss church this Sunday. Because the choir did not sing as it should the congregation lost focus on the service and their minds wandered during the sermon. Because he was obviously not making contact with the people during his message the discouraged pastor failed to preach with power and persuasion. Because the preaching was so poor the lost man who had come to church seeking something to change his life did not feel any conviction and so was not converted.

This lost man went home without Christ and the inner anger he felt drove him to curse his children and beat his wife. The oldest boy in the family finally grew so frustrated until he picked up a gun and shot his dad. Seeing the police cars and ambulance at the home caused a person who sang Alto in the choir of the local church to investigate the situation. As she gazed on the dead body, the weeping mom, and the struggling boy, she asked herself, "Why couldn't our church have done something to help this family before the situation got this bad! It is such a shame those people at church don't care for others as they should."

March 8, 2000 SELF ROBBERS

The three men had struggled for days in the desert heat and now their water was almost gone. As dusk began to fall across the landscape one of them spotted a cave among some rocks. With their last energy they staggered into the cave; but found it only contained rocks and sand. They decided to spend the night and attempt to go on the next morning.

Each man had a precious few swallows of water in his canteen so they guarded them jealously. Soon two of the men were sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. One man, however, had a plan. He doubted they had enough water for all of them to make it out of the desert so he decided to steal some of the water from the other men while they slept. He crawled around the dark cave and felt among the rocks and sand until he finally found a canteen. Quickly and quietly, he took a long swallow and almost drained the canteen. Then he eased the canteen back where he had found it and crawled back through the darkness to his place of rest.

Daylight shone its fingers of light into the cave and the men stirred to begin another day. Then is when the awful truth dawned on the thief. As he lifted his canteen from its hiding place he found it was just an empty container. In the darkness of the cave he had crawled around and stolen water from his own canteen!!

God gives each of us a "canteen" of precious moments and opportunities in our life. Don't steal them and use them for the devil. Life is mighty dry without the water of life!

March 14, 2000 WAR DISTRACTIONS

I Kings 5:3 “David...could not build an house unto the name of the Lord his God for the wars which were about him on every side,...”

David longed to build a temple for God but the wars that had to be fought to secure his kingdom kept him distracted. I wonder how many Christians also have “wars” that distract them from building the work of God.

Some Christians are at war with Self. They are constantly fighting the lust that burns them or the anger that defeats them or the bitterness that binds them and so they never have time to devote to building the Lord’s work. If they would only crucify “Self” and allow Christ to rule and reign in their heart and life then the house of God would show tremendous growth.

Sadly, some Christians are at war with other Saints. They are so busy destroying what others have built until they never have time to build anything for God. Their life is so consumed with making sure every “t” is crossed until they forget the Cross is the “t” they should be majoring on!

Thankfully, some Christians are at war with Satan over the souls of men. They realize that the “war” they are fighting is not a distraction from building God’s Kingdom; but is a part of building that very kingdom. They have learned, like Nehemiah, to have a spear in one hand and a tool in the other (Neh 4:17) so that Satan is defeated at the same time the walls are built for God.

The most important job you will do during your life time is to build the Kingdom of God. Don’t allow Satan to distract you into defeat.

March 15, 2000 CONFIDENT CHRISTIANITY

The Lord told the nation of Israel one time that “in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”(Isa 30:15). Christians need to realize that the same principle applies to life today. People in the world are under constant stress and pressure and they are looking for something that is stable and secure. And, of course, Christians have that stability in their relationship with Christ.

Let’s look at three reasons Christians can face the chaos and confusion of life with confidence:

First- We have the Lord on our side and He is able to handle anything that comes our way: Ps 27:1,3 *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.*

Second- The Holy Spirit lives within us to enable us to be more than conquerors: (2 Cor 5:5-6) *Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident,*

Third- We have God’s promise that He will give us the ability to deal with anything life throws at us: (Phil 1:6) *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:*

Be a Confident Christian today. God still reigns!

March 21, 2000 THE CEMENT GOD

It is wonderful having the Lord as a landlord! After thirty years of living in a parsonage, my wife and I recently moved into a mobile home. We prayed long and hard about where God wanted us to live and what He wanted us to live in. I told people all during our search for a home that if Mike Jones brought a home then Mike Jones would have to pay for it but if God brought our home then God would care for it- and I sure would rather let God care for it than Mike Jones!

God wondrously worked in every phase of our new home; from someone giving us an acre of land, to God directing us to the home He thought best for us, to the supernatural circumstances that worked through the permits and problems of getting the home set up. We did a tremendous amount of work ourselves but God opened the way for us.

One of the remaining problems, however, was the fact that our home sits in the middle of a field and it is very boggy and messy when it rains. On a recent Saturday night my wife and I returned home in the rain. As we sat in the car waiting on the rain to slack up my wife suddenly turned to me and said she wanted to pray and thank God for the cement pad she was going to get!

The next day I spoke at home coming at Mill Branch FWB Church. Following the service the pastor called my wife and I to the front of the church and presented us a check for \$3000 to be used to purchase a cement pad! And then he told us that they had received an offering for this money a month before we came!

Thank God that He cares about cement; and that He listens to the prayers of my princess!

March 22, 2000 AGONIZE OR AUTOPSY

The decision for the Church today has basically come down to this- Agonize or Autopsy! Either the Church begins to agonize with God for the purifying fire and the life changing power of the Holy Spirit or it will soon spend its time doing an autopsy on dead and dying churches.

Prosperity has enabled us to build ultra-modern facilities and employ ever larger staffs but lukewarm living by the members and leaders of our churches have turned these buildings into monuments to man's achievements instead of temples where we worship a holy God. Society grows ever sicker, sin is running rampant, homes are being destroyed; and all the church can do is promote another man made program or seek a worldly consultant to explain why people aren't attending church or why church members aren't making a difference in today's society.

When will we learn? What must God do to get this lesson home to our hearts? To try to do the work of God without the power of God is like trying to empty the ocean with a pitchfork; you will work yourself to death and never accomplish anything!

It is not our programs that must change but our prayer life. We don't need new methods; we need men created anew by the transforming power of God. But churches don't want this solution because it involves dedication to God and death to self. And without this agonizing prayer we better learn to do autopsies!

March 28, 2000 FEET WORSHIP

Did you know that the size of your foot is the distance from your wrist to your elbow? Did you know that the cause of all the murmuring when the children of Israel journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land was the fact that the women had to wear the same shoes for 40 years! (Deut 29:5 - And you know I am just kidding about the murmuring). Did you know that God said Edom was the place He would put His shoe (Ps 108:9)?

Did you know that the special place of worship for a child of God is at the Feet of Jesus? When the demon possessed man of Gadara (Mark 5:1) was delivered from his awful situation the people of that country found him at the feet of Jesus. When Martha fumed about her sister's lack of work in caring for the strangers she was rebuked because Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). And did you know that one day we will all bow at His feet because "God also hath highly exalted Jesus, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:9-11)

Why don't you get on your knees today and thank God you are on your feet? Why don't you quit telling God how to run the world and start sitting at the feet of Jesus so God can bring the rest to your soul you so desperately need? And why don't you stop listening to Satan and start living like a child of God who knows that "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." (Rom 16:20)

March 29, 2000 DO YOU TOUCH HIM?

"Who touched my clothes?" What a weird question. The disciples looked at Jesus and wondered if he was having a sun stroke! "Look at the crowd thronging you." they said. "How can you ask about who has touched you?"

But Jesus knew the difference between the "throng" of the crowd and the "touch" of a need. Those who brushed against Him in the throng were simply part of the crowd. The one who really touched Him caused "virtue" to go out of Him (Mark 5:30); and this virtue brought healing and relief to a woman who was at the end of her rope.

Many people attend church each week. They come in with the crowd, brush against Jesus during the service, and leave with the same ache in their heart and trouble in their soul. If asked why they were "none bettered but rather grew worst", they would say that the preaching was not adequate or the choir was off key. They might even say they "enjoyed" the service; but their heart still aches and their soul is still troubled.

Every so often, however, someone with a need really touches Jesus! Their faith meets the hem of His garment and something supernatural and special happens. And that person is never the same again.

Church will be going on this Sunday. Will you be part of the throng; or will you really touch Jesus??

April 4, 2000 SERMON SUCCESS STRATEGIES

1) Do God's work but don't try to do God's job- Jesus said, "I will build my church". Don't fall into the frustration of trying to raise the dead (sinners are dead in trespasses and sin) or make people "do better" in your own strength. The word of God is your weapon. The Spirit of God is your power. You are just an instrument for God to use. Don't forget that.

2) Work by Faith- God does not always "pay up on Friday". Work with the realization that God said, "My word will not return void". Don't judge your success by what you can see. Trust God to use His message in His way to accomplish His work.

3) Don't box in believers- God does not make "cookie cutter Christians". We are all part of the body of Christ; but one is a thumb while another may be a knee. One size, or one sermon, does not always fit all.

4) Climb on the cross before you climb into the pulpit. The pulpit is not a barrier to hide behind so a preacher can say things he does not have the courage to say in a face to face conversation. You go behind that sacred desk as an ambassador for the God of Heaven; it is not your private soap box!

5) Don't let the bleating of the ninety and nine make you forget the little lost lamb. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Don't ever make this less than the main goal of your ministry. Deal with the other needs but focus on this priority.

April 5, 2000 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MAN

(2 Cor 7:2) "Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man."

Second Corinthians is the most personal of the writings of Paul. He shares more of his heart, and his heartaches, in this letter than in any of his other writings. In the middle of this book, as he defends himself against some character accusations, he gives this short definition of the characteristics you should look for in a godly man.

1) We have wronged no man- A good man does not deliberately do harm to others. He seeks to do them right instead of wrong!

2) We have corrupted no man- Not only had Paul not done physical harm to others, he had never sought to lead them to live wrong. Every man has people he influences. He should be extremely careful about the attitude and actions he leads others to emulate.

3) We have defrauded no man- One translation of this is "we have cheated or taken advantage of no one". A man of character is someone you can trust. His word is his bond. He is someone you can rely on to give you the best advice, and best price, possible.

Do you know men of this character? Are YOU one?

April 11, 2000 YOU AND THE FIRE

There are three questions every person needs to answer concerning their relationship to fire.

First, Are you in the midst of the Fire? Peter talked about the “fiery Trials” that we all must face (1 Pet 4:12 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:”). Depending on your reaction to these trials, they will either purify you or destroy you!. When you are going through fiery trials just remember that, like the three Hebrew children, there is someone in the fire with you who is able to bring you through without even the smell of fire about you!

Secondly, Is the Fire in the midst of you? When the disciples walked with Jesus following His resurrection they felt a burning deep in their heart (Luke 24:32). If you are going to be effective in your daily living for Christ then you need the fire of God burning in your heart to motivate and reassure you. Our God is a consuming Fire (Heb 12:29) but He can only burn away that which we give Him access to.

Finally, the most important question you will ever answer concerning the fire is this. Will you miss the fire? “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”(Rev 20:15). Is your name in the Book of Life?

April 12, 2000 WHO ARE YOUR HEROS?

During the height of his basketball career everyone wanted to “be like Mike” because of his tremendous talent and abilities. As Christians, we have some “Heroes” we should emulate also. If I could pick several people to be like, I think I would start by choosing these.

I want to walk with God like Enoch. What a joy it would be to have a daily Fellowship walk with the Lord that was so close and personal until one day He would just say for me to come home to His house and stay forever!

I want to be a friend of God like Abraham. Can you imagine how exciting it would be to be such a close friend of God until He would not make a major decision without contacting me about it first! (Gen 18).

I want to be close to the heart of God like David (Acts 13:22). I want to love the lost as God loves them. I want to crave holiness in the way God craves purity. And I want to sense the heart of God so closely until I never disappoint or fail Him.

Finally, I want to find Grace in the eyes of God like Noah. In the midst of a wicked world that constantly tempts and tries me I need to know that God looks beyond my faults and sees my needs. I know His love, I enjoy His Friendship, but I need His grace.

Everyone has people patterns that guide areas of their life. Are your “heroes” making you look “cool” or are they making you more Christian?

April 18, 2000 MOST MISERABLE MAN

(1 Cor 15:19) "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

Isn't it strange that the Bible describes the world's most miserable man as one who has hope in Christ; but only in this world! I would have thought the most miserable man in the world would be a man who "looks for love in all the wrong places" or who is a slave to alcohol, drugs, or some other sin. But the Bible declares the most miserable man to be someone who has a false knowledge, and therefore a false hope, of Christ.

A "Jesus" who is only a good moral example or a powerful teacher will not bring eternal life; or abundant life! Many people are readily willing to admit that Jesus died on the Cross but fail to realize that if the tomb was not empty then the cross had no effect! That is why these "Christians" go around with sadness on their face; there have no real joy in their heart!

Christianity without the empty tomb is a religion that binds us to rules instead of setting us free to really enjoy life with the help, and the hope, we need. Without the resurrection, and the future promises that come with it, the present problems we face will simply overwhelm us.

If you have "tried Christianity" and found that it failed you, let me encourage you to go beyond Christ's payment for your sins on the cross. Come to the empty tomb and turn your misery into the marvelous joy of a person who has not only been forgiven of his past but has also been empowered to live in the present. And, best of all, someone who has the assurance that there is life beyond this life and an eternity to rejoice with God.

April 19, 2000 PROBLEM SOLVING POWER

There are three great problems that Christians face today.

1) **WEARINESS.** Most people are going at such a break neck speed in their daily life until it has become a common thing for many of them to become "weary in well doing". Something has to give in their life, and, all too often, it means they give up their work for God.

2) **WORLDLINESS.** The world, the flesh, and the devil all combine to tempt, try, and test today's believer. More and more people are less and less concerned about the moral failures of today's society. Christians cry out against wickedness and find that many people look back at them with a blank stare that really says, "Who cares!". This discourages the Christian in his work; and sometimes even causes them to give in to worldliness instead of standing for purity, holiness, and right.

3) **WEAKNESS.** The task before us is tremendous and our strength is small. How can we make a difference in our society, and in our life? That is the glory of this Easter season. All around us the world looks dark and dismal but we know that the death on the cross was followed by the empty tomb and the greatest power in the universe was released.

And that power gives us energy to overcome weariness, desire to deny worldliness, and strength to become more than conquerors thru him that loved us. No wonder we rejoice at Easter!

April 25, 2000 FAITH'S FEAR

Some people say that genuine Faith should remove all fear. They have their Bible verses mixed up! Perfect Love will cast out all fear (I John 4:18) but genuine Faith will use fear as a motivator to cause us to put works with our Faith.

Noah's Faith in God's prediction of the flood "moved him with fear" (Heb 11:7) so that he prepared an ark to the saving of his family and the condemning of the world. The Faith some people talk about would have allowed Noah to believe in the flood without making any preparations for it; and the results would have been disastrous!

Moses' Faith in God's call on his life caused him to leave the riches and security of Egypt "not fearing the wrath of the king" in order to lead God's people to the Promised Land (Heb 11:27). Moses's Faith caused him to fear failing God more than he feared the anger of Pharaoh. Faith's fear was a greater motivator than fleshly fear; and millions were delivered from slavery as a result.

Faith's Fear should also produce a constant call in our lives for holiness and commitment as we remember the tragic results of Israel's fall from faith- (Rom 11:19-21) "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

Finally, remember that Faith's call for us to come to Christ for forgiveness of sins is often sweet and gentle beyond description. Sometimes, however, Faith must remind us that a hearty fear of Hell brings more people to repentance than a great fondness for Heaven ever will!! And that is a fear that Faith wants you to have.

April 26, 2000 THE 9TH LIFE

You could see him as he crouched by the highway. The look of the hunter was intense upon his face and the moment to spring was milliseconds away.

I was riding down a country road as I caught this glimpse of a cat. Just before I drove past the cat he sprang at the rat hidden in the grass. Evidently, he must have missed, and, in the excitement of the hunt, he chased the rat into the path of my car.

This cat must have been a careless cat somewhere in life because, if he had nine lives, he was on his ninth life that day! It all happened so quickly until I was unable to even mash my brakes before the thump, thump. I was as sorry as I could be; but nowhere nearly as sorry as that cat!

That cat was so intense on doing what he wanted to do; yet death was so sudden and so final. It reminded me again that Jesus said, "Be you therefore ready, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh." Remember that Death does not always ring the doorbell and wait for you to come to the door.

Maybe you are someone who has had a lot of close calls in your life. I just wonder today how close you are to your "9th life"? And wondering, I can't help but ask myself this question, "After your "rat race" is over will you rejoice in Jesus or groan in the despair of tormenting darkness?"

May 2, 2000 DID YOU KNOW THIS?

GOD DEFINES TRUTH, NOT YOU- Most people say, “I will try it and if it works then I will know it is true.” God says, “You must believe that what I say is true and then it will work!”. The word of God is the word of God not because someone declared it to be the word of God but because it is in fact the word of God. You don’t try God’s word, it tries you! You don’t pick the parts of God’s word that you want to follow and disregard the rest. You apply all the word to all your life for all the time.

YOU MUST COME TO GOD ON HIS TERMS; NOT YOURS- You don’t come to God and say you are willing to “try” His gifts to see if you really like them; and if they meet your needs then you give God a big “thumbs up” and tell Him that you will now condescend to being His servant. God says that if you come to Him as an humble servant willing to trust His love for you and His plan for your life that He will grant you His marvelous mercy and His gracious grace. And, wonder of wonders, when you come to God as a servant He exalts you to the place of an honored son!

GOD’S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE DOES NOT ALWAYS MAKE SENSE- God chooses the Plan that is best for your life; not the one that is best for your ego. God’s definition of success is not the one found in the world’s dictionary. You follow God by Faith and Faith means we must go with God even though we do not know where we are going. But God’s destination for your life is always the very best goal you could ever reach for.

Finally, did you know that you can ignore God and pretend your life is your own business. But hiding your head in the sand will not keep your soul out of the fire!

May 3, 2000 THE LORD’S LIMITS

God’s limits are not meant to limit you; God knows that only within these limitations can we really know what it means to be free indeed. Many people avoid the church and God like they would some dreaded disease because they fear that somehow God will impose fun killing rules on them and they will never be able to really enjoy life again.

The opposite, of course, is true. Never is a man more of a slave than when he uses his “freedom” to surrender to the captivity of drugs, drink, or lust. Like the mother who has enough love for her child to limit their access to a flaming fire so God imposes limits on mankind in order to prevent hurt and pain.

Take, for example, the Lord’s basic laws. The fact that you are not supposed to murder other men, or to steal from them, or lie about them is a limit I like. Not wasting my time, energy, and money on the worship of a statue made of wood or stone does not limit my life; it frees me to worship in spirit and in truth instead of being bound by superstition and slavery.

And, I don’t know about you, but if I have to face a judge who will decide on my eternal destiny then I would prefer not to have just used his name in vain! Sounds like a law I can live with.

I’m glad my wife “limits” the tea she pours for me to the glass in front of me. Sure would be a messy world otherwise! Remember that when you wonder about God’s Limits.

May 9, 2000 POTHOLE PRAYERS

I wonder if the angels in Heaven dread my prayers? Sometimes my needs are so great, and God's provision so gracious, until I wonder if providing for my needs puts "Potholes" in the pavement of the golden streets of Heaven! Can't you just see an angel driving an "angel mobile" down Heaven's main street and every time he hits a bump he says, "Mike has been praying big prayers again".

Every so often, when the need is really great, and it appears there is no way for the money to come in, I will tell people, "Just remember this, God still paves His streets with gold." After I said this the other day, I began to think about what I said; and that is when I got this picture of the potholes in Heaven's golden streets.

Right now I am consistently praying for God to provide over \$1 million dollars for His work among Free Will Baptist in South Carolina this year, then I pray for \$75,000 for the state promotional office and \$300,000 for our state book store, then I pray for \$200,000 for our national media commission (of which I happen to be a member) in order for it to go full time, then I pray for \$75,000 for our Outreach Ministry in order to send books and materials all over the world, and, finally, I pray for God to provide the needs that my wife and I have as we set up our new home and try to do His work. Sometimes I wonder if you could lose a jeep in the pothole I need from heaven's golden streets!!

I'm glad to know there are no "potholes in golden pavement" since God (Eph 3:20) "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," But I am also glad to know that if God needed to put potholes in His pavement in order to meet my needs then I believe He would!

May 10, 2000 EVE'S ERRORS

Do you know what Adam and Eve did when they left paradise? They raised a little Cain!

What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Eden? "Your mother ate us out of house and home."

Eve had it knocked. She never had to worry about what to wear or if her shoes matched! She didn't have to wonder if her husband was looking at another woman or if she was being compared to her mother in law. But she made some mistakes and they changed her world; and your world.

Eve's first error was listening to the lies of the devil. And if you listen to the lies you end up falling for the falsehoods. Many women today have lost life's joy because they believe Satan's lie that they are supposed to be man's competitor instead of his companion and their marriage is a fight instead of a union.

Eve's next error came when she disregarded the divine directives. God said she could have everything but this; she wanted nothing but that! And, as people have learned through the years, breaking God's rules always ends up breaking you.

Eve, the mother of all living, (Gen 3:20) ended up being the mother of all dying as she introduced her husband to sin and its wages, death. What a difference it would have been has she ignored the lies of the devil and believed the words of the Lord.

May 16, 2000 THIRD CLASS PASSENGERS

Dwight Moody told a story about a stage trip he took in the old west. Finances were tight so when he arrived at the window and saw that First and Second class tickets were more expensive than Third class tickets he decided to buy a Third class ticket. When he got on the stage he was surprised to see that First, Second, and Third class passengers all were seated side by side on the same seats.

He thought he had made a good deal until they came to a hill and the stage slowed to a halt. Then the stagecoach driver announced that the First class tickets were to remain in their seats, the Second class tickets were to get out and walk, and the Third class tickets were to get behind the stage and push!

I think what we need in the Church today is a lot more “third class passengers”! We have plenty of people who are seated and satisfied. They are simply along for the ride while others do the work. And we certainly don’t need any more people who simply walk with the wagon and think only of themselves. What we need are more people who are willing to get out and push when the need arises. People who realize that when God gave them a “ticket” to ride on His stage that He called them to service as well as salvation.

When you go to church this week (you are going to church aren’t you!) remember to go as a “third class passenger”. One who is willing to push when the need arises in order to help everyone along in the journey.

May 17, 2000 ALL OF THEM

All of them. Every one. Those in the present. Those in the past. Even those in the future. When Jesus died on the cross as a payment for my sins He paid for ALL OF THEM!

All of the sins I committed before I became a child of God were paid for. All of the sins I have committed since becoming a child of God were paid for. All of the sins I will still commit before God finally calls me home to that heavenly bliss have already been paid for. Excuse me but, Glory!

The sad truth today is that men are dying and going to a devil’s hell simply because they will not accept by faith the fact that Jesus has already paid for ALL of their sins. They believe the devil’s lie that they must come to the place that they can be perfect after they are saved before they come to be saved; and so they never get saved. If they only knew that Jesus never expects them to be perfect; just forgiven.

Of course, as the apostle Paul said, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound. God forbid.” The fact that all of our sins have been paid for does not give us license to continue in sinful living or sinful conduct. But the greatness of God’s grace is that it not only pays for our sins but it also motivates us to holy living. We don’t live right in order to be forgiven; we are forgiven so we live right! Remember, He paid for ALL of them. Accept His payment today.

May 23, 2000 MIRROR BAND-AIDS

The story is told of a man who had promised his wife that he would stop drinking but stopped by the local bar on his way home anyway. When he finally arrived home it was late and his wife had already gone to bed. As he tried to slip into the home he fell on the steps, the bottle he was carrying shattered, and he received numerous cuts. He picked himself up, swept off the steps, eased into the bathroom, and doctored his cuts so his wife would never know what had happened.

The next morning he was awoken by his wife beating on him and berating him for getting drunk again. He tried to persuade her he had been delayed at work and had not been drinking but she would not believe him. Finally, he asked her how she knew he had been drinking and she replied, "I knew when I got up and saw you had been cut and had put Band-Aids all over the mirror!"

We live in a day when many people are putting "band-aids on mirrors" instead of doctoring the real problem. We put band-aids on mirrors when we give our children more toys instead of more time. We put band-aids on mirrors when we seek to find rest by watching riotous living on TV each night instead of by renewing our strength by waiting on the Lord. And we put band-aids on mirrors when we blame sinful life styles on disease instead of the devil.

Sin captures a person, controls a person, and condemns a person. It is not a life style sickness to be accepted; it is a violation of God's will that is to be deplored, forgiven, and forsaken. Anything else is simply putting band-aids on mirrors.

May 24, 2000 PILLOW OR PILLAR

(Gen 28:17-18) *And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. {18} And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.*

Jacob has just left home on a journey that would gain him a wife and change his life. At the beginning of this journey he stopped to spend the night and rolled some stones together to put his blanket on for a pillow.

During the night he had a vision about Heaven and received a Blessing from God. To commemorate this event he took the stones he had used for a pillow and piled them together into a pillar so he could use it at a place to mark a commitment to God.

Many Christians today are asleep in the pews instead of active in the work of God. They need a fresh vision of Heaven and a spiritual Blessing from God. That would turn their pillows of ease into pillars of dedication; and maybe bring the Revival this country so desperately needs.

When you go to Church this week are you looking for a place to rest your head or a chance to dedicate your heart to becoming active in the Work God has delegated you to do? Turn your pillow into a pillar and find out how wonderful the Christian life can really be.

May 30, 2000 SHEPHERD STANDARDS

Have you ever wondered why Pastors, who preach mercy and stress compassion with their members, are so hard when one of their own falls? The answer is long and complicated but here are, I believe, the two main reasons for the hard approach Pastors take when another Pastor commits open sins.

Pastors DEAL IN TRUST. The only method available to Pastors to enable them to help men in this world and prepare them for the next world is the “foolishness of preaching” (1 Cor 1:21). This is only effective if men have faith in the message; and the messenger. Because of this, it is imperative that Pastors build and maintain the confidence of people in the church and the community. And every Pastor knows that when a fellow Pastor commits publicly known sins it not only effects than man but it also splatters mud on every other Pastor.

Pastors not only deal in Trust but they are GIVEN A TRUST. They are set aside for a Holy Calling by God, the church, and society. This gives them an influence over people that can be extremely dangerous and damaging if misused (Remember Jim Jones and others who used their influence to kill and destroy instead of build and better).

In time of war, a captured enemy should be treated with kindness and mercy. But a traitor, one who betrays his friends and helps his foes, is not looked upon with that same respect. He has violated TRUST and the consequences can be cruel.

May 31, 2000 STONE EGG

At first the excitement overcame the inconvenience. As the man came home from work one day he noted that a goose had built a nest in the straw right beside his walk. The kids were all excited and his wife made sure there was food available so the goose could spend all her time sitting on the nest.

Several days went by, however, and the snapping of the goose as people came up the walk and the honking of the goose at night began to wear out its welcome. No one seemed to know how long it took for a goose egg to hatch so they decided they would just have to be patience and wait.

One day when the man came home he saw that the goose had wandered over to the water bowl at the storehouse faucet. He thought this would be a perfect time to see if the egg was beginning to crack open yet so he eased over to the nest. You should have seen his face when he discovered that the goose was sitting on a round rock instead of an egg!

Sometimes churches act like this goose. Instead of being founded on the “Rock” they are just sitting on a rock! Day after day they expect to be fed and cared for but they never produce any new births that will keep men out of Hell and change them into new creatures in Christ. They cluck a lot but that rock they are sitting on will never produce life. By the way, how many people has YOUR church won to Christ this year??

June 6, 2000 EXCUSES THAT WON'T WORK

As soon as someone gets caught doing something wrong they begin to make excuses. Here are Four common excuses that will not "hold water".

1) Don't say God does not understand what you are going through- (Heb 2:18) For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Heb 4:15-16) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

2) Don't say your temptation is different from what anyone else must face- (1 Cor 10:13) There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:...

3) Don't say your temptation is too strong for you to endure- (1 Cor 10:13) ...God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

4) Finally, Don't blame it on God; it is your own choice- (James 1:13-14) Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed

The Devil CAN'T make you do it and God WON'T make you do it. That leaves the finger pointing directly at YOU. You are going to be tempted. But you CAN endure the temptation and come out victorious. Or you can give in to sin, blame someone else; and still end up suffering the consequences.

June 7, 2000 LIFE LESSONS

1) Treat Life as a Treasure to be invested- One day we will be required by God to give account of what we have done with our life. If we have wasted our time, our talent, and our treasures then we will be very uncomfortable looking at the nail scarred hand of our loving Savior as He asks us how we have used our life.

2) Make your moments into memories- (Psa 90:12) *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Don't allow the rut and routine of life to sap your strength and steal your joy. Take time to listen to birds sing, children laugh, and God whisper. Ten years from now no one will care that you made it to the meeting ten seconds early by driving like a maniac through traffic; but they will remember that you took time to pick a flower and bring it to them.

3) Put God first; remembering you expect to spend eternity with Him- (1 John 2:17) *the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.* Read God's Word as if it were the only book that will last forever. Learn to talk with God as you would someone whom you expect to live with a long, long time. Trust Christ as your Savior, Serve Christ as your Lord, and Expect Christ to return any moment as your King

Live your life knowing your days are numbered but your soul is eternal. Don't forfeit your future in the few days you have here.

June 13, 2000 HOG HAZARDS

Three times in Scripture men “go to the hogs”. The lessons we learn from these incidents are very needful today.

In the fifth chapter of Mark the story is told of a man possessed with demons who lived in a graveyard. Jesus comes by and cast the demons out but allows them to go into a herd of hogs. The owners of the hogs then come out and, instead of rejoicing in the healing of this man, they ask Jesus to leave their country. Hogs can be a hazard when we value the riches they give more than we value the work of God.

In the second chapter of his second book Peter tells about men who compromise with sin and play with sin until they come to the place that “they cannot cease from sin” (II Pet 2:14). Peter likens them to “hog that go back to wallow in the mire”. Oh, what hazards we face when we allow sin to “vex our righteous souls” and draw us deeper into its web. It can cause a sheep to act like a hog; and that is a horrible position to be in.

Thank God, there is one more “hog story” we need to look at. It is the familiar Bible story about a boy who decided to leave home and ends up in the hog pens. As his wallet flapped empty and his stomach growled more empty than that, he finally realized the high cost of sin. But he left the hog pen and went back to the Father’s house where he found forgiveness and love.

You can value hogs more than Christ, you can turn from holy living and start acting like a hog, or you can abandon the hogs and come to the Heavenly Father. The choice is yours, but you know you don’t want to live, and die, with the hogs.

June 14, 2000 HAVNER QUOTES

A pastor who greatly influenced me in my early ministry was Rev Vance Havner. His books and sermons were a great help to me. And I readily related to his call to the ministry at a young age (as I) and his great love for his wife Sara upon whom the Lord never bestowed children (as my wife and I). Through the course of time numerous quotes from his sermons and books have found their way into my thinking and my sermons. Look at these quotes and you will see why.

“The church has a right to screen out the bugs while it lets in the light. We do it in our houses and we should do it in the house of God.”

“One may be as straight as a gun barrel theologically and as empty as a gun barrel spiritually.”

“People go where they want to go. Where their hearts are their heels will follow.”

“Any philosophy that makes it easier to sin is of the devil.”

“Many churches need to say, ‘Pray for us, Our blower is still blowing but our fire is out’”

“Some people do not know what they believe, others do not believe what they believe, and many do not practice what they believe!”

Finally, Think this one through carefully- “Even God cannot fill something that is already full!”

June 20, 2000 GOD'S LOVE

God is love. God love sinners. God wants to save sinners- (John 3:16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God's love for us is so amazing until it confuses the logic and wisdom of the world- (1 John 3:1) Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

God's love for us changes the way we look at other people- (1 John 4:7-11) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

God's love is manifested to others in our actions and attitudes- (1 John 4:20-21) If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

God's love is what you need in your life. God loves to share His love with anyone who comes to Him. Let God love you today.

June 21, 2000 POLICE PIANO

It all began with a speeding ticket. The policeman was new in his area and he stopped a person for speeding. This person was amazed that anyone would have the gall to give a ticket to HER. After all, she lived in the area and everyone knew her.

The policeman was polite but firm. Everyone else may know her but he did not know her. What he did know was that she was speeding and endangering the children in the neighborhood and he was going to have to give her a ticket.

Then an amazing thing happened. When the policeman gave the ticket to the lady he also gave her his name and number and told her to call him when she went to pay her ticket. She did just that and the policeman was able to explain things to the judge in such a way until this lady only received a small fine.

A "wave at each other in passing" friendship developed between the two. One day the policeman passed this lady's home and noticed a moving van pulled up to her door. He hated to see this family move and he stopped to say goodbye. As he was leaving the lady asked him if you knew anyone to whom she could give a baby grand piano. They couldn't move it to their new apartment and they needed to get rid of it.

And that is how this policeman, who also leads the singing in a small country church, gets to sing to the tune of a baby grand piano as nice as any you find in the big churches up town!

June 27, 2000 MANIFESTATION ANTICIPATION

His preparation gives me anticipation because I know it is an invitation to the manifestation of His glory that is soon to be revealed. Let me give you an example. Sometimes my daily devotion time with the Lord is so-so, sometimes it is pretty good, and sometimes it is just GREAT.

One Wednesday recently I had one of those “great” times when it seemed the Lord was extremely near and His word just flowed with meaning. As I sat at my table with tears in my eyes and joy in my heart I knew the Lord was preparing me for something special. Suddenly, I felt like a kid before Christmas as I anticipated what God was going to do. Like the kid at Christmas, I did not know what God had wrapped up for me but I could hardly wait to unwrap the “package” and see what God was doing.

I had planned to go to a certain church that night but as the day progressed God clearly and distinctly brought another church to mind. When I arrived at that church the Pastor shared how much he needed someone to talk to right then and we had a wonderful time of fellowship. Then this Pastor asked me to speak in his place during services that night. What a time we had as I simply shared with these people what God had shared with me earlier in the day. And, you know what, the people in that congregation needed the message God had given me just as much as I had needed it.

What a joy to be joined with God in His work on earth. The only thing I can think that could be better will be to be joined with Him in His work for eternity in Heaven. And, boy, does that give me anticipation!

June 28, 2000 CHURCH SPIDER

(Prov 30:28) *The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.* Did you know that this is the only time the word “spider” is used in scripture? (“Spider’s web” is mentioned twice). For most people, that is enough!

We were visiting in a church recently and as we came in the door a man came in behind us with a long adjustable cleaning wand. While we talked with some of the people of the church we noticed this man go into the choir, extend the wand, and try to clean something at the very peak of the ceiling.

The Pastor’s wife came up and she explained what was going on. That morning as she was singing in the choir a spider came down and almost fell into her hair. She told me that if that spider had actually gotten into her hair that her husband would have thought she had a double dose of the Holy Spirit the way she would have yelled and moved!!

If preachers could get people to fear sin the way they fear spiders we sure would have a lot better churches; and a lot better world! Like spiders, sin is found in the home of the king and the home of the pauper. And like spiders, sin weaves a web that eventually occupies every corner of your home.

Do you know the best thing to do with spiders? Crush them and clean out their nest. The same goes for sin in your life.

July 4, 2000 REAL FREEDOM

I'm free from the bondage that I once lived in. I'm free from what I used to be. The chains that once held me now lay rusting at my feet. Satan once controlled me but now, thank God, greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

How did I obtain this freedom? What price did I pay in order to escape the clutches of Satan? It was so easy. I simply admitted to God that I could not save myself and then, by faith, I accepted the fact that God's son, Jesus Christ, died in my place to pay my sin debt (Glory!).

Time after time Satan has tried to convince me that I couldn't hold out or that God would not hold on to me and I would fall back into his captivity but I found that "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36). I have learned that Satan is a liar and that listening to him leads to continual heartache, controlling habits, and captivities horrors. Living for Christ, however, leads me to the actual truth about life so that I can enjoy real freedom- "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"(John 8:32).

If you have not come to the liberty life in Christ then let me encourage you to do so today. You will find that freedom is fun and serving the Lord is the way to real abundant life.

If you are a child of God then watch out for Satan's tricks and traps and "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal 5:1).

July 5, 2000 HOW JESUS SEES SHEEP

(Mat 9:36) *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*

Oh, What a heart Jesus had! We look at multitudes clambering for our help and we many times feel anger, anxiety, and anguish. Jesus looked at the multitude and He was "moved" with compassion. His love overwhelmed Him.

What makes the difference? I believe the difference in our view point lies in the way we perceive the "sheep" that we see. Jesus had compassion on them because He saw them as:

- 1) FAINT- Weak and in need of help and support. Unable to enjoy living or have an abundant life.
- 2) SCATTERED- Lonely and isolated. Constantly moving but never enjoying fellowship and companionship.
- 3) SHEPHERD LESS- Without a leader. Without a defender to guard and protect them. Having no plan, no purpose, and no protection in their journey.

When YOU look on the multitudes around you do you see problems and stress? Or do you look with eyes of love and see hurting hearts, broken relationships, and people in desperate need of someone to show them the right way?

Look with the eyes of Jesus and see what a difference it will make in the way you deal with people.

July 11, 2000 MINISTRY EXAM

Eddie Hobbs, the manager of the Free Will Baptist Book Store in Florence recently spoke to a local Minister's meeting. As a layman speaking to preachers he said he was as concerned with the motive the ministers had as he was with the message they delivered. He then proceeded to ask these pastors three heart searching questions. I believe these questions should be applied to every worker in every church. See if you agree.

1) Do you do your job from joy or from necessity? When you come to church on Sunday Morning do you enter your class with enthusiasm about the fact that you get to share Christ or do you teach those Junior boys because no one else will do it?

2) Do you still have the burning passion for your work or has the fire died down? Ministry without fire is just a "mannequin ministry"- you may do a good job dressing things up but you will never get any results and you never impart life!

3) Do you view the people you minister to with compassion or as a burden you must endure? My flock put up with a lot of sorry sermons and a lot of innocent mistakes because they knew that I deeply loved them. I learned a long time ago that if a preacher or teacher gives me the impression that they would much rather be somewhere else then I would be better off if they WERE somewhere else!

If you were given an exam using these questions about the ministry you perform, what sort of grade would you get??

July 12, 2000 PUPPY PACKAGE

The story is told about a school teacher who had a birthday. That morning several of the students brought her presents. The father of the first student who came up was a florist so the teacher guessed that the packet contained some flowers.

The students were simply amazed that she could guess what was in the packet without opening it so when the next child came up, whose father ran the local candy store, she guessed that the box contained candy. Again she was right and the kids thought they had a really wonderful teacher.

The father of the third student who brought a present ran a local winery. When the student handed the package to the teacher there was some liquid dripping from the wrapping. The teacher ran her finger along the paper and tasted this liquid and pronounced that the package contained a bottle of fine wine. Sadly, the student shook his head.

Once again she ran her finger along the liquid and tasted it and said it was a bottle of quality champagne. "No teacher," the student exclaimed. "It's a puppy!"

Sometimes we begin to think we are so smart until we can outsmart sin and Satan. That is when we find something totally different than what we thought in our "present". The best advice I can give you is to never accept a present from Satan. It might be a "puppy" instead of what you thought you were getting!

July 18, 2000 WHO IS THE LORD??

All of my time, my energy, and my life are devoted to serving the Lord. What is there about the Lord that could gain such a devotion from me? Who is this Lord I serve and proclaim? Let me simply quote what other faithful followers have said about Him through the ages.

- (Exo 15:2) The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.
- (Nahum 1:7) The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.
- (Num 14:18) The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.
- (Psa 16:5) The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.
- (Psa 27:1) The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- (Psa 96:4) For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods.
- (Psa 129:4) The LORD is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.
- (2 Th 3:3) ...the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.
- (Heb 13:6) ...The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
- Finally, and wonderfully, (Psa 23:1) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

That is the Lord I serve. He is worthy of my time, my energy, and my devotion. Don't waste your time on anything less than this Lord.

July 19, 2000 LET GOD DO IT

Feeling frustrated and fatigued as you try to minister for God?? Maybe you have been wasting your time and effort trying to do something that only God can do- (Mat 16:18) *...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Tired of trying to change your life and failing over and over? Maybe you should relax and let the master craftsman straighten up the mess you have made and change you into a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use- (Isa 64:8) *But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.*

Weary from worrying about making ends meet? Why don't you rest in the provision provided by the God who would not let the widow's pot run out of oil and who taught us to pray each day - (Mat 6:11) *Give us this day our daily bread.* Then every day you will be able to say, with the psalmist- (Psa 68:19) *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.*

Why don't you quit trying to be God and let God do it! After all, He is (Eph 3:20) *...able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,*

July 25, 2000 TOMBSTONE TESTIMONY

It began partly from curiosity and partly as a result of my "job." As a Pastor, I have to visit cemeteries on a regular basis; either helping with, or attending funerals. And one of the most prominent features of a cemetery is the tombstones.

At first I just noticed them as obstacles to be avoided, but then I started looking for the messages on the tombstones. Some contain just the bare facts; name, date of birth, and date of death. But even that was helpful because it allowed me to determine the age of the person when they died (Lots and lots of people die very young!!).

If it was a husband and wife tomb it might also contain the wedding date of the couple. That allowed me to see how old they were when they were married (Sometimes people marry VERY young) and how long one lived after the other's death.

Sometimes, however, the tomb would also contain a short saying or a poem. Those were the ones that allow me to see how the person was perceived by their loved ones. In many of them you could almost feel the aching heart of parents for small children or the longing of a husband for a departed wife.

Tombstones indeed have a testimony. Among other things, they tell us three very important truths: 1) Everyone has to die. 2) Many die a lot sooner than they expect. And 3) Those who are left behind will reflect on the way you have lived.

When the tombstone is placed over you will your family rejoice in the life you've lived and look forward to seeing you again in Heaven? Or will it be just cold hard stone over a wasted life and missed opportunities?

July 26, 2000 THE WORD OF GOD

I am a Free Will Baptist today as a result of the first principle of our church covenant- we have "accepted the word of God as our rule of Faith and Practice". I put such a great emphasis on the Word of God because the Word of God is the only permanent thing we can rely on- (Mat 24:35) *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

Such a strong belief in the Bible has led me to follow three life principles concerning the Word of God:

HIDE THE WORD- (Psa 119:11) *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* The word of God has been placed in my memory and in my heart. It guides my decisions, cautions me about temptations, and brings peace and comfort to my troubled soul. I read it daily, listen to it being preached often, and study about its meaning at every opportunity.

TELL THE WORD- (Mark 4:14) *The sower soweth the word.* My master has given me "eternal life seed" to sow and I am accountable to Him if I must face Him with seed still in my bag. It is my job, and my joy, to tell everyone I can, every chance I can about the son of God, Jesus Christ.

DO THE WORD- (James 1:22) *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* The Bible must affect my behavior as well as my belief. I have been born again so I live as a new creature, looking forward to a Heavenly Home!

August 1, 2000 GROWTH GUIDELINES

When a man has a consistent pattern of success and growth you are well advised to listen to his counsel. Rev Bill Jacobs came to the Marion, Mullin area 30 years ago with a vision in his eyes and a call from God on his heart. Now he has a full time Christian school, an active presence in his community, and one of the largest Free Will Baptist churches in our state. Recently he shared four principles that have guided him during these years of growth. Four “growth guidelines” that you would do well to apply in your situation.

First, there must be a **DESIRE** to grow. Many churches are content with the group they have. They don't want any strangers coming in and “messing up their playhouse” so they cry and complain about how small they are but they really have no desire to grow.

Second, there must be **DETERMINATION** to grow. Desire must bloom into programs, plans, and participation that actually leads to growth. Most churches talk growth but never do anything about it. Praying for the lost must lead to witnessing to the lost about their need of Jesus as savior. A desire for a larger Sunday School class must lead to inviting friends and family to join you in class each week.

Third, consistent growth involves **DEDICATION**. Growth brings problems- the need of new teachers for new classes, the assimilation of new people into the church social structure, the building of new building, and so forth. The church must be so dedicated to its mission of reaching new people for Christ until it does not allow these problems to stop its progress.

Finally, and most importantly, real growth only comes with **DIVINE HELP**- “unless the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it”. Programs and plans are failures without the divine partnership of God; but it is not the will of God that any be lost, so join Him in building His church this week.

August 2, 2000 THE CURTAIN

It was nothing but a curtain; attractive but not too imposing. Its purpose as a barrier, however, turned the cloth into “stone”. On one side were the people in the first class section of the plane. On the other side were us just plain folks.

The first class section was well lit and the flight attendants were always evident. Those of us in couch sat in the dark and waved at the attendants as they passed.

I know of another dividing curtain. In the Old Testament Tabernacle the Holy Place was divided from the Holy of Holies by a curtain. Regular priest came and went on one side of the curtain on a regular basis but only the High Priest was allowed pass the curtain into the presence of God.

Then God's only begotten son, Jesus Christ, came to earth, lived among men, and died on a cruel cross to pay the sin debt of mankind. As He died the curtain of division in the temple was split by God. Now, praise be to the name of our Wonderful God, everyone is allowed free access into God's presence.

No longer are people divided into “first class” and “coach”. Now we all have personal access to a prayer answering God who delights in hearing, and answering, our prayers. The curtain is gone and fellowship is now available to anyone who desires to come into the presence of God. What a great privilege, have you taken advantage of it today?

August 8, 2000 CLOSED VENTS

We thought it was the fact that we opened the door into the kitchen so much. Or the fact that we used the stove in the kitchen and the heat from that caused the kitchen to be warmer. Until one day I dropped something on the floor. While on my knees looking for this item I noticed that the only vent in the kitchen was closed! Boy, what a difference it made when I opened that vent and let the cool air flow like it should.

Sometimes it appears that churches might have their “vents” closed also. Despite the fact that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever (Heb 13:8). Despite the fact that the prayer of the upright is the delight of God (Prov 15:8). Despite the fact that with men many things are impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:27). Despite all these things, many churches never have anything supernatural happen in their church services.

Everything is available; but it’s like the vent is closed. And, like the kitchen in our home, everybody knows something is wrong but they never seem to blame it on “closed vents”. It is a lot easier to fire the preacher, pout at home, or pretend nothing is wrong than it is to begin looking for the real problem.

Is God’s work evident in your life and in the life of your church? If not, do you think God has died; or do you think that you might need to get on your knees and see if your “vent” is open?

August 9, 2000 THREE WALLS

Boundaries prove a blessing when they keep you out of trouble. Walls keep me from being outside all the time; but they also keep out insects, hot air, and raindrops! In the same way, I have tried to erect three “walls” in my relationship with the Lord that can help bring abundant life to my daily living.

The first wall is one that I erected in order that I may not **DISPLEASE HIM**. My greatest goal is to do always those things that please the Father (John 8:29). This is the positive side of life that many people seem to miss. I do not simply want to avoid doing wrong; I want to always do right. When God looks at my life and my activities, I want it to bring a smile to His face.

That just naturally brings me to erecting a second wall that will cause me to never **DISOBEY HIM**. There are some things that are obviously wrong and I certainly know to avoid these things. But Jesus taught that wrong begins in the heart before it is manifested in words or actions. I have found that I have a rebellious attitude before I do rebellious actions so I must build a wall in my heart as well as in my home.

Finally, I want a wall that will cause me to live in such a way until I will never **DISGRACE HIM**. I never want God to be ashamed to be called my God! (Heb 11:16). It is not enough to erect a wall of public opinion; that changes too often! I want a wall in my life that will Honor Him; and never hurt His heart.

August 15, 2000 PREACHER PARADE

In my mind's eye I can see it as clear as day. The golden street will sparkle and shine. Beside this golden street will stand mansions of such magnificence until they will literally take your breath away. The flowers in bloom along the road will have so many colors and be so fragrance until I can almost see the crowd of children running from one to another shouting that "this one is the prettiest, no this one is prettier".

Suddenly a shout will roll through the assembled crowd like a March wind blows across a Kansas wheat field, "They are coming. They are coming." Dads will lift children to their shoulders, Moms will stand on tip toes, and children will ease toward the front of the crowd to find a seat on the curb.

Some of the participates will have famous names- Moody, Spurgeon, Billy Sunday, Charles Finney, Apostle Paul. But many will only be known by a small group in the crowd as they cry out, "That's him. He was my Pastor. He led me to the Lord and taught me how to live as a Christian. He brought comfort when my loved ones died and he brought cheer when life tried to beat me down. That's my Pastor. Oh, what a man of God he was!"

Many of these Pastors were reviled and persecuted on earth. Most of them gave up houses, land, and fortune in order to follow God's call on their life. Many times they were tempted to quit or compromise but God's fire burned in their heart and, week after week, they stood and delivered God's message. Now they look with awe and wonder at the shouting crowd and stand in amazement at the depth of God's rewards.

What a day that will be when Preacher's Parade in heaven. Hope you are there to witness it; and hope you will give your Pastor a few of his praise flowers now.

August 16, 2000 AMEN DOGS

You have seen them under the back windows of cars. You know what I mean; those little dogs that nod their head as the car moves. Well, that is what this Sunday School teacher brought out and placed on the podium. His explanation; if I can't get the members of this class to amen the truth then I will keep tapping my little dog and let him nod amen!

Later, I began to think about why the people were not saying, "Amen" when this teacher taught. This is an important question because every teacher wants to feel like their lesson is having an impact on the student.

Chapter 27 of Deuteronomy says that the people are supposed to "amen" the preaching of the truth. The last word of all four gospels, and most of the epistles, is "amen". So why did these people not amen the truth this man was teaching?

Maybe they did not understand what he was saying- (1 Cor 14:16) Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?

Or maybe they had their mind somewhere else; or their pride got in the way; or they didn't want to hear the truth. Regardless, they need to know that Jesus said the rocks would praise Him if the people didn't- - and this may even apply to nodding dogs!!

August 22, 2000 TOO MANY CHURCHES

(Phil 2:14-15) Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

The characteristic of Christians should never be confusion. We will not always agree on everything but we should always agree to disagree agreeably. The world silently watches as Churches fight, fuss, and divide; and then say within themselves, "I already have confusion and chaos in my life. Why should I go to Church for more?"

In fact, one of the most discouraging sight I see as I travel around is the large number of churches that dot our landscape. Now, before you call me a heretic, let me explain. I am all for building new churches to reach a lost world for Christ. My problem is with all the churches that spring up because a "preacher" thinks he is the only one who knows the truth and since he can't get along with anyone else he starts his own little group (see 2 Pet 1:20). Or two or three people in a church don't like the brown carpet in their church (Anyone with any lick of sense knows that blue carpet is the only carpet for the church!) so they pull out and start their own little group that does well until someone decides to put green curtains in a room- and here we go again!

How Satan must laugh as the honor of God's people is tarnished, valuable resources are "sucked up" building numerous big buildings in which a few souls rattle around, and people are so busy defending their own point of view until they never get around to telling anyone the good news of the Gospel. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

(Eph 4:1-3) I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

August 23, 2000 FENCED IN BY FAVOR

(Psa 5:11-12) *But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.*

Defended by God. Fenced in by God's Favor. No wonder the psalmist declares that the child of God should "ever shout for joy".

Just think of it. All the bad that comes our way meets the barrier of God and only what He knows is for our ultimate good is allowed through. That is what it means to be defended by God. No enemy is too strong. No weapon is too mighty. When God is our defense then the enemy might as well save their breath because we WILL be victorious!

God's defense would be enough by itself; but not for a God as good as our God. He not only defends us from the devil but He also fences us in with His favor. He doesn't just keep the bad from getting to us; He surrounds us with good! No wonder that everywhere a Christian turns ALL things work together for good (Rom 8:28).

Don't listen to Satan's lies. God is defending you from defeat and fencing you in with His favor. Ever shout for Joy!

August 29, 2000 THE LOST CHURCH

One of the joys of being State Promotional Director is that I get to visit churches all across our state. Some are big and some are small. Some are very vocal in their worship while others are more subdued. Some are located on main thoroughfares and some are located well off the beaten path. And that is where our story comes in.

Since this is my first time visiting many of our churches I have to get some general directions before I try to locate them. Recently, I was invited to Home Coming at a church so I asked several Pastors in the area for directions. One said, "Preacher, I don't think you can get there from here!". Another said the best thing I could do was call the Pastor, have him meet me on a main road to lead me in; and then be very careful to never lose sight of him!

Finally, I was able to get in contact with the Pastor and he gave me these directions. Take exit 21 off the interstate. Go to the first red light and turn left. This will take you past the largest mall in town. As soon as you pass the mall the road goes from four lanes into two lanes, when this happens take the first paved road to the right. Take the next paved road to the right and the church will be directly in front of you. With these directions I was able to drive directly to the church.

Sometimes Preachers make things complicated and confusing because they are a little confused themselves. But when they become Pastor of a church they learn it is not so hard to give good directions to others who are seeking that church. Pastor, if people who listen to your sermon this week are thinking, "I can't get there from here" maybe it's because you never got to the place you are talking about before you started giving directions to others about how to get there!

August 30, 2000 TERMITE TROUBLE

A friend told me this story. One of the well-known citizens of a certain community passed on to his eternal reward. On the day of his funeral the church was completely full. As the family of the deceased began to enter and be seated suddenly a horrible creak sounded and, with a mighty crash, the floor of nearly half the church fell to the ground.

Luckily, the church was built low to the ground and several ankle injuries plus some scrapes and scratches were the only injuries. Later investigation revealed that termites had infested the building and the weight from all those people turned out to be more than the weakened lumber could support.

Sadly, numerous churches are also infected with "termite trouble" and one day everything may come crashing down around them. These termites, however, are not the kind that the local pest control company can detect and destroy. These termites go by other names like gossip, pride, bitter envying and strife, worldly living, and rebellious attitudes. Like their physical counterparts, they can silently destroy the very foundation of the church.

I recommend that these "termites" be treated with some powerful preaching and teaching from the word of God which is able to pierce even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12). That will solidify your foundation as it should be.

September 5, 2000 DOVE DIMENSIONS

It began in a rundown store front. A few seeking people, an energetic and determined Pastor, and a common vision of a coming house of worship in which they could find the Lord, raise their kids, and stabilize their lives. Months followed weeks as new members joined in; and a few dropped out, until crowded Sunday School Rooms and the absences of seats for new worshipers changed the dream about a new sanctuary into an immediate necessity.

Land was sought; and finally bought. This was in the days before Planning Commissions and never ending regulations. The Pastor and deacons drove out to the new lot determined to mark off where they wanted the church to be located and then to start digging the foundation. It was only after they got out of the car and the Pastor looked at that wood covered lot that he finally realized he did not have a clue about what the dimensions of the new church should be.

To cover his confusion, he told the men he wanted to kneel and pray before they started. Following their time of prayer the Pastor looked up and suddenly a dove landed on a stump directly in front of him. The dove watched him for a moment and then flew directly down the lot to a pine tree. It landed there for a second and then flew directly across the lot to land on another tree. And those are the dimensions of Peace Free Will Baptist Church today.

Like Noah in the ark (Gen 8:6-11) and the Disciples who watched Jesus be baptized (Matt 3:16), this Pastor found that "Divine Doves" give good directions. If God calls you to do a job don't let Satan defeat you. After all, If God can make rocks praise Him then He will find a way to direct you as you do His will, even if it makes you become a bird watcher!

September 6, 2000 CHANGING LIGHT BULBS

Sometimes we NEED to laugh at ourselves. Here are some cute saying about "Changing a light bulb" that may help us look at ourselves in a brand new "light"!

1. How many Charismatics does it take to change a light bulb? One to change the bulb and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.

2. How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb? Change???

3 . How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb? One. But for the message of light to continue, send in your donation today.

4 . How many liberals does it take to change a light bulb? At least ten, as they need to hold a debate on whether or not the light bulb exists. Even if they can agree upon the existence of the light bulb, they still might not change it, to keep from alienating those who might use other forms of light.

5 . How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? None. They always use candles.

6. How many members of an established Bible teaching church that is over 20 years old does it take to change a light bulb? One to actually change the bulb, and nine to say how much they liked the old one.

Whoever you are, I hope you will allow God to work a change in your life that will make you the Light of the World. After all, a sin darkened world is much more interested in the light they so desperately need than in the label on the light bulb.

September 12, 2000 LOOSE SCREWS

Company was coming and we needed a fan installed in the spare bedroom. A busy schedule prevented me from installing it until late on Saturday night. Everything went fine until I was ready to install the very last blade on the fan. That is when we found that the two screws needed to install the blade were nowhere to be found. Not good!

We looked and looked, said a few unkind words about the fan company not packing the needed equipment, and were about ready to disassembly the fan and go back to the basic light. That is when I noticed that the screws that fastened the fan to the ceiling looked almost like the ones that were missing. Could I possibly use them to connect the fan blade and then “jury rig” some other screws to hold the base in place?

When I unscrewed the first screw from the base it slipped from my hand, bounced one time, and fell into the motor! Now, it is almost midnight and in addition to missing fan screws, I have to take the motor apart in order to get this screw out. I removed the bottom plate from the fan and there lay the screw I had dropped, as well as the two missing screws that had somehow gotten into the motor during shipping.

I would never in a thousand years have thought of looking in the motor for the missing screws; but God knew where they were the entire time. He just had to use a “problem” to get me to look in the right place! Remember that this week when things aren’t going the way you want and Satan whispers in your ear that God doesn’t love you. Anyone who would believe that lie has some screws loose sure enough.

September 13, 2000 JESUS AND BUREAUCRATS

Someone has humorously suggested that if Jesus lived in America today, He would be wanted by...

- *the FBI for turning water into wine without a license.
- *the EPA for killing fig trees.
- *the AMA for practicing medicine without a license.
- *the Department of Health for opening graves to raise the dead
- *OSHA for walking on water without a life jacket.
- *the SPCA for allowing hogs to jump into the sea..
- *the national Board of Psychiatrists for giving advice on how to live a guilt-free life.
- *the Interfaith Movement for condemning all other religions.
- *and by the Zoning Board for building mansions without a permit!

The truth is, Jesus was more interested in obeying the commands of His Father than He was in following the precepts of the people. He offended Pharisees by allowing the unclean to touch Him so that He might truly touch them. He taught that it did not matter if you interrupted an important class long enough to hug a child because that was the real purpose of the class anyway!

Sometimes we allow the limits imposed on us by others to suck the life out of life. We are not to be lawless; yet we are not to allow the laws of man to keep us from sharing the love of God. That won’t make the bureaucrats happy but it will allow our life to be a blessing. And isn’t that what its really all about?

September 19, 2000 I DON'T UNDERSTAND

If fifty-one percent of the people in our state go absolutely morally bankrupt and approve the evil of a state lottery then everyone in our state must accept it and live with the consequences. But if 99% of the people in a school want to pray before their children play a ball game they must forsake that privilege because of the possibility that one person may be offended. I don't understand.

Jesus preached more sermons on Hell than He did on Heaven; and the Hell He preached about was hot and horrible. Jesus plainly stated that the ONLY way to Heaven was His way; yet we live in a day when every belief must be right and no religion can be wrong. If Jesus was right, and He was, why are most pulpits in America filled with men preaching about how to overcome worry or how to feel good about yourself instead of plainly presenting Jesus as man's only hope? I don't understand.

Christians stand week after week in churches to sing and testify about their great love for God. Yet week after week they come in contact with family and friends who are unprepared to face death and the judgment of God but they never share God's plan of salvation with these people. They share gossip and gripes but they never share the gospel. I don't understand.

God is God and nothing man can legislate can change that. Jesus is coming back to claim His Bride and judge the nations and He won't use the audience of a TV talk show to determine who is right and wrong. The time God has given me on this earth is the only time I have to prepare to meet God and face that Judgment. That I understand.

September 20, 2000 EVANGELIZE

Give us a watchword for the hour,
A thrilling word, a word of power;
A battle cry, a flaming breath,
A call to conquest or to death;
A word to rouse the church from rest,
To heed the Master's last request.
The Call is given, ye hosts arise,
The watchword is EVANGELIZE!
To fallen men, a dying race,
Make known the gift of Gospel grace,
The world that now in darkness lies,
O Church of Christ, EVANGELIZE!

How comfortable the Church has become. Where is our Concern? Where is our Compassion for a lost world? Can sinners headed to a devil's hell echo the cry of the Psalmist- (Psa 142:4) *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.*

Have we become so interested in living a worry free, prosperous life until the purpose of Jesus' coming is dying in the Church like sinners are dying in the world? - (Luke 19:10) *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

Do we care? Do we share the Gospel? Do we Evangelize?

September 26, 2000 BUCKET REPAIRS

The leak problem came from a good problem. The attendance at church had grown so much until a new sanctuary was needed. Land problems prevented building a new sanctuary so it was decided to extend the present sanctuary. Doing this involved tying the new sanctuary into a presently existing Sunday School facility. And there is where the leak occurred.

Numerous people were contacted about fixing the leak but no one was successful. Finally, one of the men in the church said he knew someone who said he would guarantee that he could fix the problem. The church told him to tell this man to come and do the work. Several days later the preacher noticed a Cadillac drive up in the parking lot. A man got out in a nice suit and came into the Church office. When the Pastor asked if he could help him the man said he had come to fix the Church leak. He then went into the rest room, changed into some coveralls, and commenced hammering and banging in the attic.

The pastor was skeptical about the work but when the next rain shower came along he was amazed to find no leak. Everyone was happy until one of the Trustees in the Church became curious enough to go up into the attic. That is when he found that the man who had “fixed” the problem had done so by hanging a five gallon bucket below the leak and allowing the water to accumulate there!!

We face many problems in life. We can “hang buckets” below them and try to ignore them or we can really deal with them by allowing God to do a genuine work in our heart. It is easier to just hang a bucket under the problem and try to ignore it but, eventually, the bucket will overflow and your problem will be worse than ever. Why don't you let God do the work in your life? The only buckets He will use are buckets of blessings.

September 27, 2000 WHEN TOMORROW IS TODAY

One of our elderly Pastors was talking with me recently and he made an interesting statement. He said, “Mike, I have reached the place in my life where Tomorrow is Today!”

We laughed a little but the more I thought about it the more accurate the statement became. Age, Health, and Circumstances had all combined to take this pastor out of “full time” ministry. He still spoke whenever possible and assisted in every way he could but his ability to function as an active, energetic Pastor has come to an end.

Now, his tomorrow has become his today. All those things he hoped to do “tomorrow” need to be done as soon as possible because the sand in his hour glass is rapidly running out. No man knows his day or hour but common sense and declining health all point toward getting the house in as much order as possible; and doing with haste all those things you feel you need to do.

If YOU knew today would be YOUR tomorrow what would you need, or want, to do different? Is there someone whom you plan to tell how much they mean in your life, tomorrow? Is there a person to whom you need to tell the gospel and you plan to do so tomorrow? (Remember, Today is the day of Salvation. Tomorrow is always too late to be saved).

What do you plan to do tomorrow that you need to do today? You might need to call today tomorrow and get it done!

October 3, 2000 MOTORCYCLE SCARS

Recently some friends of mine bought a motorcycle. The next day they went out and bought cemetery plots! They said it was a coincidence but it sure did look funny.

My dad was the first one in our family to own a motorcycle. Soon all four of us boys either owned a motorcycle or were busy riding his. One of us slipped on the pavement as he was turning around and now carries the scars on his elbow. Another had to lay his bike down in the middle of a road to avoid a car that pulled out in front of him. Then there was the one that flipped his bike on a sandy road and ended up doing a scratch dance with the bushes beside the road. We all rode bikes; and we all carry scars from the experience.

Life is a lot like riding a motorcycle; it is hard to come out of it alive, and, even if you do, you end up with many scars. Some are physical scars as a consequence of carelessness, conflict, or circumstances. Some are emotional scars that came from broken hearts, broken promises, or broken dreams. Some even have soul scars as a result of demonic attacks, temptation failures, or “being wounded in the house of a brother”. And, like motorcycle scars, most of them last for a lifetime.

I’m older now. I remember the thrill of letting the wind whip through your hair (when I had hair!) and the excitement of feeling part of the machine as you sped down the road. But I also remember the scars. So I am happy driving in the cocoon of my car and letting others buy the motorcycles and cemetery plots. Just like I’m content that I now live for God and find my joy in Him. I’ll let Satan’s children worry about death and scars from the wild ride he gives them.

October 4, 2000 LOOKING AT LADY LUCK

One of the questions people ask me from time to time is “What is wrong with Gambling”?. There are 4 reasons I think it is wrong to Gamble.

1) It **CAPTURES** those who play. Oh, the heartache and pain I have witnessed when people began with a “little innocent fun” that developed into a debt developing, family destroying habit. They would soon beg, borrow, or steal to get just one more dollar; convinced that the “next” dollar would be the one that hit the jackpot and made up for all their previous losses.

2) It **CORRUPTS** the Government officials who promote it. The profits are so enormous and the temptation to “compromise” just a little for your piece of the pot is so great until it is extremely hard to avoid entanglement. And a little thread soon leads to a steel rope that controls the actions and attitudes of many.

3) It **CIRCUMVENTS** the plan of God that men would earn his living by the sweat of his brow. If no one farms than a million dollars would not buy a loaf of bread!

4) It **CONDITIONS** men to look to “luck” to meet their needs instead of trusting in the Lord. Father God is replaced with “lady luck”; and she is a hard woman to live with, and extremely fickle. The only “sure bet” is to trust God for daily bread. That way you will always be a winner.

October 10, 2000

WEAK WITNESSES

Christians have the most needed “product” in the history of the world; eternal abundant life with God. Yet, many in the world have not received this “product”; and many have not even hear of it! Why are Christians such weak witnesses for such a needed “product”? The answer, I think, is threefold.

Christians are weak witnesses because they are WEAK IN CHARACTER. Careless, lukewarm living causes many Christians to be very poor “samples” for the “product” we promote. The abundant life that we pronounce with our lips seems a terribly poor choice when compared with the “fun life” that the world lives; and that many Christians seem to envy and emulate! It is hard to get you to switch to “dove” soap is you find I, like you, am using “zest”.

Christians are weak witnesses because they are WEAK IN FAITH. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God; yet many Christians look for ANY excuse to miss Church and seldom, if ever, have a consistent daily devotion with God. Many Christians would be totally shocked if something actually happened when they pray! And because their faith and fellowship with God are weak they don't have an impact on a world that is desperately looking for something that is supernatural; and yet real.

Finally, Christians are weak witnesses because they are WEAK IN COURAGE. Christians can talk about ball games, social events, and even the latest Gossip! But in church after church, when I ask how many people try to share their faith with at least one person each week, all I get are dropped heads and embarrassed looks. The reason is simple. Most Christians seem terrified to tell anyone about the most important event in their life; when they met God and became His child.

God commanded you to tell. The World needs to hear. Don't be a weak witness.

October 11, 2000

HOW ANTS EAT ELEPHANTS

Satan hates Christians. He wants to destroy them but he can't do that because greater is He that is in the Christian than he that is in the world. Knowing he cannot destroy them Satan next tries to defeat them. That will not work either because Christians are more than conquerors thru Christ who loves them.

That leaves Satan only one avenue of attack. He knows that if he can defile Christians then that will defeat their testimony and destroy their effectiveness for God so that is how he attacks. And, like an ant trying to eat an elephant, he does his job slowly but consistently until even the mighty have fallen.

Like Lot, he vexes the righteous soul of Christians day by day with the ungodly conduct of an ungodly world. Television, music, office conversations, and worldly advertisements all promote values and morals that are hurtful and offensive to Christian growth and weaken Christian character.

As in the case of David, Satan uses wicked imagination to stir thoughts and actions that defile and defeat Christian conduct. Animal sex replaces human love in the hearts and minds of people until purity is lightly honored while promiscuous behavior is praised, applauded, and laughed at; even by Christians!

If you are a Christian, Satan cannot destroy you and he cannot defeat you. But he will try to defile you. You must constantly be on guard or the “ant will eat the elephant!”

October 17, 2000

UNDERWEAR EXPOSED

(Heb 4:12) For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Word of God is wonderful. This familiar scripture verse tells us that the Word of God is Alive- It changes every time you read it while remaining changeless in its affirmation of God and His plan. It is also powerful- In its endurance: (Mat 24:35) Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. And in its ability: (Rom 10:17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

It is also an exposer. The Word of God is like a knife that cuts pass our defenses and pierces into the very heart of who we are. It has no pity on our pride; it opens us up and shows us secret places and passions in our soul that we really would prefer not to know about!

When this verse says that the Word of God exposes the “thoughts” of the heart it uses a Greek word that means our “underwear”. In other words, we are exposed down to our private and intimate parts. Attitudes and actions that we are able to hide from others (and sometimes even ourselves) are exposed by God’s word so we can see how much we need His righteous covering.

The word “intents” is a Greek word meaning to “expose the jugular” and is used of a person in the Greek games who is defeated and a sword is at his throat awaiting the thumbs up of mercy or the thumbs down of death. The Word of God exposes just how helpless and hopeless we are apart from Christ.

Read God’s word today. Heed God’s word today. And if it exposes your underwear it only means you need the Garment of Salvation that God freely provides.

October 18, 2000

PONDERING POINTS

In my position as state Promotional Director for Free Will Baptist I get to attend a large number of revivals and special services. Many times as the speaker delivers God’s message some particular point stands out and makes me “ponder”. Here are some of those “pondering points” I have written down recently.

“How many people will be in Heaven because of you?” Rev Dale Yarborough.

“Is the moral stand you make based on crowd convictions, church convictions, or Christ convictions” Rev Eddie Reddick

“When God’s people get serious, God gets serious” Rev John Diggers.

“I started out with nothing and still have most of it!” Missionary to Brazil, Jim Cowart

“God called me to be a fisher of men. He then gave me India as my fish pond. I cannot quit as long as there remain fish to catch.” 75 year old missionary to India, Carlisle Hanna

“My job is not to bring all men to Christ. My job is to bring Christ to all men”. Home Missionary Bennie Turner

“It is seeing a lost world through the eyes of Christ and the heart of God that makes us go on when we want to give up.” Home Missionary Todd Smith.

“We lose the joy of life when we begin to love the Blessing more than the Blesser.” Rev Theron Scott

.October 24, 2000 RETURN REWARDS

I love feeding Preachers! From time to time I get the opportunity to buy a meal for a Preacher. To me it is one of the most exciting things you can do because you know God is going to “return the favor” somewhere down the line; and God always gives more than has been given!

Recently at a Minister’s Meeting I realized that I did not have very much money. My first thought was, “I need to pay for some preacher’s meals today”. Carefully counting my pennies I was able to pick up several tickets and tell the Pastors that I would pay for them. On the way home from the Minister’s Meet my wife called and said we were going to have to go out to supper that night. Now you want to second guess buying those minister’s meals.

My wife’s sister in law’s mother had passed away and her nephew was home from service for the funeral. The family wanted to spend some time together with him, and since most of the ladies worked, it was decided to go out to eat and enjoy some fellowship. Sounds good except for the fact that I had cut myself pretty short paying for those minister meals.

As soon as we walked into the restaurant one of my brother in laws said to me, “Mike, my wife and I have been talking and we want to buy supper for you and your wife tonight.” I love feeding preachers. It is one of the most exciting things you can do!

(Eccl 11:1) “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” (And sometimes even the same day you sow it!!).

October 25, 2000 AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW

(Rev 14:13) *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

Sometimes it is a long time before you see the fruit from the seed that is sown. Let me tell you a true story.

I was at Home Coming at First Free Will Baptist Church in Greenville. People were testifying about what the Church had meant to them. The Piano player told about how she came to the Church and the long range impact it had.

She and her husband decided to visit their family in Coward. The family convinced them to attend Sand Hill Free Will Baptist Church with them. Pastor Washington Miles preached a powerful message and the couple got saved. Brother Miles told them to find a local Free Will Baptist Church in their home town of Greenville when they returned.

The next Sunday they attended the First Free Will Baptist Church in Greenville. Unknown to them, the Pastor of the Church had become discouraged and was thinking about leaving. He had prayed that week that if God wanted him to stay that somehow God would bring a couple into the Church so he could see some progress. This couple came in and 33 years later the successful ministry of this pastor is a matter of history.

Brother Washington Miles has gone on to be with the Lord. But the work that he did for God that Sunday is still bearing fruit in a most unusual way. Sometimes it is just marvelous to see how God works in our labors so that our “works do follow us”.

October 31, 2000

A NAZARETH NIGHT

In my mind's eye I can see it as clear as night. The sun is just going down on the sleepy little village of Nazareth. The cool October weather has allowed all the children to get out of the house and there are shouts of excitement and fun echoing down every street in town. About mid-way down a side street, at the door of a home beside a carpenter's shop, a still lovely lady wipes a wisp of hair from her eyes and calls out, "Jesus, it's time for supper. Gather your brothers and come on home."

With one last yell of "see you tomorrow" they all come tramping down the street. The younger ones are quarreling about having to come in and begging for one last adventure but Jesus herds them toward the house just like a shepherd would lead his sheep into safety for the night. Mary greets them all with a point toward the wash basin and tells Jesus to go next door and tell Joseph that supper is ready.

Soon they are all gathered around the table and Joseph asks Jesus if he would like to return thanks for the meal. The younger ones squirm a little but Mary and Joseph still marvel at how simple and honest are the prayers of Jesus; just like a son who is talking to his father. The supper talk is about events of the day and plans for tomorrow but as soon as the meal is finished Joseph asks Jesus to bring the most treasured item in their poor home to his chair. Jesus fetches the Holy Scriptures and the evening hour takes on a sacred stillness as the word of God is read and discussed.

That is what I see on an October night in Nazareth. What I don't see is Jesus dressing up as a witch and threatening his neighbors with violence and vandalism if they don't fill his bucket with candy. What do you see Jesus doing on the last night in October?

November 1, 2000

CHRISTIAN CITIZENS

John Stott in his classic book "Basic Christianity" makes the following statement- "The best contribution anyone can make to the supply of the world's needs is to live a Christian life, build a Christian home, and radiate the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ".

How succinctly he describes the Three main duties of a Christian who wants to be a good citizen.

1) **Live a Christian Life**- Can you think of a greater need in society today than pure, peaceable, godly living? Christians are the salt of the earth and what a horror it is when the "salt has lost its savor!" How important is this- remember, it is the removing of the Christian Church that ushers in the terrible tribulation time.

2) **Build a Christian Home**- Society increasingly believes it is the duty of the government or the schools to raise children correctly. Christians know that children are an heritage of the Lord and Christian parents are responsible for training them in the way they should go. The principles and practices taught in the Christian home are extremely important for now; and for eternity.

3) **Share the Gospel Light**- Christian Citizens are very aware that "the boat is sinking". We value the environment but we know that it will be burned up one day- along with all who reject God! Our priority must be the preaching of the Gospel with our life and lips so that people can be saved and enjoy a new earth wherein dwells righteousness!

November 7, 2000 PLASTIC PROTECTION

Email was what finally did it. For over seventy years this lady had found no real use for a computer. She had seen them and even used one a little at work, but she never had a desire for one until she found the benefits of Email. Suddenly, those far away friends were as close as a few taps on a keyboard.

Finances put a new computer out of range but an older model that was not needed by a local store so it could be donated to her was just her price. But even free items sometimes cost as she ended up having to purchase telephone connectors, wires, and a power strip in order to plug in all the components. And the power strip is where the problem came in.

She hooked everything up and plugged everything into the power strip. But when she tried to plug in the power strip it wouldn't work. She turned it over; and even tried a different receptacle but still she could not get the strip to plug in. Finally, she called a friend to see if she needed a special receptacle for her power strip.

As she described her problem it suddenly dawned on her friend that she had left the plastic protectors on the plug and that was why she couldn't get it to plug into the receptacle! It made me laugh until I thought about the number of times I fail to "power up" for God because I have let sin or self cover my connection to God. And I have found, as this lady found, that you cannot get power if you do not remove the obstacles between you and the source of power.

November 8, 2000 WHEN LIGHT IS DARK

Far too many Christians have become "bushel believers" who hide the light of their relationship with God under the "bushel" of busyness or bashfulness. Their Christianity is a private personal possession instead of a world changing, people drawing, life style.

The world has convinced us that it proper to talk about sexual exploits or sleazy gossip but we must never mention our private religious convictions. To the world it is quite proper to get on national TV and reveal you are having an affair with your mother but it would be the height of embarrassment to declare publically that you were praying for the salvation of your mother.

The world does not mind if you talk with foul language, expose your sinful desires, or even parade your naked body in public (!) but it cringes in terror if you talk about your life changing relationship with Christ.

Jesus said the light of believers was supposed to shine from the mountain tops; not cower under bushel baskets. Christians can choose to be politically correct or biblically obedient with their light. But what a sad day it will be for these "bushel believers" when they face the blinding light of a righteous God and try to explain the devouring darkness that enveloped this sin cursed world while they cowered under cover.

November 14, 2000 CONGREGATION CONCERNS

Why do Pastors go gray (or bald) so soon? Why do so many of them have “stress stomachs” full of ulcers? Part of the answer lies in the concerns every good pastor has for his congregation. These concerns are almost innumerable but let me list three that preoccupy most pastors.

The SALVATION of the Sheep. Pastors are well aware that we live in a world bound for destruction. Only those who trust Jesus Christ as Savior will escape the tears and torments of the eternally lost. The primary concern of every true Pastor is that the members of his congregation repent of their sins and turn in faith to God’s offer of eternal life in Christ. To a Pastor this is so clear, and so necessary, yet he must preach his heart out week after week to people who seem little concerned with the flames of hell that lick at their feet.

Secondly, a good pastor is concerned with the SANCTIFICATION of his flock. It is not enough for men just to get right, they must walk right also. Purity of life is the only way to build a consistent relationship with the Lord and a consistent testimony with the world. Developing Biblical Standards and Christian Character in people takes a lot of hard work and practical preaching on the part of a Pastor.

Finally, a good pastor has to work hard at getting his congregation actively involved in Christian SERVICE. Faith without works is a dead faith. Christians must be enlisted and trained in the work of God. And then the pastor must continually work with these volunteers in order to prevent desertions, disputes, and discouragements. My ulcer acts up just thinking about it!

Pray for your pastor this week. He has many concerns on his shoulders; and one of those concerns is you!

November 15, 2000 PRAYER BARRIERS

(Mark 11:24) *Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*

Can this verse really be in scripture? Is it possible that God really WANTS to answer our prayers? The answer, of course, is that (1 Pet 3:12) *the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers*:. Like any loving Father, God wants the very best for His children and He delights in granting them their proper requests.

Why then do so many Christians pray so much and get so few results? The answer lies in recognizing the three major barriers to consistently answered prayer:

- -the Iniquity in our Heart- (Psa 66:18) *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*: Sin in our life breaks our fellowship with God and blocks our prayer line.
- -the Ignorance in our Mind- We don’t know HOW to ask or WHAT to ask or even WHEN to ask and we have not because we ask not (James 4:2). Learning the mind of God helps bring the Blessings from God.
- -the Infirmities of our Body- Sometimes you just don’t feel like praying (remember the disciples slept while Jesus prayed). Praying is very hard work and many are too lazy to pray.

If few of our prayers are answered, it is because we beg and hope instead of asking, believing, and receiving.

November 21, 2000 2434

A year ago 2434 was nothing but a grown up field. A year ago 2434 was covered with weeds and almost useless. Today, due to the kindness of a Christian friend and the help of my wonderful brother, it is a level lot covered with grass and blooming with flowers.

A year ago people started driving on 2434 and bogging down was a normal part of their travel. Mud and slick piles of weeds made each excursion an adventure; and not the pleasant kind. Today, thanks to the kindness of Christian friends in a wonderful Church, 2434 has a concrete drive way, a concrete parking area, and a paved entrance.

A year ago snakes, rats, and spiders were the main occupants of 2434. A year ago 2434 was just a field to traverse for local rabbits, squirrels, and dogs. Today, due to the mercy and grace of our wonderful Lord, it holds the first home that two wayfaring strangers on this earth have owned in over 31 years.

A year ago the present residents of 2434 were filled with confusion and despair as they tried every method in their means to find a place to dwell but every road seemed to led to a dead end and every effort at finding a place to stay ended in failure. Today the lights of 2434 gleam brightly each night as they cast a welcome glow that spells Home as I drive in from work.

God is great and greatly to be praised. There are many things that I thank Him for and for which I praise His wonderful name. Among them this year is the place I now call home- 2434 Allen Road. It was bought with God's directions. It is being paid for by God's provision. And it exists so that two workers for God will have a place of refuge and refreshment as they journey around our state doing a work for God. Thank God for 2434.

November 22, 2000 THE MIDDLE VERSE

Did you know that the middle chapter in the Bible is Psalm 118? The shortest chapter in the Bible is the one before this chapter (Psalm 117) and the longest chapter in the Bible is the chapter after this chapter (Psalm 119).

The Bible has 594 chapters before Psalm 118 and 594 chapters after Psalm 118 making a total of 1188 chapters. 1188 could be translated Psalm 118:8. Guess what? This is the middle verse in the Bible. Should the central verse in the Bible have an important message? Look at it- "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." Is this not the main message of the entire Bible?

The Bible begins by showing man in a pristine state of innocence in the Garden of Eden. He has almost anything a man could want; and even when he needed a helpmate to make him complete God graciously provided one for him. His work was easy, his fellowship with God was daily, and his life was great.

Then came sin, expulsion from the garden, and all the deceit of sin at work in man's character and conduct. Since then the middle verse of the Bible has proved to be all too true- It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. In a world of chaos and confusion, who is your trust in today? Sinful man or a loving God? Put trust in God at the center of your life and see the wonderful difference it will make.

November 28, 2000 SERMON'S SUBSTANCE

Pastor Brian Tolliver of New Prospect Free Will Baptist Church recently prayed before I preached. In his prayer he asked God to do three things with the message I was about to deliver. As I listened to his prayer it occurred to me that the three things he had asked for were the three main purposes of a sermon.

1) Sermons are supposed to Convict us of the sin and wrong in our life. A famous preacher once said that the best way to preach so as to get no one converted was to preach about sin but never name any! Sermons are not discourses on current events. Nor should they be discussions about the pet peeves of the speaker. Sermons are messages from the Most High God that are intended to show how much we need God; and then show how God has provided a way for us to meet His standards through faith in the death and resurrection of His dear Son.

2) Sermons are supposed to Challenge us to commit to serving God with all our heart and soul. Sermons are not meant just to inform us about circumstances and situations; they are supposed to lead to action. The Bible admonition is always "Faith without works is dead, being alone". So a sermon will not be presented just to make you feel good; its main goal will be to motivate you to action for God.

3) Finally, a Sermon is meant to show how God can Change us into a new creature in Christ. The book stores are full of theories and programs that are supposed to help you make a success out of life. Only the word of God, preached under the anointing of God, can bring about real change, however.

God does not convict us of our wrong and challenge us to do right without providing a way for us to accomplish what He requires. And He reveals this plan in Sermons. Visit the House of God and listen to one this Sunday.

November 29, 2000 TROTT THANKS

Rev Tony Trott, Pastor of Jefferson Road Free Will Baptist Church in Sumter, recently shared numerous reasons why he was thankful he was a Christian. The reasons he gave starting with the letter "T" are enough to make any person stand up and shout about the privilege of being called a child of God.

Christ Transformed me from a sinner into a son of God when He forgave my sins and covered them with His shed blood. His Tenderness toward me during our years Together has kept me from falling.

Christ is the Truth and I can Trust Him to always lead me in the right way. The greatest Thrill I have in life is having unbroken fellowship with Christ. The greatest opportunity I look for in this world is to Tell someone else about what Christ has done for me.

Christ will Transport me one day to a Heavenly home where I will be able to enjoy His presence always. Christ might even come back today and rapture me from the Tribulation that will soon engulf this world. And when I finally get to Heaven I will see all the Treasures He has laid up for me to enjoy.

I believe Brother Tony's statements fit Christianity to a "T"! What a joy to know that God loved me enough to come to earth and die for my sins. What a pleasure have the Spirit of Christ abiding in my heart each day. And what an anticipation it is to look forward to Heaven where I will finally see him Face to Face.

December 5, 2000 THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

As Paul was writing Second Corinthians he came to a place in his telling of God's goodness that he simply had to proclaim, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Cor 9:15). What is this gift and what would make it so valuable that words could not describe it? The answer, of course, is the heart of Christmas.

Notice the MOTIVE of this Unspeakable Gift- God's Great Love- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". (John 3:16)

Next see the PURPOSE of this Unspeakable Gift- To free men from sin's penalty and give them eternal abundant life- "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23)

But what makes this gift so overwhelming until it simply cannot be described is the COST of this gift. Most of you expect that here I will say this gift cost the death of God's precious Son, Jesus Christ- and it did! But that is not the crux of the cost.

Note one finally verse- "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". (2 Cor 5:21) Let me explain it this way. God and I go to lunch. I incur a debt when I order a meal. When it comes time to pay I cannot pay. God says He will pay for me. He reaches into His bottomless pocket and pulls out the payment for my meal I am thankful. But God says, "I don't have any money either but I will wash the dishes for you in order to pay your debt!"

That's it!! That is what makes God's Gift "Unspeakable". Christ did not just die for my sins; He took my punishment of hell and endured it for me so that I could spend eternity in Heaven! Glory, Glory, Glory! What a wonderful savior; and what an unspeakable gift He gave!

December 6, 2000 JOSEPH'S CHOICES

(Mat 1:18-21) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

What a dilemma Joseph was in. Just before his long anticipated marriage he found his wife was pregnant. Three choices lay before him; choices that would affect millions.

In the loose moral standards of today this does not seem like such a big deal. In the time of Joseph and Mary it was a "killing offense". Had Joseph wanted to, he could have publically exposed Mary and asked the city to stone her. That would be the self-righteous, angry vengeance choice that suited the mob.

Joseph was a "Just man", however and decided to simply put her away privately. Translation- You go your way and I will go mine and we'll let you deal with this problem. The selfish Choice.

But Joseph chose the final option- listen to the voice of God, marry Mary, accept the gossip, and fulfill God's plan for man. Not an easy choice but the right choice.

This Christmas season will present you with many choices. Will you choose to follow the mob, think only of yourself, or listen to God and obey His plan for your time?? Your answer is important.

December 12, 2000 KILLER ORANGE JUICE

It started as a snuffle. Then came the hoarse sounding voice. Then the “I just don’t feel good” comments and it was obvious that a cold was beginning. The manager of our Free Will Baptist Bookstore is a dedicated Christian, a hard worker, and the only full time employee at the store! It sounded like he was getting sick and that would put us in a big bind here at Christmas.

We didn’t have time for him to go to a doctor; and catch no telling what from the sick people there, so I prescribed some home remedies. Two aspirins, some Vicks salve under his nose, and a gallon of orange juice. That’s when he told me, “Preacher, you must be trying to kill me instead of cure me”. Then it dawned on me that Brother Eddie is a diabetic and that much orange juice would send him into insulin shock.

For years good men have done the same thing. They have tried to deal with the chaos of a sin cursed world by recommending every “human remedy” they thought would work- religion, good works, self-confidence, education, etc.. What they failed to realize was that they were doing the same thing I was doing for Brother Eddie, killing him instead of curing him.

Christmas is about many things to many people but its true meaning is that God looked down from Heaven and saw that mankind was separated from Him and destined for eternal punishment with Satan. Unwilling in His love for this to happen, God sent His only begotten Son to earth to provide the only remedy that would cure instead of kill. He wrapped this gift to the world in a manger and attached a cross ornament to the bow and then presented it in such a way that whosoever will may come and receive eternal life.

This Christmas you can drink “orange juice” and slowly kill yourself, or you can accept God’s Son as your savior and follow Him to a new and abundant life. The choice seems easy to me.

December 13, 2000 HE CAME, HE IS COMING

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

All around people are making preparations to celebrate the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would do them well to turn their thoughts toward His second coming! For just as surely as He came the first time as a babe in Bethlehem, so He will come again very soon as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

At His first coming prophets had preached for years that He would come; but few really believed it. So it is today as only a few believers are anxiously awaiting His second coming.

At His first coming many were unaware of what had happened as Angels sang and shepherds worshiped. Even so, at His second coming the Church will be “snatched” away in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye and most people will hardly know or care about the removal of the righteous.

Today many only celebrate His first coming as an excuse to give gifts and celebrate with parties and festivities. After His second coming men will give gifts and celebrate at the death of the two witnesses who proclaimed His word (Rev 11:10). In each case they are inviting the wrath of God.

He Came before. He WILL come again. You need to factor that into your Christmas plans.

December 19, 2000 THE VIRGIN BIRTH

(Mat 1:20-23) But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

One of the most important aspects of Christmas is the Virgin Birth. Unless that truth is true then the rest of the Gospels are simply good moral stories. Without the Virgin Birth Jesus is simply another man born in a small village in a small nation who grew beyond his circumstances and became a great teacher and leader.

The Virgin Birth means that Jesus was born without the sinful nature that condemns all men after the fall of Adam. The Virgin Birth means that Jesus was the Son of God come to earth to die for the sins of mankind instead of the son of Mary born in a stable under suspicious circumstances.

Paul said that if you did not believe in the resurrection you were of all men most miserable (I Cor 15:19). I contend that if you do not believe in the Virgin Birth then Christmas is simply Xmas and the stress and commercialization that have become such a normal part of the holiday season will make it a miserable time for you. But if Christ was born of a virgin that makes Him the Son of God; and that is the only thing that will turn this holiday into a Holy Day.

December 20, 2000 THE CHRISTMAS WORD

(John 1:1,114) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

When God wanted to talk "People" He sent a person! Man's sinful rebellion had brought different dialects to the earth (Gen 11). How could one person communicate to all these different languages and cultures? God knew the only way was for that person to be the "Word"; so God, the Word, was made flesh and dwelt among men.

This means then that Christmas is not just a celebration; it is a communication. It is God talking about the three things that most need to be talked about in any language or culture: Love, Redemption, and Hope.

Love for man caused God to leave the comforts of Heaven and come to the cruelty of earth. Love beyond expression. Love beyond comprehension. Love that could only come from a God who is Love.

Redemption is the reason Love acted. God's Love was not some mushy sentiment meant to make us feel good. He knew we were slaves to sin, captives to corruption, and bound for Hell. So His love brought Redemption. And that brought Hope for all mankind.

What a Word God gave us at Christmas! Listen to Him today.

December 26, 2000 PROVIDE AND PILOT

I call it one of those “Glory” verses- (Psa 78:72) So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands. It shows that God provides for, and pilots, His people.

Everyone needs Nourishment and Direction. The Nourishment sustains our life and the Direction provides meaning to our life. That is why Jesus stressed that He was the “Bread of Life” and the “Light of the world”; He came so that man would have everything he really needed to live an abundant life.

But note how God Provides and Pilots. He feeds us according to the integrity of his heart! The “integrity of his heart”- and we are talking about a pure and holy God! That is as good as it gets! When God provides our needs He does so with pure motives that seeks only the ultimate good of the person.

And look at how He leads us, “by the skilfulness of his hands”. Is there anyone more skillful than God? Would anyone else’s hand on the steering wheel of your life be as steady or as sure? Absolutely not! What a joy it has been in my life over and over to see God’s skillful steering in my circumstances and situations. Often the passages have been narrow and the obstacles have loomed directly ahead, but God’s guiding hand has always brought me safely through.

A new year looms just over the horizon. I don’t know what it will bring or where it will lead. But, as a Christian, I can rest in a God who provides provision according to the integrity of his heart and who pilots my ship by the skillfulness of his hands. And that allows me to face the new year with faith and hope.

December 27, 2000 POSITIVE PRACTICE

(James 4:13-17) Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: {14} Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. {15} For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. {16} But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. {17} Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

In a short article, that is a lot of scripture but it was necessary in order to show you what God revealed to me. First note the folly of Presumption. As one man said, “Man composes but God disposes”. We make our plans but God can change all of our plans in a moment of time- sickness, death, disaster, etc.

But note verse Seventeen. It reveals the necessity of Positive Practice if we are to be acceptable to God. Verse seventeen begins with a “Therefore” and the therefore is there for us to see that, while it is wrong to leave God out of our Plans; it is a sin to leave good works out of our Practice!

Just as it would be presumptuous for me to plan my life as if God did not exist, so it would be folly for me to claim to be a Christian and fail to actively live for God. Remember that; and put God first in your plans and in your practice this year.