

2001 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 2, 2001 CHEWING CLEANSER

(Psa 65:3) Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.

Sometimes an “innocent sin” can become a life changing, and life controlling, habit. It is then that “iniquities prevail against me”. What can be done about such a horrible state of affairs? Well, in our verse, the Psalmist said that God would have to “purge” away our transgressions.

The word “purge” normally means “to remove the waste” and is routinely used with the idea of giving someone a laxative! With that in mind, let me tell you a short story. Seems a mother I know found a can of chewing tobacco in her son’s pocket when she went to wash his clothes. She knew her son was aware that she didn’t want him to chew; and she also knew that if she simply rebuked him that a big scene would develop.

Inspiration hit her and she took a box of brown looking laxative and chipped it up into her son’s can of chewing tobacco. It was several years later, after he had given up chewing, that he found the reason chewing tobacco upset his stomach was not the tobacco but what was in the tobacco!

Sometimes the only way God can get us to give up sin is to allow us to see what a “waste” it is. He would like to do that by simply telling us that the sin is wrong and needs to be abandoned. As rebellious as we are, however, God often has to add a little something to our nasty habits in order for us to see how really bad they are. That doesn’t make it pleasant for us, or for those around us, but it does bring us to the place that sin becomes exceedingly sinful and we ask God to purge away our transgressions. And, in the long run, that is worth any amount of discomfort.

January 3, 2001 CHURCH REPENTANCE

Maybe the problem is that we are calling on the wrong people to repent! Don’t get me wrong, the Bible calls on “all men everywhere to repent” and Jesus specifically said he had “not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt 9:13). However, when I look at the last message that Jesus spoke to the Church I find that in five out of the seven churches He spoke to He issued an order for them to repent or else!

What would a Church be doing that would cause it to need repentance?

The Church at Ephesus was to repent because she had left her first love. God was no longer first in the message or methods of the Church.

The Church at Pergamos was to repent because she had allowed the false doctrine of Balaam to be taught and practiced.

The Church at Thyatira was to repent because she allowed a “Jezebel” to teach and seduce God’s servants to commit fornication. Corrupt the leader, corrupt the congregation.

The Church at Sardis was to repent because she was a dying congregation. Wow, that applies to a lot of churches today!

The Church at Laodicea was to repent because of her lukewarm living and attitude.

Does YOUR Church need to repent? Remember, a Church is made up of members. Is God calling YOU to repentance?

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January 9, 2001 LAMB IN A LARGE PLACE

For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place. (Hosea 4:16)

When I first read this passage I thought it was a great promise. After all, doesn't it sound great to be a "lamb in a large place"? Then I remembered a firm Bible principle- "a verse out of context is a pretext!" and decided to look at this verse in greater depth.

This is a passage of scripture where God is berating Israel for her backsliding ways and lukewarm living. When God tells Israel here that she acts like a backsliding heifer He is saying that Israel is a rebellious animal that continually pulls away from its owner. Because of this rebellious attitude then God said He would feed Israel as a "lamb in a large place".

Now it becomes clear that this is not a promise of blessing but a pronouncement of woe! Just as the broad way is the road to destruction, so the "large place" is a field of folly. A sheep wandering in a large place would lose the guidance of the shepherd, the fellowship of the other sheep, and the provision of green pastures beside still waters. The large place becomes a field of dangerous valleys, prickly briars, and wandering wolves.

Satan makes it sound great to be a "lamb in a large place". He promotes it as a place of freedom, fun, and fleshly satisfaction. We know, however, that the size of the cell does not negate the captivity of the prisoner. Don't let your rebellious living lead you from the security of the sheepfold into the dangers of the "large place". Remember, a violin string makes no music, and has no purpose, until it is attached to its place.

January 10, 2001 GETTING A HANDLE ON LIFE

How do you deal with life when life will not give you a square deal? How do you control circumstances when circumstances are beyond your control? How do you handle life's problems when Life always moves the handle just as you get ready to grasp it? Do you know what I mean?

Sickness never seems to put itself on your schedule when you have a convenient time to schedule it. Interruptions always seem to interrupt you at a time when you really don't want to be interrupted. Stress always seems to attract stress so that the more pressure that is put on you, the more pressure that is put on you!! Makes you depressed just thinking about how depressing depression is, doesn't it!

The Bible states that Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are". How, then, did He deal with interruptions, catastrophes, and increased stress? Amazingly.

When people were hungry and His disciples couldn't buy bread Jesus looked for God to provide a glorious provision; even if it took a little boy's lunch. When the boat was sinking and the disciples were terrified Jesus slept in complete confidence that situations beyond his control were not beyond God's ability. And when Jesus was confronted with increasing demands on His time and energy He simply "took time to power up" through prayer.

Life will either drive you to despair or develop your faith in God. And that is the handle on life you need to grasp.

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January 16, 2001 DOG HOUSE HUSBAND

We were staying in a motel while we visited with several churches in the Spartanburg area. As usual, I had gotten up first, prepared for church, and was going down to the lobby to get some coffee while my wife was getting ready. I noticed a man sitting by himself and spoke to him as I was getting my coffee. It was obvious he was not in good spirits so I decided to engage him in conversation and try to cheer him up.

Here is his sad, but true, story. His wife has been bugging him about replacing the leaking showerhead at their home so he decided as his Saturday project to do something about it. No big deal, right? Just go to the local plumbing store, find the shower head you need (along with a few other things), get out all your tools, and unscrew the shower head. Then chaos hits. The house is old and the pipes are corroded. Unscrewing the shower head breaks the pipes in the wall behind the shower. Water is going everywhere. Now the main water switch to the house has to be turned off and the home is "water less".

Fast forward to Sunday Morning as this sad story is being told by a man who had to bring his family to spend the night in a motel since they did not have any water at home. The plumber is hard at work (at double time pay since it is a Sunday!) removing the wall, replacing the pipes, and putting in the new shower head. One more "Saturday projects" will put him in the poor house!

This man's actions affected his home, his family, his pocketbook, and his pride. Remember that the next time Satan tells you a little sin will not produce big problems in your life.

January 17, 2001 MOM'S MOUSETRAPS

My job involves much traveling. That means that the mobile home my wife and I call home is empty much of the time. To make a long story short, we found evidence of mice the other day. My wife was not a happy camper.

Out comes the mouse traps. The first day home from work we have trapped a mouse. Problem solved, right? Just to be sure, I reset the traps. Before we go to bed we hear the trap go off and another mouse is caught. The next morning another mouse has been trapped. When we came home that night another mouse had been trapped. Thankfully, either the mouse has put out warning signs to avoid our house or we have solved the problem for now.

During this time my mother was in the hospital. While sitting with her one day I told her about the mouse problem and she told me she was having some problems with mice also. I asked her if her traps were working and she said, "Not exactly. I have never gotten around to setting them."

I looked at Mom and said, "When you have a mouse problem and you fail to set your mouse traps it is like saying you intend to get saved some day and yet never make a decision for Christ." Everything is available to deal with the problem but if no action is taken then no change will result.

Life is a short journey. Death leads to a final destination. Don't get caught with your "mousetraps" in a drawer!

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January 23, 2001 THE GLADNESS GOD

Psalm 4:7 "Thou has put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased"

Aren't you glad about God's gladness! The world we live in offers us happiness- I am happy when things happen to happen happily but happiness seems to be meagerly given and it disappears like the morning fog in the harsh glare of reality's sunshine. God's Gladness, however, abides amidst debt, disease, and even death.

What causes God's Gladness to be so great? First of all, look at the source of God's Gladness- "Thou {God} has put gladness in my heart". God's Gladness does not come from changing circumstances or fleeting fame; it is based on a relationship with a never changing, always loving, God. God's Gladness is not something I must manufacture for the moment or muster up to impress those around me. It is the outward expression of the inward joy that I have because of the wondrous privilege of having constant communication with the God of the universe. The Spirit of God lives within me and His joy radiates in me and from me.

How great is God's Gladness? "More than in the time that their corn and their wine increased". Society is only happy when possessions or partying increases. They want a million dollars but find it empty and vain when they finally obtain it so they seek after more and more and more. They work all week so they can knock themselves out all weekend with drugs, drink, and debauchery to make them forget the emptiness they felt all week! God's Gladness abides in my heart all week long and simply expands and exalts on the week end when I worship and adore the Lord with fellow Christians.

God's Gladness is available for "whosoever will" allow God to come into their heart. He is knocking at your door right now. Let Him in and let the gladness begin.

January 24, 2001 LEASING LIES

(Psa 4:2) *O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing?.*

The word "leasing" here threw me for a loop until I looked it up in a Bible dictionary and found it meant "lying". It is, however, the same word from which we get our term "leasing" today. So I asked myself the question, "What do lying and leasing have in common?" Here are the similarities I came up with.

- Leasing is for a long term, so lying has long term consequences.

- Leasing cost a lot up front and at the end; so does lying.

- Leasing is not evident from outward observation. Unless you tell someone your car is leased they think it is purchased. Even so, lying may not be evident from casual outward observation.

- Leasing costs continue to escalate- the more miles you put on your car the more it costs you. The same way with lying. The more you do, and the longer it remains uncorrected, the more it will cost you.

- Leasing makes a car yours but it is not yours! Lying makes you think you have gotten by with something but eventually you find it got you instead of you getting it!

Don't sign a "lease" on lying. It is a mighty poor bargain.

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January 30, 2001 REACH ONE IN 2001

(Prov 11:30) *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.* Wisdom for the Christian would dictate that he make every effort possible this year to win someone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Soul winning is our greatest task; and should include our greatest efforts. Why then do so many Christians go an entire year without leading one soul to trust Christ for the pardon and forgiveness of sins?

“He who aims at nothing normally hits it!” If we don’t make it our goal to share our faith each week with someone along life’s journey we will not take advantage of the opportunities God puts in our paths. So your first rule for this New Year should be to seek out opportunities to share Christ with others. Here are a few methods to help you.

Share the Burden- Next Sunday night pass out slips of paper at Church. Have everyone write the name, address, and phone number of someone whom they are concerned about on that slip of paper. Then have each side of the church exchange their names with the other side of the church. Everyone is to take that name, pray over it, and then seek an opportunity the following week to share their testimony (Letter, phone, personal) with that person and invite them to church.

Seek a Sinner- Pray for opportunities to share your faith. Look for opportunities to tell someone what God revealed to you in your devotion that day. Gossip about the good service you had Sunday.

Talk about God- Ask someone what they think the weather is like in Heaven today! Talk about the coming tribulation and ask them how they will deal with it. Share your excitement about God’s work in your life and circumstances and ask them how they handle life’s troubles without the Lord’s help.

Reach at least one for the Son in 2001. It will bring salvation to a heart and rejoicing in Heaven; and a million years from now you will still remember it as one of your greatest accomplishments.

January 31, 2001 SPACE TO REPENT

In Revelation 2:21 God talks about giving a wicked woman “Space to repent”. In other words, God said that before His judgment fell He would give a time for the person to reconsider and change their actions. In this case God does not give a specific time period before His judgment will fall but in numerous cases in the Bible the “Space to repent” is clearly listed.

In Gen 15: 13-16 God tells Abraham that the children of Israel will not be allowed to invade the promised land for 400 years until the “iniquity of the Amorites is full (complete)”. Once God’s space to repent for the Amorites was completed then the Children of Israel were to invade the land and destroy every man, woman, and child as part of God’s Judgment.

In the days of Noah God gave a space of 120 years for the people to repent as Noah built the ark. At the end of that time God shut the door to the Ark and every man, woman, and child not in the ark was destroyed by God judgment of water.

In the parable of the fruit tree in Luke 13 the dresser of the vineyard ask for 1 year in order to get fruit from the fruitless tree. When that time was over it would be either fruit or the fire!

But in the story of the rich fool in Luke 12 his space to repent ran out that night- “God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: “

How much “space to repent” do you have left?

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February 6, 2001 ROCKS, STUMPS, AND RECLINERS

At first the statement confused me. People from the upstate area would talk about going out and spending time at their “Rock” and coming back spiritually refreshed and I would wonder what they were talking about. Finally, it dawned on me that the upstate rock was the same thing as a low country stump. And I know what a low country stump is all about, that is a place to get alone with God so you can share the burden of your heart and allow God to speak sweet peace to your soul.

Now that I have grown older and moved from a wooded area to an open field, my stump has changed to the recliner in my office. But, regardless where you go- rock, stump, or recliner- you should always have a place of prayer and worship where you can meet with the Lord on a regular basis.

Jesus called such a place a “closet” in His Sermon on the Mount- Matt 6:5-8 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.⁶ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Every person needs a private place where they can do business with God and not simply show off before men. So find you a rock, a stump, a recliner, or a closet where you can spend time with God today. You will soon realize that the special time you spend at the “rock” is the most important part of your day.

February 7, 2001 SAMARIA SITTING

It all began because Jesus “must needs go through Samaria”. The Disciples did not understand why they were going into “no mans land” instead of traveling the route normally used by the Jews but they willingly followed Jesus (good principle to remember!).

Upon arriving at Sychar, Jesus told the disciples to go into town and get something to eat while he rested by the well. With much apprehension, they go into the town while Jesus just sits by the well “resting”. A woman of ill repute comes to the well for water and Jesus brings her to the realization that He is the Son of God and is able to change her life.

Then, and this is simply amazing, Jesus sends the woman back into town to spread the good news while He remains sitting by the well. Soon the disciples return with the food and the woman returns with the town (!) while Jesus is simply sitting by the well.

Revival breaks out in the town and refreshment is provided for Jesus with hardly any effort on His part. What a lesson for us to learn. We think we must work ourselves to death with great effort and expenditure of energy but Jesus was extremely successful by simply learning to be where God wanted Him to be at the time He was supposed to be there. He did more by sitting at a well in Samaria in the will of God than most Christians do in a life time of self-effort. Maybe what we need is to just “sit in Samaria” for a while.

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February 13, 2001 WHICH WAY OUT?

Josh McDowell in his book "Answers to Tough Questions" give a great illustration about why Christians claim Jesus is the only way to God; and Heaven. You and your friends are walking in the woods. Suddenly, you realize that you are lost. Night is coming, hunger stirs in your stomach, wild animals roar all around you. You try every way you can to find the way out but every effort on your part only leaves you frustrated and deeper in the woods.

All at once you see a path, hope springs in your bosom as you and your friends hurry along. Ahead you see a fork in the path and you realize that your decision about which path to take could mean life or death. When you get to the fork you notice two people. One is healthy, alert, wearing a park ranger's uniform and pointing down a path as he proclaims, "This is the way to life, freedom, and deliverance."

Lying in the middle of the other path is the other person: dead, stinking with decay, and infested with worms. Which one of these men do you think would be the proper choice to ask directions about getting out of the death trap you have found yourself in?

Mohammed, Confucius, and every other leader of this world's religions have died and their body has decayed in the grave. Good men, no doubt, but not a good choice to follow about matters of eternity.

The fact that makes Jesus so unique is that His grave is empty!! As the angels proclaimed, "He is not here, for He has risen." He can give advice about eternity because He came from eternity, He proclaimed information about eternity, and He has eternally risen from the dead. I believe that I will take the path He recommends. And I believe you would be wise to do the same thing.

February 14, 2001 LOVE NOT

Three times in Scripture God tells us about some things we are to "Love Not". Maybe these negative admonitions will help produce some positive passions in our lives and actions.

1) **Love Not Self:** (Prov 20:13) *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.* Laziness of life comes from thinking only of self. Forgetting the needs of others while depending on others to meet all our needs will lead to failure and frustration.

2) **If you Love Not the Savior you are in big trouble-**(1 Cor 16:22) *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.*(Accursed when the Lord comes).You should love your church, you should love fellow Christians, you may even love, in a spiritual way, your Pastor; but you better never come to the place you play the Christian Game without really loving Christ! This real love for Christ will change your conduct, your character, and your community. Does yours??

3) **Love not Society-** (1 John 2:15) *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* Loving the things of this world ends up stealing our testimony, our treasures, and our talents. And what a horrible thing it would be to walk the aisle at the marriage supper of the Lamb with another woman held in your arms!

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February 20, 2001 FOUR FACTS

Garden, God, Helper provided, Paradise to enjoy. What went wrong? Serpent enticed, Eve bit, Adam fell, God displeased. Morning dawns anticipating God's visit and ends hiding from God's presence in the fig bushes. When the day started there was a barrier about one tree but when it ended there was a fence around the entire garden. And on this day, four facts about sin were revealed in all their horror.

1) **Sin makes us Hide from God.** What a horrible thought. Our heart is a lonely hunter seeking only God. Sin makes us hide from the very one that our heart is seeking to find. And, sadly, when we starting hiding from God in the dark bushes our search for the satisfaction our aching heart craves leads us to horrible attitudes and actions.

2) **Sin makes us Blame others.** I've seen men fall into sin and immediately start blaming their wife, their church, their friends, and their circumstances. The devil made them do it or a character flaw beyond their control controlled them. The finger of blame is pointed in every direction except in the direction of the person who actually committed the sin. And there will be no change until they heed the message from God which states, "Thou art the man!"

3) **Sin makes us Suffer Consequences.** Serpent slithering, Eve submitting, Adam sweating. The Personal Consequences were astonishing. The Garden closed, the ground cursed, God crying. Oh, how awful are the results of sin.

4) **Sin makes a Blood Sacrifice necessary.** Fig leaves tried but failed. Only the shedding of blood from an innocent sacrifice will bring about remission of sin. Praise God that Jesus Christ died for my sin debt. Accept Him, serve Him, Worship Him, Share Him, and Look for Him.

February 21, 2001 HOSPITAL OR HOME

A Hospital is a wonderful place. Now, stop laughing, I really mean it. Just think about it. In a hospital you are the center of attention. You get to lie around in bed all the time where you are waited on hand and foot. If you are in pain someone tries to stop it and if you have a problem someone tries to solve it.

In a hospital family and friends come to visit you on a regular basis. People bring you flowers and special gifts and many will even spend time in prayer with you.

In a hospital everyone wears the same "designer" gowns; and very little else, so choosing what to wear is not a problem. Hospital food is healthy (although not necessarily tasty!) and, many time, cooked specifically for your situation.

With all these benefits, why is it that almost everyone you meet can't wait to get out of the hospital and back to their home? You would think they would want to stay in the wonderful environment of the hospital but people almost cry with relief when the doctor finally signs their papers and allows them to go home.

To me, this world is a hospital and Heaven is home. I appreciate everything that people do for me here and I don't want to sound ungrateful for their care and concern but I sure am excited about going home! There is just something about finally being in the place of rest with the Savior I love that makes me want to leave this "hospital" and head for home- Is it check out time yet?

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February 27, 2001 WHY I DON'T PRAY

Pastor Tony Trott of the Jefferson Road FWB Church in Sumter recently gave the devotion at our Minister's Breakfast. He began by stressing the fact that all Christians know they need to pray. Then he gave us 11 reasons why we don't pray even though we know we need to pray. Looking at these reasons may help you change your prayerlessness into prayerfulness.

I don't pray because: (1) It reveals my heart to God and I don't want God to see everything in my heart. (2) God already knows my needs so why should I go to the trouble of telling them to Him. (3) I believe God but sometimes I don't really believe that God can make a difference in the difficult situations of life that I face. (4) I sometimes doubt that God cares about what I am facing. With all the world to run, my problem would probably get put so far down on the list until it would never get answered. (5) I sometimes feel alone and unworthy and just don't feel like talking to God.

Some other reasons I don't pray are: (6) Prayer is hard work and I am too lazy to put forth the effort. (7) I am impatient to get an answer and don't want to wait on God's time. (8) That extra half hour of sleep in the morning or that extra hour of TV at night seems more needful than spending time in prayer. (9) God will take care of it anyway so why should I tell Him what to do in prayer. (10) I don't want to burden God with my problems. I will try to carry them alone and only bother God if they get beyond my abilities.

And the final reason I don't pray is (11) I just don't see the importance of Prayer. Ouch! Excuse me, I need to go pray.

February 28, 2001 MASTER METHODS

The Master's methods sometimes amaze me. A lady in Kansas needed some Bibles for her teen group. The printed Bibles were easy to order but she had the additional problem that (sadly) many of her teens were unable to read very well so they would need the Bible on Cassette.

Several years ago I obtained a Master copy of the Bible on Cassette that allows me to make copies to give away. It has been a tremendous help in the past years. But time constraints would not let me copy some tapes to send to this lady before she had to have them so I ordered a case of already recorded Bible tapes from the company from which I bought the Master tapes.

Imagine my surprise when I opened the tapes and found a set of Master tapes instead of copied tapes. The Master tapes are MUCH more expensive than the copied tapes so I called the company to explain the error. When I told them they had sent me the wrong tapes; and mentioned what I was using them for, they said to just keep the Masters at the copy price so this lady could use them to make copies for her teen group!

Now this Teen group can read the word of God or listen to the word of God as the need arises without having to wait on me to find the time to prepare tapes for them. When the Master wants Masters in order to share His word He is able to work circumstances in awesome ways.

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March 6, 2001 THE MAZE

A great king noticed one day that his knights spent much of their time boasting about their greatness and bragging about their exploits. Realizing the need of teaching them a needed lesson he had his gardener devise and plant a giant maze. Then he called his knights in and asked them to prove their abilities by being the first to escape from the maze.

The knights gladly accepted the challenge and were placed into the maze. Some of them sprinted to the first corner with cries of exaltation and boastfulness determined to travel the maze the fastest. Others devised schemes and plans and depended on their intellect as they journeyed pass turn after turn in the maze. Several even joined forces in the belief that collectively they would be able to find the way out.

As they wandered through the maze they found a break in the wall leading to another maze. Over the entrance was a sign telling them not to go that way. Some thought it was a trick and went through into a deeper maze of briars and thorns which made their journey one of misery and suffering; and they learned the pain of disobeying the king's directions.

Hour after hour the sun beat down on these men as they wandered in the maze. The only relief from the oppressive heat was a shade tree along one wall. There in a small alcove was a spring of water, refreshing shade, and a man who said he was sent by the king to give them help if they needed it. The knights scoffed at his offer of help for a while but finally one of them, in desperation, asked for help in finding the way out. The helper simply said, "Look up." The knight was puzzled at first until he looked up and noticed that a limb from the shade tree hung down enough that he could reach up to it and use the tree as a means of escaping the maze.

Life is a maze; the only way out is the tree provided by God- (Acts 4:12) Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

March 7, 2001 CONSCIOUS COMMUNION

To most people, God is an inference, not a reality. They deduct from the evidence presented to them that God must exist so they believe He exists. Someone or something HAD to bring this world into existence so they believe that "force" was God and they believe in God based on "common sense".

To others, God is simply another name for goodness, natural beauty, or eternal truth. Striving for goodness is the highest ideal of man so this must be striving for God. As beautiful as nature is there must be a supreme being somewhere that created it all so we will give him the name, God. Enlightenment and education bring men to search for the final truth; so they call this final truth, God.

But I am puzzled. In the Garden of Eden God came down each day and walked with Adam and Eve. He was not a force of nature, He was a person! The Bible calls upon us to "Taste" and see that the Lord is good. How do you taste an inference? Jesus said that his sheep "Hear" his voice. He also said that the pure in heart would "See" God. How do you see and hear a theory?

I believe God is real and that I need to have conscious communion with Him on a regular basis. I must stop simply studying about him and actually start spending time with Him. I must stop praying to the ceiling and begin talking to my "Father". I must walk with God as a friend so that His character becomes my character. I MUST have conscious communion.

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March 13, 2001 LOST THAT LOVING FEELING

The Righteous Brothers (What a neat name! I always thought it should have been used by a religious group instead of a rock group) used to have a song out that said, "You have lost that loving feeling". One of the verses stated that the "loving feeling" was gone, gone, gone and now they were so alone. Seen it happen to Christians in their relationship with God.

Mrs Diane Bridgemen recently spoke at a ladies meeting and shared about her triumph over marriage problems. She said that when she was first married her husband used to always touch her and make some kind of comment every time he passed her. One day as she was washing dishes she noticed that her husband walked by without any comment or contact. Right then she knew her marriage was in trouble. Seen it happen to Christians in their relationship with God.

The very first rebuke that Jesus had for His church was that they had left their "first love". They were still active and energetic but they had lost that loving feeling and now it was gone, gone, gone and they were so alone. When my wife and I were dating she used to sit right beside me. Several years into our marriage I commented on the fact that she was sitting on the other side of the car now. She made a couple of defensive comments but I settled the argument with the statement, "I haven't moved!"

If you have lost that loving feeling in your relationship with God and you no longer feel the pleasure of His contact and comments; I have just one question for you, "who moved?". And what are you doing to get back to where you need to be?

March 14, 2001 TRIBULATION OR CELEBRATION

Jesus is coming. Write it down. Mark it on your calendar. Look for it to happen. Expect it any minute. But, regardless of what you do, the coming of Jesus is going to take place.

When Jesus returns to get His Bride (the Church) your choices will be simple- Tribulation or Celebration. Joyful reunion or Judgmental Wrath. The marvels of the Heavenly kingdom or the mark of the satanic empire.

What will determine if it will be celebration or tribulation for you? Easy answer, the determining factor is your relationship with Jesus Christ. God's separating question will be, "Were you born again by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?"

Note what I did not say. I did not say God would ask if you were religious, or thought well of by society, or were rich. It will not be your fame, your family, or your fortune that will be the deciding factor. What will matter on that day will be your trusting in, relying on, and clinging to Jesus Christ as your only help and hope.

I am ready for the celebration. I can hardly wait to see what God has in store for them that love Him. It is going to be some kind of party- a marriage feast to end all marriage feasts! Hope you are coming with me. But if you are not part of the Celebration you had better prepare for the Tribulation.

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March 20, 2001 SUPER SERIOUS SIN

The Sky is Brass. Troubles mount for the people of God. Persecution is prevalent. Easy enough to solve. Just call the Church to prayer and ask everyone to re-dedicate their lives to God and suddenly the sun will break through the clouds and the problems will disappear- Right? Not always! Joshua found out after Israel was defeated at Ai that even prayer and dedication don't work sometimes.

God told Joshua that the problem was deeper than a causal commitment would solve. This was not a cold that an aspirin and some orange juice would cure, this was cancer that required radical surgery. Three times in scripture, God sees a problem among His people that is so serious until it defeats Nations, dismantles Kingdoms, and destroys Lives. This is what I call SUPER SERIOUS SIN and its consequences are deadly.

God told Israel to destroy everything in Jericho. Achan allowed greed to cause him to disobey God and take some of the loot and hide it in his tent. After being publicly exposed, he and all his family and possessions were destroyed. God said the only cure for this Serious Sin was to remove the "Cancer".

King Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions. Pride and Public pressure caused him to disobey God as he spared King Agag and kept the best of the flocks. Samuel the prophet preached to him that "to obey is better than sacrifice," (I Sam 15:22) and told Saul that his Kingdom was rent from him and his usefulness for the Lord was destroyed.

Ananias and Sapphiria greedily kept back part of their offering as they lied to Peter, and the Holy Spirit, about their Gift. The result was instant death.

Three "Super Serious Sins" and all revolved around greed and pride. Do you see a pattern here? Do you own things or do things own you? Are you destroying your family, your church, and your soul in order to have more? Remember how seriously God treats these "Super Serious Sins".

March 21, 2001 GOOD WORKS MAINTENANCE

Four times in Scripture Paul tells a young preacher that certain things are "Faithful Sayings".

1) **Salvation was Christ's Purpose:** (1 Tim 1:15) This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

2) **Spiritual is more important than Physical:** (1 Tim 4:8-9) For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

3) **Resurrection Reality overcomes the rigors of ministry:** (2 Tim 2:11) It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

4) **Good works, that are a sign of a changed life, need to be carefully maintained:** (Titus 3:8) This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

That last one about "maintaining good works" intrigues me. It shows that "good works" can easily stop functioning in the life of a Christian unless you are careful to give them the support they need. What a challenge. Not just to do good works but to uphold them as well. Now I need to ask myself each day, "What good work maintenance do I need to do today?"

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March 27, 2001 EARNING YOUR AIR

You, and a large number of other people, are trapped in a mine as the ceiling collapses. The air will soon run out and the only means of escape is digging through to the outside air. You begin frantically to dig. When you stop for a moment to catch your breath and look around you notice that numerous people are not digging. One girl is busy painting her nails, a man is busy counting the money in his wallet, and several others are engaged in heated conversation about how hot it is in the cave.

You know the air is fast running out and everyone needs to be busy digging. Maybe your question to these people should be, "What are you doing to earn the air you are breathing?" To some degree, that is the question Jesus is asking when He refers to the fruitless tree "cumbering" the ground in the following parable.

(Luke 13:6-7) Jesus spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

This is the only place "Cumbereth" is used in the Bible. It means to occupy space without providing any benefit. So Jesus is actually asking what right the tree had to exist without fulfilling the purpose for which God had planted it. Boy, does that cause me to examine my life! Am I enjoying God's sunshine and using the nutrients provided by God without producing any "fruit" for God? If so, according to this parable by Jesus, the judgment will be harsh; and soon.

March 28, 2001 PACIFIER PROBLEMS

Ever tried to wean a child from a pacifier? Good luck! Those of you who have gone through this traumatic experience can testify that it is almost as hard on the parents as it is on the child. The child believes that you are trying to do them tremendous harm and they are determined to resist you in every way possible.

A similar problem emerges when God tries to wean people from some of the pacifiers in their life. They believe they cannot live without these "pacifiers" and they fight God every step of the way when He tries to wean them. Oh, if they could only learn that God wants to liberate their life instead of limit their pleasure.

What are some pacifiers that people cling to instead of enjoying the abundant life God intended for them to have?

- "milk" services that are emotionally fulfilling but provide no spiritual growth. Everyone leaves excited but nothing changes in their character or conduct. Every week they come to Church for an hour and enjoy an emotional experience but they never get around to eating the meat of the word of God so they remain "babes in Christ" all their life.
- Eating the chaff of the world instead of enjoying the bread of life. The chaff seems filling but, like a pacifier, provides no nutrition. Instead of seeking real food, however, people keep chewing chaff and wonder why they are hungry all the time.

Are you "sucking a pacifier" or are you growing in Christ?

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April 3, 2001 STEADY SERVICE

Sometimes I have been a sorry Christian, but I have never been sorry I was a Christian. At times I have been embarrassed by my actions as a Christian but I have never been embarrassed that I was a Christian. Many times I have failed my Heavenly Father but not one time has my Heavenly Father failed me.

On Sunday, Jesus was so popular until people would place their coats under the feet of his donkey as a sign of their loyalty. On Thursday, they cried for the release of a murderer and the murder of Christ. What happened? What atrocious act did Jesus commit that caused these people to turn from admirers into accusers? One day they are crowding around Him for healing and bread and the next they abandon Him and cry to a Roman Governor to crucify Him. What great failure in His life was exposed during this time to cause this shift of allegiance?

Surprisingly, nothing of any great consequence is revealed during this time. He begins the week casting the money changers out of the temple, but He had done that before to the applause of the people. Otherwise the week is spent answering questions, spending time with the disciples, and having a "last supper". But a few well-placed words from some leaders and the multitude became a mob and Jesus goes from admiration to crucifixion.

Sometimes I feel bad when people hurt my pride. Often I complain when I suffer minor persecutions for my stand as a Christian. How it must hurt the heart of Christ when I cry and complain; when I whine and whimper. I have never been sorry I was a Christian. May God help me to live so that, regardless of what the world does, God will never be sorry I am a Christian.

April 4, 2001 HELD BACK HONOR

(Num 24:11) Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour.

Mrs Linda Trott, Pastor's Wife, pointed this verse out to me. She found it in her devotion and told how the Lord spoke to her heart about how sinful attitudes and actions could hold a person back from reaching the Prestige they were intended to have.

Immediately my mind went to several other ways that sin causes God to put a restraint on our life.

Sin holds us back from Pleasure. Some may say that sin gives pleasure but the Bible declares that the pleasures of sin are just for a season. One bout of drinking, drugs, or debauchery is never enough. The "pleasure" fades very quickly and the emptiness that returns is worse than ever. Only Christ gives abundant life.

Sin also holds us back from Potential. How many really great individuals have failed as presidents, performers, preachers, or people because sin destroyed their usefulness? They were held back from accomplishing really great exploits because of sinful habits or actions.

Held back from Honor. Held back from Happiness. Held back from Hero like accomplishments. And worst of all, held back from Heaven. Oh, the horror of Sin. Come to Christ today.

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April 10, 2001 WHY HE REMAINED THERE

The horror was beyond comprehension. The hurt was beyond bearing. The humiliation was pulverizing to his pride. His disciples fled from Him when the going got rough. His nation rejected Him because He did not meet their wrongly held expectations. Even God the Father hid His face in the thick darkness.

One word and a legion of Angels would have come swooping down to destroy the Roman guards and ease Him gently from the cruel wooden cross. But while His lips may have parched with thirst, they never uttered a cry for help. The only words that came were a question to His father, concern for His mother, salvation for His neighbor on the cross, and forgiveness for the people who had done this horrible deed to Him. Everything human about Him cried out for relief but still He hung there in meekness and submission. What kept Him there? Why did Jesus stay on the cross?

I received an email from a missionary to Russia today. He was rejoicing because his first convert (a 47 year old woman) had accepted Christ during Prayer Meeting. That is why Jesus remained on the cross.

Following a revival service recently, a young man came up to me and said, "You don't remember me do you? My brother and I used to play in the lot beside your church. You talked to us one day and we both were saved. Remember, you baptized us both on an Easter Sunday morning many years ago." That is why Jesus remained on the cross.

A 14 year old boy; headed for Hell, along with his mother, father, and brothers. One Monday night at a revival in a small country church Jesus was preached, the Holy Spirit brought conviction, and God the Father graciously forgave his sins and make him a child of God. Soon the mother, father, and brothers were all saved and this young boy became committed to sharing Christ with everyone possible by every means possible. That is why Jesus remained on the cross.

He could have come down. He could have cried out. But He remained there- - because of you.

April 11, 2001 THE FIRST RESURRECTION

(Rev 20:4-6) And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The Resurrection of Jesus was simply the "first fruits" of the resurrection of God's people-(1 Cor 15:23) But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Christ was resurrected as a "proof" that He was in fact the Son of God; and as a sign to all the rest of God's children that they too will be resurrected one day!

This resurrection of God's children will not simply mean that we get a new eternal body; it will be the start of our reigning with Christ as priests of God and Christ (Glory!). Eternity will not mean we lay around all day "twiddling our thumbs"; it will be a time of triumph and glory as we work with the Lord to advance His blessed agenda over all of creation.

Christ was resurrected, Christians will be resurrected. Will you be part of the First Resurrection unto life or will you be a part of the second death?

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April 17, 2001 PROPHECY PRINCIPLES

One of the greatest joys of the Christian life is to study about God's future plans and to anticipate the soon coming of Christ. Sometimes, however, this delightful duty can lead into a maze of misunderstanding as people "develop" doctrines instead of study prophecies. Here are two rules that will help keep you in the straight and narrow as you look down the roadway of revelation about the future God has provided for us.

1) **DON'T WRESTLE THE SCRIPTURE; ITS DESTRUCTIVE:** Any study of Prophecy should heed well the words Peter spoke about the complex writings of Paul: (2 Pet 3:16) *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* Sometimes you get so determined to prove a preconceived point until you "wrestle" the scripture into a place it is not supposed to go.

2) **DON'T MAKE A FOREST OUT OF A TREE; ITS DEADLY:** (Rev 22:18-19) *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.* If you are walking through a pine forest and you find an oak tree it is foolish to suddenly declare that you have determined that you are in the midst of an oak forest instead of a pine forest! In the same way, one verse of scripture looked at from a certain perspective can be used in an attempt to suddenly make all of the "pine trees" in the Bible look like "oak trees". That can have deadly consequences for you; and for those who follow your teachings.

Keep the Faith and anticipate the Future; but don't try to put God in your "box". He will always burst the seams!

April 18, 2001 BOASTING

Humility has flown. Cockiness has become common. Many people seem to have an overwhelming desire to tell everyone how "bad" they are and how horrible they will treat you. Maybe it's time we restated the principles found in "Pride goes before a fall".

DON'T BOAST ABOUT:

- 1) Your Fighting Skills: (1 Ki 20:11) And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.
- 2) Your Financial Stability: (Psa 49:6-7) They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him:
- 3) Your Future Successes: (Prov 27:1) Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

DO MAKE YOUR BOAST ABOUT:

- 1) The wonderful God we serve: (Psa 44:8) In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.
- 2) The Grace God gives because our works aren't enough to save us: (Eph 2:8-9) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Many people that boast sounds like "whistling in the graveyard". What a difference it would make if they realized the tomb was empty!

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April 24, 2001 DYNAMITE DISCIPLES

Traffic delayed my arrival so I arrived a few minutes late. Wonderfully, the gym was completely full and I was forced to sit high on a bleacher seat. As I sat high in the bleachers at the annual camp meeting of this Bible college that night and looked out over the vast throng of preachers and Christian workers seated on the gym floor, my soul was moved in me and I seemed to hear the voice of God whisper in my ear, "What you see before you is a storehouse of dynamite. These workers can produce power for enormous good or they can be instruments of tremendous destruction. The difference will be their commitment to me."

Dynamite Disciples, what a concept! Some may explode in anger or lust and destroy homes, churches, and communities. Some may get all wet and fizzle out in discouragement and disappointment instead of reaching their mountain moving potential. Some will refuse to wait on the Lord and will explode prematurely in the air where they will simply make a loud noise and put on a good show instead of fulfilling their mission. Some will lazily lie on top of the ground where their explosion will simply throw dirt all around without accomplishing anything of value.

But some, blessed be the name of the Lord, will allow themselves to be buried deep under the rock where their energy and efforts will level the mountains and raise the valleys as they prepare a highway for our soon coming King. They will give themselves with such dedication and commitment until the force of their life will reshape the world around them. They won't make the biggest sounding bang but their explosion will produce light and power that will crumple the hardest heart and bring men to trust Christ as Savior.

All Disciples are Dynamite. The question is, will they do harm or good in their explosion.

April 25, 2001 DIVINE WOODCUTTERS

Many times in life we are faced with some very difficult and stressful circumstances. These circumstances will make us either Better or Bitter. The difference will be in the way we relate to them.

Paul tells how a Christian should look at his circumstances in Philippians 1:12 "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;" The interesting thing about this is that Paul wrote it while sitting in a Roman jail awaiting execution!

The key word in the verse is "FURTHERANCE". It comes from a Greek word meaning "advance Woodcutters" and was used to describe the party that went before ancient armies to establish roads to allow the army to reach the battle field.

Paul wants us to know that the circumstances of his life were simply God's method of clearing a path for him in order to enable him to do battle for the Lord.

What a difference it will make in your attitude (and actions!) when you realize God allows difficult times in your life in order to prepare you for service for Him.

So let the woodcutters work. They're simply preparing a way for you to work and witness for the Lord. Soon they will have the road ready and you can enter into battle; and I've read the end of the book. It's a battle we win!

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May 1, 2001 REVELATION'S CHRIST

Only four places in the Bible is Jesus declared to be the "Alpha and the Omega" (The first and last letter of the Greek Alphabet). All four of those references occur in the book of Revelation. Looking at them gives us God's final revelation of His Son and our Savior.

1) The Soon Coming Judge. The first time He came to die as a criminal in your place. The next time He will come as your Judge- (Rev 1:7-8) Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. {8} I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

2) The Message of the Church; any other message is meaningless- (Rev 1:11) Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

3) The only way into Heaven. When all is said and done, He is still the only one that can save- (Rev 21:6-7) And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. {7} He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

4) The final and eternal source of rewards. Why give your time and energy to anyone or anything else?-(Rev 22:12-13) And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. {13} I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

May 2, 2001 REVELATION BEATITUDES

Seven times in Revelation the writer tells how people can be "Blessed". These seven last beatitudes show us the way to enjoy the blessings of God in the midst of some of the greatest troubles and trials known to man:

(1) Blessed are those who read, hear, and keep this prophecy, which emphasizes the importance of looking at God's future plans as recorded in Revelation (1:3)

(2) Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, which stresses the importance of remaining faithful to God no matter what the world throws at you (14:13)

(3) Blessed are those who watch and keep their garments, which portrays the importance of Holy living as we anticipate the Lord's return (16:15)

(4) Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, which suggests the joy of Christ's presence (19:9)

(5) Blessed are those who participate in the first resurrection, which emphasizes deliverance from death (20:6)

(6) Blessed those who keep the words of this prophecy, which stresses obedience to the Word (22:7)

(7) Blessed are those who have washed their robe and gaining access to the Tree of Life, which guarantees eternal sustenance (22:14).

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May 8, 2001 HOW TO MAKE ENOUGH MONEY

Most people would readily “Amen” Solomon’s statement in Proverbs 23:5- “riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” Or how about the wisdom espoused by the Preacher in Eccl 5:11 “When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?” But it doesn’t have to be this way. No matter where you fit on the pay scale, here are some principles that will help make what you make enough for you to make it.

1) TITHE: You cannot expect God to bless you if you are robbing Him each week. My personal testimony, and the testimony of countless others, is that giving God your “First fruits” is the best possible way to accomplish more with 90% than with 100% used only for self.

2) TRUST: Faith in God for provision and supply brings glory to God. Guess what makes God happy; when His children do things that bring glory to Him! So the more you exercise your faith the more you will see God’s amazing ability to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think (Eph 3:20)

3) TEMPERANCE: Self-control and Self-denial are two character traits that God desires to build in His children. That is because even God finds it difficult to fill a pot that has no bottom!

4) THINK: Use your brain before you open your pocket book. Is the Debt worth the “slavery” that follows (Prov 22:7)? Is there a way your money can earn interest instead of pay interest? Money is not “magic”; it is a tool. Learn to use it in the most effective way.

5) TALENT: God gives every person some special gift. Too many people settle for being part of the “rat race” instead of freedom flying as the Lord intended. God gave you that ability for a purpose; part of that purpose may produce a profit!

Two fish and five loaves to feed 5000. Angel food manna to feed millions in the desert each day. God is able, are you willing to do it His way?

May 9, 2001 THE 28 GENERATION STAIN

The Old Testament ground to a horrible halt. Rebellion, captivity, and the task of rebuilding brought on numbing despondency and led to a desperate yearning for the coming Messiah. Suddenly, the sun burst through the fog of despair as John the Baptist roared onto the scene with his thundering message that the Lamb of God has arrived.

At the very beginning of this new chapter in the history of man, when you would think you would find nothing but hope and joy, suddenly the stain of sin leaps from the pages of God’s word. After 28 generations (Matt 1:17) the stain still remained and blotted the record of one of the most famous of God’s Servants- (Mat 1:6) And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

A 28 generation stain. Could it not be forgotten? Had there not been enough time since the incident that it could be laid to rest? Why bring it up now at the beginning of a New Testament showing forth God’s mercy and grace as never before?

Maybe, just maybe, God allowed this 28 generation stain to shine through so we would see the far reaching consequences of Sin in order that we would understand the tremendous need of the soul cleansing power of the blood of our Blessed Savior. What a great God we serve. He is able to cleanse and forgive even if the stain is 28 generations old!

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May 15, 2001

WINNING FAMILY MEMBERS

(Acts 16:30) ... and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

When I got saved I believed it was something that ought to happen to everyone in my family! Thankfully, with this belief in mind, my mother and father and all my brothers (and their wives) are all saved. My father-in-law, mother-in-law, wife, and all her sisters and brother (and all of their husbands and wives) are all Christians. Four principles led to this happy conclusion.

1) Determination of Objective. I did not want my family “do better” so I could have a “good” family. I realized they were bound for an eternity in the flames of hell and I did not want that to happen! I did not just want them to “start going to church” to make me happy. I wanted them to be a vital part of the Body of Christ and know the joy I knew as a Christian. Your goal must not be for them to be Better. It must be for them to be Born Again.

2) Desire of heart. If you are satisfied with Johnny being a “nice boy” or Susie being a “good little girl” then you will never reach them. You must long for their salvation so greatly until it deprives you of food and drives you to your knees every day.

3) Demonstration of Christ. Your life must be consistent and Christ like. You can't have “fried preacher” for dinner on Sunday and expect your family to trust what that preacher says about them becoming a child of God. You can't do wrong and expect them to want to do right.

4) Declaration of the Gospel. Reprimanding their wrongs will not save them. Quarreling, crying, and sighing will not save them. The good news of forgiveness in Christ must be plainly presented.

Give God no rest (Is 62:7) until everyone in your family is safely in the ark of Salvation.

May 16, 2001

SOUL SNUGGLING

(Psa 63:8) My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.

Children love it, couples practice it, and everyone needs it. A good “snuggle” does you good all over better than anywhere else! In fact, I remember some times on Wednesday night at church when people would come in and say, “Preacher, let's have some greetings fellowship tonight. After what I have been through this week I really need a hug from someone!”

That is what the Psalmist is talking about. He wanted his soul to be in such close contact with God until the strength of God poured into his soul and the “right hand of God would uphold him”. Then he knew he would not have to face the struggles of life in his human weakness but in the strength of that strength

He wanted to snuggle up to God and feel the love of God flowing into his soul like the warmth of a warm bed on a cold night. He wanted that love to flow into, and out of, him so that he could be the person God intended for him to be. What a difference it would make in our attitude all day if we began the day by snuggling our soul up to God!

When you love someone- and there are no barriers between you, snuggling is a normal part of life. Is it normal in your relationship with Christ?

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May 22, 2001

CORRECTING CHRISTIANITY

Sadly, many times it is difficult to distinguish a Christian from a non-Christian in today's world. Christians now talk like the world, dress like the world, act like the world, and wonder why they have very little influence on the world! We have entered the day of "Cheap Easy Believism" in which all that is necessary for a person to claim Heaven as their home is for them to acknowledge that they believe a person named Jesus died on a cross. Nothing is ever mentioned about the resulting transformation that is expected in a person's life.

Real Christianity deals with 3 areas in a person's life- His Conversion, His Character, and his Conduct. His Conversion comes about when he realizes he is a sinner and that his sin has alienated him from God. This causes him to repent (dislike what sin is doing to him and to his relationship with God to such an extent that he turns away from sin and turns toward God for help). Repentance leads to acknowledging that the only payment sufficient for his sin debt is the price Jesus paid when He died on the Cross. By an act of Faith he accepts Christ as Savior and is born again.

This leads to his body becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit where the fruits of the Spirit bloom in his life bringing about a Character change. His old works of flesh (Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God) are replaced with the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: (Gal 5:19-23).

This change in Character produces an evident change in Conduct. He acts different, talks different, and behaves different as his life is now lived to glorify God instead of satisfy self. And his Christianity is one worth living for; and dying with.

May 23, 2001

THE BEST BOOK

The Bible contains 3, 566,480 letters, 773,692 words, 31,173 verses, 1,189 chapters, and 66 books. The longest chapter is the 119th Psalm. The Shortest Chapter is the 117th Psalm. The middle verse is the eighth verse of the 118th Psalm. The longest verse is the 9th verse of the 8th chapter of Esther and the shortest verse is the 35th verse of the 11th chapter of John.

The longest name in the Bible is "Mahershalalhashbaz" [The name of Isaiah's son (Isaiah 8:-)]. All of the letters of the alphabet (except "J") are found in the 21st verse of the 7th chapter of Ezra.

The 37th chapter of Isaiah and the 19th chapter of Second Kings are alike. The word "and" occurs 46,227 times. The word "Jehovah" is found 6,855 times in scripture but the word "God" is not found in the book of Esther or the Song of Solomon.

The Bible is the most important book in all of creation. If you know all of science, math, and social studies and are not familiar with the Word of God you are sorely lacking in your education. If you own a dozen Bibles and have one in each room of your home; yet you never read the Bible, you are trampling underfoot the greatest blessing and benefit open to your life.

The Bible is the message of God to the world. It is divinely inspired and the informational source of salvation. It contains the principles and practices you need if you would live a proper life. It is the greatest book known to mankind- but only if you read it!!

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May 29, 2001

ANGER ANSWERS

Specialist list 7 reasons for Anger (1) Your Rights were violated. (2) Disappointment over your place or your circumstances in life (3) Blocked Goals {Someone driving slowly in front of you as you are trying to get home!} (4) Irritations {Like someone constantly asking foolish questions} (5) Feeling Misunderstood (6) Unrealistic Expectations that aren't met because they can't be met {I have watched people become extremely angry at ball players because they were not perfect every single time!}(7) Physical problems- Pathological or Physiological.

The Bible List several types of Anger- (1) Righteous Anger: (1 Ki 11:9) And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, (2) Reasonable Anger- (Eph 4:26) Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: (3) Restrictions Anger- (Col 3:21) Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. (4) Regulated Anger (Prov 16:32) He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

The Dictionary defines Anger as something that irritates, enrages, or inflames a person and brings them to pain, distress or vexation. Sadly, that is exactly where anger leads most times- to pain, distress and vexation. Paul told the Ephesians to "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph 4:31-32). And that is Anger's Answer, to love others as God has loved you. Replace anger with kindness and see what a difference it makes in your life; and in the attitude of those around you.

May 30, 2001

PUZZLE PROCLAIMING

The project was simple to explain but hard to do. A person was given a picture of the letter "K" that was made up of jigsaw puzzle pieces that were clearly defined in the picture. Their partner was given all the pieces necessary to constructing an identical "K". The challenge was for the first person to tell the second person how to construct the puzzle simply by describing parts and telling them where to put them.

Today, I leave for India to spend 2 weeks with one of our missionaries. During that time I hope to share Christ with as many people as possible. The above described project was part of the training for this trip in order to help me understand the frustration of trying to tell someone about something when that person has little or no knowledge about what I am talking about.

In the picture puzzle project I referred to everything finally came together when you realized there was one key piece that all the other pieces hooked onto. Begin there and the puzzle was not too hard. Start anywhere else and putting the puzzle together was extremely perplexing.

Pray for me during my ministry in India that God will give me the wisdom I need so I can help turn the broken pieces of people's lives into the finished project God desires. And I know it can be done; because I know the key piece that their life must "hook" to is a personal relationship with Christ.

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June 5, 2001 MEMORY-VISION

Someone wrote once that “When your vision for the future is replaced with your memories of the past then you have one foot in the grave!” There are several truths to that statement.

The older a person becomes the more they spend time in the past and less time looking ahead to the challenges and visions of the future. Part of that is God given human nature. Before the advent of books and other recording paraphernalia the only means of transferring information from one generation to another was stories told by the older generation to the younger generation. That is why, as you grow older, your long term memory increases and your short term memory decreases- you can remember the color of the clothes you wore in the second grade but you cannot remember if you took your medicine that day!

There is nothing wrong with this kind of Memory-Vision transfer. The problem area is when a person allows memories of past happenings and hurts to bring them into bondage to bitterness, jealousy, envy, and anger so that they lose the joy of life and the anticipation of future growth. Something in the past controls their present and clouds their future! Like a convict chained to a ball of lead, they are unable to run the race of life because of the weight of the past.

Are you so busy looking back at the past until you constantly run into others; hurting yourself as well as them? Have you lost the joy of living because you look back at problems instead of ahead to potential? Let me give you some advice- (Phil 3:13-14)... “this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

You can let memories defeat your vision and dig your own grave. Or you can catch a vision of the abundant life found in Christ. The choice is obvious to me.

June 6, 2001 D-DAY BATTLE

June 6th, D-Day. The weather was bad, the location was unusual, and the Germans thought for sure that the Allies would not attack on this day. Or, if they did attack, it would certainly not be in this location. But they could attack, and they did attack, and the beginning of the end of the German empire was built on the blood and effort of Allied soldiers on the now famous beaches of that June morning.

Christians are in a war also. The difference is that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and forces that would destroy in the most horrible way, and for eternity, every man, woman, boy, and girl on the earth.

Satan is fighting with all his strength to keep people from hearing the good news about Forgiveness, Redemption, and Eternal Life in Heaven. He lies continually about God, about God’s people, and about God’s offer of salvation. He intimidates people with peer pressure and he bullies people into believing that God’s way is wrong and his way is best; all the while laughing with glee as souls slip into the eternal flames of hell.

The battle is fierce. It involves YOU, your family, your friends, and everyone around you. Like the Germans, you can ignore every warning and go down in defeat; or you can gird yourself with the armor of God and raise up to defeat the destroyer. But it is not a battle you can ignore.

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June 12, 2001

WHY LEADERS FAIL

CHRISTIAN LEADERS DON'T FAIL IN MINISTRY BECAUSE THEY CAN'T PREACH A SERMON; THEY FAIL IN MINISTRY BECAUSE OF HIDDEN OR UNRESOLVED CHARACTER FLAWS.

I have had the "privilege" of hearing many people complain about Pastors. One thing I have noticed is that it is extremely unusual for that complaint to center around his preaching. Invariably, it is about his neglect of some group (the youth, the seniors, the shut-in) or his attitude toward others (too bossy, too partial to one segment of the church over another, too independent so that we don't feel we have a part in what goes on). But I just can't remember the last time someone has said to me, "Our preacher can't preach a lick! We really need to get someone in his place. Do you know of someone?"

I have seen churches that had the potential of reaching large numbers of people but they stay at the same low level year after year. Many times that is the result of the members of the church having no real desire to grow because of fear of loss of "control" if new people come in or an unwillingness to accept anyone else into their circle of family and friends. Sometimes, however, it involves a Pastor who is lazy, lukewarm, or lacking in a real vision of God's plan and purpose. If the Pastor would "get on fire" he would be amazed at how fast the fire of revival would sweep through his congregation!

Pastors are people. God does not expect every one of them to have a dynamic appeal that causes large crowds to flock to hear them every Sunday. He does, however, expect each of them to have consistent clean character that allows Him to use every area of their life in exactly the way God intended. And that kind of character will make a difference in their preaching as well as their personality!

June 13, 2001

SON SACRIFICE

It was that time in the service to receive the offering. After the offertory prayer the ushers made their way up the aisles of the church as we sang a song of praise. When the ushers came back down the aisle one of them had a little boy by the hand. I looked at my wife and said, "Someone really gave a special offering today! They gave one of their children!"

Obviously, the child belonged to the usher and he had decided to go to daddy when the offering was being received but it certainly did paint a great illustration. I just wanted to name the usher "Abraham" and think of him climbing that mountain to offer his son "Isaac" as a sacrifice to God.

Children are a gift from God. Our greatest obligation is to raise them up for God and then give them back to God in order that they can accomplish God's plan for their lives. That means that a father's primary task for his children is to teach them the need of; and the requirements for, a committed relationship to God.

Don't give your children in the offering this Sunday. Instead, commit them, and yourself, completely to the Lord. That will invoke God's protection and guidance on their life and make you the best parent you can be.

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June 19, 2001 A BABY'S CRY

I will long remember sitting by a small desk beside an open window listening to the sounds of India when I heard the voice of God. Daylight comes early in this part of India so 5:00am is the normal rising time. By 6:00am much of the activity of the day is well underway. The Moslem Mullah is calling the faithful to prayer from the Mosque down the street. The Hostel boys in our compound are jabbering as they sweep the yards, compete their baths, or prepare for their daily lessons.

The main road is only 1 mile away and the constant blaring of truck and auto horns add to the morning sounds that sweep through the window. The farm tractors have already begun their daily task and their chug, chug, chug mingles with the early morning birds singing their different tunes.

In the midst of this canopy of sound comes the cry of a young child. I hear its cry and so does God. Center a map of South Carolina over the spot where I sit and you enclose nearly 100 million people from parts of 7 nations. The baby cries for his mother; these 100 million souls cry for the pardon and peace that can only be given by God through Christ. Some of the most loving and wonderful people in all the world live in this area. God's voice gently whispers to me through the cry of a little child, "Where will they spend eternity?"

June 20, 2001 LADY IN WHITE

The sparkling white of her outfit matched the white of her hair. She came to the annual Church Conference in India and shyly approached the local pastor. It was difficult at first to hear her broken dialect but finally the pastor realized she wanted to speak to the missionary in charge.

Conference is an extremely busy time for the missionary and the local pastor asked if there was anything he could do. "No", she insisted, she needed to speak to the missionary.

From her demeanor and actions the Pastor finally thought he should tell the missionary about her. It was another task in an already overloaded schedule for the missionary but he followed the Pastor back to where the Lady in White waited.

When the missionary arrived the Lady in White bowed at his feet and wept, "Uncle (her term of affection)," she said. "Thank you for coming to our country. Without you I would never have come to know Christ as my Savior. My husband and one son died never knowing there was a Christ to save them. Thank you so much for coming that I might hear before I died."

As an Indian pastor visited her in the following days he found that she fasted and prayed 3 days every week praying that others around her would not die without hearing of Christ. What will YOU do to help answer her prayers?

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June 26, 2001

THREE YOUNG LADIES

It was my third service of the day. We had left the place I was staying in India very early that morning, driven across very bad roads, went through Indian Immigration, and then endured the complex Immigration process in Nepal- Paid very much for a one day visa, paid a customs tax, paid the car tax, paid a gas tax, paid a road tax, and finally arrived at my first service in a crowded store front church.

The services in the various churches had been wonderful but all the activities of the day and the time consuming process of police check points had made us over an hour late for this final service. When we arrived the sun was beating down with ferocious heat and the hot humid air that precedes a thunderstorm made perspiration pour with every movement.

Sitting on the hard cement floor beneath a hot tin roof was another group of Nepalese Christians happily singing out their love for God as they awaited my arrival. Greetings were exchanged and I was given the opportunity to share God's Word. Three young ladies (late teens, early twenties) responded for salvation at the end of the message. As they knelt to accept Christ they were questioned first by the Nepalese Pastor and told of the persecution they would likely endure if they trusted Christ. Then the Indian Pastor with me talked with them and made sure of their commitment. Finally, I was asked to pray with them.

Many people grumble and grip about life in America. I think a day in Nepal would "cure their fever"! Many Church members "play the Christian game" with no real commitment to God or His work, I think 3 young ladies in Nepal could show them what real Christianity expects of them. I look forward to meeting these girls again in Heaven one day; I hope you will be there rejoicing with us.

June 27, 2001

RIVER ROUTES

Looking down on a recent plane trip I noticed the rivers. They wander and curve and almost turn back upon themselves as they travel across country. Suddenly it dawned on me why they did this; Rivers always seek the easiest way! If a river meets an obstacle it will simply seek the path of least resistance; thus allowing its path to be determined by the obstacles it meets.

We, in the Christian Church, are in a difficult time- Society and customs around us are changing at an increasingly rapid pace. Obstacles are becoming common in the path of the Church. Many Churches look for the easy way around these obstacles and their path has become extremely crooked. When you are riding the river it is hard to realize how crooked your course has become but if you ever get the chance to stand on a hill and look down it becomes very obvious.

The force of a river; and of the church, is tremendous. Sometimes the best use of that force is to work around an obstacle until it can undermine that obstacle and return to its proper course. It should never, however, get into the pattern of allowing obstacles to become the director of its course.

Remember this. Rivers travel was at one time the major method of traveling in our country but it is almost obsolete today. People prefer straight roads to crooked rivers.

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July 3, 2001 CLOUD CONFIDENCE

It had been a long miserable night with cramped conditions and a very hard seat but we were finally coming to the end of the 9 hour flight from Delhi to Amsterdam. The sun was just coming up behind us and it revealed a solid cloud mass below us. The swirls and peaks of this field of clouds were simply breathtaking. Below the clouds, the world was dark and dreary but up here, from God's point of view, things looked great!

The pilot came on and told us we were beginning our descent into Amsterdam Airport. Suddenly, we were not floating above these clouds but we were descending into them. The world went blank. I could not even see the end of the wing because of the fog of these clouds.

Where was the earth? What was ahead of us? Were we going in the right direction? Was the pilot as blind as I was? Then I remembered that the pilot had radar and he could see as if the clouds did not exist. And, sure enough, when we finally broke through the clouds the airport was revealed just ahead of us and all my worry had been in vain.

Sometimes my way gets foggy and I want to panic. I can't see what is ahead and my faith begins to falter. What if "this" takes place? What if "that" gets in my way? I can no longer see. I am no longer in control. Does God know what is going on? Have I been forgotten?

Then I remember who is piloting my "plane" and peace settles back over my soul. God sees through clouds as if they were not there. They don't even faze Him. He is still on course and He knows exactly what is ahead of me. What a marvelous bit of confidence in the chaos of life.

July 4, 2001 THIS DAY

(Exo 12:14) And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

Today we observe the day the United States declared its self a free and independent nation. It is a day to rejoice and celebrate the freedom we have as citizens of such a great nation. Sure, we have problems in our country but I still would rather be a citizen of the United States than a citizen of any other country on this planet!

That is the way the Children of Israel must have felt when God gave them their "Declaration of Independence". After 400 years of bondage and slavery in Egypt they were finally being set free to start a new life in the Promised Land. Is it any wonder the Lord told them to set aside this day as a perpetual memorial?

I said I would rather be a citizen of the United States than a citizen of any other country on this planet. There is a country, however, that is not of this planet. I became a citizen of that country one night when, like the children of Israel, the blood was applied to my sins and I became a child of God.

Now my citizenship is in Heaven and my heart longs for that faraway land. I try to live as a good citizen of that country every day and I invite you to become a citizen also. It will set you free and give you a real reason to celebrate this day every year.

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July 10, 2001

PASSENGER PALS

My recent trip to India gave me the opportunity to meet some interesting people. From Columbia to Atlanta my seat mate was an engineer whom I barely got to meet because of the shortness of the flight. Atlanta to Detroit was a widow who had just spent 3 months with her children and was heading back home. Sadness and insecurity flavored her speech and gave an excellent opportunity to share God's love and care.

On the Detroit to Amsterdam flight I sat beside a college girl from Atlanta headed to southern Africa to help on a short term mission work. This 9 hour flight began at midnight so more sleep than conversation took place but I was able to share some missionary principles that I hope proved helpful. Amsterdam to Delhi was another young lady on a summer mission trip (although she gave me the impression she was more interested in the sites she would see than in the souls she might reach).

Delhi to Baghdogra was where things really got interesting. The man sitting beside me was a noodle inspector from the Baghdogra area who had been to Delhi on company business. He spoke little English so conversation was limited to short sentences with many gestures. It was difficult to go into depth about his relationship with the Lord but I was able to build a bridge of friendship and share my faith in Christ.

When we arrived at Baghdogra we didn't! Unknown to me, the airline had added another stop to this flight. When the plane stopped and I started to get off the man to whom I had been witnessing stopped me and got a stewardess to explain it was not my destination. Had I gotten off the plane there I would have been in BIG trouble. This was a time that being a witness for the Lord paid off in more ways than one!

July 11, 2001

FERRY FALLACY

Recently I took the car ferry from Cedar Island, NC to the Outer Bank islands. The first island (Ocracoke) has no bridge connection so the ferry is the only way to get your car to this southern beginning of the Outer Bank chain of islands.

The first ferry ride is almost 2 ½ hours and it was interesting to observe the people who were taking the trip. After loading up and leaving the dock everyone milled around for a few minutes, fed the sea gulls, and got used to being on a ship. Soon almost everyone had gotten back into their car and the gentle rock of the ship was putting most of them to sleep. About half way through the trip, however, an interesting phenomenon began. Slowly, you began to see doors open and people begin to flock to the center passenger lounge. The hot sun beating down on the cars began to make the air conditioned lounge appear very appealing!

I have observed the same thing with some people in church. They begin their Christian life with excitement and interest. Soon, however, they appear to drop into a spiritual sleep as they get accustomed to the normal events of the journey. Unless some "red hot preaching" comes along and stirs them they will spend the entire journey ignoring everyone around them and trying to sleep their way to Heaven!

Paul said we were to awake out of sleep for now was our salvation near than when we believed. May God turn up the heat until the Church is stirred from its slumber and realizes it is in a war for the souls of men instead of on a vacation from the stress of life.

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July 17, 2001

LAUGH OUT LOUD

Amsterdam to Atlanta is a dull trip. Almost immediately you are over the ocean and the view is just miles and miles of miles and miles. It was not long until the constant hum of the airplane engines provided a perfect pattern of sound silence that induces most of the people aboard the plane to take a nap.

Suddenly a loud laugh was heard. I didn't think much of it as first but then it happened again; and then again. Finally, I figured it out. One of the passengers was watching a movie over the plane's video system and listening to it through a set of headphones. When an exceptionally funny part would take place he would, without realizing what he was doing, laugh out loud.

His laughter made little sense to me because I was not hearing what he heard. But I know the feeling. I, too, have found myself laughing out loud sometimes as I have seen God's sense of humor manifested in His works. I know God must snicker sometimes at the way women's "thermostats" works, at the antics teens go through in the dating years, and at the foolishness of men who try to hide from Him with fig leaves instead of faith. It is a wonder we don't hear God's laughter rolling over the hills!

Jesus said we were to have abundant lives. Yet, People all around have glum faces and harried looks because they are so busy with living until they had lost the joy of life. If they could just hear what God is saying and see what God is doing they might just find themselves laughing out loud- and wouldn't that startle everyone!

July 18, 2001

REMODELED OR REBORN

The question that needs to be asked of many church members is, "Are you a Remodeled Sinner or a Reborn Saint?" Have you been born again and become a new creature in Christ so that old things have passed away and all things have become new (II Cor 5:17)? Or have you simply changed the paint scheme on the outside of the building so that the neighbors will be impressed into believing everything is alright on the inside?

A reborn Child of God does not habitually and happily commit sin (I John 3:9). A remodeled sinner says not to get too fanatical about this righteous living thing. After all, we still live in the flesh and need some fun every now and then. A reborn Child of God realizes the supreme need of committing their life to fulfilling God's will and work (Rom 12:1-2). A remodeled sinner dodges church services, ducks any responsibility that involves sacrifice, and deftly shuns any direct stand for God and right.

A reborn saint walks with God and looks forward to the day he will hear the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." A remodeled sinner who only knows how to "play the game" well enough to fool his family and friends lives in constant fear of death and the ultimate judge's declaration, "Depart from me, ye worker of iniquity, for I never knew you."

By the way, are you a reborn saint or a remodeled sinner?

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July 24, 2001

YOUR WALK WITH THE LORD

One of the things that is immediately noticed about the Christians in India is their hungry for the Word of God. They don't want "pabulum preaching" that tickles their ears but leaves their heart empty. Even though many of them live in abject poverty (The wages for a day laborer in Northern India is less than a dollar a day) they don't seek sermons on how they can "hold on". Their desire is for messages from God about Christ and how they can better relate to Him. Their faith in Christ for Salvation was normally made in the face of fierce persecution and intense social pressure so the hungry of their heart is to learn more about this wonderful soul saving, life changing Lord that made such a difference in their life.

Most American Christians live the "good live" so they add God on as an extra help to assist them with the stress and sicknesses of life. They aren't nearly as interested in learning more about God as they are in finding a way that God can give them prosperity, pleasure, or pain free living. If you look at the normal sermon and then observe the lack of commitment by church members it appears that the average Church member in America is much more concerned about what God can do for them to make their life better than they are in learning how they can follow Christ more closely and serve God more fully. The focus seems to be on God serving them instead of them serving God.

The common greeting among Indian Christians is "How is your walk with the Lord?" What a wonderful phrase. It brings into focus what should be the primary concern of every child of God. How are you progressing in your relationship with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit? Enoch "walked with the Lord, and he was not for God took him." Are you walking with the Lord in such a way that Heaven will be simply another step in your growing relationship with God? Or do you "drive your own car" and simply look at God as a very convenient spare tire?

July 25, 2001

EFFINGHAM SPEED LIMIT

I live in the Effingham community. Almost every morning I leave home, drive out to Highway 52, and turn into all the rush hour traffic headed to Florence. The intersection where I turn has a speed limit of 35 miles per hour. Most mornings people try to hold it down to 50 miles per hour as they come through!

One morning recently I noticed when I came to the stop sign that the traffic was very slow. I wondered what was wrong- until I looked down the road and saw a blue light flashing. Suddenly, everyone knew the speed limit going through Effingham!

Christians live in an age of Grace. We are no longer under the law. Grace, however, is not lawlessness. While you can't be made to do anything when you become a child of God, and a member of His body (The church); you will soon find that such great privileges involve great responsibilities. And responsibilities incur consequences.

You can "run through" your relationship with God at 50 when He tells you to slow down to 35 so you can develop as you should but one day the "blue light" will swing in behind you. You can play with lust, greed, and anger in spite of God's warning signs but one day, as you sit in the wreckage of your life, you will realize what those warning signs were all about.

God gives Grace and God gives guidelines. Both are very important in your growth as a Christian.

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July 31, 2001

BUILDING A WORLDLY CHURCH

Pastor Joe Cagle recently gave an unusual devotion at the Eastern Conference Meeting. The title of his message was "How to Train your Church to Be like the World"! That is not something the normal pastor is seeking but the message really drove home some important points. See if you agree.

The First way to train your church to be like the world is to provide a worldly atmosphere in the Church. Play music that has the world's beat and the world's message. Abandon all standards in dress codes so people will think of the church as just another place instead of the House of God. Be user friendly instead of a set apart people for God.

Next, he said we should abandon all Negative Preaching. Never point out sin in a sermon. Tell people nothing is wrong unless they don't feel good about it. Preach about Heaven but never mention the possibility of Hell. Tell people they are basically "good" and it is someone else's fault that they do wrong. Share about God's love in such a way until people laugh about God instead of fearing His coming judgment.

Finally, a worldly trained church should put respect for Public Opinion above the word of God. If an enlightened society calls Homosexuality an alternate life style then ignore the fact that the Bible calls it sin. If Hollywood stars favor killing unborn children then forget that the Bible calls it murder. If the majority of the public dress like a harlot and talk like the devil then disregard Biblical teaching about modesty and taking God's name in vain.

I believe following Pastor Joe's principles would put a church well on the way to being a worldly church instead of the Church Christ died for.

August 1, 2001

PASSENGER PAST TIMES

Some were cuddled together using only one and a half of the two seats allotted to them. Some were reading gossipy checkout counter magazines or some other material. Some were in adamant conversation about family or business; while others busied themselves eating a snack or trying to sleep. A few simply looked out of the window and marveled at the scenery passing below. But everyone was doing something as we journeyed through the air at over 500 miles per hour toward our destination.

I wonder how many of them would have been "killing" time, "marking" time, "existing" in time or looking for a way to have what they considered a "good" time if they would have known what was going to transpire in a few short hours? What a difference it would have made in their activities or conversation.

You see, the flight we were on was coming from Detroit to Myrtle Beach. In a few short hours it would turn around and make the flight back to Detroit. On that return flight, parts of the engine would fall off and the plane would be forced to make an emergency landing!

Like the passengers on this plane we are passing thru time on the way to a destination. Sadly, many people make that "flight" without a thought of how suddenly the whole world can change. I told my wife at the beginning of the flight that we would go up one way or the other! May that same assurance be in your heart.

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August 7, 2001 THREE DAY DEATHS

The call had come; and was rejected. Jonah simply did not want to go to Nineveh. So he ran from God. Like everyone who runs for God his path went down; down to Tarsus, down into the ship, and, finally, down into the belly of a whale. There, in the “belly of hell”, he came to his senses and cried out to God.

God graciously forgave him and sent him back to his original task. He arrives in Nineveh, preaches about God’s coming wrath, and great revival breaks out. The entire town repents and God turns away from His wrath. My thought is this, “What about the people who died during the three days Jonah spent in rebellion in the whale’s belly?”

Jonah could possibly have arrived much earlier than he did but I know for sure he should have arrived at least three days before he did. How many people died during that time without hearing Jonah’s message of repentance? Had Jonah arrived on time they might have heard God’s message, turned from their sins, and died in a state of repentance. Will they be able to point their finger at Jonah one day about their missed opportunity?

Jonah’s three days of waywardness worry me; but not half as much as the opportunities I miss each week! How many people die each year that will face God unprepared because I was not where God wanted me to be in order to share God’s love with them? My “whale” may look like a TV, a bed, or a busy schedule but it had better not make me three days late delivering God’s message. The implications of such a delay are staggering.

August 8, 2001 BEING READY

The emotion choked his voice as he told about it. Tears streamed down his face as he remembered the horror. Just the telling of it sent cold chills down the spine of everyone present.

Life had been good for this preacher. The church was doing well, his ministry was prospering, and things were finally beginning to “fall into place.” Then came the knock at the door. Someone had accused he and his wife of a horrible crime. And with this kind of crime you are presumed guilty until you can prove over and over that you are innocent.

Life was turned upside down. Rumors were flying. Sleepless night and agonizing days stretched out ahead. Finally, after great expense and trouble, their innocence was proven and life returned to normality.

One comment stood out. When the situation began, the FBI came into his home and removed his computer without any warning. Had he been to places on his computer that he was not supposed to go, it would have been almost impossible to prove his innocence of the other charges.

His testimony was this. I always tell my people to live right so you will not have to fear the light shining in your life. This was one case where if I would not have practiced what I preached then I would have been in deep trouble. Remember that this week as you go about your daily routine.

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August 14, 2001 2 EGGS AND A RITZ

My host in India thought to do me a great honor and have homemade Ice Cream with the evening meal. Ice Cream is seldom seen in this part of India and this was an exceptional treat. The only problem was that Indian food is very spicy and a week's diet of spicy food plus sweet Ice Cream proved more than my stomach could handle. It was a long night.

The next morning we resumed visiting the Churches of Northern India. Indian Roads are very rough and several times I thought my stomach would not allow me to reach our first engagement. Add to that the fact that you cannot visit in an Indian home without being expected to drink very sweet tea and eat extremely sweet cakes. I prayed a lot that trip!

We arrived, everyone was greeted, we all sat at the table, and I kept trying to figure out how to turn down refreshments without greatly offending our hostess. Our hostess returned with bowed head and explained that somehow all their sweet cakes had disappeared and all she could offer me was 2 boiled eggs and some Ritz crackers. Is there a Glory anywhere out there!

This was exactly what I needed at the time; and the only time I was served salty instead of sweet refreshments the entire trip. Excuse my English, but "Ain't God Good!". How careful is His care of His children. (Mat 6:31-33) "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

August 15, 2001 INTERMITTENT POWER

Electricity goes on and off in India so frequently until people ignore it when possible. When the power goes off conversation continues as if nothing had happened. If you are doing something that requires electricity then you begin to do something else. If that is not possible then you just wait.

Sadly, this same situation exist in many churches. The power of God is so seldom seen until many churches pretend it does not matter if it is not "on". Preaching, singing, and organized "Christianity" go on as if nothing is wrong. Human effort produces enough results to satisfy most people because they really don't expect much from the church or God anyway! (That is, unless they are in deep trouble that goes beyond human ability- death, disease, deep debt, divorce, etc).

Sometimes someone will be insensitive enough to comment on the fact that the power is off but the rest of the people simply shuffle in embarrassment and go on pretending nothing is wrong. Souls are departing without Christ. Homes are being destroyed. Churches are dying. It must be the modern Culture we live in or the Circumstance we encounter today. The fact that the power is off isn't relevant, is it??

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come for men shall have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof; from such turn away." II Tim 3:1, 5.

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August 21, 2001 ANOTHER DUNGEON DAY

It was just another Dungeon Day. The hot August sun was already turning the Egyptian Prison into a steam bath of trickling perspiration and perpetual stench as Joseph began his morning duties. The cursing of prisoners pounded his ears as he supervised the morning meal and a sense of hopeless despair shone dully from the eyes of all he greeted on this August morning.

Just an hour before Joseph had lain for an extra few minutes on his sweat soaked pallet and thought about the road that had led him to his dungeon duties. He was his father's favorite until he was rejected by his family and sold into slavery. Hard work and God's Blessings had landed him in a great job until he was betrayed by a woman and thrown into prison. In prison, his great wisdom had brought great hope until it became apparent that he was forgotten by the King's Butler. Now it seemed he had nothing to look forward to except more and more dungeon days.

"But the Lord was with Joseph". What a statement for the Bible to make at a time like this! Where was God on this Dungeon Day? Could God change things? Was it worth it to remain faithful to God?

Oh, the difference a day makes when God is at work. Before this Dungeon Day was over, Joseph would be exalted from a prisoner into the second most powerful ruler in Egypt! He would prevent the starvation of millions of people, change the course of a nation, and start down the road to reconciliation and salvation for his family. But it started out as just another Dungeon Day.

If you are doing duty in a "Dungeon" today make friends with God. It is amazing the changes God can make in a Dungeon Day that is committed to Him.

August 22, 2001 PARKWAY PLUSES

Recently, I had the honor of attending Parkway Free Will Baptist Church in Spartanburg. Pastor Mitch Edge is doing a great job there and we really enjoyed the services. Several good things "stood out" at this church and I would like to point them out.

First, we were there for "Honor Deacon Day". It is wonderful when Deacons are honored instead of vilified by preachers! These men had served faithfully and had been a great asset to the ministry of the Church and should have been so honored.

Second was the welcome we received. When we came in and sat down in the church before Sunday School, no less than 10 people got up from their seats to come greet us. Everyone acted as if they really wanted us there.

Thirdly, when it was time for Sunday School, no less than 4 people invited us to walk with them to their Class (a big help in a strange church).

Finally, The Music (Congregation, Choir, Special) during the worship service was simply great- and ended before 11:30am! The Preacher had time to preach and He preached very well. His message honored these men; and it uplifted the Lord. That's good preaching.

Then time was taken to present honor and plaques to the Deacons before the Deacons and their families were given head of the Line privileges in the fellowship meal.

If I were a stranger in this area looking for a good church you can rest assured that I would give Parkway a second look. And isn't that what every church should strive for?

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August 28, 2001 SINGLE SAINTS

Remember the old story about the man in the Civil War who could not make up his mind if he wanted to fight for the North or for the South? He finally put on a Blue Shirt and some Grey Pants- and both sides shot him!

That must have made God laugh for that is exactly what God has preached all the time- you are either for me or you are against me and it just makes me sick for you to try to be lukewarm with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. Jesus always demanded decisive decisions from those who wanted to follow him- Let the dead bury the dead, sell what you have, don't look back when you put your hands to the plow.

But how do we make this actual in our life? What does it take for us to be such a Committed Christian? The answer is found in the three-fold commitment that you make to be a "Single Saint".

God pleasing Christians have a Single Mind- They realize that "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways" so they seek the mind of Christ that enables them to say, "This ONE thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Such Committed Christians have a Single Heart- God and His work are the love of their life. They don't serve God with one eye always looking toward the world. They are pilgrims and strangers passing through on their way to the Heavenly city. Their body is on earth but their heart longs for Heaven.

These Single Saints also have a Single Will- They realize that no man can serve two masters so they listen to, and obey, God's voice first and foremost.

Are you a Single Saint; or does everyone take pot shots at you?

August 29, 2001 STAIR SCARS

On the flight from Amsterdam to Delhi I sat beside the stairs going up into the "World Class" section of the plane. In front of me was First Class and above me was World Class; I guess that meant I was in "No Class!".

Almost immediately I noticed that the bottom 3 feet of the stairs going up to World Class were heavily scarred. As the flight attendants pushed the refreshment carts by they often hit the stairs. Now numerous scars on the stairs marked the height of the refreshment cart. Above this area the stairs looked elegant and new but the bottom portion looked scarred and scuffed.

Sometimes people are like that. Most areas of their life look "World Class" and "First Class" but when you see the "No Class" section of their lives you notice the many scars. Unlike the stairs in the plane, some scars in people's lives are self-inflicted. Many scars, however, are the result of the carelessness of others. Maybe something as simple as an unkind word, a negative attitude, or a social slight. Maybe something as awful as abuse or neglect.

Stairs were made to carry you higher. Sometimes this is difficult because you can't get past the scars on the bottom. That is why it is so important to know that Jesus bore our scars in order that God might redeem us and make us a vessel unto honor. Don't let the scars of "No Class" continually defeat you. Come to Christ and let Him lift you past the scars and into "World Class" living!

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September 4, 2001 HOLY SPIRIT HELP

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit- God who is Three in One. God the Father planned our Salvation. God the Son paid for our Salvation. God the Holy Spirit presented our Salvation. All are divine, all are important, all are God. With that in mind, look at some ways the Holy Spirit has helped us.

The Holy Spirit Sought us. Fallen sinful man seeks to hide from God among the bushes of a busy life. Hungering for God, he instead eats the husk of the hog pen as he hides from God and from God's Message. The Holy Spirit goes into the highways and byways and pierces hard sinful hearts with the arrows of conviction.

The Holy Spirit Brought us to Him who Bought us. He drew us with bands of Love to the foot of the Cross where we saw the Grace of God displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It was not enough that He looked for us until He found us hidden in the dark recesses of despair away from the glorious light of God; He then brought us into God's presence so we could see how much God longed for us to have a relationship with Him.

Then, when we accepted God's gift of life through Faith in the shed blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit Wrought us in the image of Christ. Day by day, moment by moment, the Holy Spirit worked as we became conformed into the image of Christ.

And along the Christian Journey, the Holy Spirit Fought for us against the attacks of our arch enemy, Satan. Early we learned that the battle was not ours but it was the Lord's. We have neither the strength nor the wisdom to win these battles. The Holy Spirit has both.

Finally, one glorious day, the Holy Spirit will join with us in rejoicing as we are Caught up into the eternal presence of God and exalt in the victory won with the Help of the Holy Spirit.

September 5, 2001 WHERE DID SHE STAY?

It was one of those questions that just "pop into your mind". Listening to a teacher teach the story of the woman at the well as she met Jesus it just suddenly occurred to me, "Where did she stay that night?"

You know the story, Jesus "must needs go through Samaria". His disciples go into town hunting something to eat. Jesus is sitting by the well in the middle of the day when a woman comes to get her water. In the ensuing conversation, Jesus reveals that she has had 5 husbands and is now living with a man. She becomes aware of her need of "Living Water", puts her confidence in Christ, and leads in a community wide revival.

But where did she stay that night? She couldn't go back to the man she had been living with because they weren't married. She couldn't go back to her first Husband because the Bible said that would be an abomination (Deut 24:1-4). So where did she stay that night?

The point in my mind was that when a person comes to confidence in Christ as their Savior then it will produce a change in their life. They will not talk the same talk, walk the same walk, or spend the night in the same place if it was a wrong place!

Faith in Christ not only changes your ultimate destination; it transforms your manner of life. Even to changing where you sleep at night!

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September 11, 2001

HELPING AND HURTING GOD

Job's comforters were wrong in their conclusions but sometimes their arguments are well worth examining. Take the eloquent Elihu and his argument about helping and hurting God- (Job 35:1-8) Elihu spake moreover, and said, Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's? For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee. Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.

What questions! If you sin, do you hurt God? If you do righteous, do you help God? It is obvious that "thy wickedness may hurt a man and thy righteousness may profit a man" but what impact do my actions, good or bad, have on the God of the universe?

If Elihu had been right in his assumption that God was some far off Judge simply watching with interest as men either did good or evil then life would indeed be vanity and drudgery and the good or evil you did would have little impact on Him. But God's very essence is Love. Because of this, God becomes so involved with us until He is indeed helped by our righteous acts and hurt by our rebellious actions.

God does not need our good and His plans cannot be defeated by our bad but, oh, how it helps His heart when we behave as Children of God should behave; and how it hurts His very being when we act like children of the devil. Remember that, and consider your actions this week. Everything you do either helps God or hurts God. What a responsibility!

September 12, 2001

HEAVENLY WELCOME

I have told churches for years that they need to have a "Wal-Mart Welcome Person" at their church near the beginning of every service. Welcome people, give helpful information, and start their visit to the church with a smile on their face.

Recently, I thought about what a great joy it would be if you could be the "Wal-Mart Welcome Person" in Heaven! Wouldn't that be neat?! You would get to welcome Senior Saints who come in with a sparkle in their eye and a spring in their steps as they looked for their new permanent mansion.

You would get to hug with delight and reassurance that 10 year old boy or that 5 year old girl who came in with wonder and awe at the magnificence of the city. And what a shouting and laughing time you would have with that person who had been bed ridden for years but now had a new body free from pain and sickness.

Think of it. People from every race and every nation will continually be streaming into that city and you would get to share in their first moment of triumph. You would see the tears of joy, hear the shouts of victory, and witness the jubilation as they arrived in that celestial city. What a privilege!

I am headed for that Heavenly Home. If you get there first, tell the Welcome Person I'm coming- You will know me by the smile on my face and the "Glory!" on my lips.

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September 18, 2001

ACORN AGING

At a recent minister's breakfast, Pastor Robert Rose was asked to give a list of guidelines that would enable a Pastor to grow old gracefully. It was noted that sometimes as he approaches retirement age a Pastor will become bitter and cynical and do great harm to a testimony he has spent a life time building. What can be done now so that acorns of anger will not grow into trees of bitterness later in life?

Here are the Five guidelines he gave:

- 1) Realize that People are sinners and will never live up to your expectations. Don't let an anticipation of perfect people bring disillusionment when they turn out to be human.
- 2) Accept God's Sovereignty in matters and avoid disappointment when He does not do things exactly as you would do them. God's ways are not our ways and He has a right to be God.
- 3) Examine your definition of Success. Are you happy to be faithful or must you constantly measure your life by accomplishments? Can you be as faithful to God in the Pew as you preached that others should be from the pulpit!
- 4) Keep a warm heart for God, His people, and His Word by maintaining a consistent life of prayer, Bible Study, and the sharing of God's Blessings. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If you find yourself always speaking negative or bitter things then you need a heart exam.
- 5) Plan for the future in order to deal with the fears that accompany aging- Failing health, Financial needs, and Facing Loneliness. One day your body will betray you or the board will reject you. What is God giving you now in order to prepare you for that coming conclusion?

Good guidelines, not only for ministers, but for all people as they face the aging process.

September 19, 2001

MAKEBATES

When the Apostle Paul instructed young preachers about the characteristics to expect of Godly Women he always included the statement that they were not to be "Slanders" or "false accusers". In both cases the Greek work is "diabolos" and is translated in other places in the Bible as "devils".

The only weapon the devil can use against you is words! The devil cannot make you do anything unless you yield to his power. He seeks to get you to yield by telling you false things about God and men. That is why Satan's very name means to Slander or falsely accuse. He first appears in the garden of Eden slandering the character of God and throughout the Bible he is shown as the accuser of the brethren.

So Paul is actually telling these young preachers that Godly Women will not act like the devil and slander others in the church or in the community. The thing that caught my attention is the fact that "false accusers" is translated in the margin of my Bible as a "Makebate". I had never heard that word before.

"Makebate" is defined as a person who is in the habit of calumniating others, or aspersing their character. In other words, someone who has something bad to say about everyone!

If your tongue has made you into a "Makebate" then repent and ask God to cleanse your heart (out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks) and make you better so you will work for the Lord instead of "Makebate" for the devil.

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September 25, 2001 Unusual Things in the Bible

Here are some little "odd" things I have picked up through the years as I have read the Bible. May they be used to help prick your curiosity so you will get into the Word.

- 1) Man who lived to be 969 years old (Gen 5:27). Do you know what happened the year he died?
- 2) Man who used a stone for a pillow (Gen 28:11)
- 3) Baby who had a scarlet thread tied around his hand before he was born (Gen 38:28-29)
- 4) The man who controlled a battle by holding out his hands (Ex17:11)
- 5) The man whose donkey saved his life (Num 22:28-30)
- 6) The man who had a bed 13 1/2 feet long and 6 feet wide (Deut 3:11)
- 7) The women who had to shave their heads before they could marry (Deut 21:11-13)
- 8) When the Sun stood still for a day (Josh 10:13)
- 9) The woman who killed a man by driving a tent stake through his head (Jud 4:17-21)
- 10) An army with 700 left handed men (Jud 20:16)
- 11) The man whose hair weighed about 6 2/3 pound when it was cut annually (II Sam 14:26)
- 12) The man who had 12 fingers and 12 toes (II Sam 21:20)
- 13) When an Axe floated on the water (II Kings 6:1-6)
- 14) The man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I King 11:3)
- 15) The man who had 88 children (II Chron 11:21)
- 16) When did the Sun travel backward (Is 38:8)
- 17) The Preacher who walked naked for 3 years (Is 20:2-3)
- 18) When an entire graveyard came to life at one time (Ezek 37:-)
- 19) The Harlot who was the ancestor of Christ (Matt 1:5)
- 20) The man who ate locust for food (Matt 3:4)

September 26, 2001 THINGS GOD WILL NOT ALLOW

Several times in Scripture we are told that God "will not suffer" certain things. We would translate that today as God "will not allow" these things. With that in mind, let's look at some things that God will not allow.

In Ex 12:23 we are told that God will not allow the destroyer to come into the house to smite a person with the blood applied. Glory! What a promise. Satan can "hoot and holler" all he wants but he cannot break past the blood. God simply will not allow it!

Psalms 121:3 states that God will not allow the foot of the righteous to be moved. Established on the "Rock", the righteous can face any storm that comes their way in calm assurance that He that keeps us will neither slumber nor sleep and He will not allow our foundation to be undermined.

Proverbs 10:3 proclaims that God will not allow the soul of the righteous to starve. Satan cannot put a Christian in a place that God cannot provide food for his soul! There is no hospital room, no lonely nursing home, and no isolation area that God's presence is not present! And He will not allow your soul to starve.

Finally, there is the overwhelming promise of 1 Co 10:13 that God will not allow you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. God will not allow a temptation without providing an escape route. I've got to say it again, "Glory!"

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October 2, 2001 DIVINE DOMINION

Man was given Dominion over the animals of the earth at creation. After the fall of man in the garden of Eden that Dominion was lost and mankind now fears and fights animals instead of having dominion over them. Man is able to Dominate some animals but he does not have Dominion over them.

Several times in the Old Testament we are shown God's Dominion over Animals: When the animals marched two by two into the ark and when the Ravens brought Elijah bread and flesh each morning and evening. During his life on earth Jesus showed his dominion over animals by filling the nets of the disciples with fish on several occasions, by commanding a single fish with tax money in his mouth to allow himself to be caught by Peter, by riding an untamed donkey through a crowd of shouting, boisterous people on His entrance into Jerusalem, and even by dwelling among the wild beast during His temptation.

During the Millennial rule of Christ on earth man will once again be given dominion over the animals as "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;" (Is 11:6). And in an amazing display of dominion over animals during that time "the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den." (Is 11:8). Fighting among animals and fear of animals will vanish.

My question is this- If the animals yield to God's Dominion and are willing to obey His every command why do we humans disobey, disregard, and disrespect God's call and commandments? Why do we act as if God is supposed to obey and please us instead of us obeying and pleasing Him? Why can't we be as smart as the animals?

October 3, 2001 IN TIME OF TROUBLE

(Jer 2:27-28) *Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. **But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble:***

A Christian Radio Station received an unusual request on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The local Rock and Roll Station in town was in a dilemma. After the terrorist attack they just knew in their heart that they should not be playing songs that blasphemed the name of God, glorified drug use, and continually used sexual innuendoes. They thought about using some "Christian Rock" but even that did not feel right. Finally, they called this local Christian Station and requested some hymns that told of God's love and care.

The week before the terrorist attack school boards were debating (and defeating) the idea of having prayer before ball games. Since the attack prayer has been a vital part of almost all public activities. Before the attack, people "worshipped" sports heroes and sporting events. After the attack the sporting world stopped in recognition of how insignificant it really was.

Again God has asked, "Where are the gods that thou has made? Let them arise, if they can save thee in time of trouble."

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October 9, 2001 REALITY CHECK

Jesus said that if something was in your heart that it would come out in your talk. Paul kept saying that if something was in your talk then it ought to come out in your walk. I guess that means that what you believe in your heart will show itself in your conversation and your character. With that in mind, what have you said or done this week to convince those around you that Jesus Christ is your Savior and the only hope they have for eternity in Heaven?

The Apostle John made the statement that “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:” (1 John 1:6) . In other words, a man is a liar who claims to be in right fellowship with God while he is actually allowing wickedness and the world to control his life. He may accomplish a lot of “good” but the ultimate goal of mankind, fellowship with God, is missing. With that in mind, regardless of your position in the Community or the Church, in the darkness of your home, what do you watch on TV and where do you go on the Internet?

When Paul was counseling young preacher Titus (Titus 1:16) about people in the Church he cautioned him to be on guard for some people would “profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” Their talk was entirely different from their every day walk. With that in mind, does your daily actions and attitude at home cause your family to seek the Lord or to be bitter about people who profess Christianity?

Christianity is absolutely the best thing that has ever happened to mankind. What a shame it is mocked and hated because those who talk Christ sometimes walk worse than those who live only for sin and self.

October 10, 2001 HYPOCRITE HELPS

The word “Hypocrite” comes from a Greek word meaning “Actor”. It was used to refer to someone who wore a mask during a performance in order to make people believe they were a different person. An apt description!

What would cause a person to “wear a mask”? Why would people be afraid to let people know who they really are? Three reasons have been given:

1) We live a life of pretense because we think people would stop loving us if they knew what we are really like.

2) We wear a mask because we fear being hurt if we expose our “secret” self to others.

3) We hide as Hypocrites because we doubt the genuine concern of others. People learn to develop relationships by fashioning fences instead of by building bridges; and then wonder why they are more and more isolated.

What can help a Hypocrite? Remember that God has seen you at your worst and still loved you enough to let Jesus die for you (Glory!). Accept the fact that you are not perfect, just forgiven. You are expected to grow in grace; not become an instant superstar!

Many people are exhausted at the end of the day because they have been holding a mask instead of living the abundant life. What a shame they never realized Jesus died for who they are; not who they pretend to be!

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October 16, 2001 WHAT IF WE LOSE

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (Eph 1:11). In Mike Jones English- God determined what He wanted to do without asking approval from anyone.

I fought in the only war America ever lost. Basically the war in Viet Nam was a war against people using Terrorist Tactics- and we lost that war. When Russia went to war in Afghanistan it was a Super Power. When they left Afghanistan they were a “has been that was a was were”. We can bomb Afghanistan back to the Stone Age but that will not prevent Terrorist from popping up from their escape holes all over the world. And how will Americans respond to daily death, constant terror, and the inability to find a place to conquer to bring the whole thing to an end?

Am I anti-American? Am I spreading doubt and despair? No, just the opposite. I do not find America in end time prophecy and just wonder if this is part of the plan of God who “works all things after the counsel of His own will”. If it is, or if this is just a long tough war (which even the President keeps proclaiming), then I want people to realize that God is in control even when life is in chaos.

God’s chosen nation of Israel was defeated many times because it was being punished for sin or because it was part of God’s plan. But the circumstances they faced were not outside the control of God. In victory or defeat, God was still caring for them; and God still loved them.

I don’t know what tomorrow holds but I know who holds tomorrow. And if things don’t work the way I think they should then I have to hold to the hand of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will.

October 17, 2001 SECOND TIME ROAD

In order to visit all of the Free Will Baptists Churches in South Carolina each year, my wife and I travel many, many miles each week. Much of it is done via Interstate (I long for an “automatic” car that will allow you to get on the Interstate, punch in where you are going, and either work or take a nap while the car drives those mile after monotonous interstate mile!). There are, however, many back roads that must be traversed. That is where the excitement begins.

Most Sundays we are at one church for the morning service and another church for the evening service. Because of that we are always having to get to churches via different routes than we took the last time. That makes for a lot of brand new roads.

There is something unique about a brand new road; especially if you are not completely sure it’s the right road and you are on a tight time schedule! Doubt, fear, and anxiety ride with you the entire trip. But the next time you take that road peace and calmness ride with you because you have “been there, done that”.

That is the wonderful things about following Christ. Every road I travel in Life He has been there before me. He has wrestled with temptation, worked through sudden storms, and walked through rejection and being misunderstood. I get anxious but His presence brings peace to me since this is a “Second Time Road” for Him. And even the valley of death road is familiar territory for Him. What a Savior! What a joy to follow Him.

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October 23, 2001 HONDA HELP

It began with a frantic phone call from my wife. A light had started to shine on the dash of our car. After several phone calls we determined that it was safe for her to drive home. A former deacon who worked on Honda's was called and he said he would have it checked. He took it to the local Honda dealer and they said the Oxygen sensor was bad and it would cost \$700 to have it repaired. Not good news at the present time so we began to pray for God to provide and give guidance.

Soon afterwards a letter came from Honda telling of a recall and describing the very problem we had. The dealer was called and an appointment was made. In order to satisfy the government's requirements about the recall the dealer not only replaced the oxygen sensor but he also replaced the plugs and the rotor and changed the oil- all for no charge! (Glory!). God not only met our need, he did exceeding above anything we could have thought about. How wonderful is our God's supply.

And to add the "Icing on the cake", the time I spent in the waiting room allowed me to get in my Bible reading for the day, witness to several people about my faith in Christ, and do some work that I desperately needed to do but could not get done due to interruptions at the office. Sometimes God just opens up the windows of Heaven and pours out Blessings! I am so glad I am a child of God until I can hardly stand it. How greatly He manages the affairs of His children.

October 24, 2001 HEART HOLINESS

3 John 1:2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

Pastor Stewart Norris, Cornerstone FWB Church, recently shared two very important items. First, He had requested prayer at the past two conference meetings for a member of his church who had been diagnosed with cancer. One lung was so bad until the doctors would not operate and shortly after they operated on the other lung to remove what they could the x-rays showed it to be completely covered in cancer also. A recent trip to the doctor after we prayed revealed both lungs were now clear and the doctors could only ask him to come back in three months for another checkup! (Is there a "Glory" anywhere out there!).

Brother Stewart also preached a powerful message on "The Need of Holiness". He stressed the fact that Holiness has to begin in the Heart, must be lived out in the Home, should become a Habit of Life, and will then be regularly displayed in our worship at the House of God. Holiness is not a mask we put on for our neighbors; it is a changed life we live because of our relationship with God.

Health and Holiness- John said he wanted our body to be healthy according to the way our soul prospered. If so, would you be bed ridden this week or would you be busy showing the world the difference Christ makes in a life?

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October 30, 2001 CHECKLIST

Recent events in America have led to a revival in Patriotism. That is commendable and celebrated. My desire, however, is for a revival of genuine Christian living. I love my country but I realize that being a good citizen will not get me into Heaven; admission through the Heavenly Door comes only to those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

With that in mind let me ask you some questions that I hope will stir you to becoming the best Christian you can be.

1) What are you doing about what Jesus did? Jesus died to pay for your sins. Have you accepted Him as Savior and claimed His shed blood as a payment for the sin debt you owe God? If you are a Christian, what have you done this week to share the good news of what Jesus did?

2) What has changed since you became a child of God? Can you list 5 things that you have stopped doing and 5 things that you have begun doing that are a direct result of your relationship with Christ?

3) When is the last time you did something for the first time for God? Have you become lukewarm and unconcerned in your Christian life? Do you rest on what you used to do for God? Has Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance become just a routine for you to routinely go through? Have you lost the excitement of being a child of God?

4) Finally, How are you preparing for His Coming? Have you become so worldly minded until you have lost your Heavenly vision? Do you daily pass up opportunities to share your faith with others thinking that you will do it later; not realizing that King Jesus could return at any moment?

Becoming a Christian will change your character and your conduct; which will lead to a great change in our country. How are you progressing?

October 31, 2001 DEVIL'S DAY

A Month and a half ago he inspired his followers to commandeer some airplanes and crash them into buildings with terrific loss of life. Joyfully he organizes hatred, racism, and prejudice. Gleefully, he orchestrates murder, mayhem, and mischief on a regular basis. Death, destruction, disease, and disorder are his trademarks.

Yet, many pause on this day to honor the devil's representatives and act like the devil's disciples. Kind of makes you wonder, doesn't it?

In a time of attacks, anthrax, and anxiety; witches, ghosts, and demonic disguises are paraded down streets with celebration and merrymaking- while anyone who represents the God of Peace, Love, and Salvation is barred from displaying their faith and teachings in public assemblies. Is there something wrong with this picture?

Of all the horrible things that happened on that horrible Tuesday one of the most heartbreaking is the fact that when some of the people aboard those planes crashed into the buildings and their lives were ended much too quickly in a ball of fire; they never stopped burning! And it just seems strange to me that people would want to celebrate a day that promotes the devil and his demons who are the instigators of this unspeakable horror.

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November 6, 2001 CHURCH'S CHORE

You drive through town and see all the fast food places and you know what they are there for. You drive by a hardware store and you know what it is there for. But when you drive by the many churches in our area, do you know what they are there for? Here are some of the "chores" assigned to the Church by their "boss" (God).

Raise the Dead. One of the first jobs of the Church is to raise those who are dead in trespasses and sins. This is a job that takes supernatural power and is performed by the clear preaching of the Word of God about sin's penalty, Jesus' payment, God's promise, and man's acceptance. It can't be done by asking the corpses to act better, dress better, and talk better.

Resist the Devil. The enemy of God and good is Satan. The Church is to fight the good fight of faith in standing against Satan and all he tries to do.

Rebuke the Erring. Sin and Self lead men astray. The Church is to continually point them back to the straight and narrow so they will enjoy the peace and happiness of a committed holy life.

Restore the Prodigal. Sometimes men leave the Father's house and live in the world's hog pens. The Church rejoices when these men "come to themselves" and return to the Father. The consequences of their wasted wealth must be faced but the family is thrilled to have them back home.

Rejoice with the Saints. Churches should be places of music, fellowship, testimonies, praise, and joy. It is there that Christians get together and share how God has blessed them and spend time in worship of the Most High God.

Reflect the Savior. Jesus said that if He was lifted up that He would draw all men unto Himself. The church exist to exalt Jesus! A Church is to do this in its actions, its attitudes, its preaching, and its dealings with society.

These then are some of the chores of the Church. If your church is not doing these chores then I would look closer at who gives orders to your Church.

November 7, 2001 MIRROR REFLECTION

While sitting at my desk reading, recently, I looked out the window and noticed that someone had put a flower in the back of my van. Surprised that anyone would do that without telling me, I investigated. There was no flower in the back of my van. Something strange going on here.

Again, sitting at my desk looking at my van, there was a pretty flower sitting in the back of the van. What could it be? Beyond the van was the parking lot and the street so I was not looking thru the van window and seeing a flower. The van was parked right beside the building and there were no flowers on that side of the building. I was thinking about getting my eyes checked!

As my eyes wandered around my office I noticed the flower sitting on the book shelf across my office. It looked like the flower in my van. Finally, I figured it out. Since the time change I was at my office just as the sun was coming up. The sun was reflecting thru the window where the flower was sitting and shining on the window next to the van. Since it was still dark on that side of the building that window was acting as a mirror and showing the flower across the room. Whew! I'm not crazy after all!

As I sat there God seemed to speak to my heart and tell me, "That is what I want you to do. I want you to reflect my beauty and goodness in such a way until people see me instead of you." May God help me to be that kind of mirror reflection.

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November 13, 2001

WEEKLY WISHERS

One of the aspects of ministry that has greatly surprised me as I visit different churches is the number of pastors who have become “Weekly Wishers”. Each week they open the doors of the Church and wish that a huge crowd of people would suddenly show up. They have not done a whole lot to get extra people there but they sure do wish they would come so everyone could brag on the pastor!

First, let me give you some practical advice. If Fifty extra people suddenly showed up at your church this Sunday what would you do with them! Who would teach the 4 extra Sunday School classes that would be needed? Where would you find the 3 extra staff for the Nursery? If you were too lazy to invite them, would you be energetic enough to add 50 extra visits to your already overcrowded schedule next week? How would your normal members react to suddenly being overwhelmed with a room full of strangers? Remember that even God knew the value of “little by little” in growth- (Exodus 23:29-30) I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

Having said that, let me give you some ways that will help turn your “weekly wish” into a reality. Write Five post Cards each week. For slightly more than a dollar you can encourage some people, invite some people, and endear yourself to some people. Good investment. Then do a day of your Bible reading each week in the cafeteria at Wal-Mart. You can do more visiting in an hour at Wal-Mart than you can in a day of driving over the community; and, if you do not see a soul you can talk too, you have still done your Bible reading for the day. And when you leave there, take a stroll through the Grocery Store. You will be amazed at who you see.

Be a Weekly Worker instead of a “Weekly Wisher” and stand amazed at how God will grow you as just the right pace.

November 14, 2001

GET NOTHING

Jas 1:6-7 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

Many people pray a lot but seldom, if ever, see an answer to those prayers that can be directly attributed to God. It is almost like going to a water spigot time after time and always coming away with an empty glass. After a while I believe I would get thirsty enough to find out what was wrong with the water supply!

James declares in this scripture that one reason the spigot never provides water is the wavering faith of the person doing the praying. Instead of standing upon the rock of the promises of God as given in the Bible, this person is driven by whim, wish, or worldly pressures to throw some words at God in the fickle faith that one day God might accidentally do something about their request. Probably no one would be more shocked that their prayer was actually answered than them!

I am glad I know a loving Heavenly Father who delights in providing the needs and answering the requests of His children. He longs for His refreshing living waters to flow into our glass of need every single time we come before Him. But He can't get past the dam of our doubt. Oh, what Blessings would flow if real faith would destroy this dam and allow God to work.

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November 20, 2001

WONDROUS WALK

Adam walked with God in the Cool of the Day. Enoch walked with God so much until one day “he was not for God took him”. Abraham was told to walk before God and be perfect. Paul walked so close to God until he could exhort men to walk before God in the same way that he walked. Jesus said it was necessary for Him to depart and go back to the Father so that the Holy Spirit could take up residence in our heart in order that we could daily walk in the power of the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. What a difference it makes when you know the day ahead of you is a day walking in victory instead of defeat!

But sometimes we take our ability to walk with God for granted. Moment by moment, day by day, God has given us the happy privilege of walking with Him and experiencing the warmth of His love and care. Yet, too many times, our daily walk turns into a rush and a rat race as we are driven along with the cares, concerns, and circumstances of this present world. What will it take to make us come to a real realization of the unspeakably glorious privilege we have to daily walk and talk with the God of the universe?

Sometimes in our rush to thank God for the Wealth we possess, or the Wellness we enjoy, we forget to thank Him for the Walk with Him we can experience. Maybe that is because we are so wrapped up in our own desires and dilemmas until we walk as if we were alone even when our great and mighty God is walking right beside us! How thankful we should be, and how blessed we should live, to realize that God wants to walk with us in order to supply our needs, support us in our problems, and sustain us in our battles. Is God YOUR walking partner today?

November 21, 2001

COMMON BLESSINGS

The prayer request from this ladies prayer group brought tears to our eyes, pain to our hearts, and earnest prayers to our lips. A false accusation turned a carefree life completely upside down. A divorced son had to return home and he brought 3 children with him. The entire life of two families was changed. An ailing mother had to move in with her son and his wife, both of whom were barely able to care for themselves; and now they had a seemingly overwhelming burden added to their lot.

One request was for cancer that was a three on a scale of one to four. The next was for a four! Requests for surgeries, sicknesses, and unsaved family members rolled off lip after lip. The pain and problems carried on the dainty shoulders of the ladies in that room would have brought a Hercules to his knees.

Oddly, the greater the requests piled up the more I realized how thankful I needed to be. My trials and tribulations seemed like a molehill beside the mountain of needs expressed by these ladies. God forgive me for the days I take so many of life’s blessings for granted. Prayer multiplies during great troubles. Praise comes easy during bountiful blessings. But the really thankful heart is the one to which common blessings bring continual praise. Every day I need to remind myself to praise God for common as well as special blessings.

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November 27, 2001

CONNECTED CORRECTLY

Everyone worships a god; even if it is the god of no god! Most wars that are fought, and most traditions that box in people, tribes, and nations come from their perception of the guidelines put in place by their god. Yet, surprisingly, gods are always invisible and must be accepted by Faith, represented by a man made idol, or proclaimed by a “god called man”. That has led to many “prophets of god” who have only wanted to profit from god or push upon other people their own agenda (Which is piously blamed on god’s will or god’s word).

In the midst of claims and counter claims, under the overwhelming pressure of fanatical zeal and social pressures, how do you know what or who to believe? No wonder many have thrown up their hands and simply proclaimed that it does not matter what you believe just as long as you sincerely believe what you believe.

I recently had to make up some cables to connect some computers in our office. One thing I learned very early, if you cross the wires when you make up the connectors then you will not be able to get the computers to communicate- no matter how long you work or how hard you pray! In the same way, you can’t get your perception of God all twisted up and still expect to have a clear vision of who God is and what He wants from you.

That is why God became flesh and dwelt among men. God knew we needed an untwisted view of God in action and that could only come if God walked among us. So if God seems far away and you can’t seem to get in touch with Him it might be time for you to allow Jesus to straighten out your life. You will be amazed at how close God seems and how well life works when everything is connected correctly.

November 28, 2001

PREACHER PLATE

When I was the pastor of a local church, the Ladies Group began a tradition that I did not try to stop. After the Ladies had their Bible Study time they would always have some light refreshments. A tradition was begun that whoever was serving the refreshments would tell my wife to fix a plate and carry it home to the preacher. I like those ladies!

After I left the Church to serve our denomination on a state level my wife continued to attend the Ladies Group. But the tradition of a plate for the preacher was discontinued so I would go to a local restaurant, get a light meal, read my Bible chapters, and wait for my wife to finish her meeting.

When I dropped my wife off at the last meeting the new pastor of the Church wanted to show me the new sanctuary addition they are building. We rejoiced so much (and talked so much!) until I did not get the opportunity to get anything to eat. Now my non-lunch was turning into a non-supper.

When my wife came out of the Ladies meeting she had a plate of food in her hand with a piece of cake wrapped up on top. Is there a Glory anywhere out there! Just at the right time, God touched Mrs. Dot to remember and reinstated the plate for the preacher tradition.

That may not mean a lot to you but it spoke volumes to me of God’s continual care and provision. Thank God that even a hungry preacher does not escape His attention!

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December 4, 2001 CHANGING SHOES

The hole in the bottom did not bother me. The fact that the inside of the shoe was coming apart did not bother me. What finally made me go to the local shoe store for new shoes was the fact that the side of the shoe “blew out” and my socks were beginning to show!

New shoes are nice; and they provide a thrill to women that still baffles my brain, but I hate to give up my comfortable broke in shoes for a new set. When my wife goes to buy shoes she looks at the style, the color, and way it goes with a certain dress. When I go to buy shoes I look at the comfortable way they fit, how easy they will be to polish, and the price tag!

When I returned to the office with my new pair of shoes; and after I recovered from sticker shock (!), I began to consider that men think about shoes like sinners think about Salvation. Most men put off buying new shoes until something major makes them make a decision; just like many sinners put off salvation until a major happening makes them realize the importance of turning to Christ.

Men look for comfortable shoes that feel good when you wear them; sinners look for something to bring comfort to their heart and quite the nagging conviction that screams in their soul. Men look for shoes that are easy to maintain; sinners look for something that they can really live instead of just talk about on Sunday Morning. Men look for “economical” shoes; sinners find they can freely receive eternal abundant life by a simple act of faith.

I’m glad I’ve gotten my new shoes and wonder why I waited so long. And if you will accept Christ as your savior today you will think the same thing!

December 5, 2001 RED DOT CONCERN

Recently as I was talking with Pastor Larry Hughes of Salem FWB Church about some remodeling work at his Church I found that he shared the same philosophy as I do about remodeling- Get a committee of people who can be trusted, give them the authority to make color decisions, and then be prepared to back their decision as if it were your own. He did say, however, that he tried to caution the committee to stay away from putting “red dots” on the outside of the Church since that was the symbol for a liquor store!

Such a statement was meant mostly in fun but it had a serious foundation. Church Members need to be aware that the world is watching our care of the church almost as much as they do the conduct of the members. If people ride by and see neglected Church buildings and overgrown Church yards then they will assume that the members of that Church care little about God’s reputation; or about their relationship with Him. In this case, the “red dot” might be a peeling shade of faded white or a weed infested flower bed beside the walk leading to the front door of the Church!

“Red dots” also seem to appear on the Church when members of the Church act toward each other as if they were drunk with wine instead of being filled with the Spirit. That damages the Church’s reputation; and breaks God’s heart.

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December 11, 2001 THE COST OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas is expensive. Yes, it cost most people more money than they have but I'm not talking about that kind of expense. That first Christmas exacted a cost to all those who were involved that is flabbergastingly above anything financial. Let's look at part of the bill for that first Christmas.

Joseph lost his reputation and his standing in the community when he obeyed the angel's voice and remained engaged to a lady with child of the Holy Spirit before they were married. He lost his job and his home in the move to Bethlehem that Christmas demanded. Joseph paid a high cost for Christmas.

Mary paid her bill for Christmas in pain and suffering. Can't you just picture her riding those rough roads of Israel when it was almost time for her baby to be born. What anguish she must have suffered as she lay in a stable looking around at the feed trough that was soon to hold her child and wondering how she and Joseph could deliver this child on their own. And when finally the agony of birth was over and she thought she could get some rest a bunch of rough neck shepherds came barging in waking the baby and tracking mud all over the stable. Mary also paid a high cost for Christmas.

But what of the child born that first Christmas day? Suddenly to be clothed in flesh and to be totally at the mercy of Mary and Joseph after ages of angel adoration and the comfort of complete power. To feel pain, hunger, and temptation as a man so that He could eventually die for mankind. Such love overwhelms me. It is beyond the comprehension of normal thought. What a cost Christ paid that first Christmas.

At Christmas we think much of buying presents and little about being in His presence. The pressure of buying gifts for people who don't need anything makes us forget about the one who gave everything. What a different attitude we would have if we just considered the cost of Christmas.

December 12, 2001 PUMP HOUSE LIGHT

You don't heat your pump house with a neon light. Those of us who live in the country and depend on our own water supply know the importance of preventing your pump from freezing. Normally, the easiest thing to do is to put a light in the pump house and let the heat from this light keep the pump from freezing.

The pump house does not need the light, it needs the heat. Churches need the light; but they also need some heat! The water of the Spirit is not flowing in our homes and in our communities because many Churches have begun to use "neon lights" instead of regular light bulbs and the pump is frozen.

These churches meet week after week and "let their light shine" but the homes of the church members are falling apart and a wicked world is dying of thirst while drinking from pipes that only contain the sands of sin. People should be coming to the fountain of living water to find refreshment and relief. Instead they look with longing at empty pipes and frozen churches.

If your church burned down this week, and you could not rebuild it, what kind of difference would it make in your community? If the only people who would be affected would be the Church members then you need to find out why your light has no heat; and what it would take to put you back into the Living Water Business!

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December 18, 2001 MAGIC MONEY

I don't know where they think it comes from. I talk with people all the time about the work of missionaries and the need to respond to their budget needs. It always surprises me that people see the need of sending missionaries to the regions beyond but they seem to think that "magic money" suddenly appears for missionaries without anyone having to give it.

A missionary's budget is composed of three different parts: Their salary, their operating expenses, and special project needs. Most missionaries live on a salary so low when compared to their abilities and sacrifices until it should make Christians and churches blush with shame. Add in the cost of traveling, the expense of living in a foreign country, and the money needed to run churches, schools, and other missionary endeavors and you get a glimpse of the needs of their operational budget. And remember, every penny they spend has to come from somewhere; it doesn't just "magically" appear.

Jesus left Heaven to live on earth. He suffered rejection, pain, and death in order to provide eternal life for a sin cursed world. Like the missionary money, we must realize that the cost of salvation did not just "magically" appear. Jesus paid the full price for our sin debt (even to having God the Father turn His face from Him!) in order for us to be forgiven and receive eternal life. Salvation is free to receive but it sure didn't come cheap!

When you are sitting cozy and comfortable with family and friends this Christmas enjoying all your benefits and blessings, remember missionaries and the Messiah; and think about the fact that there is no "magic money" for missionaries and no cheap way to get to Heaven.

December 19, 2001 MIND OF THE MESSIAH

The mind of the Messiah boggles my brain. I have probably read at least a thousand times about the mindset that caused Christ to leave Heaven and come to earth to be born as a babe, to walk as a man, and to die on a cruel cross. Yet each time I read it I sit in awe and admiration and wonder how anyone could love anyone as much as God loved mankind.

I have seen pictures of men who would sit for hours and gaze at a diamond. They would turn it from side to side and marvel at the way the light sparkled and shone. Some would even say that they could feel the "warmth" as it emanated from the gem. Personally, diamonds don't do a thing for me; but I often sit and wonder and am warmed by the mind of the Messiah.

Here then is the Mind of the Messiah as given to the apostle Paul to share with the church at Philippi- (Philippians 2:5-12) *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, 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.*

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December 25, 2001 GIFTS TO GIVE GOD

After all, it is HIS Birthday! Early on this day cries of excitement will echo in rooms full of hyperactive children who can't wait to finish unwrapping one present so they can begin unwrapping another one! Cameras will flash to record that special moment of surprise and trash dumps will soon overflow with torn wrapping paper and empty boxes. But what will Christ receive on HIS Birthday? Here are a few suggestions about what you might want to give.

Give the Gift of Gratitude. My wife was treated for cancer this year. When people ask how she is doing it is easy for me to tell them that compared to what some others have gone through this year she is doing great. In the midst of all the difficulties we have faced this year we have seen love, concern, and God's purposes at work. Paula and I plan to begin this Christmas morning with a season of gratitude for God's goodness, mercy, and care.

Give the Gift of Sharing. I am fat, bald, and ugly (the truth is what will stand when the world is on fire!) yet, it never ceases to amaze me that my mother wants to see me! Of all the presents she will receive this year, the one she will talk about is the fact that her boys came to be with her. God is always there for me. Sometimes I am so busy working for Him until I fail to spend time with Him. This Christmas I plan to share myself with God; and then share my faith in God with others.

Finally, give the Gift of Commitment. For God so loved the world until He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God has forgiven me of my sins and made me one of His children. Surely, I should totally commit myself to Him and love Him with all my heart and serve Him with all my life.

Many gifts will be given this Christmas. But it is HIS birthday. What will you give Him?

December 26, 2001 FACING THE FUTURE

My devotional reading today was from the book of Revelation. It told about wrath, judgement, and rebellious men who blasphemed the name of God. Not the calm and relaxing verses you normally want for your devotion but since I try to read the entire Bible it is part of the real world described in vivid detail in many passages in the Word of God.

Another year is about to open before us. This time last year no one had any idea about the terrible chain of events that would shake our world to its very foundation. We were at "ease in Zion" with nothing but prosperity and security before us. Now we are under constant security alerts and face constant treats to our jobs and livelihood.

According to Revelation chapter three prosperity will return and people will increasingly depend on goods instead of God which will make them prime targets for the reign of the Antichrist as he ties people's worship of him in with providing the goods they have become accustomed to having. Pleasure and profit will be the keywords of society until one day, with the suddenness of September 11th, situations will change as death and chaos arrives.

How do you face such a future? Just trust in God. Nothing takes Him by surprise and nothing is beyond His loving care. So make your "New Year's Resolution" this year the fact that you will serve God with all your heart. Then your future, no matter what it brings, will be great to face!