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CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND THE WORD OF GOD

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christian growth and the Word of God, which is the title of this study, at once suggests a close connection between the two subjects. It allows a number of possibilities. It could imply that Christian growth, as the concept will be developed, is dependent on the Word of God, or that it is at least described in the Word of God. It could also imply that Christian growth evidences itself in or results in a more consistent use of the Word of God. While each of these inferences will be shown to be valid, the first mentioned is the major concern of the writer. However, as will be established in this thesis, the dependence of Christian growth on the Word of God is a dependence on the Word, not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end, God Himself being the true source, working through this means.

The relation of the two concepts, Christian growth and the Word of God, will be one of the chief concerns of this study; but almost equal to it in importance will be the proper understanding of a number of the factors involved: (a) God's revelation of His holy will regarding Christian growth; (b) Man's nature before and after conversion with special reference to his relation to God; (c) The possibility of Christian growth, indicating God's

approach to man in His Word; (d) The responsibility for Christian growth as indicated in the Word; (e) The ideal Christian life, as described in the Word; (f) Man's need of help in patterning his life after the Word; (g) The help offered to men by the servant of the Word of God; (h) Attainable goals in Christian growth as these are presented in the Word; (i) The proper use of the Word of God toward the attainment of Christian growth; (j) The Scriptural guidelines for the minister of the Word as he applies himself to the task of fostering Christian growth in his members.

The need for such a study is the more acute today for two reasons. First of all, this is a scientific age, an age of searching for facts but often resulting only in theories beyond which man finds it impossible to go with his limited knowledge of the world. The theories seem to work and man works with them, but he does not always know why they work. The Christian especially must be on guard against such a quasi-scientific approach to problems, knowing that even in this enlightened age science is still far from pure. In fact, modern man in general would do well to give thought to the suggestion of William Pollard, one-time professor of physics, now a priest in the Episcopal Church, that the nineteenth and twentieth century might some day be considered a dark age because of an overemphasis on the scientific way of thinking about the world and

about man. He admits that

from the standpoint of the triumphs of science and medicine, of productivity and standard of living, of education and social welfare, it seems just the reverse. Yet (he adds) underneath all our material prosperity and accomplishments there is a deep-seated malaise, a sense of meaninglessness and frustration, and a background of dark and foreboding suspicions about the feasibility of modern man's whole enterprise which have been widely noted in recent commentary. A surprising proportion of contemporary thought is sufficiently dark to justify the use of such an adjective to describe the age in which we live.¹

The Christian today must combat the unscientific use of the theories of science as a source of knowledge and as a directive for life. And the surest way of doing so, at least as far as he himself is concerned, is to go to the Word of God for guidance and help. The world today needs the Word of God more than it has ever needed it before. In this age of science, when men are daring to do the impossible, they need to know that only with God nothing is impossible. In this day of learning, when men are seeking out the unknown, they need a knowledge of God which they can never seek out themselves. Men need the Truth and the Truth needs men to proclaim it. For Christian living is a serious matter. No Christian has fully attained perfection in it.² Even the Apostle Paul, who

¹W. G. Pollard, "Dark Age and Renaissance in the Twentieth Century," The Christian Idea of Education, edited by Edmund Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 14.

²Ps. 143:2

called upon men to follow his example in seeking to do all things to the glory of God,³ had to admit his own imperfections.⁴ Christians need help--how much they need it will be shown later--and the servants of the Word, if they are true to their calling, will seek to offer it.

But the servant of the Word who wishes to help his fellow-Christians must know how to use the Word of God in offering help to men in Christian growth. And that brings up the second reason for the need of a thorough study of the relation of Christian growth and the Word of God. The reason lies in the tendency of modern preachers to moralize when they speak to Christians about their Christian life. Ferris says of this:

One of the reasons why so many sermons are ineffective is that they are written largely in the imperative mood. They are exhortations, not proclamations. . . . They try to nag people into being good instead of attracting them toward goodness by showing them what is really good. . . . They tell people that they ought to be better Christians, that they ought to love their neighbors more than they do, and never disclose to them the inexhaustible love of God as it is revealed in Jesus. They urge them to come to church more faithfully, but never give them a vision of the church as the company of all sorts and conditions of men who live under the influence of Jesus.⁵

The fact that other recently published books on preaching contain warnings against moralizing that are

³I Cor. 11:1

⁴Phil. 3:12

⁵T. P. Ferris, Go Tell the People (New York: Scribner's, 1951), pp. 19 f.

just as definite, indicates a fear on the part of church leaders that the practice of moralizing is rather widespread. Gresham warns that

the moralizing of the pulpit is its departure from Christian preaching. . . . To tell people that they ought to be good is like telling a drowning man that he ought to know how to swim.⁶

Schroeder, dealing with the same subject in his book, Preaching the Word with Authority, points out that

moralistic preaching has the added liability that it must be held theologically suspect. Unwittingly it lends support to a doctrine of good works. If people are goaded by constant exhortations to do this, that, or the other, it should not surprise us if they come to the conclusion that by meeting the various demands made upon them they will lay up⁷ for themselves imperishable treasures in heaven.

This tendency, in the opinion of the writer, is due to the fact that preachers today have heard so much about the need of counseling that they believe a man can help himself if he is just given proper guidance and that given a bit of counseling he will be able to lift himself above the difficulties of life. Such urging, since it lays the responsibility for improvement on man, is moralizing in the real sense of the word. It aims to get man to do his best, without any regard for the question of whether the best that man can offer is good enough for God. The man who seeks to follow such guidance is led to believe that

⁶P. E. Gresham, Disciplines of the High Calling (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1954), p. 44.

⁷F. W. Schroeder, Preaching the Word with Authority (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), p. 55.

he is his own savior or at least can help toward that goal.

Such a view will be shown to be entirely out of harmony with the Word of God, which traces man's every improvement back to God Himself working through His Word.

Before any further comment is made on this subject, a few definitions are in place, both for Christian growth and for the Word of God, as these terms are to be used in this paper.

Christian growth, as the concept will be developed, includes every proper advance in knowledge of God's Word⁸ and of His will,⁹ growth in Christian attitude toward the Word¹⁰ and will of God¹¹ and especially toward God¹² and man,¹³ and, finally, growth in Christian activity.¹⁴ It must, however, be borne in mind that these areas of growth are not in any sense exclusive of one another. An increase in knowledge of God's Word and will that does not include a proper attitude toward the Word cannot properly be

⁸I Cor. 1:5 ff.

⁹Eph. 4:20 ff.

¹⁰Gal. 1:8 ff.

¹¹Jn. 17:13

¹²Eph. 2:11 ff.

¹³I Cor. 6

¹⁴I Cor. 15:58

considered Christian growth.¹⁵ This will become evident as the concept of growth is developed. Likewise, an increase in activity that appears to be Christian, if it is not based on and accompanied by the proper attitude toward God, is vain.¹⁶ This, too, will become clear from the development of the concept of Christian growth. The whole man must be involved. The person must grow as a person in Christian faith and life if growth is to be thought of as Christian.¹⁷ Moreover, it will be clearly shown that such growth is possible only in the life of one who is already a Christian.¹⁸ Conversion itself is not here thought of as growth but as the creation of the new life,¹⁹ which from that moment on is capable of growth²⁰ in the manner that will be set forth in this study. It is the concern of the writer that Christians be helped to grow in faith and life and that the servant of the Word who is to help them toward such growth be guided in this difficult and important work. The responsibility resting on the individual and on the servant of the Word will be set forth later.

¹⁵II Pet. 1:3-8

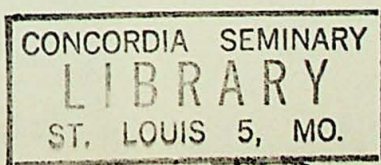
¹⁶I Cor. 13

¹⁷II Tim. 3:17

¹⁸I Cor. 2:8-14

¹⁹Eph. 2:4 ff.

²⁰Eph. 2:10



Since reference will constantly be made to the Word of God, it is important that this concept be likewise defined. The Word of God, as the term is understood and is to be used by the writer, is synonymous with the Scriptures or Holy Scripture. The reference is always to the writings of the Old and New Testament, given by inspiration of God²¹ through Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament²² and through the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament.²³ The very words used by the holy writers were given to them by God,²⁴ and all Scripture is exactly what the word "all" includes, when Paul states that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.²⁵ The veracity of Scripture in every point is one of the bases of this study.²⁶ The efficacy of Scripture due to its divine origin is another of these bases.²⁷

This is a matter of personal faith. No man can be satisfied with another's faith in the Scriptures²⁸ any more

²¹II Tim. 3:16

²²II Pet. 1:21

²³Jn. 17:20

²⁴I Cor. 2:13

²⁵II Tim. 3:16

²⁶Jn. 17:17,20; Cf. 21:24

²⁷I Thess. 2:13; Rom. 1:16

²⁸I Tim. 4:15

than he can be saved by another's faith in Christ.²⁹ Each must believe for himself³⁰ and each can come to such faith only through the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word.³¹ It follows from this that the Word of God must be recognized as a true and reliable norm of teaching or it will not serve as an authoritative source of information, let alone of power for Christian growth.

²⁹Gal. 5:4,5

³⁰Hab. 2:4; Cf. Rom. 10:14 ff.

³¹Rom. 10:17; I Cor. 12:3

CHAPTER II

THE RELATION OF GROWTH TO THE WORD OF GOD IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER REVELATIONS OF GOD

Once the Scriptures are recognized as a true and reliable norm of teaching, it is not difficult to establish the relation of the Word of God to Christian growth, for the Word itself establishes that relationship in clearest terms. In "the epistle of Paul to the Romans" the Apostle Paul indicates that the Scriptures--and he is referring to the Old Testament--were written for the learning of Christians.¹ But he adds in the same verse that the learning is to be more than head knowledge, for it is to result in hope in the heart of those who have received the Word. Moreover, in the very next verse he adds the thought of Christian activity expressing itself, for one thing, in true Christian unity. But there is more in this chapter than at first meets the eye. The Apostle not only mentions the fact that the Word was written to give men hope; he at once makes use of the written Word of the Old Testament for this purpose, applying it to the readers of his own letter, thereby offering them joy and peace in believing.² And even this is not all that is contained in Paul's discussion of the matter. He also

¹Rom. 15:4

²Ibid., vv. 9-13

describes God Himself as the God of hope, obviously not the God who Himself has hope, but the God who is the giver of hope to men.³ Finally he shows how men can learn the truth from the Scriptures, how they can grasp the comfort that is given, how they can approach the God of all comfort without fear. All this, he says, is accomplished through the power of the Holy Ghost.⁴ In these few verses the Apostle states the chief thoughts to be developed in the following chapters, namely, that God Himself, as the source of all goodness, approaches men through His Holy Spirit, working with the Word as a means of imparting Christian knowledge, attitude and activity. He offers a most comforting teaching, which every servant of the Word will do well to meditate on to prepare himself more fully for his important work.

In the tenth chapter of "the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians" the Apostle again comes to speak of the use of the Word of God for Christian growth. Here he draws warning after warning from the Old Testament Scriptures against those who refuse to live their life to God, showing the terrible punishment which an angry God inflicted upon those who did not accept God's grace. Here, too, he gives an example of how the Scriptures are to be

³Ibid., 15:13

⁴Ibid.

used, though in this instance the emphasis is on especially the hortatory use of the Word.

One more passage dealing with the relation of the Word of God to Christian growth should suffice to indicate, by way of introduction to this whole question, that the one concept cannot be properly discussed without the other. The Apostle Peter treats the subject in "the second epistle of Peter". In the second verse of the first chapter, reference is made to the relation of knowledge to the enjoyment of gifts of God which definitely involve the Christian's attitude. This thought is developed even more fully in the following verses, where reference is also made to the power of God operating in this process. Then the Christian life becomes the focal point and one virtue after the other is referred to, each one a part of Christian living, each one a matter of concern of all who are interested in Christian growth.⁵ In fact, the lack of these virtues is spoken of as an indication of a lack of knowledge of the truths of salvation,⁶ whereas attention to these virtues is closely linked with an increase of knowledge of salvation. Here the importance of the subject of Christian growth comes into focus. He who does not grow in Christ is in grave danger of losing Christ altogether.

⁵II Pet. 1:5-7

⁶Ibid., v. 9

It is, therefore, imperative that Christians give constant attention to the Word of God as well as to their growth in Christ. Peter indicates that he and others, as eye-witnesses of Christ's majesty, were permitted to record this Word for the salvation of men and for their life in Christ,⁷ even as holy men before Christ's coming had recorded the Word which they received from God.⁸ In this study of Christian growth, the Word of God as recorded by the New Testament writers will be given preference, since these so often give a fuller development of the truths recorded in both testaments. But in no sense should this indicate a lack of trust in the efficacy and applicability of Old Testament revelation to New Testament times. As has already been stated, all Scripture of the Old Testament as well as of the New is the Word of God. The two testaments are alike in this respect. They differ in that the New Testament sheds the light of fulfillment on the prophecies of the Old.

One other matter is of importance in this connection. The reference to the relation of Christian growth and the Word of God, as the latter term is employed, focuses attention on the revelation of God in Scripture in distinction from other recognized sources of knowledge. This is done with good reason.

⁷Ibid., 1:16-19

⁸Ibid., v. 21

It must be granted that there was a time in the history of the world when the written Word was not God's means of communication with man. That was at the very beginning of the history of man. Adam and Eve in their state of perfect bliss and holiness were able to commune with Him without fear, for He had created them in His image.⁹ Being in the image of God, they had a knowledge of God's will,¹⁰ but this did not rule out further specific revelations of His will. Murray, in his book, Principles of Conduct, states that

Adam was created in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. The analogy of Scripture teaching would indicate that this implied the inscription of the law of God upon his heart. But it is abundantly clear that this inscription did not obviate the necessity of giving to Adam positive directions respecting the activity which was to engage interest, occupation, and life in this world. We must not focus our attention upon the specific prohibition of Eden respecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to such an extent that we overlook the other commandments given to Adam, commandments germane to the most basic interests of life in this world.¹¹

Murray goes on to say,

If all this is true in a state of sinless integrity, when there was no sin to blind vision or depravity to pervert desire, how much more must expressly prescribed directions be necessary in a state of sin in

⁹Gen. 1:27

¹⁰Col. 3:10

¹¹John Murray, Principles of Conduct: Aspect of Biblical Ethics (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 25 f.

which intelligence is blinded, feeling depraved, conscience defiled, and will perverted.¹²

With the advent of sin, Adam and Eve at once became far more dependent on God's revelation of His will and needed His grace, if they were to live as God's children. For they were now completely separated from God.¹³ That becomes evident from their flight from God¹⁴ and their faulty answers to God's questions.¹⁵

But before God could reveal His will to them in their sinful state, it was necessary that they first become His children. This God accomplished by the revelation of His grace in the first Gospel promise.¹⁶ After this He gave them instructions regarding their place in the world, their labor and sorrow, their duties in life,¹⁷ all of which proves that they needed such instruction. It is evident also in the appearance of the angel with the flaming sword, guarding the entrance to the garden of Eden.¹⁸ All this was a revelation to Adam and Eve concerning the will of God toward them in their state of sin.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Rom. 5:12,14,16

¹⁴Gen. 3:8

¹⁵Gen. 3:10,12,13

¹⁶Gen. 3:15

¹⁷Gen. 3:16-19

¹⁸Gen. 3:24

The Bible records of the life of Noah and, later, of the patriarchs also indicate how God revealed His will to men. He appeared to them directly¹⁹ as well as through dreams and visions.²⁰ He even sent angels, appearing as men, to bring them His Word and to reveal His will toward them.²¹ Moses, many years later, was permitted to come into His presence. He talked with God face to face²² and his countenance reflected the glory of God when he brought God's message to men.²³

Whether the Lord spoke through dreams or visions or audible words or signs, He so fully and so completely imparted His truth to men that there was no question in their minds concerning the will of God regarding their life.²⁴ In Abram's mind there was no difference between God's message to him through the spoken word²⁵ and the vision of the lamp that appeared to him in a dream.²⁶ His grandson Jacob was just as convinced as Moses was

¹⁹Gen. 6:13; 7:1; 12:1

²⁰Gen. 15:12; 28:12

²¹Gen. 18:1 ff.

²²Ex. 33:11

²³Ex. 34:29

²⁴Gen. 6:22; 12:4

²⁵Gen. 12:1

²⁶Gen. 15:17

later on that God had spoken to him, though he was asleep when God spoke and the message came to him in a dream.²⁷

All of these revelations of God's will, though they were not imparted in written form, were as efficacious as are the Scriptures today. But obviously these revelations do not aid man today in knowing or in following God's will except as they are recorded in the Scriptures.

It is different with the revelations of God's will to the prophets, who were moved not only to speak His holy Word but to write it and to preserve it for posterity. They constantly reminded their hearers that the message was not their own but the very Word of God, as is clear from the first verses of the first chapter of practically all of the books of the prophets. They were conscious of a direct revelation. Moreover, they were convinced of their positions as channels through whom God made known His will for the life of men.²⁸ Warfield makes the following comment regarding prophets:

The fundamental passage which brings the central fact before us in the most vivid manner is, no doubt, the account of the commissioning of Moses and Aaron given in Ex. iv. 10-17; vii. 1-7. Here, in the most express words, Jehovah declares that He who made the mouth can be with it to teach it what to speak, and announces the precise function of a prophet to be that he is a "mouth of God," who speaks not his own but God's words. . . . In no case does the prophet put his words forward as his own words. That he is a prophet at all is due not to choice on his

²⁷Gen. 28:12 ff.; Cf. Gen. 35:1

²⁸Is. 1:1,2; Jer. 1:2,4; Ezek. 1:3

own part, but to a call of God, obeyed often with reluctance; and he prophesies or forbears to prophesy, not according to his own will but as the Lord opens and shuts his mouth (Ex. iii. 26 f.) and creates for him the fruit of the lips (Isa. lvii. 19; cf. vi. 7).²⁹

The writings of these prophets were the revelation of God to men of all ages. There was no thought of limiting their words to their own times. What Jeremiah had said before the Babylonian captivity was still binding during and after the captivity.³⁰ The same was true of the writings of the other prophets. So, though no prophets were sent to Israel for over four hundred years, it is not correct to say that God was not revealing His will to men during these hundreds of years. He was speaking to them as directly as if He had raised Isaiah or one of the other prophets from the dead to repeat over and over again what they had written concerning the will of God. The fact that it was God's Word kept it in force, since God continued to speak to men through that Word. This is amply proven by Jesus' own use of the Old Testament Scriptures. He constantly reminded the Jews of His time that God was still speaking directly to them through the written words of Moses and the prophets, since these words were intended also for them. He charged the scribes and

²⁹Breckinridge Benjamin Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 87.

³⁰Dan. 9:2

Pharisees of His day with fault for not heeding what God was saying to them in the writings of Moses. This matter is thoroughly discussed by Warfield in his excellent book entitled The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible. He says:

It is not merely the two disciples with whom He (Jesus) talked on the way to Emmaus (Lk. xxiv. 25) whom He rebukes for not trusting themselves more perfectly to the teachings of Scripture. "Ye search the Scriptures," He says to the Jews, in the classical passage (Jn. v. 39), "because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life!" These words surely were spoken more in sorrow than in scorn: there is no blame implied either for searching the Scriptures or for thinking that eternal life is to be found in Scripture; approval rather. What the Jews are blamed for is that they read with a veil lying upon their hearts which He would fain take away (2 Cor. iii. 15 f.). "Ye search the Scriptures" - that is right; and "even you" (emphatic) "think to have eternal life in them" - that is right, too. But "it is these very Scriptures" (very emphatic) "which are bearing witness" (continuous process) "of me; and" (here is the marvel!) "ye will not come to me and have life!" - that you may, that is, reach the very end you have so properly in view in searching the Scriptures. Their failure is due, not to the Scriptures but to themselves, who read the Scriptures to such little purpose.

Quite similarly our Lord often finds occasion to express wonder at the little effect to which Scripture had been read, not because it had been looked into too curiously, but because it had not been looked into earnestly enough, with sufficiently simple and robust trust in its every declaration. "Have ye not read even this scripture?" He demands, as He adduces Ps. cxviii to show that the rejection of the Messiah was already intimated in Scripture (Mark xii. 10; Mt. xxi. 42 varies the expression to the equivalent: "Did ye never read in the scriptures?"). And when the indignant Jews came to Him complaining of the Hosannas with which the children in the Temple were acclaiming Him, and demanding, "Hearest thou what these are saying?", He met them

(Mt. xxi. 16) merely with, "Yea, did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfect praise?" The underlying thought of these passages is spoken out when He intimates that the source of all error in Divine things is just ignorance of the Scriptures: "Ye do err," He declares to His questioners, on an important occasion, "not knowing the scriptures" (Mt. xxii. 29); or, as it is put, perhaps more forcibly, in interrogative form, in its parallel in another Gospel: "Is it not for this cause that ye err, that ye know not the scriptures?" (Mark xii 24). Clearly, he who rightly knows the Scriptures does not err.³¹

Thus in the Old Testament already God was revealing His will for men of all times to come, by causing His Word to be written. The direct revelation was then already giving way in part to the revelation of God's will in written form.

In God's appointed time, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary,³² grew up among God's people,³³ was baptized of John the Baptist in the Jordan,³⁴ and began His public ministry. The comment of the people was that no one had ever spoken to men about their daily life with the authority with which Christ addressed them.³⁵ The common people heard Him gladly.³⁶ For the most part, He did not come with new teachings. He was constantly referring to the Word

³¹Warfield, op. cit., pp. 141-143.

³²Mt. 1:23,25; Lk. 2:5

³³Lk. 2:51,52

³⁴Mt. 3:13 ff.

³⁵Mk. 1:22

³⁶Mk. 12:37

of God given through Moses and David and the prophets.³⁷ But He showed that He was the fulfillment of God's promises.³⁸ What God had said through the fathers He was still saying to men through the written Word handed down from generation to generation.³⁹ However, Jesus made it clear that more could now be said than Moses and the prophets were permitted to say in their day. The time of fulfillment had come.⁴⁰ God's Son had come to save the world from sin⁴¹ and to give them power to live their lives to Him.⁴² Those who saw Him and witnessed His suffering, His death and resurrection were deeply affected by what they saw and heard.⁴³ They received power from Christ Himself to follow Him in true discipleship.⁴⁴

But again it must be said that this revelation to men of Christ's day affects the Church today only in and through the Scriptures. If the Church was to be helped, it was necessary for the Apostles and Evangelists to

³⁷Mt. 13:14; 15:17; 8:4; 19:8; Mk. 12:26

³⁸Lk. 4:21; Mt. 11:4

³⁹Lk. 2:29; Jn. 8:47; Rom. 10

⁴⁰Gal. 4:4

⁴¹Jn. 3:16

⁴²Gal. 2:20

⁴³Jn. 21:24

⁴⁴Jn. 6:68,69

record what Christ had accomplished by His suffering and death.⁴⁵

This message was preached by Christ's followers in Judea and Samaria and was carried to the uttermost parts of the earth.⁴⁶ When the Apostles could not go from city to city, they wrote the message and sent it by special messenger.⁴⁷ Thus the writings of the Apostles came into existence, as if by chance. Yet not at all by chance. The Lord was thus providing for the future ages of the world. He had promised that men of future generations should come to faith in Him through the Word of the Apostles.⁴⁸ Therefore, as He had given the Holy Spirit to move the prophets of old to write their message for the world,⁴⁹ so He now through the same Spirit directed the writings of the Apostles.⁵⁰ They, too, were moved by the Holy Ghost. They, too, wrote the very Word of God.⁵¹

The Church today is now separated from them by almost two thousand years. Yet it still has the Word of truth. God still reveals Himself and His will regarding man's

⁴⁵Jn. 17:20

⁴⁶Mk. 16:20

⁴⁷Eph. 6:22; II Cor. 13:10

⁴⁸Jn. 17:20

⁴⁹II Pet. 1:21

⁵⁰II Pet. 1:19; Gal. 1:1

⁵¹I Cor. 2:13

life to men today in the Scriptures--and chiefly in the Scriptures, as will be seen below. It is, therefore, the duty of the Church to make diligent use of the Scriptures in the interest of Christian growth.

What has been said above does not rule out the possibility that God reveals Himself to men today through means other than the written Word of God. The Scriptures themselves speak of God's revelation in nature. The Scriptures state that the heavens declare God's glory and that the world shows His mighty power and unfathomable wisdom to men.⁵² God states in the Word that He is constantly showing men His eternal power and godhead through the things that He has made, that is, through the world and all that is in it.⁵³ God tells them through these things, which are visible to them, that He is the mighty God. But very little is revealed in nature of what God wants man to do and especially of what He wants him not to do. Moreover, nothing is said in nature of how man is to find power to live the Christian life, let alone grow in life.

Actually, God's revelation in nature constantly points the Christian to His Word. He tells the Christian to consider the lilies of the field. Obviously, He is thus directing him to nature. And the Christian can observe in nature that the lilies neither toil nor spin and yet are

⁵²Ps. 19

⁵³Rom. 1:19,20

more beautiful than anything that man can produce. But the chief lesson he is to learn as he considers the lilies is a lesson that is recorded in the Word of God. It is this, that the God who so clothes the flowers of the field will provide His children with all they need for body and life.⁵⁴ Thus God's Word directs the Christian to His revelations in nature, and nature in turn directs him back to the Word.

In the Word, God tells the Christian to consider the fowls of the air. When he does so, he sees that they do not gather food and store it for future use. Yet they are nourished and actually grow fat on the food they find each day, no matter what the season of the year. But in the mind of the Christian God has related this fact to the teaching of His Word that man in God's sight is of much greater worth than many sparrows.⁵⁵

God has also written a reminder of His holy Word in the trees as they bud forth in the spring of the year. They do not tell the Christian about the coming of Christ. Only Scripture tells him that.⁵⁶ But God uses His

⁵⁴Mt. 6:30

⁵⁵Mt. 6:26

⁵⁶Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, 106: "Neither nature, in all its wide reaches, nor the voice of conscience tells anything about the specific content of the Christian doctrine, about the Gospel of Christ. That is the clear teaching of Scripture (I Cor. 2:6-16).

constant revelation in nature to remind him of His Word. It is the Word that is thus the norm of his faith and his source of knowledge about Christian life and Christian growth. The person who does not have the Word of God almost invariably misinterprets God's revelation in nature. Danielou, whose recent book on God and the Ways of Knowing is an important contribution on the subject indicated in the title, finds that

Pagan religions never present cosmic revelation in the pure state, but always more or less deformed. At this stage, indeed, man as St. Paul says, "feels after God," without the light of positive revelation. The result is that, if it is the true God whom he seeks, the picture which he contrives is always faulty.⁵⁷

Again he states that

in its quest for God, the pagan soul falls by the wayside. Lacking the support of a positive revelation, it expresses clumsily what it sees; it falters and is deceived.⁵⁸

The fault for all of this does not lie with God's revelation--a revelation made to all men on earth--but

The natural religion, the knowledge of God derived from what God has revealed concerning Himself in nature and in man's conscience, is not the Christian religion, but the religion of the Law. That is the clear teaching of Scripture (Rom. 1:20: 'The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen'; Rom. 2:14-15: 'The work of the Law written in their hearts . . . their conscience also bearing witness . . . their thoughts accusing or else excusing one another')."

⁵⁷Jean Danielou, God and the Ways of Knowing, translated by Walter Roberts (Greenwich Editions Original: Meridian Books, Inc., 1957), p. 40.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 51.

with man, who, in his blindness, refuses to accept the evidence that is there for him. But that does not make God's revelation of His will purposeless. Since man has a conscience⁵⁹ and the knowledge of the Law written in his heart,⁶⁰ he must face the revelation of nature with fear. Pieper points out that the natural revelation produces in man

the feeling of guilt, or the evil conscience, the fear of punishment and with it the inner flight from God, the endeavor to avert punishment through the performance of good works, and, owing to the futility of this endeavor, the fear of death (Heb. 2:15), the state of hopelessness and despair, (Eph. 2:12): "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."⁶¹

God's revelation in history has very much the same effect on man as His revelation in nature. Man sees God's hand in the rise and fall of nations, in the destruction of cities, in the debasing of proud and haughty despots, in the peaceful reign of good rulers. But the assurance that the affairs of nations are in God's hands is given only to those who find God in His Word.⁶² It is to the Word that God directs the Christian when he seeks to understand God's revelation in history. The reason for what goes on in the world is not given in the events of

⁵⁹I Tim. 4:2

⁶⁰Rom. 2:14,15

⁶¹Pieper, op. cit., p. 14.

⁶²Acts 17:24 ff.; Eph. 1:21,22; Heb. 2:7,8.

history, nor can it be positively stated by the historian. The reason is much more clearly stated in Scripture, even though Scripture was written long before the events occurred. The Christian must, then, use the several modes of revelation of God's will for the purpose for which He intended them.

Without the Word of God he would be as inclined as natural man to misinterpret the revelations of God in nature and history. Natural man so often makes the mistake of identifying nature with God. He worships the sun, the moon, the earth and the creatures of the earth, instead of the God who made them, thus living his life entirely apart from God.⁶³ He does this in spite of the fact that God has clearly revealed Himself in the things of the world.⁶⁴ And so he becomes guilty of idolatry.

But the Christian would be no different if it were not for the Word of God.⁶⁵ He is tempted even now to go along with the faulty reasoning of men and needs God's warning against such a course.⁶⁶ For to do so would be to substitute reason for the Word, the conclusions and delusions of men for the clear revelation of God. It must, therefore, be emphasized that the Word of God is of utmost

⁶³Acts 17:23

⁶⁴Rom. 1:19,20

⁶⁵Rom. 3:9,10

⁶⁶Prov. 3:5

importance to him who wishes to study Christian growth. For the Word speaks clearly on this subject, as will be seen in every chapter, while other revelations of God, such as His revelation in nature and history are helpful chiefly in illustrating and exemplifying the truth revealed in the Word.

Since Christian growth is of real concern for every servant of the Word of God and since he, above all others, is interested in this subject, the following chapters are intended especially for him as a guide and an aid to him in this important work.

CHAPTER III

MAN'S LIFE WITH AND WITHOUT GOD

Before man's relation to God and His Holy will is considered, it will be necessary to establish what the Scriptures say about man. It is surprising to read the answers which some men find in God's Word to the question; What is man? Robinson actually approaches the Scriptures as he would a book of physiology, seeking to determine what conception "primitive" man had of himself.¹ Smith is content to go back to the Hebrews to find an answer to these questions.² But even he comes up with some rather strange views of man's knowledge of himself. Both authors find that the ancient Hebrew knew very little about the blood vessels, the brain, the method of respiration, the difference between body--which the Hebrew referred to as flesh and bones for want of a better term--soul, heart, mind, spirit, and the like. They will grant modern man the right to speak metaphorically of the heart, but not the Hebrew. His use of terms, so they say, is due to a lack of knowledge.

In a study of man, with a view toward Christian

¹H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Doctrine of Man (Third edition; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1926).

²C. Ryden Smith, The Bible Doctrine of Man (London: The Epworth Press, 1951).

growth, it is not at all important to know whether or not the Hebrew knew anything about the nervous system, the muscular system, the respiratory system; whether or not he distinguished between life and breath; whether or not he really believed the bowels to be the seat of some of the emotions. To seek answers to such questions in the Scriptures is about as rewarding as to seek to learn what Lincoln knew of man when he spoke of all men being created equal. No sane person living today would seek to press the word "created" as used by Lincoln. Nor would he try to prove anything of a purely biological nature from his statement that our fathers "brought forth" a new nation, "conceived" in liberty. What modern man must face when he questions what the Hebrew knew about himself is that even the modern conception of man is based far more on theory than most men would like to admit. The Scriptures do not scientifically analyze man's body.

A study of the composition of man's body as "taught" is not therefore too rewarding. A far better knowledge of man is gained from the Scriptures when the search lies in another direction. He who wants to know man as he is described in Scripture, will do well to forget about blood vessels, respiratory system, and the like, which are referred to only incidentally, with no thought whatever of teaching men about the composition of man's body. He may even forget the problem of interaction of body and soul, the relation of body, mind and spirit, interesting

as the subject might be. He may leave it to the philosopher, the scientist, the sociologist, the psychiatrist to take man apart and examine him piece by piece and then to seek to put him together again. In contrast, he must interest himself in the whole man. His dealings must be with people, not with their mind alone, their body, or even their soul apart from the body, for the Scriptures show that body and soul belong together. The body is nothing without the soul, and even the soul is "unclothed"³ without the body.⁴ The resurrection of the body and the reunion with the soul is one of the great doctrines of Scripture, as a comparison of passages reveals.⁵

The study of man according to the Scriptures ought to begin at the beginning. In the beginning man is spoken of as God's highest visible creature. Not only the manner in which he was created⁶--which was completely different from the creation of the world and of the whole plant and animal kingdom--but also the position to which he was assigned by God⁷ clearly establishes this fact.

According to the Scriptures Adam was a holy being,

³II Cor. 5:4

⁴II Cor. 5:1-8; II Pet. 1:4; Cf. Mt. 10:28; Rev. 6:9,10

⁵I Cor. 15:35-38,42-49; Jn. 5:28,29; Cf. Footnote 4

⁶Gen. 1:26; 2:7

⁷Gen. 1:28

without sin in thought, word and deed.⁸ He was a righteous being, his days in Eden filled with good works, pleasing to the Lord.⁹ The Scriptures describe him as having been created in God's own image.¹⁰ He had a will that was in perfect accord with the will of God, and his body, mind and spirit were in perfect accord with his will. He did all that he wanted to do and what he did was right. The reason for this is to be found in the perfect guidance of the Holy Spirit which Adam and Eve enjoyed in the state of bliss, as can be inferred from the Spirit's work in regenerate man. Psalm 119 gives a clear account of this. It describes the blessedness of the man who knows God's will and follows Him in godly living. The constant prayer of the psalmist is that the Lord would reveal His will to him and keep him in the way of truth. All this Adam enjoyed in the state of bliss. Adam was, of course, bound by space and time. Days, seasons, years, were a part of God's creative order and Adam was bound to them.¹¹ But his life was fully attuned to God's creative order. He accepted the world for what it was, knowing it to be the creation of God. Even Adam in his perfection had a position to fill. He had work to do. But he delighted

⁸Gen. 1:27,31

⁹Gen. 2:19,20; Cf. Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10

¹⁰Gen. 1:27

¹¹Gen. 8:22

to do his work for God.¹² Scripture does not suggest that Adam had to learn to take his place in the world; that he had to grow in favor with God; that he gradually learned to love God and to serve Him. In all of this Adam was perfect.

His knowledge was also perfect. That does not mean that he was omniscient. He knew nothing of his future fall into sin, of the curse which God would pronounce upon him and all creation because of sin. He did not know that God would create woman. It has already been stated that he was even dependent on God for instructions regarding his daily life. But all that he knew was right. He did not have to theorize about the world in which he lived. He understood the plant and animal life that surrounded him. He was able, by virtue of his perfect knowledge, to name all of the animals.¹³ He knew how to take care of the Garden of Eden.

As Adam received instructions from God, he accepted them at once as the will of his loving Creator. There was no thought of rebellion nor of mere blind obedience but of a delight to do the will of God. Undoubtedly God's voice would often have been heard in the garden with further instructions to Adam if he had continued in the state of bliss. The point to be observed here is that every

¹²Gen. 2:19,20

¹³Gen. 2:15

revelation of God was at once pleasing to him. God's call to man to love Him indicates that Adam in the state of bliss showed such love to God. The relationship that existed between them was glorious. Adam knew no fear, no doubt, no grief or sorrow, but only perfect bliss in the presence of a loving God.

Then came the day that Adam and Eve fell into sin. It was due to no inherent weakness, to no lack of knowledge of the right course of action, to no fault of God.¹⁴ Adam was responsible, fully responsible for his own undoing.¹⁵ And the undoing was complete.¹⁶ Holiness was given up for sinfulness in the strict sense of the word. Adam's holiness was not just marred by sin. It was completely lost. His righteousness had not just suffered a set-back. It was a thing of the past. Adam was now completely separated from God. The Holy Spirit no longer

¹⁴Gen. 1:31

¹⁵Rom. 5:19

¹⁶J. M. Machen, The Christian View of Man (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), p. 218. Machen correctly analyzes the fall when he says: "What was that first sin of man, according to the Bible? Was it the gratification of a bodily appetite? Yes, it was that. The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, we are told. But was the sin merely the gratification of a bodily appetite? Most certainly not. No, it was a highly intellectual spiritual thing. The serpent said that the eating of the fruit of that tree would make man wise, that part of it was not a bodily appetite at all. What then, was that first sin of man? Is not the answer perfectly clear?"

dwelled in him. He was now an enemy of God.¹⁷ As a result, his love for God turned to fear and resentment. His will was directed toward his own welfare. Yet all the while guilt stared him in the face, and he could do nothing to rid himself of it. All this is clear from the fact, as Scripture teaches, that natural man, flesh born of flesh¹⁸ is totally corrupt.¹⁹ Man's sinful condition, his corruptness, is the consequence of Adam's fall. Adam thus shared in this corruptness and sinfulness of the whole human race.

Adam and Eve also knew that they were estranged from God. Hearing His voice in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from His presence for they were afraid.²⁰ Well might they be afraid. They had rebelled against their Maker and must face His holy wrath. They did not yet know the power of His wrath. They, in their state of sin, did not yet fully realize their lost condition. They would not have sought to hide from God among the trees of the garden if they had. They would not have dared to excuse themselves before God. Adam

Why, it was disobedience to a command of God. God said, Ye shall not eat of the fruit of the tree; man ate of the fruit of the tree: and that was sin."

¹⁷Rom. 8:7

¹⁸Jn. 3:6

¹⁹Rom. 5:16; Eph. 2:3; Mt. 15:19

²⁰Gen. 3:8-10

proved his total corruption by suddenly blaming God for his own predicament. The reason can only be found in his sinful condition. He was now estranged from God. Quickly his love for God became love for self. At once he showed that his own will ruled his heart. He was his own god. The devil was right. He was now like God, knowing good and evil.²¹ As a god, Adam gave himself first place in his own thoughts. In his self-love he even condemned his wife along with God.²² Clearly Adam had no real conception of the grievousness of his sin and of the wrath of God. Like modern man, he suddenly viewed God as a weakling who could not raise His hand against His own creatures.

But as soon as God spoke in His wrath, Adam knew his terrible lot. He must work in the sweat of his brow in a world that had suddenly turned against him. God shed the first blood when He made coats of skins for Adam and Eve,²³ but that was only a beginning of the shedding of blood. Adam had to learn to fight for his life in a world that had learned the meaning of death, to protect himself against the elements which could and would destroy him, to seek alliances with nature which nature would grudgingly accept for her own good. The land would give her increase

²¹Gen. 3:5

²²Gen. 3:12

²³Gen. 3:21

if he would care for her. The cattle would furnish him with food if he would do the same for them. Adam had to find out by bitter experience that he was not god; that as he had rebelled against his Creator, so all creation would now rebel against him.

As the result of the estrangement of God and man, man, the rebel, now hates his God. Brunner says of this

The first thing that the Bible tells us about Primal Sin is that it is the revolt of the creature against the Creator; thus it is not something negative, it is a positive negation. Sin is defiance, arrogance, the desire to be equal with God, emancipation, a deliberate severance from the hand of God. This is the explanation of the nature of sin and its origin, not only in the story of the Fall but also in the parable of the wicked husbandmen--the stewards who wanted to make themselves masters, and in the parable of the Prodigal Son.²⁴

So also Barth says

Man with all his outward and inward achievements, with his thoughts and feelings as well as his deeds, stands in the presence of (God's) Law as one who is unthankful and impenitent, and who, since he does not love God or his neighbor, must hate them; or who is there who could stand at any time before God's Law in any other guise?²⁵

But God, the Creator, cannot forget His own. Though He is filled with wrath against man in his sin, He still loves him as His creature. In mercy He sends sunshine

²⁴ Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 42.

²⁵ Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation (London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1949), p. 139.

and rain to cause the crops to grow that man may eat.²⁶ He fills the animal world with fear for man to protect him against them. He forces nature to serve man even in his sin.²⁷ In Him man lives and moves and continues to exist.²⁸

From man's point of view it is not such a bad existence. Man has learned to enjoy life and find happiness in it. He realizes that he is under the law of a supreme being and has his feelings of guilt,²⁹ but he has learned to disobey without regret and to give in to the evil to which he is tempted.³⁰ Accordingly, he closes his eyes to the realities of life and especially to its responsibilities, sets his sights as high as he cares to go, dreams of the good old days and of better days to come, marvels at his own accomplishments, and promises himself that eventually nothing will stand in his way. Heedlessly he rushes on to eternal destruction.

But that is not the complete picture of man. He is not always the happy individual he would like to be.³¹

²⁶Mt. 5:45

²⁷Rom. 8:20-22

²⁸Acts 17:28

²⁹Rom. 3:19

³⁰Col. 3:5,6

³¹Brunner, op. cit., p. 201. Brunner finds that:

He does have a sense of guilt and fear of punishment.³²
 He would do anything to ward off this punishment. Time and again he has made efforts to re-establish himself with God. He has sought peace through penance, through good works, through prayer, and even through suffering, but all to no avail. The price is greater than he can pay. Somehow he seems to feel that. The Scriptures give the reason: The righteous God loathes the offerings man brings to justify himself with God, for in His sight they are full of sin and an abomination before Him.³³ Even sinful man at times is aware of this as his conscience accuses him before God.³⁴

To silence his conscience man reminds himself of what

"Every human being who is aware of his humanity at all, that is, who has some sense of responsibility, is aware that the order of life has been disturbed; this comes out in a 'bad conscience'. Of course people maintain that modern man never suffers from a bad conscience, but those who say this only show that their own view of life is superficial; they are only looking at the surface-consciousness." In The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 265, Reinhold Niebuhr also calls attention to this fact: "No man, however, deeply involved in sin, is able to regard the misery of sin as normal. Some memory of a previous condition of blessedness seems to linger in his soul; some echo of the law which he has violated seems to resound in his conscience. Every effort to give the habits of sin the appearance of normality betrays something of the frenzy of an uneasy conscience."

³²Ps. 90; Prov. 28:1; Rom. 2:14-15

³³Mt. 7:21-23

³⁴Rom. 2:14-15

he has heard of the love of God.³⁵ He believes that a loving God will be satisfied with him, even when he is not satisfied with himself. But that is not possible. The thought was good while it lasted, but it does not last. Man is thus in conflict with himself as well as with God.³⁶ One moment man hopes that God will receive him in love, the next he despairs of all mercy. One moment he strives to lead a good life to please God, the next he succumbs to all manner of evil. Judged by God's holy law and by the law in his own heart man is therefore a child of wrath,³⁷ worthy of death.³⁸

³⁵I Jn. 4:8

³⁶Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, translated by John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), p. 15. Prenter paints a vivid picture of this conflict that some men experience: "The cause of inner conflict is guilt. Unpardonable guilt lays hold of the conscience in inner conflict so that man knows he is under the eternal and irrevocable condemnation of God, stricken from the book of life forever. No one and nothing can help in this case. All good works and all merit disappear. No man is able to help. Agreeing with the angry God, the whole creation is against me. All others are righteous and I alone am guilty. The merciful God himself turns his face from me. It is futile to call upon him for he does not hear me. Then man stands alone face to face with the angry and irreconcilable God, without any mediator. For even Christ has at the command of God turned himself away from me. Then the never-ceasing wrath of the eternal God is experienced. . . . This torturing experience of the wrath of God in a guilty conscience becomes one with the anguish of death and hell. There is in reality no difference between death and hell and the reality of the wrath of God in one's conscience."

³⁷Eph. 2:3

³⁸Rom. 1:32

But from eternity God had better things in mind for man. He did not want man to be estranged from Him. He had created him in His image and He wanted the image restored. With an oath He has assured the whole world that He wants no one to perish in his sins.³⁹

As soon as Adam and Eve had sinned, He, therefore, announced His plan of salvation whereby they would be brought back to Him, their God. Though the world was plunged into sin by Adam's transgression,⁴⁰ the blood of Christ would remove that sin, not only for Adam but for the world.⁴¹

The price of that redemption is clearly shown in the holy Gospels, not only as they depict the passion of the Lord, but as they recount all that Jesus did and all that He endured as man's substitute under the law. He was born under the law for man.⁴² He obeyed the whole law for man.⁴³ He suffered contempt, shame, abuse, torture, death on the cross for all mankind.⁴⁴ He was raised

³⁹Ezek. 18:23; 33:11

⁴⁰Rom. 5:12 ff.

⁴¹Jn. 1:29; Heb. 2:9

⁴²Gal. 4:4,5

⁴³Mt. 5:17; Rom. 5:19

⁴⁴Is. 53:4-7; Rom. 5:8

from the dead⁴⁵ and ascended into heaven.⁴⁶ At the right hand of glory He now rules the world in the interest of His own,⁴⁷ constantly interceding for His own that they may be with Him forever.⁴⁸

In His life and in His death Jesus was the Savior of the world. He paid the ransom for all mankind,⁴⁹ tasting death for every man,⁵⁰ to cover the sins of the whole world,⁵¹ thus reconciling the world unto God.⁵²

In the light of the redemptive work of Christ, the Scriptures describe man as a sinner wholly justified by God, his trespasses no longer imputed to him,⁵³ an enemy of God wholly reconciled to God,⁵⁴ a mortal man deserving eternal damnation⁵⁵ who can enjoy eternal life with God.⁵⁶

⁴⁵Rom. 4:25

⁴⁶Acts 1:11

⁴⁷Col. 3:1-4; Eph. 1:20 ff.

⁴⁸Rom. 8:34

⁴⁹I Tim. 2:6

⁵⁰Heb. 2:9

⁵¹I Jn. 2:2

⁵²II Cor. 5:19

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Rom. 5:10

⁵⁵Rom. 5:12

⁵⁶Jn. 3:16

However, because natural man rejects the salvation earned for him, he remains an enemy of God, filled with hate, inclined only to evil, subject to eternal damnation,⁵⁷ not for his sins--for Christ bore them for him⁵⁸--but for his unbelief.⁵⁹

Yet, the Scriptures give a picture of another man. It is the picture of one who, by the grace of God, has accepted the atonement wrought by Christ⁶⁰ through the work of the Holy Spirit in him.⁶¹ Being justified by faith, he can have peace with God.⁶² For his iniquities are forgiven, his sins are covered.⁶³ Since God is on his side, having made him His own through Christ His Son, he need fear no one, nor the accusations that man would bring against him,⁶⁴ for he will not come into condemnation, but has already passed from death into life.⁶⁵ Moreover as a child of God, with God dwelling in him⁶⁶ he is

⁵⁷Eph. 2:1-3

⁵⁸Heb. 9:28

⁵⁹Jn. 3:18; 8:24

⁶⁰Jn. 1:12,13

⁶¹I Cor. 12:3

⁶²Rom. 5:1

⁶³Rom. 4:7,8

⁶⁴Rom. 8:31-34

⁶⁵Jn. 5:24

⁶⁶Gal. 2:20; I Cor. 3:16

prepared to live a Christian life of service to God,⁶⁷ a life of good works,⁶⁸ which he is able to perform through the grace of God in him⁶⁹ and the help of the Spirit who is with him.⁷⁰

That is the Christian man. He is the one, the only one to be considered when speaking of Christian growth. For Christian growth is possible only where there is faith in Christ the Savior.⁷¹ The relation of Christian growth to grace will be considered later. What must be considered first is the need of growth in one who is already a Christian.

It may appear contradictory to speak of Christian growth when the Christian is described in the Scriptures as fully justified before God. Obviously he cannot grow in the righteousness of Christ. There can be no growth in His righteousness. The righteousness earned by Christ is perfect and complete. It is the righteousness of the Son of God Himself, freely given by God Himself to all who believe.⁷² Either man has this righteousness in its fullness or he has none of it at all. For even the

⁶⁷Lk. 1:74,75

⁶⁸Eph. 2:10

⁶⁹I Cor. 15:10

⁷⁰Jn. 14:16,26

⁷¹Jn. 15:5

⁷²Rom. 3:24-26

weakest faith through the power of the Spirit takes hold of the full and complete righteousness of Christ.⁷³ In other words, the object of the faith is complete. The difference between strong and weak faith lies only in the grasp which man has on the perfect gift of God. There can be growth in faith and assurance, as will be seen later. But concerning the righteousness in Christ it must be said: It is complete. No growth is possible here, for it is the perfect work of God Himself.

Nor is growth possible with regard to man's reconciliation with God. If man played a part in the reconciliation, there would be need for growth. But again, it is a work of God Himself. He reconciled the world to Himself by the death of Christ.⁷⁴ The reconciliation had to be complete, for the righteousness of God cannot accept one who is only partially reconciled. Therefore God, desiring to be reconciled with man, achieved this Himself, by placing man's sin on Christ, punishing Christ for that sin, and imputing Christ's righteousness to man.⁷⁵

It may seem, then, that Christian growth, if it is at all possible, must be found in what the Christian does for himself and by himself. Yet such a view must be rejected at once for the Christian is able to do nothing

⁷³I Pet. 1:5

⁷⁴II Cor. 5:19

⁷⁵Col. 1:19-22; Cf. II Cor. 5:19-21

for himself by himself.⁷⁶ He can, of course, read the Scriptures without the aid of the Spirit. Even an agnostic can do that. But without the Spirit's aid, he will get nothing out of his reading but mere words. The Spirit must lead him into the truth of God's Word if he is to profit from his reading.⁷⁷ He can, if he puts his mind to it, lead an outwardly decent life even without the aid of the Spirit, as does many an unbeliever. But such works, righteous as they may appear, are not acceptable to God.⁷⁸ The deeds men do of themselves without help from above are always sinful. The reason is that without Christ man can do nothing.⁷⁹

If it is argued that the Christian has Christ, and therefore can do good works, it must be admitted that his growth in good works is not his own. When Paul speaks of his good works he takes no credit for them but properly credits them to Christ working in his ministry.⁸⁰ The writer in "the letter to the Hebrews" says the same: "The God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing

⁷⁶Jn. 15:5

⁷⁷I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 4:6

⁷⁸Is. 64:6

⁷⁹Jn. 15:5

⁸⁰Acts 21:19

in his sight, through Jesus Christ.⁸¹

The fact of the matter is that the Christian looking at his own accomplishments will have to admit that he is nothing. He can do nothing without Christ in him. And even having Christ in him, he can do nothing that can properly be called his own work, except as God imputes Christ's righteous deeds to him.⁸²

A few examples from Scripture will help to make this clear. When the Apostle Peter first learned to know Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, his faith was based on the promises of the Old Testament and on the Word of Jesus which his brother Andrew had heard the day before and had told him of. From that day forward Peter was willing to follow the Lord. He did so for about six months, then returned to his trade for a time when Jesus left Judea and came to Nazareth, but was again with the Lord after the miracle on the sea and the consequent call to be a fisher of men.⁸³ To this call Jesus later added the call as Apostle.⁸⁴ During this time Peter grew in faith and knowledge. He became the spokesman of the twelve. Fearlessly he confessed his faith. He dared to walk on the water. He was chosen as one of three to

⁸¹Heb. 13:20,21

⁸²Rom. 5:18-21; Cf. Mt. 5:17

⁸³Mt. 4:19

⁸⁴Mt. 10:2

witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus⁸⁵ and then to be with Christ at His transfiguration.⁸⁶ Later, in writing to the Church in Galatia, he spoke of this experience as an added proof of the sureness of what he was writing.⁸⁷

But at every point in Peter's life in which there was growth in knowledge or in faith or in boldness to confess Christ, the spirit of Christ was active in his life. Christ had to rescue him when he began to sink while walking on the water.⁸⁸ Christ indicated the source of his power to confess Him at Caesarea Phillipi.⁸⁹ Christ had to instruct him on the holy mount and correct his false notion that it would be good to remain there.⁹⁰ Peter truly grew stronger but only because Christ was with him.

Later, at the high priest's palace, Peter did not seem to be the same man. That cursing, blasphemous person, could hardly be the one who had been with Jesus. Yet it was Peter, but now he was entirely on his own. He had been warned against the weakness of the flesh and had been

⁸⁵Mk. 5:37-40

⁸⁶Mt. 17:1 ff.

⁸⁷II Pet. 1:16

⁸⁸Mt. 14:31

⁸⁹Mt. 16:17

⁹⁰Mt. 17:4 ff.

urged to watch and pray. Instead, he slept. And when he awoke he was caught up in a succession of events that completely unnerved him: Judas' shameful betrayal, the unjust arrest of Jesus, the Savior's rebuke when he drew his sword, the actual binding of Jesus, His trial before the highest court of the Jews, and then those sneering taunts of the maids directed at Peter, the sudden and ominous interest of the soldiers in this disciple of Jesus--Peter could not take it. Shamefully he denied his Lord. He fell from grace. In that moment there was no difference between him and the worst of unbelievers. He had joined their ranks. His Christian growth was gone. Without Christ he was the same as any unconverted man, dead in sins and an enemy of God. He cursed as he said, "I know not the man."⁹¹

David is possibly the best example from Old Testament times. It is to be regretted that the mere mention of his name recalls to mind the sins of which he was guilty. But there is a lesson in this. That is the way in which man must see himself without Christ. Actually, David was with the Lord through most of his life. He is spoken of as the greatest of the kings of Israel, for whose sake God kept an heir on the throne of Judah for generation after generation.⁹² God found him a man after his own

⁹¹Mt. 26:74

⁹²II Cor. 7:18

heart, who would fulfill his will.⁹³ Young says of him in his concordance

Seventy-five of the Psalms have his name prefixed to them, and remain imperishable monuments of his poetic genius, and his unfeigned piety, repentance, and hope in God, though marred by grievous follies and crimes against both God and man.⁹⁴

These grievous follies, however, show that as soon as David had fallen away from God, he was no better than any other unbeliever. Suddenly there was nothing left of his faith and godly life. He was an adulterer, murderer, liar and deceiver.

It seems impossible that a child of God, who has grown so in faith and love, should suddenly be counted with the worst of criminals. But that possibility lies in the nature of converted man.

Though man at his conversion has truly been made a new creature, prepared for all good works,⁹⁵ though he has been delivered from the power of darkness,⁹⁶ from the power of sin,⁹⁷ and from Satan himself,⁹⁸ and has been

⁹³Acts 13:22

⁹⁴Robert Young, Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Twentieth edition; New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., n.d.), p. 24.

⁹⁵Eph. 2:10

⁹⁶Col. 1:13

⁹⁷Rom. 6:14

⁹⁸Acts 26:18

made a child of God,⁹⁹ rich in knowledge and understanding,¹⁰⁰ and able to please God,¹⁰¹--all of which is the work of God in him, as all of the Scripture references above clearly testify--though all this can truly be said of him, and though the Scriptures also teach that the old man, the flesh, being contrary to the spirit of Christ in him,¹⁰² has been put off in his conversion,¹⁰³ having been crucified with Christ,¹⁰⁴ finally, though, he who has taken Christ seriously realizes that the old man has no place in his life;¹⁰⁵ nevertheless, and here lies the reason for sin in his life and the need for growth, the Christian finds the evil flesh with its sinful lusts still clinging to him making it necessary for him to put off the old man over and over again.¹⁰⁶ The passage in "the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians" dealing with the old and the new man, has been the subject of much discussion. Niebuhr in speaking of this and other passages says

These injunctions (which Paul makes to Christians

⁹⁹Gal. 4:5

¹⁰⁰I Cor. 1:5

¹⁰¹Phil. 2:13

¹⁰²Gal. 5:7

¹⁰³Col. 3:9

¹⁰⁴Rom. 6:6

¹⁰⁵Eph. 4:22-24

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

to put away the evil and do the good) declare in effect: you are now sinless. Therefore you must not sin any more. The exhortation implies that the original statements have a slightly different meaning than their obvious connotation. They really mean: self-love has been destroyed in principle in your life. See to it now that the new principle of devotion to God in Christ is actualized in your life. The qualifying statements, following immediately upon affirmations which suggest, or might suggest, complete holiness, raise the question whether St. Paul's conception of holiness ever connotes complete freedom from sin. He does undoubtedly maintain that there is a radical difference between "carnal-mindedness" and "spiritual-mindedness" and this difference might be defined as the contrast between the life which is governed by the principle of self-centeredness and one which is governed by the principle of devotion and obedience to God. But his injunction to the sinless, not to sin any more, implies that he understands the possibility of sinning for those who have broken with sin in principle.¹⁰⁷

Murray, in his recently published Principles of Conduct, has an entirely different view. He holds that the Apostle is not exhorting the Christians to put off the old man and put on the new, but is rather reminding them of the fact that they have so learned Christ that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. He admits that the Greek will permit the translation which makes these words imperatives, but he adds:

Exegetical considerations and the analogy of Paul's teaching elsewhere point to the entirely different conclusion, namely, that when Paul speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new man he is

¹⁰⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 102.

thinking in terms of result rather than in terms of exhortation.¹⁰⁸

Murray reasons that the description of the old man with his sins and evil lusts makes it difficult to think "of a believer as answering to this description."¹⁰⁹ What Murray fails to see is that Paul is not describing the believer as corrupt and full of lust, but is thus describing the old man which the believer must ever and again put off.

This putting off is not a gradual act. The picture is not that of a beggar, always on the lookout for something better than what he has on, gradually picking up a "new" wardrobe. The Christian, with power from on high, in a decisive action puts off the old man when he feels the urge to sin within himself. This he has learned from Christ. At the same time he puts on the new man, who is in the likeness of Christ so that his life is no longer his own but Christ living in him.¹¹⁰ If he fails to do so, he is not following Christ. He then succumbs to the old man and is capable of any and every sin of the children of the world, as Peter and David have testified.

This is the nature of the man in Christ. Two forces

¹⁰⁸John Murray, Principles of Conduct: Aspect of Biblical Ethics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 25 f.

¹⁰⁹Murray, op. cit., p. 216.

¹¹⁰Gal. 2:20

are constantly working in him: the spirit with power from on high constantly seeking to lift him up, the flesh tempted by Satan constantly seeking to drag him down. Paul pictures this as a conflict in the Christian, which makes it impossible for him to do what he pleases.¹¹¹ And it is this conflict in man, this constant struggle with the flesh, this need of constant watchfulness, lest the flesh gain the upper hand, that makes it necessary to work for Christian growth. On the other hand, the very fact that through the work of the Spirit Christ is in the Christian with His power and grace makes Christian growth possible. This thought will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹¹¹Gal. 5:17

CHAPTER IV

THE POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH

The possibility of Christian growth lies in the very nature of converted man. The Christian has been described as having the old and the new man in him as two opposing forces, constantly in conflict with each other. If there is to be Christian growth, each of these forces must be recognized and each must be properly dealt with. It is necessary first of all properly to identify them.

The flesh--the term with which Scripture identifies the old man, as can be seen from a comparison of passages in which the one term or the other is used¹--is the negative force and an obstacle to Christian growth.² It seeks constantly to drag man downward on the way of sin.³ It has no positive worth.⁴ It is negative throughout and its negativism can be increased.⁵ Every lurid picture, every evil joke, every suggestive story will activate the flesh. Let the picture come alive and the downward pull is even greater. Again, every chance to get ahead of

¹Rom. 13:13 f.; Tit. 2:12; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:8 f.

²Rom. 8:12,13; Gal. 6:8

³Gal. 5:19-21

⁴Rom. 7:18

⁵Rom. 6:19

others, every opportunity for easy money activates the flesh. Rich foods in abundance, alcoholic beverages are very apt to activate the flesh. The promise of earthly glory, fuel for pride, liberty turned to license activate the flesh.⁶ And the flesh is in the Christian as a force, seeking constantly to drag him downward.⁷

Satan and the world are in league with the old man.⁸ The old evil foe knows man only too well. He has had so much experience in dealing with people that nothing seems to escape him.⁹ He keeps up with all the modern advances, seems even to anticipate their development and is ready with his cunning deceit before man has had time to think.¹⁰ He feeds the flesh of man. He tries to guide the feet of man to the broad way that leads to death.¹¹

The world, that is, the evil world, is in league with him. Actually the world is in his power.¹² Evil men are so often the dupes of Satan, serving him to their own undoing, following him deeper and deeper into destruction, but only too often gloating over their every advance in

⁶Rom. 13:14

⁷II Cor. 7:1

⁸I Jn. 3:8, Jn. 13:2

⁹Mt. 13:19 ff.

¹⁰Eph. 6:12

¹¹II Cor. 4:4

¹²Ibid.

evil.¹³ Yet, not being satisfied to keep evil to themselves they seek converts to their cause in the very church of God.¹⁴ And they find in the flesh of the Christian an avenue of approach to him.

There is no need of proving with additional references that the description of Satan, the world and the flesh is not overdrawn. The danger lies in the other direction. Man's failure too often lies in obscuring from his thoughts the utter corruptness, depravity, and sinfulness of the forces of evil with their negative power. That, too, is due to their evil influence.¹⁵ Clearly, something must be done about these forces of evil. But before this can be considered, attention should first be given to the positive force in the Christian.

In antithesis to the flesh, the Scriptures speak of the spirit in the Christian¹⁶ as a positive force drawing the Christian upward. But it should be stated at once that the spirit does not have this power in itself but always and only as a gift of grace through the operation of the Holy Spirit¹⁷ as will be shown later. With the

¹³Rom. 1:24-32

¹⁴Ps. 37:12; Rom. 3:13-15

¹⁵Jn. 8:44

¹⁶Rom. 8:16

¹⁷Rom. 8:9 ff.; Gal. 5:16 ff.

aid of the Holy Spirit the spirit in man can also be activated. Every reference to the calling of Christians as the sons of God,¹⁸ every hint at the glories of heaven,¹⁹ every description of the love, the joy, the peace that the Christian will enjoy²⁰ activate the spirit within him to lead him onward in Christian living. For the Holy Spirit uses these means to foster Christian growth.²¹ Paul therefore urges all Christians to think about and let their minds dwell on that which is right and good.²² In fact, his every exhortation to godliness is addressed to the Christian in view of the new man, the spirit in him, who is enabled by God to seek the good.²³

However, as previously stated, though Scripture clearly distinguishes between the spirit, the new man in the Christian, and the Holy Spirit, who has made the Christian His temple, the two belong together in the Christian life. Any consideration of the operation of the spirit in man as a positive force apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit in him is contrary to

¹⁸Lk. 1:74,75

¹⁹I Pet. 1:3 ff.

²⁰I Pet. 1:8; Rom. 15:13

²¹Rom. 12:1

²²Phil. 4:8

²³Col. 3:1 ff.; I Pet. 2:9

Scripture.²⁴ For Christians at their conversion were not made children of God with power to live as the children of God and then left to their own devices. Nor is rebirth of such a nature that the Christian of himself constantly reaches out for and draws on the power of God for good, as Wand would have us believe.²⁵

These views of the nature of the Christian militate against the clear teaching of Scripture that man is not only saved by grace through faith in Christ, as is so

²⁴This is a lesson that many in our day have not learned. The popularity of a man like Peale augers no good for the Christian Church. He talks much of prayer to God, but his emphasis is always on man. In The Power of Positive Thinking (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1954), p. 1, his repeated counsel is: "Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy. But with sound self-confidence you can succeed. A sense of inferiority and inadequacy interferes with the attainment of your hopes, but self-confidence leads to self-realization and successful achievement. Because of the importance of this mental attitude, this book will help you believe in yourself and release your inner powers."

²⁵J. W. C. Wand, The Authority of the Scriptures (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1950), p. 116. Wand is one who places such confidence in man's ability. He states: "If our life on this earth is a school, a training ground, to enable us to attain that kind of character which alone will qualify us to enjoy the infinitude of bliss that God has prepared for those who love Him, then that character can only be acquired as we are continually making decisions, exercising judgment, surmounting doubts and difficulties, and in every way throwing ourselves on the side of what we believe to be good against all that is evil. For that very reason we must be left to find our way about the seas of life. A chart has been put into our hands, we have to learn to read it and to rely upon our capacity with God's help to steer our course by it."

fully taught in "the epistle of Paul to the Romans" and "the epistle of Paul to the Galatians," but is also kept by the power of God to salvation.²⁶ If it were not so, he would not be saved by grace. For grace rules out any kind of merit in man, either in conversion or in his life as a Christian.²⁷ It was briefly mentioned that the spirit in the Christian is spoken of as a moving force, drawing him upward aiding his Christian growth, it is imperative that one keep in mind that the energy, the power, the force is that of God Himself. Phillips who has written such excellent paraphrase translations of the New Testament says of this

The whole wonder and glory of the Gospel is that in-to people who have sinned and failed badly God can pour not only the healing of forgiveness but the positive reactivating power of goodness. It is not the mere overcoming of a fault that we should seek from God, but such an overflowing gift of the opposite virtue that we are transformed. I cannot believe that the miracles of personality transformation, which undoubtedly occurred in such places as Corinth and Ephesus nineteen centuries ago, are beyond the power of God's activity today.²⁸

The Christian must therefore admit with Paul that it is only because Christ has shown his perfect patience in making him His own²⁹ that he is able to reflect that

²⁶I Pet. 1:5

²⁷Rom. 11:16

²⁸J. B. Phillips, New Testament Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 90.

²⁹I Tim. 1:16

patience in his life. He can approach God with boldness to ask for the gifts which He has promised for body and soul only because he has that boldness in Christ.³⁰ If he is at all wise in his Christian life then it is only because Christ is this wisdom in him.³¹ If he obeys that truth, if he shows unfeigned love to the brethren, this, too, is the work of God in him.³² If he labors for Christ, at times working hard and long in His kingdom, it is God that is not only supplying the energy³³ but performing the work through him.³⁴ Growth in Christian living is His work.³⁵ He has had a hand in every good work, not only guiding the Christian into such works, but fashioning them Himself, so that, strictly speaking, it is not the Christian who lives the Christian life, but Christ in him, given to him through the working of the Holy Spirit. The relation of Christ and the Holy Spirit in fostering Christian growth is discussed by Elert in his book, The Christian Ethos. He says:

The creative power of God which makes the newly given life an actual life, experienced as chronological sequence, is the power of the Holy Spirit. It is so

³⁰Eph. 3:12

³¹I Cor. 1:30

³²I Pet. 1:22,23

³³Col. 1:29

³⁴Heb. 13:21

³⁵I Thess. 5:23

stated in the testimony of the apostles. Though they think of the creation and activity of the new life as the work of the Holy Spirit, this orientation does not detract from their dependence upon Christ but rather becomes the full realization of his promises. The question of how the Holy Spirit relates to God and the Son of God finds its answer in the trinitarian dogma of the church. From it we take, at the moment, the assertion that God is always one and the same. For the doctrine of the Trinity is decisively monotheistic. Though distinguished from the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit does not differ in essence. The apostles needed no elaborate explanation of this fact. In receiving the Holy Spirit and under his direction they perceived the fulfilment of the promise Christ had made to them.³⁶

Prenter shows the relationship even more clearly:

Without the work of the Spirit, Christ is not a redeeming reality. Without the work of the Spirit, Christ remains an example and faith a historical faith. Without the work of the Spirit with our faith, with our Christ, and with our new life, we remain under the law, which ultimately means under the wrath of God.³⁷

And again he says:

The Holy Spirit is God himself present in us, but present in such a way that his presence takes Jesus Christ out of the remoteness of history and heavenly exaltation and places him in the midst of our concrete life as a living and redeeming reality.³⁸

By the grace of God Christ's activity in the Christian life is imparted to the Christian so fully that he can

³⁶Werner Elert, The Christian Ethos, translated by Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 210.

³⁷Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), p. 54.

³⁸Ibid., p. 92.

say with Paul, "I live. This is my life that you see. I am a child of God, truly qualified by Him to serve Him,³⁹ but purely by grace, without any power or worthiness that I can call my own. To God alone be glory."⁴⁰

If what has been said is at all convincing, it is because of the power of the Gospel to which constant reference has been made. That is the means which the Holy Spirit uses as He performs His work in man. In one sense it is a humbling thought that the Christian educator cannot even discuss these matters with others without power from on high. But how thankful he may be that he has the Spirit to guide him as he seeks to understand who he is and what he is and what he is able to do.

Barth tries very hard to agree with this Scripture truth but still feels he must give some credit to man. Note how he stresses man's decision in the following:

What happens is this, man is found guilty of his sin, but also and to a far greater extent is assured of the grace of God. When this happens repeatedly

³⁹II Cor. 3:4 ff.

⁴⁰Prenter, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Prenter says of this: "It is true that faith in us and its new life are a part of our real self, a part of our totus homo, and that as such it struggles with the old man as the other part. But this is only true as long as faith (and the whole new life in faith) in the strictest sense is a gift of God. To the same extent that faith and this new life become our own possession, they become a part of our old man. That which makes us total human beings, the children of God, is not the gift as a part of ourselves, but grace as the favor of God which is inseparably connected with the gift. The favor of God is completely outside ourselves and continues to be so."

and when it becomes true in our case that Jesus Christ has borne the wrath of God for us too, and has revealed God's love toward us, and when we continue to accept the fact that He has done this for us and on our behalf, and when through the daily decisions of our lives it is decided that this is what happens daily, and when we give God the glory by this being the meaning and content of our daily decisions, then we are involved in the real struggle of the Spirit, i.e., of the Holy Spirit, against the flesh, i.e., against ourselves in the totality of our existence, in our piety as well as in our godlessness. For this existence of ours is what the Bible calls flesh. We are involved in the struggle, which is also the true and effective struggle of God on our behalf. That we are the scene and the witnesses of this struggle is what constitutes the real Christian life, which is a life in which God intervenes on man's behalf."⁴¹

In this whole process of Christian growth, God binds man to the means which He has given. He could have chosen to work in everyone directly with no means whatever. In His wisdom He chose to do otherwise. But as has been shown in Chapter II, God's revelation in the Scriptures is not a dead letter but is accompanied by God who through His living Word is speaking to men, working in them, accomplishing His will in and through them.

The Gospel in the specific sense of the word, as the message of salvation through Christ is such a means of grace, that is, a means which God uses to give men all that He through Christ has earned for all mankind. Paul

⁴¹Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation (London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers, 1949), pp. 121 f.

calls the Gospel the power of God to salvation,⁴² not just offering salvation to men but actually the means of saving them. He clearly demonstrates that without the hearing of the good news there can be no faith.⁴³ It is the same Gospel through which men are kept in the faith,⁴⁴ and through which they are enabled to live the Christian life.⁴⁵ The same is true of Baptism. It is called a washing away of sins,⁴⁶ offering the remission of sins,⁴⁷ and giving Christ to him who is baptized as a living force in his life.⁴⁸ Finally, the Lord's Supper is a means of grace in which Christ offers the believer His true body and blood for the remission of sins,⁴⁹ in remembrance of Him and all that He means to him,⁵⁰ so that also the Sacraments become a power for Christian living. These means of grace are therefore urged upon the Christian as the means which he is to employ for the

⁴²Rom. 1:16

⁴³Rom. 10:14 ff.

⁴⁴I Cor. 15:1,2

⁴⁵Jn. 17:17

⁴⁶Acts 22:16

⁴⁷Acts 2:38

⁴⁸Gal. 3:26,27

⁴⁹Mt. 26:28

⁵⁰I Cor. 11:25

strengthening of his faith and for his growth in Christ.

By these means he is also strengthened for the conflict with his evil flesh. But that does not mean that the Christian must combat this force of evil within him alone. Again it must be emphasized that actually he is enabled to do so only through the Holy Spirit working with his spirit. God alone can give him the power and the desire to crucify the flesh.⁵¹ Through the Gospel and the sacraments the Christian is strengthened for this fight.⁵² He is enabled to take drastic action against this evil force within him. But he does not deal with the flesh on the basis of the Gospel itself. The flesh will listen to no pleas or entreaties. The Lord has given a different weapon to use against the evil force, a Word of God which can also be used against the world and Satan, the allies of the flesh. That weapon is the Law of God. When Christ wrestled with Satan in the wilderness, He used three clear passages of the Law to defeat him.⁵³ With His words, It is written, He held up before Satan the holy will of God and Satan had to flee before Him.⁵⁴ That holy will of God, written in His holy Law, is just as effective when the Christian uses it against

⁵¹Gal. 5:16,24; Phil. 2:13

⁵²Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:26,27

⁵³Mt. 4:4,7,10

⁵⁴Mt. 4:11

the devil for in it God Himself is speaking. His power is in the Word.⁵⁵

It is also his weapon against the world. The world cannot be induced to give up its efforts to mislead the Christian with pleas from the Gospel of Jesus the Savior. It considers His Gospel foolishness.⁵⁶ But the world cannot stand up against the Law of God for men find the same law written in their heart and they know it is true. With the Law every mouth is stopped and all the world becomes guilty before God.⁵⁷

The flesh, which is in league with Satan and the world, is just as terrified by the Law as it reveals God's wrath upon sin.⁵⁸ But the Law must be used. The flesh will try to draw away from it. It will seek to obscure the holy will of God. It will endeavor to give man an easy conscience and to make light of sin. It must, therefore be silenced with the Word of God. The Christian must say to his flesh, You listen to God's law. Machen shows the power of the Law when he says:

Consider for a moment, my friends, the majesty of the law of God as the Bible sets it forth. One law over all - valid for Christians, valid for non-Christians, valid now and valid to all eternity. How grandly that law is promulgated amid the

⁵⁵Eph. 6:11

⁵⁶I Cor. 1:18

⁵⁷Rom. 3:19

⁵⁸Ibid.

thunderings of Sinai! How much more grandly still and much more terribly it is set forth in the teaching of Jesus - in His teaching and in His example! With what terror we are fain to say, with Peter, in the presence of that dazzling purity: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Nowhere in the Bible, in the teaching of Jesus our Savior, do we escape from the awful majesty of the law of God - written in the constitution of the universe, searching the innermost recesses of the soul, embracing every idle word and every action and every secret thought of the heart, inescapable, all-inclusive, holy, terrible.

.....

And what sort of law is that? Is it an arbitrary enactment of some cruel tyrant, a meaningless sport of one whose power exceeds His wisdom or His goodness? No, this law is grounded in the infinite perfection of the being of God Himself. "Be ye therefore perfect," said Jesus, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." That is the standard. God's law is no arbitrary or meaningless law; it is a holy law, as God Himself is holy.

If that be the law of God, how awful a thing is sin! What tongue can tell the horror of it? Not an offence against some temporary or arbitrary rule proceeding from temporal authority or enforced by temporal penalties, but an offence against the infinite and eternal God! What nameless terror steals over us when we really contemplate such guilt as that!⁵⁹

Every Christian needs to use this law against his flesh and he will do so if he sees the grievousness of the sins to which his flesh tempts him. To this end every Christian ought to read the Ninetieth Psalm, where Moses, as a true servant of the Law of God is teaching men the seriousness of sin. Luther's comments on verse

⁵⁹J. Gresham Machen, The Christian View of Man (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), pp. 224 f.

eleven of the Psalms are especially appropriate, though every teacher of men would do well to read his commentary on the entire Psalm. Luther says

Moses concludes the previous argument with a summary. "There are unbelievably few people," he says, "who give thought to the magnitude of Thy wrath and to Thy horrible and furious anger. All the rest of mankind live out their lives in smugness, though Thy furious anger is ever present, is always active, and hovers above them continually. They are not worried about their sins and Thy wrath. They indeed feel their misery, but they neither know nor believe it."

In this verse Moses deplors this blindness and the stupidity and insensitivity of people who do not understand their own intolerable misery even though they feel it. They are like slaves accustomed to the beating administered by their masters. God's chastening does not reform them in the slightest degree. But we all, so Moses tells us, are like that. We are victims of an incredible stupor of the heart and, therefore, fail to understand our misery even though we feel it

In this verse Moses places the calamity of our condition squarely before us. He wants us to know that in God's sight we are indicted and condemned sinners, that we might open our eyes and in faith rid ourselves of our smugness and pray for deliverance.⁶⁰

Such a use of the Law of God will accomplish with the flesh what no Gospel invitation will ever accomplish. It will strike terror in the flesh, thus helping the Christian to win the victory over sin. Joseph so used the Law against his temptress and at the same time against his

⁶⁰ Martin Luther, Selected Psalms II, in Luther's Works, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Ps. 90 translated by Paul M. Bretscher (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XIII, 124.

flesh when he pointed to the fact that sin is against God.⁶¹ God Himself enables the Christian to use His Law like a club against the flesh which seems so much a part of him. No man could do it without help from above. In Christ alone he has the victory.⁶² And he has it through the means of grace,⁶³ even as did the believer in the Old Testament. He, too, was strengthened by the Gospel to make proper use of the Law in his life.⁶⁴

He, too, saw a constant need of the Holy Spirit to aid him in this fight.⁶⁵

Moses, who speaks with such force about God's wrath, also knows about God's love in Christ⁶⁶ and though he is not permitted to preach the Gospel with the same clearness that Jesus preached it, he does have the same Gospel. He knows no other way to God than through faith. His law did not remove the Gospel promises given to Abraham hundreds of years before.⁶⁷ Nor did he himself lose sight of those promises. He and all Old Testament believers

⁶¹Gen. 39:9; Cf. Ps. 51:4

⁶²I Cor. 15:56,57

⁶³Rom. 1:16

⁶⁴Deut. 32:46

⁶⁵Ps. 51:10,11

⁶⁶Deut. 4:37-39; 7:6-10

⁶⁷Gal. 3:16 ff.

trusted in them and looked to Christ as their Savior.⁶⁸ Those who find a difference between the believer in the Old Testament and the believer in the New show that they do not understand the grace of God. That grace is eternal, though it is revealed in Christ. It reached back to the beginning of the world and saved Adam just as it has saved the whole world.⁶⁹ The grace of God in Christ is the only way to heaven in the Old Testament as in the New,⁷⁰ and that grace was just as active in the life of Abraham, Moses, David and all the saints of the Old Testament as it is today.⁷¹ The good works which these saints were able to do were not fruits of the Law but were worked in them by the Holy Spirit, who put Christ into their life. They lived by faith.⁷²

In the Old Testament, a far greater emphasis is placed upon the Law than in the New Testament. But a closer examination reveals that very much of this emphasis is placed upon the ceremonial rather than upon the moral law.

The ceremonial laws had to do with the blood of bulls and goats and calves dashed at the base of the altar of

⁶⁸Heb. 11:24 ff.

⁶⁹I Cor. 15:22

⁷⁰Acts 4:12

⁷¹Jn. 8:56; Gen. 17:7

⁷²Heb. 11

burnt offering, with the significance of the great day of atonement, with the scape-goat, with the sabbath law of rest in all of which God was giving a message to His people. The Old Testament believer found in all of these a sign of the covenant which God had made with them in which He told them that He was their God and they were His people, the true children of Abraham and heirs of the promise. Not only Paul,⁷³ but Moses and all believers under the covenant saw in these observances a promise of the Messiah in whom they and all the nations of the earth would be blessed.⁷⁴ The fact that most of the Israelites did not have this attitude toward the ceremonial law, but considered it as something to be kept for its own sake,⁷⁵ does not alter the situation. God warned them against a mere formal, outward keeping of the law.⁷⁶ He loathed their sacrifices when they were not offered in faith in His promises.⁷⁷ He looked with disfavor upon their mere outward keeping of the sabbath. So the attitude of the average Israelite gives us no indication of the place which the laws of God had in the covenant relationship of God with His people. "The Book of

⁷³Col. 2:16,17

⁷⁴Gen. 22:18

⁷⁵Is. 58:1-5

⁷⁶Is. 58:6,7

⁷⁷Gen. 6:20

Deuteronomy" teaches over and over again that the keeping of the commandments was always to be an indication on the part of the Israelites that they knew God as the One who had provided them with all they needed for body and soul and that they loved Him and delighted to serve Him as their covenant God.⁷⁸ The keeping of the commandments was not their way to God, but it was to be their way of showing that they were God's people, chosen by Him in mercy and grace.⁷⁹

That the true Israelites, the believers of Old Testament times, had this conception of the Covenant relationship is clear from the Psalms which they used in their devotions. In them God's people give expression to the joy in their hearts as they come to worship God in His holy tabernacle.⁸⁰ They show the delight which they have in God's statutes.⁸¹ They cannot praise Him enough for

⁷⁸Deut. 11:1,13,22

⁷⁹Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 60. Phillips, who is an authority on New Testament Christianity, does not understand the Old Testament when he says: "Of course, the Old Testament contains many passages which refer to the love of God, but it would be fair to say that on the whole they are conditional. Put very crudely, the burden of the Old Testament messages in general is: 'If you are good and obey the Lord He will be kind and will prosper you. But if you are disobedient and arouse His wrath then He will most surely destroy you.'"

⁸⁰Ps. 84

⁸¹Ps. 19:7 ff.

His goodness toward them.⁸² They know their blessed estate, having tasted His forgiveness and His abundant pardon.⁸³ They trust in Him as their Shepherd to lead them through life,⁸⁴ blessing them with spiritual as well as earthly gifts.⁸⁵ It is true, their worship was regulated by the ceremonial laws. They were not at liberty to change the form of their worship.⁸⁶ But the motivation for their worship was that of the Christian today, who by God's grace knows the goodness of the Lord who forgives his sins, heals his sicknesses, and will keep him in faith and favor until death.⁸⁷

The believer of the Old Testament, with the ceremonial laws to regulate his life and worship, was not too different from the Christian who is a member of a church having a set liturgy. The liturgy of the New Testament church is not prescribed by God as was the ceremonial law of old, but the individual Christian worshiping in a liturgical church is fairly well bound to that form of worship. It is easy to understand that some church-goers today will follow these forms in a mere outward way,

⁸²Ps. 36:5; 107

⁸³Ps. 32:51

⁸⁴Ps. 23

⁸⁵Ps. 107

⁸⁶Num. 15:32; II Sam. 6:46 f.

⁸⁷Ps. 56

getting no help whatever from the liturgy. Their "worship" will be like that of the Israelites who conformed only outwardly to the ceremonial restrictions. But that is not due to the form of worship but to the heart of the "worshiper".

The liturgy can be a real aid to worship and an aid also to understanding the attitude of the believer under the ceremonial law. Though the worshipers follow a set form of worship, they have no real cause to become formalists or legalists when they kneel before the Lord and pray

Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Thine infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Thy grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸⁸

Such a prayer is in full accord with the Christian life. The person who prays it sincerely thereby recognizes and admits his need of spiritual growth and properly comes to the Lord, the source of help, for grace and forgiveness.⁸⁹ He does the same when he joins his fellow Christians in the prayer:

O most merciful God, who hast given Thine only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Thy Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of

⁸⁸The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 6.

⁸⁹Eph. 5:15-21; Heb. 10:19 ff.

Thee and of Thy will and true obedience to Thy Word, to the end that by Thy grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁹⁰

Such prayers give the Christian an opportunity to worship God each Sunday, to pour out his heart in prayer, seeking forgiveness, knowledge, and strength to live a Christian life. In such a service of worship the Introit is spoken by the pastor or chanted by the choir. As a rule it contains a glorious announcement of God's love and grace which is itself a means of growth and prompts the Christian congregation to respond in worship, saying,

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.⁹¹

Such songs of praise are a part of the Christian life.⁹² The worshiper brings all his earthly needs to God in prayer, joining the Syrophenician woman, the blind beggar Bartimeus, the lepers of Galilee in the simple prayer,

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us,
Lord, have mercy upon us.⁹³

He knows at once that the Lord has heard his prayer for spiritual and temporal gifts, so he joins the congregation and Christians in all parts of the world in

⁹⁰The Lutheran Hymnal, op. cit., p. 6.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ps. 102

⁹³The Lutheran Hymnal, op. cit., p. 7.

the great hymn of praise,

Glory be to God on high: And on earth peace, good will toward men. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy great glory.⁹⁴

That is Christian worship which is intended to aid the believer in the expression of his faith,⁹⁵ and in growth in Christian living.⁹⁶

The treasury of hymns used in the service is in full harmony with this thought of Christian worship. The hymns are all printed out in the hymnal and the church-goer opens to the hymn posted on the hymn board. Throughout, he is following a set form. But that is no reason for saying that his worship cannot be of the heart. In like manner the ceremonial laws did not keep the worshiper in the Old Testament from coming to God as his only help for faith and life just because the form of his worship was stipulated by law. On the contrary, the very laws which regulated the worship were an aid to the true Israelite in his growth in godly living.⁹⁷

In his worship and in his daily life the child of God of all times has thus been helped by God Himself to live a godly life. With grace from on high he has grown

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ps. 14:6; 147

⁹⁶I Cor. 1:4-7

⁹⁷Heb. 9:1-10

in faith and whatever good there is in the life he leads he owes entirely to a good and gracious God.⁹⁸ So it must also be to the end of time. Christian growth must ever be a work of God in man which he receives with joy and thanksgiving and for which he uses the means of grace given by God Himself.

⁹⁸Tit. 3:7-8

CHAPTER V

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH

With the possibility of Christian growth an established fact, attention should next be given to the question of responsibility for such growth. It will be shown that every Christian, though he is entirely dependent on God for growth, nevertheless bears some responsibility for his own growth, but that the Lord aids him in meeting his responsibility by making it the duty of his fellow Christians to urge him on in love and especially by placing him into the spiritual care of the servant of the Word whom He has called to be a shepherd and guardian of His people. Brunner says in his book, Man in Revolt, "In the Christian doctrine of man we are concerned with the true knowledge of responsible existence."¹ He contends that one who has understood responsibility has also come to understand man and the person who sees his own responsibility has come to know himself. But Brunner sees man shirking responsibility and thus sinning against God. He shows that man refuses to recognize God as God and, therefore, refuses to serve Him.

Man as he is by nature will never begin to serve the

¹Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 50.

Lord for he is dead in sins.² He is an enemy of God, hating Him with all his heart.³ If there was to be any thought of service to God, man first had to be reconciled to God as was shown in Chapter III. That reconciliation took place when Jesus took man's place, suffered and died on the cross, and established peace between God and men.⁴

Thereupon God took the next step and proclaimed this peace to man.⁵ He caused His Gospel to be preached through all the world.⁶ He did more. He sent His Holy Spirit to accompany the preaching of the Word, to give it power unto salvation as the Holy Spirit brought men to faith in Christ as their Savior from sin.⁷

Redeemed man can now look to God without fear.⁸ But as he looks to God's Word he finds exhortations addressed to him to lead a godly life.⁹ He knows that Christ through His Holy Spirit must produce fruit in his life if God is to be pleased with his works.¹⁰ But he finds in

²Eph. 2:1

³Jn. 15:23; Ex. 20:5

⁴II Cor. 5:19,21

⁵II Cor. 5:20

⁶Mt. 28:20

⁷I Cor. 12:3

⁸Is. 41:10

⁹Rom. 12:2; II Pet. 3:18; II Tim. 2:22; Jn. 15:10

¹⁰Jn. 15:5

Scripture that trusting in God's promise he must also seek to serve Him and to increase in godly living.¹¹ He must feel his responsibility to make ever better use of the grace which God gives him to know His holy will¹² and in faith to keep His commandments.¹³

As a Christian he is, therefore, a responsible being. But as with everything else in his life, so his feeling of responsibility is still far from perfect.¹⁴ The Father in heaven, who so loved the world that He gave us His only-begotten Son into death for the sins of all mankind,¹⁵ must constantly remind him of his duty to serve Him.¹⁶ It seems strange, yet it is true that children of God have to be reminded to serve Him who rescued them from hell.¹⁷ Heirs of eternal salvation have to be urged to hold on to their salvation.¹⁸ The free sons of God have to be admonished to live as free men.¹⁹

This call to the Christian life is stressed in every

¹¹II Cor. 7:1

¹²Eph. 4:22-24

¹³I Jn. 2:3-4; 3:24; Ps. 119:32

¹⁴Heb. 5:12-14

¹⁵Jn. 3:16

¹⁶Rom. 12:2

¹⁷I Pet. 2:9-11

¹⁸Rev. 3:11

¹⁹Rom. 6:18-22

letter of the Apostles. They constantly urge the saints of God to grow in sanctification. And consistently they include in their exhortation to godliness a clear reference to Christ's salvation. The two thoughts are always together. Those who are saved are to serve the Lord in their lives, but they can serve Him only because He is with them, strengthening them with His grace.

In "the epistle of Paul to the Romans," for instance, the Apostle Paul devotes several chapters to the great doctrine of Justification.²⁰ He shows that Christ is the only Savior from sin and that salvation by faith without the deeds of the law is the only way to God. Then in Chapter VI and following he speaks of Christian living. He comes with the plea that the readers walk in newness of life,²¹ that they do not serve sin.²² But he has not gone far in this chapter before he reminds them again that they are able to do this only because Christ is in them.²³ That is the ever recurring theme of the next chapters. Christians are shown their responsibility to serve the Lord but they are reminded of the help that God Himself will give them to meet their responsibilities. In Chapter XII, for instance, Christians are called upon to

²⁰Rom. 3:21-5:21

²¹Rom. 6:4

²²Rom. 6:6

²³Rom. 6:11-14

present themselves wholly to the Lord, as is proper.²⁴ But a few verses later they are reminded that they have received grace to live the Christian life and grace to serve God with their various gifts.²⁵ In other words, while Paul urges them to Christian living, they are not to lose sight of the fact that God has prepared them for service and is with them always, giving them strength to serve, so that they are actually cooperating with God all along, He furnishing the power which they need to live the Christian life, He furnishing the guidance for them to follow, He furnishing the motive for their every act.

Paul says the same in other letters. A study of "the epistle of Paul to the Galatians" involves the reader in the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law.²⁶ There Paul speaks of God's gift to men.²⁷ But when he speaks of the Christian life, he does not leave the Galatians to their own resources. He does not even intimate that because Christ died for them they must with power of their own now live to Him, giving them the impression that their justification was God's work, but that their sanctification must be their own answer to a good and gracious God. Clearly and convincingly he teaches

²⁴Rom. 12:1

²⁵Rom. 12:6

²⁶Gal. 3

²⁷Gal. 3:22

the very opposite. In all humility he confesses that though he is living in Christ, actually it is not he who is living, but Christ is living in him.²⁸

In "the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians" for the congregations in and about Ephesus he shows his own true Christian humility when he credits it all to grace that he is able to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles.²⁹ In "the epistle of Paul to the Colossians" he does not fail to state, when speaking of the Christian life, that Christ is their strength.³⁰ As they have received Christ, so they are to live in Him.³¹ He assures the Thessalonians that the Word of God effectually worked in them also after they had come to faith.³²

Peter and John do the same in their letters. They place the responsibility upon Christians to live their lives to God, but they remind them constantly of God's grace which alone can enable them to do it.³³

So believers, in the measure in which they know the Word of God, have felt themselves responsible to God. But God has also kept them mindful of His love for them, and

²⁸Gal. 2:20

²⁹Eph. 3:8

³⁰Col. 1:11

³¹Col. 2:6

³²I Thess. 2:13

³³Cf. I Pet. 1:15; 2:11; II Pet. 1:5; I Jn. 1:7; 3:1-3

has assured them of His help as has just been shown.

In love He has also given them help through fellow-Christians by making each Christian responsible for his brother in the faith. They share a common faith and life³⁴ and are helped by God Himself to feel responsible for one another.³⁵ He has made all Christians members of His body and helps them in this way to see their dependence on each other.³⁶ For He has distributed His gifts among them in such a way that in any and every congregation of believers no one is self-sufficient³⁷ and no one who keeps company with his fellow-believers is lacking in any gift.³⁸ As the eye and hand and foot in the human body are concerned about one another, each depending on the other, each aiding the other, so is the body of Christ.³⁹ When the strong bear the weak, both profit. When the wise teach the unlearned, both are helped. Those who seek to rejoice with the joyful become recipients of their joy. Those who mourn with the sorrowful, share their comfort with them. These joys of the corporate life the Lord wants all believers to have and it is seldom that conditions make it

³⁴Eph. 4:4,5

³⁵Eph. 4:16

³⁶I Cor. 12

³⁷I Cor. 12:29-30

³⁸I Cor. 3:22

³⁹Rom. 12

impossible for one or the other to enjoy them. Elijah is one of the few who for a time felt himself alone and found it difficult to live the godly life because he felt himself surrounded by unbelief. But even he was not alone. Seven thousand had remained true to God in his day. Because of the persecution, they were not able to worship together and thus strengthen one another in their godly life, but the very fact that they had remained true to God was comforting to the prophet.⁴⁰

Ordinarily conditions permit a much closer relationship of God's children to one another and God wants them to make use of it. The very names given to Christians call for a loving concern of one Christian for the other. Paul calls the Christians fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God,⁴¹ faithful brethren in Christ,⁴² one body in Christ and fellow-members in Him,⁴³ a holy temple in the Lord.⁴⁴ In this communion they can find strength. If the members of a freshman class at college, being hazed by upper classmen, are brought closer together and thus develop true class spirit as they realize their need for one another, how much more will

⁴⁰I Kings 19

⁴¹Eph. 2:19

⁴²Col. 1:2

⁴³Rom. 12:5

⁴⁴Eph. 2:21

Christians profit from close fellowship with fellow-Christians as they fight against Satan and the world. Every individual Christian ought therefore recognize Christian fellowship as a power for good and heed the exhortation of the Lord to make full use of it.⁴⁵ For only then can he carry out his responsibilities toward others, providing for them, encouraging them in Christian living, urging them on in love and good works.⁴⁶

The importance of this working together in Christ can be clearly seen from a comparison of the congregation in Corinth with the congregation in Philippi. In the former there were factions and, as a result, any number of problems arose. Members were guilty of going to court against their brethren.⁴⁷ Some were strong in a fleshly way.⁴⁸ Others were sinfully weak.⁴⁹ Their services had degenerated into gatherings in which members vied with one another to speak.⁵⁰ Even the Sacrament was no longer celebrated according to Christ's institution.⁵¹ In Philippi things were very different. They had joined in a

⁴⁵Heb. 10:25

⁴⁶Heb. 10:24

⁴⁷I Cor. 6:1

⁴⁸I Cor. 8:1

⁴⁹I Cor. 6:13 ff.

⁵⁰I Cor. 14:23

⁵¹I Cor. 11:20 ff.

partnership in the Gospel and carried on their work jointly.⁵² It was not just a coincidence that they were more liberal in giving than all other congregations,⁵³ that they remembered the apostle in their prayers⁵⁴ and that he could call them his joy and crown.⁵⁵ They were working together in Christ and working according to Christ's plan, who also in this way had evidenced His love and grace to them in that He had bound them together in faith, thus strengthening them for their Christian life.

Christ's plan is clear from a study of the pastoral epistles in which Paul urges both Timothy and Titus to foster the spirit of love among Christians, even going so far as to suggest what each could do for the common good. No one should consider himself too old to serve.⁵⁶ No one should think himself too busy. Even the young mother with a hundred and one things to do had something to do toward Christian growth.⁵⁷ The Lord of the Church thus makes every Christian responsible for Christian growth. In love He provides for all and provides all with power to serve.

But the record of His love and concern does not end

⁵²Phil. 1:5

⁵³II Cor. 8:1-5

⁵⁴Phil. 1:19

⁵⁵Phil. 4:1

⁵⁶Tit. 2:2-3

⁵⁷Tit. 2:5

even here. In providing for His own before He left the world, He established the ministry of the Word,⁵⁸ that He might, through the servants of the Word, admonish, exhort, aid and nourish the members of His church in Christian living.⁵⁹ In His great prayer to the Father on the night of His betrayal⁶⁰ He did not ask the Father to take the disciples out of the world. For He had work for them to do. They were to receive power, after the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them, to preach His Gospel in all the world.⁶¹ They were to be witnesses of His suffering, death and resurrection and were to proclaim this for the salvation of men.⁶² They were to be laborers in His harvest-field, gathering in the sheaves.⁶³ They were to be His ambassadors, announcing reconciliation to God's enemies.⁶⁴ They were to be stewards of His mysteries, dispensing His gifts according to the needs of men.⁶⁵ They were to be shepherds of His flock, feeding His lambs and sheep.⁶⁶ They

⁵⁸Mt. 28:20; Jn. 21:15 ff.

⁵⁹II Cor. 5:20; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:3

⁶⁰Jn. 17

⁶¹Acts 1:8

⁶²Lk. 24:48

⁶³Mt. 9:38

⁶⁴II Cor. 5:20

⁶⁵I Cor. 4:1

⁶⁶I Pet. 5:2-4

were to be workmen, building up His Church.⁶⁷ They were also to be teachers, training each Christian in Christian service.⁶⁸ He made this their life's work.⁶⁹ They were to devote themselves wholly to it, dedicating themselves heart and soul to this glorious task. They were to be faithful to Him.⁷⁰ He would expect an accounting from them for every soul given into their charge.⁷¹ But they were also assured of His help. He would not leave them nor forsake them. He would be their sufficiency, making them able ministers of His Word,⁷² even going so far as to giving them the words they were to speak when called upon by the government to give an account.⁷³ And their work was to go on after their death. They were to arrange in every place for preachers like themselves.⁷⁴ They were to instruct others that these in turn might instruct the Christian congregations that began to spring up in all parts of the world. Thus the Lord provided for His Church.

And so He is still providing for men. He who gave

⁶⁷II Tim. 2:15

⁶⁸Tit. 2:1-10

⁶⁹I Cor. 1:17; 9:14

⁷⁰I Cor. 4:2

⁷¹Heb. 13:17

⁷²II Cor. 3:5,6

⁷³Mt. 10:19

⁷⁴II Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5

apostles, prophets, evangelists to the early Church,⁷⁵ is still calling men to serve Him in the ministry of the Word.

The Lord does not leave it to the discretion of the individual congregation or of the individual Christian to have or not to have a pastor.⁷⁶ He wants His Word proclaimed by men whom He Himself has given to the Church.⁷⁷ And He wants His followers to hear the Word when it is proclaimed.⁷⁸ For through the Word He accomplishes His good purpose today as He has throughout the history of the world.⁷⁹

No man, therefore, has the right to preach or teach in the Church unless Christ has called him.⁸⁰ He would have no message⁸¹ and, consequently he would have no means at his disposal to help the Church of God. For there is no message that can save mankind other than the Word of God.⁸² And no man has the right to proclaim it without a call from the Lord. The Church belongs to Him.⁸³ The

⁷⁵Eph. 4:11

⁷⁶Tit. 1:5; II Tim. 2:2

⁷⁷Eph. 4:11

⁷⁸I Cor. 14:31; Col. 3:16

⁷⁹Is. 55:11

⁸⁰Rom. 10:15

⁸¹Gal. 1:6,7

⁸²Acts 4:12

⁸³Eph. 5:25-27

Word is His own.⁸⁴ Christian growth is His work in man.⁸⁵ Therefore no man has the right to preach unless he is sent. And those who are sent can do no less than to preach the Word of God. For that is their call, to preach the Gospel of Christ.⁸⁶ It is their work to shepherd the flock as it was the work of the apostles in the early Church. It is their duty, as it was the duty of Christ's first disciples, to be stewards of the mysteries of God, laborers in God's field, ambassadors for Christ, witnesses of all that Jesus said and did for the salvation of men.

⁸⁴Jn. 8:32

⁸⁵II Cor. 9:8

⁸⁶Mt. 28:20

CHAPTER VI

THE IDEAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

The servants of God, who are in part responsible for the Christian growth of their members, need a goal toward which to strive and God gives it in His holy Word. They will never fully reach it themselves, nor will they achieve complete success in the life of their members, for sin still clings to them and robs them of perfection.¹ With Paul they must complain that their best efforts are still far from perfect.² Yet they know that the Lord wants them to work toward that goal.³ The life they strive to live may, therefore, be called the ideal Christian life. The description of this life is given in Scripture. That will be shown in this chapter. The life itself will be described only briefly and incidentally. Attention will be given especially to the means which God uses on the one hand to reveal His will to men and on the other to accomplish His will in them as regards their growth in life. God's means will be shown working in the life of men, helping them as they strive to grow in Christ. It has already been shown that through His holy

¹I Jn. 1:8

²Phil. 3:12

³II Tim. 4:1-5

Word and sacraments God Himself comes to men, dwells in them, and strengthens them for the Christian life. He won the victory for them over sin, Satan, and hell and is constantly giving them this victory in their daily life.⁴ He wants them now to use the power He gives to strive after perfection, seeking to do His will.⁵ God has also revealed His will to men in His holy Word. If they want to know His will, they must seek it in Scripture. There they will find a light to their way.⁶ In the Ten Commandments, which are explained in precept and practice in hundreds upon hundreds of passages in the Scriptures, the Christian can learn to know God's will regarding his relation to Him and to his fellowmen.

As an example, a study of just one of the commandments will show how clearly God reveals His will to men. He says, Thou shalt not kill. In another portion of Scripture He shows that this sin begins in the heart, in the form of a thought of murder,⁷ thus putting the Christian on guard against such thoughts. In the life of Cain He shows the danger of letting the thought remain in the

⁴I Cor. 15:55 ff.

⁵I Thess. 4:3

⁶Ps. 119:105

⁷Mt. 15:19

heart.⁸ He says that it is already murder in His sight.⁹ He warns that even "righteous" wrath must be controlled lest it grow into hatred, so that the Christian will know what he is to do about his "just" anger.¹⁰ When hatred shows itself in the heart of a neighbor, the Christian has the duty according to God's Word to do something about it.¹¹ In keeping with the commandment his heart is to be filled with love and mercy and forgiveness.¹² He must, therefore, guard against an indifferent attitude toward the neighbor. Moreover, the law of the neighbor enters the picture. The neighbor may well be his enemy. He should not begrudge him food and clothing, even though he goes no further than harboring such thoughts in his heart, for God's law requires that he have the welfare of his neighbor at heart and love him as he loves himself.¹³ That is the teaching of God's Law.

The Scripture references were purposely restricted to the keeping of this commandment in heart and mind. If the search were to include the teaching of Scripture regarding the keeping of this commandment in speech and

⁸Gen. 4:7

⁹I Jn. 3:15

¹⁰Eph. 4:26

¹¹Mt. 5:23,24

¹²Col. 3:12,13

¹³Rom. 12:20; Gal. 6:10; Mt. 22:39

conduct, the passages and whole chapters of Scripture that would suggest themselves would fill page after page and still would not have done full justice to the subject.

In the light of such explicit instructions, the Christian cannot plead inability to know the will of God. In love, God has given His holy Law in such fullness that, through a study of His Word, man can learn in everything to distinguish right from wrong.¹⁴

This knowledge of right and wrong is essential to Christian growth. Therefore, a study of God's Law is likewise essential. But that is not enough. If the Christian were like Adam in the state of perfection, his knowledge of God's will would always result in good works. If he would love the Lord with all his heart and soul and mind,¹⁵ he could do whatever he wanted because it would always be right and pleasing to the Lord. But he has not reached perfection. He still has his evil flesh which takes no delight in God's Law.¹⁶ There is also the power of Satan and the world. They are the enemies of God and of His children. There is need, therefore, that the Christian grow in attitude and not just in knowledge.¹⁷

But a mere study of the Law will not change man's

¹⁴Mt. 7:24-29

¹⁵Mt. 22:37

¹⁶Eph. 2:3

¹⁷Phil. 2:13

attitude. The Law is much like a sign along the road, indicating the direction man is to take but not helping him in the least to get to his destination. In fact, because the Law directs him to perfection and he finds in himself an inability to reach perfection,¹⁸ the commandments of God tend to fill him with anger and resentment.¹⁹ Even Christians, who know that God forgives sins for Jesus' sake, who know that Jesus kept the Law for them and bore the punishment of their sins on Calvary, can seldom look to the Law as a rule for godly living without at the same time feeling the accusation of the Law in their hearts.²⁰ But that does not obviate the need of studying the Law. It does indicate that they need more than what the Law can give them, if their attitude toward God and His Law is to be right and good.

The law can never of itself give more than the mere word and symbol. It may beautifully describe the life we shall live. But the description does not have within itself the power to realize that which is described. The law is only a symbol, but it is not the thing which it symbolizes. The law can describe the ideal. But the ideal described remains a mere word so long as the Spirit is absent.²¹

The Christian's attitude toward God's holy will regarding his life, since it is not improved by the Law,

¹⁸Rom. 3:19

¹⁹Lev. 26:43

²⁰Dan. 9:7,8; Rom. 7:24

²¹Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, translated by John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), pp. 58 f.

must be improved in another way. And God has given the means of improving it. It is His Gospel, the good news of salvation in Christ. This Gospel not only tells men that they are saved from sin. It also assures them that they are able with God's help to serve Him, as has been clearly shown in Chapter IV. And it invites and urges them to take and make full use of God's sanctifying power within them. William Hamilton has an interesting comment on this sanctifying power of God.

When we read in Matt. 5:44 that the disciple is to love his enemies, we first see that we cannot. This demand reveals the vast complex of hostilities that all of us live with: noisy neighbors across the street, the Russians, the stupid Republicans or the witless Democrats. But when we take this demand as a judgment of God on our imperfect obedience to him, when we come to him as sinners confessing that we do not come anywhere near to loving our enemies or even our friends, we can then become at least honest enough with ourselves to let God get at us with his terrible and forgiving love. When he has forgiven us, we can never again be as sure of the evil of our enemies (or of our own virtue) as we once were. We will continue to fight for our political views, to criticize our political opponents as before. But our basic attitude to the opponent or enemy is decisively changed. We are much closer together than before, because we are both sinners under God, both needing His healing and changing. We will oppose our "enemy" now with much greater understanding of why he stands where he stands, with much more sensitivity to the pressure under which he operates. We will oppose him still, when we must do so, but without reducing him to a subhuman level.²²

God's sanctifying power thus regulates the mind and heart of His children. The Holy Spirit constantly seeks

²²William Hamilton, The Christian Man (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 29 f.

to teach them concerning the Christian life,²³ guiding them in the way they are to go,²⁴ giving them opportunity to serve the Lord.²⁵ At the same time he fills them with God's own love²⁶ and permits them to approach the task of Christian growth with the right attitude.²⁷ They learn more and more to see that it is not a task but a privilege to serve God²⁸ and to find real joy and happiness in such service.²⁹ God still binds them to His will,³⁰ but He makes them feel that they are free.³¹ And they are free: free from Satan who would lead them into sin and misery,³² free from the world that would deceive them,³³ free from the dominion of sin itself,³⁴ free to enjoy the blessedness of God's Children.³⁵

²³Col. 1:9-11

²⁴Jn. 16:13

²⁵Eph. 2:10

²⁶I Jn. 4:12,13

²⁷Phil. 2:13

²⁸Phil. 1:7

²⁹II Cor. 9:8

³⁰I Thess. 4:3; I Pet. 1:15

³¹Rom. 6:2-12

³²Heb. 2:14,15

³³Jn. 17:15,16

³⁴Jn. 8:36

³⁵Ps. 1

This freedom is most clearly set forth in the Scripture account of the life of God's children. They tell of Abel's acceptable sacrifice, of Enoch's god-pleasing life, of Noah's trust in God though surrounded by evil men, of Abraham's willingness to leave family and friends to follow the Lord, of Sarah's trust in God's promise that she would be a mother, though she was far past the age of childbearing, of Abraham's childlike obedience when he consented to slay his son because God said he should, of Joseph's firm trust in God's promises regarding Canaan, of Moses' courage and trust in God, of Rahab's kindness to enemies because she believed God's Word, and of many others. In this account God says in effect, These are the works, this is the life that is pleasing to Me. These are the fruits of faith which should be evident in the life of every believer.³⁶

The believers of old were able to serve God because He was with them. Seeing their works of love is like seeing God's Law and His glorious Gospel working together. The Holy Spirit through the Gospel gave these people the desire to keep the commandments of God, actually producing in them the good works which are in keeping with the Law. Through the Holy Spirit working in them, putting Christ into their heart with His love and patience and strength they were able to keep the commandments, not because of

³⁶Heb. 11 and 12

the demands of the Law nor even because of its promises, but for Christ's sake. Even their works were due to God's gift of grace, the Holy Spirit performing them in their life. In the Scriptures the Lord urges the Christian to follow them in their godly life and to learn from them as they in turn learned from Him.

But Jesus Himself is the Christian's best example of godly living. Being in the image of God³⁷ He, as a man, constantly exemplified in His earthly life the works that are pleasing to God.³⁸ When He sat down at the table with sinners, they knew themselves as such. He did not condone their sin. At the same time, they knew Him to be their friend.³⁹ When He rebuked men in their sin, He did not mince words. At the same time, He revealed His love to them and sought to save them.⁴⁰ When He found men weak in faith, He rebuked them for that weakness. At the same time, He strengthened their faith.⁴¹ When men tried His patience with their worldliness, He still dealt patiently with them.⁴² When men invited Him to a meal with the hope of catching Him in a fault, He accepted, but did not

³⁷Heb. 1:3

³⁸Lk. 2:40

³⁹Mt. 9:10-13

⁴⁰Mt. 23:37

⁴¹Mt. 8:26,27

⁴²Mt. 20:20-23

compromise Himself.⁴³ When men needed His help, His love, His presence, He did not ask whether they were worthy. He helped them. His statement to the Greek woman, the Syrophenician by nation, that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,⁴⁴ cannot be taken to mean that He would help no one but a Jew, for He did help this woman after He had tried her faith, even as He helped the leper who was a Samaritan⁴⁵ and the centurion who was most likely a Roman.⁴⁶ Thus Jesus demonstrated the Christian way of life.

It is true, He was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. As such He did much that Christians can never do even with His help.⁴⁷ No man can save his brother from sin.⁴⁸ No man could endure the pain of hell and live⁴⁹ and gain the victory over Satan.⁵⁰ No man could ever say that he is sinless.⁵¹

Yet it is also true that much that Jesus did,

⁴³Mt. 14:1-6

⁴⁴Mt. 15:24

⁴⁵Lk. 17:16

⁴⁶Lk. 7:2 ff.

⁴⁷Mt. 20:22

⁴⁸Ps. 49:7

⁴⁹Mt. 27:46

⁵⁰Heb. 2:15

⁵¹Jn. 8:46

Christians could do after Him, if they relied more on His help. Christians need encouragement in this as they needed it in the days of the Apostles.⁵² Far too often Christians today forget that Christ wants to enable them through His Spirit to live the Christian life. For He is just as willing to hear, just as powerful to grant the prayer of those who call upon Him today as He always was. Phillips challenges Christians to greater activity when he says:

No doubt there are many reasons for the deterioration in quality in Christian faith and Christian living over the centuries, but one explanation which I personally regard as wholly inadmissible is to blame the passage of time, that is, our distance measured in years from the events recorded in the New Testament. I regard this as inadmissible partly because of the Nature of God, which is naturally unchangeable, and partly because I cannot believe Jesus Christ founded a Church which was intended to taper off into ineffective mediocrity.⁵³

Much of what Christ wants to accomplish in the world He wants to do through those whom He has called to be His own.⁵⁴ What they do with His power they do for Him.⁵⁵ Too often Christians fail in this. They are not active enough in their Christian calling and are tapering off into mediocrity. They must, therefore, be urged to strive

⁵²Phil. 2:1-3

⁵³J. B. Phillips, New Testament Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), pp. 23 f.

⁵⁴I Cor. 15:58

⁵⁵Mt. 25:35-40

harder to reach the ideal. When Christ calls Christians to be His own He makes them different from other men.⁵⁶ Too often they are not different enough that others will see it. They need to spend more time communing with the heavenly Father.⁵⁷ They need to hear God's Word and learn to rejoice to be in God's house.⁵⁸ They need to learn to show willingness to listen to people when they want to talk about their problems to sympathize with them in their troubles and offer to help them according to ability. Following Jesus is often just doing a lot of little things that love dictates. Doing them with Jesus' power, in Jesus' name is what makes the difference. Too many Christians fail to see that Jesus does make the difference. Elert reminds the reader that

. . . like his first disciples we live in permanent dependence upon him. It is the dependence upon their Redeemer of the redeemed who, as redeemed, belong to him. This dependence is a relationship of one person to another. We can only live it in this manner if he is as concretely real to us as to his first disciples, if we see him and hear him as they saw him and heard him, if we know that the same questions are addressed to us as were to them, if we are humbled and uplifted by the same words which he spoke to them. In this manner he exercises his power over the actual events in our life. This continuous encounter constitutes him as our ethical authority as he was authority for his first disciples.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Jn. 15:18

⁵⁷Jn. 14:13,14; Jas. 4:2,3

⁵⁸Ps. 84

⁵⁹Werner Elert, The Christian Ethos, translated by Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 200.

Christians and Christian leaders must keep in mind whom they are following. Their guide and helper is the perfect Son of God. He always leads men along the right path.⁶⁰ He is also the sympathetic friend.⁶¹ He constantly looks back as He leads men along life's way, and when He sees them stumble and fall, lifts them up, supports them with His strong arm, and even bears them up when life becomes difficult.⁶² Those who follow Him are on the way to the ideal Christian life which He lived in perfection.⁶³

It is not in keeping with the purpose of this study to go into great detail in speaking of the Christian life itself. Suffice it to say here that the Scriptures are man's guide in Christian living. Where they have spoken, the servant of Christ can speak. Where they give no explicit instructions, he can make no laws. He will find it difficult to give clear-cut answers on many social or economic problems of the day. He will not be able in a few words to render a definite decision on the right or wrong of dancing, card-playing, smoking, promiscuous dating, the use of alcoholic beverages, and the like. He will not be able to establish in every instance what is

⁶⁰Ps. 23

⁶¹Heb. 4:15

⁶²Is. 40:11

⁶³I Cor. 11:1

proper business procedure, what are permissible kinds of business or service, whether it is proper to engage in strikes, what is the proper relation of capital and labor, and the like, or to establish the per cent of income constituting proper support of the Church, the frequency with which Christians should attend communion, the exact nature of unionism, the place of woman in the Church. In all these matters, circumstances may alter the case.

The danger in seeking to give rules and regulations for any and every question of life--as every servant of the Word will be able to testify--is that men then let the Church be a conscience for them or, more often, for their fellow-members, prejudging matters which the conscience of the individual must judge on the basis of the Law of God. Only the individual knows what is in his heart. When the attitude of the heart is involved, the individual must, therefore, seek to determine the nature of his action and act accordingly. The Christian who knows the Law of God and follows the dictates of his conscience will usually know what to do in cases where no explicit instructions are given. He will want guidance, but he cannot shirk responsibility.

The Church must, of course, show the dangers in modern living. It must teach men the restrictions which God has placed on sex, the instructions which God has given regarding the use and abuse of the body, the limitations placed on marriage and related matters, the

importance of the law of love in all relations of man with his fellow-man, but the Church dare not state absolutely that such and such actions are sinful, unless the Scriptures themselves declare them to be so.⁶⁴ Pride, lust, intemperance, greed, avarice, indecency, immorality, contention are all clearly condemned.⁶⁵ Whether or not men are guilty of these sins is often a matter that only the individual involved can decide.

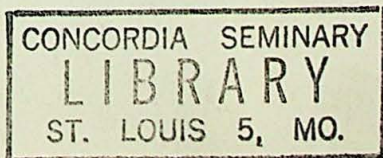
To these warnings against sin, the Church must add positive instruction regarding the blessedness of the Christian life. It must help men to see what a privilege it is to serve God, what power there is in communion with Him to grow in grace and every Christian virtue. This, especially, is of importance when dealing with the matter of growth in Christian living.

This emphasis on the positive instruction in Christian living is prominent in William Kramer's book bearing the encouraging title, Happiness Can Be Yours,⁶⁶ and in

⁶⁴It would lead to misunderstanding, if Scripture references were given to cover these points. Matthew 5: 27,28 deals with sex, but it does not say enough. Leviticus 18 speaks of Prohibited degrees of marriage, but it does not say all that needs to be said. Matthew 5: 31,32 speaks of divorce, but it gives only a part of the picture. To give a few Scripture references for any ethical problem without properly relating them to the problem is to misuse the Word of God.

⁶⁵Mk. 7:22

⁶⁶Wm. A. Kramer, Happiness Can Be Yours (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952).



Oswald Riess' book, The Secret of Beautiful Living.⁶⁷

These books are not designed to give a complete picture of the Christian life, but, in discussing a number of current problems on the basis of God's Word, they inspire the reader to seek answers to other problems in the Word itself, keeping them mindful of the proper approach to the Word and of their need of Christ in their daily walk of life.

In this they are entirely different from so many of the books published today to help man in his daily life. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale has written two books on Christian living that have become very popular, The Power of Positive Thinking⁶⁸ and Stay Alive All Your Life.⁶⁹

Peale's approach, as he seeks to help men in "Christian living," is to build them up personally, giving them confidence in themselves, assuring them that if they quote an encouraging Bible passage often enough each day and say it convincingly enough they will actually be able to do what the passage indicates, whether that be trusting in the Lord or doing all things through Christ. His suggestion that they look at themselves in a mirror as

⁶⁷Oswald Riess, The Secret of Beautiful Living (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

⁶⁸Norman Vincent Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954).

⁶⁹Norman Vincent Peale, Stay Alive All Your Life (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1957).

they say these passages shows where he looks for men's power to succeed. It does not come from the Word. Peale never bothers to explain the passages, since they are not too important to him. He is interested in people who are looking for happiness, but he offers them no more than happiness and success on earth.

It is disturbing, to say the least, to find men flocking to such a leader, whose advice is no more than good psychology. It is definitely not theological. The student of God's word will find that if he wishes to aid men in striving toward the ideal in Christian living he must direct them away from themselves to Christ, the only source of all goodness, who comes to men in His holy Word and through the power of the Spirit guides and helps them in their daily life.

As men use the Word to learn the ideal Christian life, they must take note of two limitations. First, a study of the will of God regarding the Christian life reveals that the Scriptures when speaking of Christian life and service to God do not make the same requirements of all. The fact that Jesus instructed the rich young man to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor⁷⁰ does not make that a rule which must be followed by all rich men. The fact that Peter, Andrew, James, and John were instructed to leave their fishing boats

⁷⁰Mt. 19:21

and become fishers of men⁷¹ does not place this obligation on all men. Some were specifically instructed by Jesus not to follow Him.⁷² The fact that Jesus commended the widow who gave her last two mites⁷³ does not obligate every widow to give all that she possesses to the Lord. Scripture can so easily be misused by those who seek to make laws for their fellowmen. The Christian, therefore, needs a rich measure of God's Holy Spirit to guide him as he studies His holy Law.

A further restriction in the interpretation of God's rules of life lies in the distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. This is especially important for the Christian of the New Testament, because the ceremonial law, having fulfilled its purpose,⁷⁴ has been set aside, whereas the moral law is still binding for men of all times.⁷⁵ Bible scholars of all times have had difficulty in determining the nature of some of the laws of the Old Testament, but in most instances the Scriptures themselves have given a clear answer. Laws regarding clean and unclean animals for food,⁷⁶ sabbath observance,

⁷¹Mt. 4:18-22

⁷²Mk. 5:18,19

⁷³Mk. 12:42 ff.

⁷⁴Col. 2:16,17

⁷⁵Mt. 5-7

⁷⁶Acts 10:15; 15:10 ff.

Jewish holy days,⁷⁷ the sacrifice of animals,⁷⁸ circumcision,⁷⁹ tithing,⁸⁰ are no longer binding for the Christian but are part of the Old Testament economy. But it is still God's will that men watch their eating habits,⁸¹ that they gather for public worship,⁸² that they practice liberality in giving to the Lord.⁸³ A careful study of God's Word is, therefore, required of all who would know of the life that is pleasing to God. Those who need help in these matters will do well to study Christian ethics under the guidance of men who know and accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as their only authority for faith and life. For only God can lead men to know the ideal, Christian life. And that He does in His Word.

⁷⁷Col. 2:16,17

⁷⁸Heb. 7:12,27

⁷⁹Acts 15:24 ff.

⁸⁰I Cor. 16:2

⁸¹Deut. 21:20 (Here and elsewhere excess in eating is linked with excess in drinking as an evil.)

⁸²Heb. 10:25

⁸³I Cor. 16:2; Phil. 4:15 ff.

CHAPTER VII

MEN NEED HELP IN CHRISTIAN LIVING

If the religious leaders of our day are to be true to their calling to aid men in Christian growth, they must come to a full realization of the hideousness of man's sin and of man's desperate need of help to live the Christian life. To be able to say that the world is evil is not enough. The servant of God must come to grips with sin in its ugliness. He must see the power of Satan working in the lives of men, dragging them down to the very depth of depravity. Such depravity few leaders have seen. Many have not even read of what a beast man can be, and how important it is that he be saved from himself. Newspaper accounts of brutality are usually censored. The full truth cannot be told. The fiendishness of the criminal can only be guessed at. The mutilated body of the victim suggests to many that the killer was filled with fear of being detected, that he struck in a frenzy of fear. He must have been out of his mind. But that is not facing the facts. That is modifying the wickedness of men who are without God. The truth must be told if men are to be helped.

Even religious leaders, who are constantly dealing with sin, may become guilty of toning down the wickedness of crime and vice because they have had so little actual

contact with it. Many pastors and Christian teachers do not know the full truth about evil because they led such a very sheltered life. They have grown up in Christian homes. They have attended Christian schools. Even while they were preparing for their Christian vocation, they were sheltered from the evil of the world. Few people will reveal the evil that is in them to a future minister of the Word. The tendency is rather to pretend that they are good at heart. So the real evils of the world may not be known to the minister of the Word until he reads the uncensored report of one who has had to deal with men in all their filth and vice, and dares to print his expose¹ of crime.

One such writer is J. Paul de River, consultant criminal psychiatrist. He made a psychoanalytical study of "the sexual criminal" and has given men the result of his study in a book bearing that title.¹ The descriptions and illustrations in his book are so revolting that the reader is almost forced to skip over whole chapters. But he should not do so. He should realize what evils are a part of the world in which he lives. The Apostle Paul wrote about these evils long ago in "the epistle of Paul to the Romans."² He showed men at their worst: their

¹J. Paul de River, M.D., The Sexual Criminal (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1956).

²Rom. 1:22-32

lowdness, their excesses, their diabolical perversions, their idolizing of crime and vice, and their pleasure in all manner of evil. But here in de River's book is the same story with documentation as something that is constantly going on in the world today, at times even victimizing the members of the Church. Dr. de River does not excuse the sex criminals for their perverted ideas of life. He finds that usually they have premeditated their crimes,³ that they are "cinical and coldly indifferent toward the tragic and horrible"⁴ that they are "jealous, vain, selfish, and egotistical" creatures, "with complete disregard for the rights of others,"⁵ gaining satisfaction through the physical injury and torture of the victim,⁶ who have "elevated sex and the will to power to the position of Deity," which they "proceed to worship in adoration."⁷ He finds most of those who have repeatedly seduced others to be egotists, just as the Apostle Paul described them, "living under the idea that they can improve upon the laws of God and man."⁸ What a commentary that is on Paul's description of the world in "the epistle

³de River, op. cit., p. 99.

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁶Ibid., p. 99.

⁷Ibid., p. 9.

⁸Ibid., p. 275.

of Paul to the Romans," chapter one! Anyone who needs to be convinced that the world is evil would be convinced by reading the book. It proves what a beast man can be.

What is most disconcerting is to read that

There is no hard and fast rule as to the type of personality that might, on some occasion, indulge in acts of abnormal sexual nature. He may come from any walk of life. Nevertheless, as there is a basis for every action, a reason behind every crime, within himself, such an individual has been willfully breaking down his character, blocking those thoughts, those actions which build strong character, and placing in their stead, if not actions, ideas which he pleases to think are to his better liking.⁹

The doctor is very frank in stating that obscene literature has contributed to the spread of vice and crime and that "pornographic reading is largely to blame for the increase in sex degeneration and perversion."¹⁰ He warns parents against neglecting the proper education of their children. And he shows what he considers proper education:

Every child should receive a religious education in order that he may learn to respect God and the laws of nature. Truthfully, it may be said, that today, perhaps more than ever before, there is need of proper religious education, and the sense of love and obedience that goes along with it.¹¹

Another book that reveals the evil life is that of Murtagh, chief magistrate of the city of New York, and

⁹Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 269.

¹¹Ibid., p. 28.

Sara Harris. The title of the book, Cast the First Stone,¹² indicates that it deals with prostitutes. The title, however, does not indicate the filth of mind and life which are depicted. The authors have actually induced the fallen women to tell their own story of their way of life, a life at times so degrading that the reader wonders whether he is reading about human beings.

Paging through the book the reader comes to the chapter headed, "There but for the grace of God." The writers have shown the circumstances that involved many of these fallen women in vice. They have shown their early training or lack of it. They do not condone what they describe, but they plead for help for those who could still be rescued from a life of filth.

The point to be made here is that religious leaders today are not giving sufficient attention to the dangers which the Christian must face, they are not urging parents forcefully enough to speak to their sons and daughters about the ways of the world and of how easy it is to fall into sin. They are most likely telling men of the forgiveness which Christ has earned for any and every sin, but they are not sufficiently impressing upon parents the need of such forgiveness for a son or a daughter who has gone astray. If Christian homes and churches are not

¹² John M. Murtagh and Sara Harris, Cast the First Stone (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957).

asylums of refuge for those who have been led into sin, Satan will drag them down ever deeper into sin and vice. Christians and especially Christian leaders must keep in mind that every Christian is capable of the greatest sin and vice and might commit it, if he is not constantly helped to make full use of the grace of God.

However, the greatest dangers for Christians are not the gross sins of the flesh. These they themselves are on guard against at least in a measure. What they do not see so clearly are the sins of every-day living, the sins of respectable people.

On the face of it, there seems to be no wrong in social acceptance. It has a prominent place in the list of the things that people want most in life.¹³ Few people want to be alone. They want friends. Rollo May gives an important reason for this when he says:

Social acceptance, "being liked," has so much power because it holds the feelings of loneliness at bay. A person is surrounded with comfortable warmth; he is merged in the group. He is reabsorbed - as though, in the extreme psychoanalytic symbol, he were to go back into the womb. He temporarily loses his loneliness; but it is at the price of giving up his existence as an identity in his own right.¹⁴

Yes, it is necessary that friends be alike in many respects. They must think alike and act alike. They

¹³Malcolm S. Knowles, Informal Adult Education (New York: Association Press, 1950), p. 16.

¹⁴Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1955), p.33.

must like the same things. They must, in a measure, give up something of their very own. "Tell me with whom you associate," said the ancient Greek, "and I will tell you what you are." If Christians are friends with the people of the world, even with the respectable people of the world, they and the world must have some things in common. They must then also agree not to discuss matters on which they disagree, matters that are as much a part of the Christian life as faith in Christ and the hope of heaven. But they are not following the Savior in this desire for social acceptance. Very early in the public ministry of Jesus He was told by Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews, that he recognized Him as a teacher sent by God. With Nicodemus' influence Jesus could have had social acceptance among the religious leaders. Those leaders were respectable people. Outwardly at least--and who but God can judge people inwardly--they lived a good life.¹⁵ But they had no use for the testimony of the Scriptures concerning the Messiah.¹⁶ Jesus gave that testimony to Nicodemus.¹⁷ Later He gave it to other leaders. But they rejected it. And as a result Jesus Himself was denounced by these leaders. They accused Him of being in league

¹⁵Lk. 11:39-44

¹⁶Jn. 5:43-47

¹⁷Jn. 3:14 ff.

with demons.¹⁸ They tried on several occasions to have him arrested.¹⁹ They even sent soldiers to make the arrest²⁰ and they figured prominently in His trial and crucifixion.²¹ All this Christ suffered at their hands, because He refused to condone their life and teachings.

His followers ought to be His followers in this respect. They ought to see that by going along with the crowd they will soon become a part of the crowd, sharing their way of life. With comparatively few people today showing any interest in ethics, it should not be too difficult to see how easily indecency, profanity, laxity could become a part of the life of Christians even though they associate only with respectable people of the world, be that for business reasons or for membership in some society, club, or organization. The more respectable people of the world may still want the Christian as a member of their organization, to preserve the moral level of the group. But their level of morality is not what it was in the past. Carl Henry has sought a reason for this change in attitude toward ethics. He says:

The severance of ethics from fixed values and standards, ardently promoted by John Dewey and the naturalists, has brought moral chaos. Theological

¹⁸Mt. 9:34

¹⁹Mt. 12:14; 21:45

²⁰Jn. 7:32

²¹Mt. 27:12,20

sanctions discarded, the modern man covets only social and sometimes only individual, approval of his behavior. The sense of ethical imperative is evaporating from one range of life after another. The obligation to durable principles is no longer insisted upon. The soul of the twentieth-century man no longer feeds on objective and eternal norms, but is content with ethical leftovers.²²

In view of this the Christian is in real difficulty when seeking to be a contributing member of society. For Christianity is not contagious.²³ Materialism is.²⁴ Faith in Christ is not imparted by example.²⁵ Unbelief is.²⁶ Good works in the sight of God are not possible in the life of the unbelievers.²⁷ The evil works of the world, however, can easily become a part of the life of a Christian.²⁸ Here, then, is a danger zone for the children of God. Here there is need for Christian counsel and help, for grace to live the Christian life.

A second felt need of men is self-preservation. On the face of it, this, too, seems perfectly proper. A Christian should provide for his own.²⁹ But it should

²²Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p. 13.

²³I Cor. 12:3

²⁴Mt. 7:13,14

²⁵Mt. 16:17

²⁶Jn. 6:66

²⁷Jn. 15:5

²⁸Eph. 5:6-18; Jas. 1:14-16

²⁹I Tim. 5:8

not be an end in itself. He dare not go along with the children of the world who often make self-preservation their goal in life.³⁰ They may disagree on what constitutes self-preservation, but they are all agreed as to its importance in life.

Some are especially anxious about health. They must preserve their health at all costs. They try every new drug that appears on the market. They take very seriously every symptom of disease. They pamper themselves. They take no risk with any ache or pain. Floyd Ruch discusses this overconcern for health and bodily condition and the exaggerated interest which some have over matters of health.³¹ His discussion of this is in connection with his treatment of hypochondria.

Some people are far too anxious about money. To preserve themselves they must have money for a rainy day and especially for old age. They spare no pains to increase their source of income. They hold down as many jobs as they can, and they do it for the money that is in it. They are even willing to ruin their health for the sake of a few extra dollars a week. Rollo May has good reason to wonder if man has

so thoroughly surrendered inward psychological and spiritual freedom to the routine of his work and to

³⁰Mt. 6:32

³¹Floyd L. Ruch, Psychology and Life (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1948), pp. 502 f.

the mass patterns of social conventions that he feels the only vestige of freedom left to him is the opportunity for economic aggrandizement.³²

There are those who think of self-preservation in terms of power and prestige. Looking out for self means keeping themselves in first place. They dare not grant privileges to others which would make them equal to themselves. They must subjugate, oppress, dominate to preserve their position and honor. Often this is merely an effort to overcome inferiority.³³

Then there are those with whom self-preservation means no more than the enjoyment of every technical device that will make life easier and more enjoyable. Automation has come too late for them. They wish they could look forward to life in an age where machines would remove all drudgery--and all work is drudgery to them. Halford Luccock suggests using a slide rule based on Jesus' teaching to measure the things of this world.

With such a slide rule

many of the world's boasted advances become its diseases, measured by the effect on people While our society has done wonders with the mechanical arts of multiplication, it has done far less with the ethical art of division.³⁴

³²May, op. cit., p. 159.

³³Richard Müller-Freienfels, The Evolution of Modern Psychology (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), p. 380.

³⁴Halford E. Luccock, Communicating the Gospel (New York: Harpers, 1954), p. 167.

It is easy for Christians to be impressed with one or the other of these aims of self-preservation, and thus to forget the warning of Christ that to seek after these things is to be a part of the world; that His followers should concern themselves about their Christianity and all these things will be given unto them according to their need.³⁵ To counteract the advertising of the world, the Church must be about its business, reminding its members of the fact that God is the giver of all good gifts.³⁶ Phillips is not too critical in his analysis when he suggests that

Without admitting it in so many words, many Christians today cannot readily conceive of God operating in a world of television, washing machines, atomic fission, automation, psychiatry, electronic brains, glossy magazines, modern music, jet propulsion. The complication and speed of present-day living make it extremely difficult for the mind to imagine the Biblical God interpenetrating such a system and operating with its pressures.³⁷

In view of such a situation, the Church and her leaders must admit that the Christian needs help to live the Christian life. They dare not say that the Christian is immune to the drives of natural man.³⁸ If social

³⁵Mt. 6:31-33

³⁶Jas. 1:17

³⁷J. B. Phillips, New Testament Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 58.

³⁸Rom. 7:18

acceptance and self-preservation are not a temptation to him, he may be troubled with keeping up appearances. The Lord Himself said that He loved beauty. He nowhere ruled out respectability. But much needs to be said of a proper sense of values. To want the latest model car just because it is the latest, and a home that dates all others in the neighborhood, to buy clothes because of the nametag, to advertize the brand of food and drink that are served, all this is a mark of sinful pride which brings in its wake the sin of heaping up insurmountable debts contracted with no thought of paying them,³⁹ poor stewardship of funds, the temptation to dishonesty, the danger of neglecting real necessities of life for the sake of luxuries.⁴⁰ All this is no part of Christian living. In view of its prevalence there is a real need for careful instruction, lest Christians become worldly in such matters.⁴¹

The field of education is also a matter of concern for the alert church leader. People today are education-minded. So many young people with lesser talents have flocked to the colleges and universities that these have often been forced to lower their standards in order to accomodate them. "Well, let them go for a year or two.

³⁹Ps. 37:21

⁴⁰I Tim. 6:8-10

⁴¹Gal. 5:16; Jas. 1:14-15

It will not do them any harm." But if they are unable to think for themselves and are interested in staying in school, they are in danger of accepting all that the instructor says just to preserve their standing. In view of the worth of education today, which is by no means the best, the Christian must be warned against seeking the truth where he may not find it. A realist will admit that there is the same blind spot in education, and that education is faced with the same crisis that men like Hay⁴² and Bell⁴³ wrote about some years ago.

Religion is lacking on all levels of education. And without religion educators are helpless to get at the real problem of betterment of the learner. They can add to his knowledge and learning, they can give him the desire to succeed, they may even impress him with the virtue of moral living, but they cannot give the Christian what he really needs, the power of God for faith and life. The responsibility for this rests with the Christian home and with the Church and her leaders.⁴⁴

It would lead the writer too far afield to speak of

⁴²Clyde Lemont Hay, The Blind Spot in American Public Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950).

⁴³Bernard Iddings Bell, The Crisis in Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949).

⁴⁴A very worthwhile discussion of this whole problem is offered by Frank Gaebelien in Christian Education in a Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).

every human drive that is a temptation to Christians to forget their place and purpose in life. But one ought still be mentioned. It is the desire for romance, which often degenerates into the mere gratification of passion. The sex urge itself is perfectly natural. God made man and woman and gave each sex an attraction to the other.⁴⁵ He thus provided for marriage, which is His own institution,⁴⁶ and for the propagation of the human race.⁴⁷ He at the same time established the necessary safeguards for the man and woman who would regulate their life according to His Word.⁴⁸ But what a temptation to evil confronts Christians on every side! Popular magazines are becoming more bold each year in the pictures they dare to print. But these are decent when compared with the pictures which make their appearance wherever lewd men and women can find a mind to pervert. They do not stop with pictures. Color sound movies portray the most perverted sex acts and are available for home projection. Every large city provides opportunity for the world to be truly worldly and to tempt the Christian to go along just once. Free love, premarital sex experience, promiscuity are so common that the Christian would have to

⁴⁵Gen. 2:24

⁴⁶Gen. 2:18,22

⁴⁷Gen. 1:28

⁴⁸Mt. 5:27-32

leave the world to avoid every contact with those who are guilty.⁴⁹ Yet there are very few convictions. It is one of the evils that is known and yet not known to the point where it can be proved. Authorities can only guess at the prevalence of the evil. The leaders of the Church are well aware of these sins of the times. Their experience with teen-age marriages, mixed marriages, broken homes involving their own members should prove to them that they have no right to feel that the young man and woman of the parish are perfectly safe. In view of all these natural drives that tempt the Christian as they do the children of the world the Church must have something positive to offer them in their need.

What makes it the more difficult for the Church to minister to the members is the fact that many of those in need of help will not come to their pastor or spiritual advisor for such help. The person who finds that he is a homosexual at heart may wonder whether he was guilty of some sin that brought it on, or whether his parents were guilty of a perverted sex life, whether he may have inherited this inverted sexuality. He will usually not take his questions to a pastor. He may even hesitate to take

⁴⁹This is brought out in Kinsey's books which seem to present reliable statistical studies. Alfred C. Kinsey and others, Sexual Behavior in the Human Female (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1953). Alfred C. Kinsey and others, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948).

them to a doctor. There is the young Christian who has been humbled by a sex fiend. She may not want to speak of it to her pastor. She may even hesitate to mention it to her parents. There is the member who is all mixed up in his emotions. He will not be likely to speak of his trouble. The business man who finds himself sorely tempted by difficulties in business to stoop to unfair business practices will hardly discuss the matter with a spiritual advisor. Life is full of problems and Christians are no exception. They are constantly being tried and tested and tempted. They may not find help for their problems if they do not bring them to one who could help them with the Word of God. And there lies the challenge for the Church. The Church must find a way to come to those who need help.

Those who need the help of the Church often do not realize it themselves because of the difficulty of living the Christian life in this complex society, where man can easily be involved in sin by just going along with the world in its economic, social and political life, not even suspecting that thereby he is involved in the moral life of the world. This, too, points up how important it is that the Christian be helped toward Christian growth.

The person who is to be helped must of course be willing in a measure to help himself. Being in need of help in Christian growth, he must face up to his own responsibility as was shown in Chapter V. But even here there is a weak spot in so many members of the church.

They seem to want no help. Worse than that, they seem not to want to grow in Christian living. They seem to be working against the minister of the Word who is seeking to lead them toward perfection! But that especially emphasizes the need of help. Men are often too weak to see their own need.

The Apostle Paul had his share of work just along these lines. He had spent much time in Corinth. On his first visit he was there for a year and a half⁵⁰ working night and day to build a solid, active church. All the time that he was there he received no salary from them.⁵¹ He supplemented the gifts he received from other congregations⁵² with a job as tent-maker.⁵³ He was not in Corinth for pay. He wanted only to preach the Gospel of Christ and thus to lay a firm foundation for Christianity in this city of vice. His hard work, however, seemed all for naught. A hasty reading of "the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians" might give the reader the impression that the Corinthians spurned all the help they had received. Paul had to speak to them as men of the flesh.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Acts 18:11

⁵¹I Cor. 9:12-15

⁵²Phil. 4:15

⁵³Acts 18:3

⁵⁴I Cor. 3:1-4

He had to reprimand them for their sinful pride.⁵⁵ The reader has cause to be shocked to find them tolerating incest.⁵⁶ He will take note of their lovelessness, Christians bringing court charges against their fellow-Christians in heathen courts.⁵⁷ Even their church services were disrupted by their contentions.⁵⁸ Paul himself was forced to say that he feared many would be found sinning when he returned to the congregation, and, worst of all, would not repent of the evil they had done.⁵⁹ From this it appears that the Corinthians needed help first of all to see their need of help.

The same must be said of some of the congregations in Asia Minor, as is clear from the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, addressed to them by the Lord Himself through the Apostle John. One of the congregations is pictured as being so lukewarm that the God of all patience warns that He will spew them out of His mouth.⁶⁰ Another is spiritually dead.⁶¹ Another is tolerating

⁵⁵I Cor. 4:7 ff.

⁵⁶I Cor. 5:1

⁵⁷I Cor. 6:1-10

⁵⁸I Cor. 11:17 ff.

⁵⁹II Cor. 12:21

⁶⁰Rev. 3:16

⁶¹Rev. 3:1

immorality.⁶² Such circumstances seem to indicate that men want no help and deserve no help toward Christian living.

After two thousand years of Gospel preaching, the same results are still found in many places. Ministers of the Word, attending a conference, at times pour out their heart to fellow-workers. They can see no result of their labors. It actually seems as though people want no help in Christian living because they do not want to grow in Christ. They want to hold on to the world, to continue in at least a few of the evil pleasures which were so much a part of their life before conversion,⁶³ or, having spent their youth in a Christian home, to experience at least a little of the unhampered life of unbelievers. Every servant of the Word has felt at times that his people seem to resent it when he speaks to them of the life in Christ. They seem to hate the detailed account of what constitutes Christian living. Christianity becomes a maze of laws for them. "You must not do this," "you must not do that," "you must do this," "you must do that." If Christianity were presented to them in this way, they would have cause for complaint. But even when it is properly presented, they seem to see nothing but law, law, law. In times like these the Church has

⁶²Rev. 2:20

⁶³Eph. 2:3

no room for impatient, timid, fearful, discouraged servants of the Word. They will not be able to offer the help men need. The Church must see the challenge in men's needs⁶⁴ and fearlessly, courageously carry on in spite of all obstacles, yes, because of the obstacles, knowing that these are set up by Satan,⁶⁵ that it is the duty and responsibility of the Church to help men see that the real cause behind their problems is Satan himself⁶⁶ and then to urge and aid them to put on the whole armor of God that they may be able to stand in the evil day.⁶⁷ It should be clear from this that men are in sore need of help.

Regarding the needs of men, one final point should still be stressed and that is the fact that all Christians need such help in Christian growth.

The temptation arises at times to be satisfied with conditions as they are. Some members of the church are weak, some strong. Since that was true in the days of the Apostles,⁶⁸ it is likely that it will be true today. But the danger lies in expecting too little of the weak, and being perfectly satisfied with the achievements of the strong. The hymn writer seems to have given voice to this

⁶⁴Mt. 18:12

⁶⁵Mt. 13:39

⁶⁶Eph. 6:11,12

⁶⁷Eph. 6:13-17

⁶⁸Rom. 15:1

sentiment when he wrote:

If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

If you cannot give your thousands,
You can give the widow's mite,
And the least you give for Jesus
Will be precious in His sight.⁶⁹

The Scriptures clearly teach that "the least" men should do for Jesus is constantly to seek to do more.⁷⁰

No man will ever reach perfection. Thus growth is possible for all.⁷¹

Christian growth will, of course, not be the same for all, for no two people are alike. Their need of growth and their need of help in such growth will, therefore, be different. A factor that enters in here is men's temperament. Some people are more sanguine than others, some more phlegmatic, some choleric, some melancholic. Formerly it was thought that the types were due to a preponderance of one or another body fluid. Modern psychologists, though they are not returning to this line of thought, do find a relation of temperament to physical structure of

⁶⁹In fairness to Daniel March, the author of the hymn, it should be stated that he wrote the hymn in great haste. The inferences drawn from these lines were hardly intended by him. Cf. W. G. Polack, compiler, The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), p. 347.

⁷⁰II Pet. 1:5

⁷¹Eph. 4:13 ff.

the body.⁷²

Since psychologists teach that there is relatively little chance to modify temperament through development, the church leaders are in danger of taking people as they are, feeling that since little can be done to change their temperament little can be done to change their life. They find one member more joyful and happy than others, another tempted to lose his temper, another not easily involved in anything constructive, whether that is a collection for missions, a church canvass, or the like and they are likely to say: That is his temperament. What they fail to see is that the flesh is involved in the feelings of men.⁷³ And the flesh can be subdued.⁷⁴ The spirit can be activated to the point where men actually change their whole way of life.⁷⁵

The church worker must see the need of helping one member to control his temper, another to become active in Christian living, another to analyze his happy-go-lucky attitude to see whether he is not guilty of indifference to the needs of others. He may never have

⁷²Cf. Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindsey, Theories of Personality (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1957), pp. 356 ff. The authors report favorably on the findings of William H. Sheldon on the relation of the physical structure of the body and temperament.

⁷³I Jn. 2:16

⁷⁴Gal. 5:24

⁷⁵Rom. 12:2

faced up to the realities of life.

It will be difficult for the servant of the Word to give attention to the needs of each individual, but he should strive toward that goal, knowing that every Christian is in need of help, and every Christian, even the weakest, can be helped.

The more he gives attention to the individual, the more he will also be conscious of the many needs of men.

Halford Luccock speaks of the

. . . oppressive sense of insignificance felt by many In these days of great impersonal forces running over the earth like gigantic tanks, we have pressed on us the feeling of being "non-entities." . . . There is the feeling of the futility of life and the absence of hope.⁷⁶

The help men need is not easily given. "Be very clear about this," says Stewart,

that what men and women need, face to face with the mystery of pain and trouble and tragedy, is not a solution that will satisfy the intellect, not that primarily at any rate, but a force that will stabilize the soul; not a convincing and coercive argument as to the origins of evil or the reasons why such suffering is permitted on the earth, but a power that will enable them to "stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.": in short, not an explanation, but a victory.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Luccock, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-80. So also James Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Scribners, 1956), p. 21; H. H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), pp. 116 f.; Perry Gresham, *Disciplines of the High Calling* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1954), p. 49.

⁷⁷Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 f.

The Christian pastor or teacher, conscious of the needs of men, may well ask how he, a poor sinner himself, will be able to provide for all whom God has put into his care. At such times he should look to the Lord of the Church, mindful of the fact that all good gifts come from Him and that He is able to help above man's comprehension.⁷⁸ The pastor need only use the Word of God to find in it the power of God. His duty, however, is to use the Word of God in his ministry and to use it according to God's instructions, as these will be set forth in the following chapter.

⁷⁸II Cor. 3:4-6

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROPER USE OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Lord Jesus, speaking to His disciples, promised that He Himself would build His Church.¹ The Apostles held to this teaching, pointing out that the Church was built on Christ² and by Christ through the Spirit.³ But if this is true, it may seem difficult to explain the fact that one pastor, working in a given congregation, appears to be very successful, though his predecessor seems to have failed. Both used the Word of God. Both have relied on the power of the Word. Yet there was a great difference in their ministry. The lack of growth in such a congregation must often be attributed to the servant of Christ, and that not because he was not using the Word of God, but because he was not using it properly. This chapter will deal with the proper use of the Word of God.

The Word of God is a great power for good, but, as with every powerful medium, it must be properly applied. The potent drug, when misapplied, can kill the patient

¹Mt. 16:18

²I Cor. 3:10,11

³Eph. 2:20-22

whom it was intended to cure. The Word of God can do the same.

In one instance it is called a power of God unto salvation,⁴ in another it is likened to a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.⁵ In one instance it convicts of sin and delivers man to Satan,⁶ in another it sustains man in the faith and gives him power over Satan.⁷ In one instance it is likened to a two-edged sword, dividing body and spirit,⁸ in another it is a means of preserving unity and peace.⁹ It can, then, have very different results.

It is important that it be used properly, especially in view of its great powers. The havoc that can be caused by a powerful racing car in the hands of an inexperienced driver is as nothing compared with the devastation that can be wrought by one who does not understand the use of the Word of God as he seeks to apply it to the needs of men.

This is seen, for instance, in the misuse of the oft-quoted Bible passage, God is love.¹⁰ It is a comforting

⁴Rom. 1:16

⁵Jer. 23:29

⁶I Cor. 5:4

⁷I Pet. 1:5; Lk. 9:1

⁸Heb. 4:12

⁹Eph. 4:1 ff.

¹⁰I Jn. 4:8

truth of God's Word. But in the hands of unfaithful or uninformed teachers of the Word it has undoubtedly lulled thousands into a complacency that will lead them straight to hell, as is done when the sinner is told not to take his sins seriously because God is love and will damn no one.

That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God¹¹ is another true statement of the Word. But used at the wrong time it will convince a person that there is no help for him and so may drive him away from the Lord unless further instruction in the Word is given at once.

No one would be satisfied merely to remind a bereaved family that the wages of sin is death.¹² But that is no more heartless than to withhold this truth from one who says he is perfectly willing to take the consequences for his evil life.

Man must face the fact that in the Scriptures the living God has much to say to every person on earth. But he does not always, no, not even too often say to one what he says to another. He knows men as individuals, as well as groups.

When the paralytic was placed before Him He told him to be of good cheer and assured him of the forgiveness of

¹¹Rom. 3:23

¹²Rom. 6:23

sins.¹³ He would not have said that to the rich young ruler who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life.¹⁴ When the widow cast her two mites into the treasury, He commended her for her action.¹⁵ He would have commended few others for giving the same amount.¹⁶

When an adulteress anointed His feet He spoke of her love.¹⁷ He would not have said the same if she were continuing in her sin.¹⁸

When Peter on one occasion assured Christ that he would not leave Him Jesus accepted the promise¹⁹ but on another occasion the same promise was met with a terrible warning.²⁰

In Old Testament times already He promised Abraham that the Messiah would come from his Seed.²¹ That promise was not given to any of Abraham's brothers.²² Jacob received the promise from Isaac according to the will of

¹³Lk. 5:20

¹⁴Lk. 18:18

¹⁵Mk. 12:43

¹⁶Mk. 12:44

¹⁷Lk. 7:44-48

¹⁸Eph. 5:5

¹⁹Jn. 6:68 f.

²⁰Mt. 26:34

²¹Gen. 22:18

²²Gen. 12:1

God²³ though Esau sought it with tears.²⁴

Often the Lord dealt with a group. In the book of Amos God's judgments are pronounced against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel. Yet in each instance the prophecy is different.²⁵

The Egyptians were threatened with terrible plagues.²⁶ At the same time God promised protection to the Israelites.²⁷

The land of Judah was promised an heir on the throne throughout their generations.²⁸ No such promise was given to Israel. In fact the very first dynasty continued through only two generations.²⁹

The person who is responsible for the application of God's Word to men must, therefore, be on guard against a faulty application. If the individual is to feel that God is speaking to him, the minister of the Word must bring him a message which God wants him to hear, a message which truly applies to him.

A search of the Scriptures will reveal many truths

²³Gen. 27:27 ff; Cf. 25:23

²⁴Gen. 27:34

²⁵Amos 1 and 2

²⁶Eph. 7:48 ff.

²⁷Ex. 7:4

²⁸Gen. 49:10

²⁹I Kings 15:27

which will apply to every congregation and to every individual member, because they apply to all men. When the Lord says, All have sinned,³⁰ He means all. When He says that there is not a just man on earth,³¹ He permits no exceptions. A pastor, using such passages in his sermon, can apply them directly to his hearers. He can say that all have sinned, that not one is just.

But it is entirely different with the many specific sins mentioned in the Scriptures. The passion story includes a number of them, possibly some of the worst of them. Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss after he had fallen from grace and though he was later sorry for the wrong he had done he showed no faith. He despaired and in that frame of mind went and hanged himself. He is, therefore, called the son of perdition,³² an expression with which Scripture describes only one other, namely, the antichrist.³³ It is not proper, in view of this fact, to accuse those whom Christ Himself has kept in the faith of having committed the sin of Judas. That has been done more than once in Lenten preaching. But it is wrong to do so. Many have denied Christ. They will

³⁰Rom. 3:23

³¹Ecc1. 20

³²Jn. 17:12

³³II Thess. 2:3

also be denied.³⁴ But in the very instance where this is foretold, the Savior promises to confess those who have not denied, but confessed Him.³⁵

In the passion story Peter's shameful denial is described. The Scriptures expressly state that Peter cursed and swore with an oath that he did not know Christ. That is not said of John or of any other disciple. Jesus' treatment of Peter was therefore, different from His treatment of John after His resurrection.³⁶ The Lord purposely used Peter after he had been converted again³⁷ to warn against the old evil foe who walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.³⁸ With the account of Peter's fall from grace, the Holy Spirit showed the constant need with Christ's help to withstand the devil's temptations. Thus even the gross sins of Judas and Peter are used by the Lord to keep Christians today from straying.

A careful study of the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, recorded in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, reveals Christ's manner of applying the Word of God to congregations and to in-

³⁴Mt. 10:33

³⁵Mt. 10:32

³⁶Jn. 21:15-22

³⁷Lk. 22:32

³⁸I Pet. 5:8

dividual members. He does not group them all together. Though all have sinned, He makes a careful distinction between them. Some of the congregations are denounced for their grievous sins. In others, only a group in the congregation or even individuals are singled out as being guilty of certain sins. The congregation at Ephesus is criticized for not loving as much as it did at first and is told to repent.³⁹ But this charge is mild compared with that leveled against the Nicolaitans, who were troubling the congregation. God said He hated their practice.⁴⁰

Against the congregation at Smyrna the Lord brings no charge whatever but He condemns the Jews who were troubling the congregation as being of the synagog of Satan and thus on the road to hell.⁴¹ Some of the members at Smyrna would be imprisoned but they were not to consider it a punishment for sin but a test of faith which would be rewarded by their gracious God.⁴² The congregation at Pergamus was troubled with adherents of a false teaching but God held it against the whole congregation that they permitted the abuse. The whole congregation was therefore called upon to repent.⁴³ Evidently

³⁹Rev. 2:4,5

⁴⁰Rev. 2:6

⁴¹Rev. 2:9

⁴²Rev. 2:10

⁴³Rev. 2:14-16

the sinners had been permitted to remain members of the congregation as was the case with the incestuous man at Corinth.⁴⁴ A similar charge was leveled at the congregation in Thyatira but in this instance the Lord stated specifically that He would deal with the members as individuals. He would search their hearts and minds and would repay each for what he had done.⁴⁵ But on the rest of the members, who were not guilty, He laid no burden but to hold on to the Word.⁴⁶ The congregation at Sardis received a most severe censure. Either they must wake up from their sinful lethargy or they would be destroyed.⁴⁷ But the faithful few were assured that they would not suffer with the group.⁴⁸

This is a lesson in the use of the Word of God that must be learned if men wish to be considered the mouth-piece of God.

Luccock warns that

with the enlargement of communication there is very frequently the result, and always the danger, of mere diffusion rather than any distinction.⁴⁹

⁴⁴I Cor. 5:1,2

⁴⁵Rev. 2:23

⁴⁶Rev. 2:24

⁴⁷Rev. 3:1,2

⁴⁸Rev. 3:4

⁴⁹H. E. Luccock, Communicating the Gospel (New York: Harpers, 1954), p. 17.

The words of Farmer are also in place here. He insists

The preacher must himself have a profound reverence for the truth and must take care that in his desire to drive home his main message he never succumbs to the temptation of making statements which are unverified and unverifiable and will not bear critical examination. Such carelessness, even on small matters, quickly destroys confidence. That is one reason why honest and sound exegesis of the text is so important. To twist a text to your message, even if it be a great and true message, imparts a flavour of sham and pretence to the whole thing.⁵⁰

The misapplication of a message dealing with sin could give occasion to weak Christians to console themselves with the thought that since they are not guilty of such sins, they have no cause to fear. Thus a wholesale accusation of denial or betrayal accusing a group of Christians of committing the sins of Peter or Judas may blind men's eyes to their own particular sins and lead them to false security, for in their hearts they will justify themselves since they know they are not guilty of the sins of which they are accused. They should on such an occasion have been led to praise the Lord for His goodness in preserving them in the faith. Not having been led to do so, they take the credit themselves for their "good life".

Paul in his day also warned against leaders in the Church who purposely lead men along the paths which they

⁵⁰H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), p. 73.

have substituted for the way of truth.⁵¹ Those who follow them show that they do not love the truth, for which cause God says He will make them believe what is false.⁵² In view of all this, it is of utmost importance that God's Law be properly applied.

The misapplication of the promises given in Scripture also leads to difficulties. There are passages that apply to all men and should, therefore, be applied to every Christian. When Paul says by inspiration that Christ died for all,⁵³ and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,⁵⁴ he is giving a message for the world. This assurance of salvation is universal.

But the God of grace, Who has given this assurance to all Christians, gives special gifts to some and withholds them from others. Each Christian is remembered by the Lord with gifts and blessings, but these gifts and blessings are often as different from one another as are the people to whom they are given. Paul brings this out very clearly in the first epistle to the Corinthians where he shows that some have received special enlightenment that they may enlighten the church, others have received the gift of wisdom that they may advise their

⁵¹II Thess. 2:3 ff.

⁵²II Thess. 2:11

⁵³II Cor. 5:15

⁵⁴II Cor. 5:19

fellow-believers, still others have been given the gift to cure the sick, or to speak in tongues, or to detect false doctrine, or to preach the Word.⁵⁵

He likens the members of the congregation to the members of a human body, an eye, an ear, a hand, a foot, God Himself arranging the parts as He chooses.⁵⁶

These facts are often ignored when statements are made with regard to God's special gifts of grace. Christians are promised gifts which God has no intention of giving them. The fact that Paul received certain gifts from God gives the Christian today no assurance that he will have the same. The fact that Paul was successful in a certain undertaking gives no assurance that success also awaits the missionary today in a similar situation. So often the account of blessings poured out on individuals is misused as an assurance that God will give the same blessings to all. If these blessings are forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, the Church can point to clear passages of Scripture to assure men that the same blessings are theirs to enjoy. But if the blessing is an open door, as it was promised to the congregation in Philadelphia in Asia Minor,⁵⁷ the Church has no right to say that God will bless every congregation with such oppor-

⁵⁵I Cor. 12:4-11

⁵⁶I Cor. 12:12 ff.

⁵⁷Rev. 3:8

tunities for mission work. In the seven letters to the Churches in Asia Minor the Lord did not promise an open door to each of the seven churches addressed. He dealt differently with each of them. He still deals differently with His children, giving one gift to one and a different gift to another. The pastor or teacher who promises the same gifts to all deceives his hearers and closes their eyes to the gifts which they have received from God, thus keeping them from proper worship of a good and gracious Father, who gives to each child what will benefit him most.

The many miracles recorded in Scripture might cause a pastor to infer that miracles will also be performed today, or that God's special help to a paralytic, a leper, a lame man is proof that He will similarly heal men today if they have enough faith to be healed. The evangelist St. John, however, clearly states in the Gospel of St. John that the account of Christ's miracles was given that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.⁵⁸ Accordingly, their purpose was not to teach what bodily help Christ will give those who believe in Him, though His power to help may well be referred to.

These remarks should suffice to show the difficulty involved in the proper use of the Word of God, and the need of proper guidance in this important task. But to

⁵⁸Jn. 20:31

give rules on the proper use of the Word is not easy, nor is it always safe to follow the rules given. Circumstances alter cases. Only the Holy Spirit can properly direct men in the use of the Word. But since He does this in the Word itself, it is important that the Word be studied with all diligence, noting especially the clear distinction between Law and Gospel lest men lose sight of their proper distinction.⁵⁹ However, before a person is able properly to approach the question of the distinction of Law and Gospel he must understand the purpose of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul declares their purpose to be to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ.⁶⁰ The Evangelist St. John says that his Gospel was written that men might know that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world.⁶¹ The servant of the Word of the New Testament is therefore to be a minister, not of the letter of the Law, but of the Word of the life-giving Spirit.⁶²

That does not rule out the need of the Law. Paul clearly shows that in the "Epistle to the Romans", where he speaks repeatedly of it. But its purpose is to prepare

⁵⁹Rom. 4:13-16

⁶⁰II Tim. 3:15

⁶¹Jn. 20:31

⁶²II Cor. 3:6-11

the way for the preaching of the Gospel.⁶³ The person who seeks to understand the Scriptures must, therefore, see the message of Christ the Savior as the center and purpose of both the Old⁶⁴ and the New Testament.⁶⁵

Since Christ is the center of Scripture, only he who believes what the Scriptures say of Christ is able also to grasp the rest of Scripture truth. And this he can do only through the gift of the Spirit.⁶⁶ But with the Spirit to guide him, he is able to grasp the fact that in the Word, God uses the Law and Gospel, as two entirely separate and distinct teachings, to accomplish His purpose. These two distinct parts of Scripture Scripture itself identifies.

The Law was given by God to show man his sin,⁶⁷ to prove to man that his life is contrary to the will of God in thought, word, and deed.⁶⁸ The fact that it reveals sin and was given for that purpose does not make the Law itself an evil thing. On the contrary, the Law is holy.⁶⁹ It is a gift of God to all mankind. It will,

⁶³Rom. 3:20-24; Gal. 3:10-14

⁶⁴Jn. 5:39

⁶⁵Jn. 20:31

⁶⁶I Cor. 2:14

⁶⁷Rom. 3:20

⁶⁸Rom. 5:20

⁶⁹Rom. 7:12

therefore, be effective on earth to the end of time.⁷⁰

But, as Paul points out, the Law is good if a man uses it lawfully.⁷¹ It was not given to bring sinful man to God, since no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God.⁷²

Accordingly, the Law is to be used to show man his sin.

Whoever does not recognize his sins, needs the Law. And this law has the power to convict him of sin.⁷³ When John the Baptist came with his message of repentance, men trembled before him, confessing their sins.⁷⁴ When Peter accused the Jews of killing the Prince of Life, they were convinced of their sin, and asked what they should do to be saved.⁷⁵

That is the purpose of the Law, It convicts man of sin and condemns him as a sinner. It does that even to the Christian. When he reads the Law or hears it preached he must admit that he has not met its demands and is, therefore, guilty of sin.⁷⁶ But there is a great difference between the Christian and the unbeliever as they hear the Law of God. For the unbeliever, the Law has one

⁷⁰Mt. 5:18

⁷¹I Tim. 1:8

⁷²Gal. 3:11

⁷³Rom. 3:19,20

⁷⁴Mt. 3:6

⁷⁵Acts 2:37

⁷⁶Rom. 7:14 ff.

of three results. It causes him to rebel against God,⁷⁷ or to seek work-righteousness to silence his conscience,⁷⁸ or to despair.⁷⁹ And in each instance he hates God as his enemy because of what he experiences.⁸⁰ The Christian, on the other hand, is humbled by the Law and sees his sins, but in this state he flees to God for forgiveness.⁸¹

The Law, of course, does not tell the Christian of forgiveness. That is the message of the Gospel, the good news that Jesus is the Savior from sin.⁸² Actually, the Gospel is much more than the good news of salvation. It is the power of God unto salvation.⁸³ As the Law has power to convict, so the Gospel has power to convert.⁸⁴ It seems to have no such power. The preaching of the cross of Christ is actually considered foolish by most men.⁸⁵ They see in it nothing but the greatest weakness.⁸⁶ But those who believe have found it the power

⁷⁷Ex. 5:2; Ps. 2:2,3

⁷⁸Is. 58:2,3; Mt. 19:20; Lk. 10:25-29

⁷⁹Gen. 4:14; Mt. 27:3-5

⁸⁰Rom. 8:7

⁸¹Rom. 7:24,25

⁸²Mt. 1:21

⁸³Rom. 1:16

⁸⁴I Pet. 1:23; I Cor. 4:15

⁸⁵I Cor. 1:21-25

⁸⁶I Cor. 1:25

and wisdom of God.⁸⁷ As sure as they are of their sins through the preaching of the Law,⁸⁸ so sure are they of forgiveness through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.⁸⁹ That is its purpose and that indicates its proper use.

Up to this point the distinction between Law and Gospel is clear. The Law shows man his sins. The Gospel shows him his Savior. It is necessary to consider the relation of Law and Gospel to the question of Christian growth. The point to be considered is whether that is a life under the Law or under the Gospel or under both Law and Gospel.

Edmund Schlink takes up the question in his book Theologie der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften. Basing his remarks especially on the "epistle of Paul to the Romans" he answers it about as follows: The Christian does not live under the Law but in the Law. Through the operation of the Holy Spirit he finds joy in the commandments of the Lord and works to keep the will of God, but always with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, of course, directs him to the same Law through which God judges and punishes the sinner. But his obedience to this Law is not one of demand but an operation of the Spirit in him,

⁸⁷I Cor. 1:18 ff.

⁸⁸Rom. 3:20

⁸⁹Acts 10:43

Who, having put Christ into his heart, permits the works of Christ to flow out of his heart. His good works are thus the fruit of his faith and of the Spirit, Who has worked that faith in him and brings forth its fruit in his life.⁹⁰

Inasmuch as the life in Christ is a life in the Law, it is necessary that even the child of God study the Law that he may know the godly life.⁹¹ But the Law will not produce the life in Christ.⁹² That is the work of the Gospel of Christ.⁹³ With the assurance of the Gospel in his heart, the Christian can approach the Law as the will of His gracious heavenly Father and see its holiness and perfection,⁹⁴ but even this attitude toward the Law is never the work of the Law itself but always and only the work of the Gospel and thus the work of the Holy Spirit, Who alone can give this Word of grace.⁹⁵

The Scriptures thus indicate that even the Christian has nothing to boast about. His good works are the works

⁹⁰Cf. Edmund Schlink, Theologie der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (Muenchen: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 3. Auflage, 1948), p. 161 ff.

⁹¹Ps. 1:119

⁹²Rom. 3:20

⁹³Eph. 2:10

⁹⁴Rom. 7:12

⁹⁵I Cor. 12:3

of Christ in him.⁹⁶ It is only for Christ's sake that God accepts them at all.⁹⁷ But for Christ's sake He does accept them as evidences of love and fruits of faith.⁹⁸ It is, therefore, important that the Christian offer himself and his works to the Lord in unceasing praise and thanks.⁹⁹

All this should also emphasize the importance of the ministry of the Word. The called ministers of the Word are to a great extent responsible for the life of their members. As has already been stated,¹⁰⁰ they are shepherds of the flock, who must lead the sheep to the green pastures of the Word. They are the stewards of the mysteries of God, who must give to each his due. They are the ambassadors of Christ, who must beseech men to be reconciled to God.¹⁰¹ As they do this work they need the Law in all its severity, that they may show men their sins.¹⁰² And they need the Gospel in all its sweetness, that they may comfort men in the knowledge of forgiveness and may

⁹⁶Jn. 15:5

⁹⁷Gal. 2:20

⁹⁸Jn. 13:35; Tit. 3:8

⁹⁹Rom. 12:1

¹⁰⁰Cf. Chapter V, footnote 66

¹⁰¹II Cor. 5:20

¹⁰²Rom. 3:20; 5:20

lead them on in Christian faith and life,¹⁰³ helping them with the strength from above to grow in Christian living. It is a glorious work.¹⁰⁴ It is also an important work¹⁰⁵ for which cause all Christ's children have reason to pray for His blessings on the faithful ministers of the Word.¹⁰⁶

The fact that the minister must look to God for guidance and blessing¹⁰⁷ does not in any way minimize the importance of his own work. On the contrary, the very fact that God is using men to proclaim His Word as a means of converting their fellowmen,¹⁰⁸ bringing them to faith in Christ, their Savior, and helping them to dedicate their life to Him¹⁰⁹ should make it clear to the Christian minister that it devolves upon him to preach the Word of God with all the power and persuasion at his command.¹¹⁰ Not that this will add to the effectiveness of the Word.¹¹¹ But the failure of the minister to use

¹⁰³Acts 10:43

¹⁰⁴Eph. 4:11 ff.

¹⁰⁵Rom. 10:14

¹⁰⁶Col. 4:3; I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1

¹⁰⁷Mt. 28:20; Rev. 2 and 3

¹⁰⁸II Cor. 5:19

¹⁰⁹Rom. 12:1

¹¹⁰II Tim. 4:1-2

¹¹¹II Cor. 3:5

his talents and abilities to the fullest measure may and often does hinder the Word of God from becoming effective in the hearts and lives of men.¹¹²

He who considers the high and holy purpose which God has in mind when His Word is proclaimed to men, has reason to ask, Who is sufficient to use the Word of God? To this Paul answers, No one is sufficient of himself. But God makes men able ministers of His Word.¹¹³ The servant of the Word must always bear in mind that the Word of God which has been given to him is much more than an account of what God has done and what He wants man to do. It is actually God's own means of accomplishing His glorious purposes. In this sense, the preaching of the Word is His work, not the work of man.

¹¹²Jn. 10:12,13

¹¹³II Cor. 3:5

CHAPTER IX

GETTING TO WORK WITH THE WORD

In previous chapters, attention was given to the description given in Scriptures of man in the state of grace,¹ the flesh and spirit in him like two powerful forces, seeking to regulate his life,² the Scriptures making it partly his own responsibility to concern himself about Christian growth³ showing him the life he is to seek to lead,⁴ and assuring him of the help of the Lord. But the responsibility for growth in Christian living was also placed on the minister of the Word,⁵ who was confronted, on the one hand, with the needs of men requiring his attention,⁶ and, on the other hand, with the Word of God, which he must be careful to use according to the directions given in that Word to accomplish his God-given purposes.⁷

Accordingly, a number of guide lines have been

¹Chapter III

²Chapter IV

³Chapter V

⁴Chapter VI

⁵Chapter V

⁶Chapter VII

⁷Chapter VIII

given to the Christian and especially also to the servant of the Word to aid in Christian growth. These have, for the most part, been drawn directly from the Word or have been based on the clear teaching of the Word.

The purpose in this chapter is to bring together a number of these guidelines, focusing them more definitely and clearly on the work of the servant of the Word as he seeks to lead and guide his members in Christian living.

The servant of the Word is here thought of with a specific assignment before him: a sermon for the following Sunday, a Bible class discussion, a lecture to a Christian group. As he comes to grips with any or all such assignments, he needs to follow a number of directives, among which the following seem essential:

- a. The faithful minister will see himself as he is.
- b. The faithful minister will count up his resources.
- c. The faithful minister will start with men where they are.
- d. The faithful minister will help men see themselves as they are.
- e. The faithful minister will give evidence of his concern for men.
- f. The faithful minister will enlist the aid of men in promoting their Christian growth.
- g. The faithful minister will offer men the help of God's Word.
- h. The faithful minister will give all glory to God.

a.

The Faithful Minister Will See Himself as He Is.

As the minister goes about his work, he will often find that a particular assignment, especially a more difficult assignment, will draw attention to itself. The closeness of the deadline, the difficulty of the work, the demanding nature of his hearers, as he is apt to think of them, all call for his attention and he sees himself caught in the midst of it all. Suddenly the assignment becomes great and he finds himself taking inventory of his knowledge of the subject, of a possible approach to it, of whether he can offer anything worthwhile, that has not been said a hundred times before.

While thinking of these things the minister of the Word may also be mindful of some of the warnings that he has heard concerning the proper use of his time while in the pulpit or while standing before a group. He may remember the words of Ramm:

The preacher is a minister of the Word of God. He is not a person who has a full and free right of sermonizing before a group of people. If he is a true minister of God, he is bound to the ministry of the Word of God. He has only one claim to the right to preach and demand decision and that is that he is declaring the truth of God.⁸

or the warning of Walther:

The time you spend in the pulpit is most valuable; it may determine the well being, here and hereafter, of many thousands of people. Pity the preacher who does not redeem that time by offering

⁸Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Complete Revised edition; Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), p. 176.

his hearers the very best that he is able to give.⁹
 The weight of the responsibility resting upon him does not make his task any easier. Craig points up this responsibility when he comments that:

The paradox of the pulpit is that its occupant is a sinner whose chief right to be there is his perpetual sense that he has no right to be there, and is there only by grace and always under a spotlight of divine judgment. And certainly the pulpit ought to be the voice of the teaching Church, the place where 'all the counsel of God' is declared, as it has been made known to the Church and verified in its life down the centuries, and not merely the place where some bright young lad or some pompous old boy is obliging enough to give his personal certificate to certain aspects of Christian truth.¹⁰

James Stewart puts his finger on the sore spot in all of this when he admits that:

We are desperately self-conscious creatures, and that miserable fact of self-love tends to thrust its way into the picture even in our work for Christ.¹¹

All of this can easily give the servant of the Word a false sense of inadequacy to do the Lord's work. He is apt to feel that all depends on him, as though the Lord had suddenly left him to his own devices. He runs the danger of not taking God at His Word as a God of grace. He may find himself growing timid as he thinks

⁹C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), p. 298.

¹⁰A. C. Craig, Preaching in a Scientific Age (New York, Scribners, 1954), pp. 104-105.

¹¹James Stewart, Heralds of God (New York: Scribners, 1956), p. 187.

of the need of confronting men with their sins and shortcomings. If even Moses, that great man of God, feared to speak to the children of Israel¹² and Elijah, the prophet of God, found it difficult to carry on,¹³ he surely cannot be censured too severely for doubting his own ability. He may also wonder what effect his message will have on his hearers. He may forget that it is not he, but the Spirit of God alone who can convince and convict men as the Word is preached or taught.

Soul searching, of course, does have its place. It may be good at times. It may serve the purpose of keeping the minister of the Word humble in his office, lest he assume an ultra-professional attitude toward his work. But he should not carry such a self-examination too far, for to do so is to lose sight of his resources.

b.

The Faithful Minister Will Count Up His Resources.

It is strange that the minister of the Word who is often so quick to see the need of others is at times so slow to see his own need of the help that God so freely offers. Yet it is all in the Word: The message is there,¹⁴ the power is there to proclaim it to men,¹⁵ and

¹²Ex. 4:1

¹³I Kings 19:4

¹⁴I Pet. 2:9; II Cor. 4:5

¹⁵Rom. 1:16

the Holy Spirit promises to accompany the Word with His power,¹⁶ to impress it upon men, and to bring forth fruit unto righteousness.¹⁷ All that the minister needs is faith to believe it. And even this is supplied to all who look to the Lord as their only source of knowledge and power and wisdom.¹⁸

In the measure in which he faces up to these truths in each and every assignment, he will also find success attending his efforts. He must, however, be conscious of the fact that his work is based on the Word of God.

Schroeder, in speaking of preaching, rightly says:

The substance of preaching is first and foremost a divinely given Word rather than the product of human thought, meditation, or speculation. Again, let it be understood that man's brooding over the given Word enters the picture, but this is secondary. The given Word is the primary element.¹⁹

Later in the same book he states that

Authority in the pulpit can scarcely be conveyed unless there is evidence that the minister himself has come under the authority of the divine Word. He must know himself as one spoken to in order to speak convincingly to others. Israel's prophets spoke, and spoke so persuasively, because the Word of the Lord had put them under its bondage so completely that they had to speak. Little wonder that kings and courtiers felt uneasy when these fearless messengers of God appeared in public to make pronouncement in the name of Jehovah of Hosts. Un-

¹⁶II Cor. 3:5,6

¹⁷Jn. 6:29; I Cor. 1:4-7

¹⁸Jn. 17:8; Eph. 1:19

¹⁹Frederick W. Schroeder, Preaching the Word With Authority (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 43.

less there is certainty within the preacher's heart his words are not apt to carry conviction.²⁰

The certainty which should be in the minister's heart is that his assignment has been given to him by God, and that actually it is God, not he, who is addressing men. This he must keep in mind. That, however, does not relieve him of responsibility and work. Stewart wisely reminds him that

When we as preachers count upon the aid of the Holy Spirit to give us utterance, we would do well to reflect that the promise is conditional upon the loyalty of common days. The Spirit of the Lord will be upon us in proportion as our work has been earnest and faithful and ungrudging.²¹

To this end, the servant of the Word has cause to follow the admonition of Broadus, one of the great homileticians of a former day, who exhorts that

In a spirit of personal devoutness, with a desire for personal benefit, and with the constant prayer that God would bless us in learning and in teaching, let us study the Bible that we may 'both save ourselves, and them that hear us'.²²

The servant of the Word who thus works with God is assured of success. It may not always be the success that he himself has had in mind, but the purpose of the Lord will be carried out, and that is, after all, the only thing that should matter.

²⁰Ibid., p. 119.

²¹Stewart, op. cit., p. 116.

²²J. B. Weatherspoon, Revision of Broadus on The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 79.

c.

The Faithful Minister Will Start With Men Where They Are.

When the servant of the Word begins with himself, he is dealing with a known quantity. A bit of introspection, a careful analysis of what he finds in his heart and mind, and he is ready with his diagnosis. The Word, in turn, supplies his needs as he sees them and he is ready for work. But it is not so easy to start with the hearers where they are. For though he addresses them as a group, he must also see them as individuals.

Here, for instance, is a congregation gathered for worship. In attendance is a young married couple, just back from the honeymoon. The pastor knows that their attitude toward the church is no longer what it was a few weeks ago. As they look to the altar, they imagine themselves kneeling before it. As they look to the pastor, they remember some bit of counsel that he gave them from the Word of God. In the same pew with them the pastor sees a father with his children. The people sitting in back of them see them, too. In fact, most of the people in church are well aware of their presence. The pastor senses that his whole congregation is wondering why God took the mother so early in life. It will not be easy for him at once to direct their thoughts to the message he wishes to bring them from the Word of God.

Others in the congregation also have their problems. These may seem entirely unrelated. The business man has

had the problem of meeting unfair competition. The unskilled worker has had a problem in just making a living. For as Neil points out, the "stupendous advances in scientific knowledge and achievement during the last century" did not result in a richer life for man but brought more crises.²³ The mother of seven children has had the problem of feeding and clothing them and at the same time giving them the loving care that they so sorely need in this day and age, where parents are tending increasingly to pamper themselves and in consequence are teaching the children so little by precept and example.²⁴ She does not want her children to grow up as others are. The aged person may have the problem of keeping active in a home that seems to function better without his help. The youth has a real problem with dates--not the history-text variety. The child is having trouble breaking into a gang or club. All of these are real problems in the mind of those who must face them. The pastor dare not close his eyes to the needs of these parishioners. He must have something to say to the child, the youth, the mother, the business man, the worker, the aged. Brown suggests that
 by some sort of spiritual X-ray the preacher
 If

²³William Neil, The Rediscovery of the Bible (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 9.

²⁴Cf. Bernard Iddings Bell, The Crisis in Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949), p. 98.

could pierce through the concealment of ordinary conventions and behold the moral crises, the spiritual famines and the personal tragedies to which he is called to minister, the very sight of it all would stir up the dullest man who was ever ordained into something of the eagerness and effectiveness of real preaching.²⁵

Gresham sees people coming to church

overborne with loneliness in a crowded world, crushed with a sense of guilt in a sinful world, defeated by circumstance in a competitive society, desolated by grief in a world of mortality, lost and groping in a wasteland of existence, anxious about friends, food and the future. They come to hear God speak to them through the Word and the messenger. It is part of the disciplines of the preacher to provide the word fitly spoken that will find its mark like a shining arrow.²⁶

If a pastor were to get into his pulpit on Sunday morning and let his eyes travel over the congregation, pausing at this late hour for a bit of reflection on the needs of each individual, he would be unnerved by the experience. The responsibility of reaching these people is too great. He must have thought of them long before. He must truly have thought of his people as individuals, while preparing his message for them.

He knows, of course, that most of his members will not be downcast and disheartened as they come to church. They have troubles, but they have learned to bring them to the Lord. They have also learned that when they come

²⁵Charles R. Brown, The Art of Preaching (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 12.

²⁶Perry Gresham, Disciplines of the High Calling (St. Louis, Bethany Press, 1954), p. 49.

to Church, the Lord, through His servant, will have a message for them.

Many who come to church regularly, Sunday after Sunday, do not stop to ask themselves what they are seeking in the Sunday service and what they want to hear. They have learned, if their pastor is faithful to his calling, that God has many things to say to them and they are always helped by listening to His Word. They may not even realize that their pastor has not been content just to study a portion of the Word of God and then to speak of it as it was written long ago for the Corinthians or the Ephesians or the Colossians. They may not know how much time the pastor has spent in his study, thinking about them and their needs. But if he had not done so, his sermon would be far less helpful.

d.

The Faithful Minister Will Help Men See
Themselves as They Are.

It is not enough that the servant of the Word start with people where they are. He must also see them as they are, as Scripture describes them, and he must help them so to see themselves. All that was previously ^{said} of the Christian²⁷ is applicable here. As the servant of the Word addresses him he should clearly see himself as a redeemed child of God, reconciled to God by the death

²⁷ Chapters III and IV

of His Son,²⁸ and wholly justified for Christ's sake.²⁹ He should often be told that being justified, he can enjoy the peace of God.³⁰ He needs the assurance that his iniquities are forgiven, his sins are covered.³¹

As a follower of the Lord, he is able to do good works.³² But he must see clearly that these works are not his own, that actually they are the works of Christ in him.³³ Only as God imputes Christ's righteousness to him can he at all speak of anything good in his life.³⁴ All this he should know about himself.

Moreover, it is necessary that he understand--as well as a Christian is able to understand these things--that the flesh in him is totally corrupt,³⁵ and that because of it, a constant conflict is going on within him.³⁶ He must also be taught to face up to all of the temptations confronting him in life, as these have been

²⁸Rom. 5:10

²⁹II Cor. 5:19

³⁰Rom. 5:1

³¹Rom. 4:7,8

³²Jn. 15:5

³³Acts 21:19

³⁴Rom. 4:2-5

³⁵Rom. 7:18

³⁶Rom. 7:23,24

set forth.³⁷

The Christian must be helped to see that wrongs against men are sins against God. Dishonesty does not just involve people, but the commandment of the Lord as well.³⁸ Unfaithfulness does not just break up a marriage. It breaks the laws of God, as well.³⁹ Poor stewardship of funds does not just rob men of their due. It robs God.⁴⁰

The Christian must, therefore, be helped to check on his own attitude toward sin, to see whether he is fully conscious of the fact that sin is against God, that it dare never be taken lightly.

The Christian should understand himself so well that he appreciates it when the servant of the Word approaches him with the two-edged sword of the Word,⁴¹ cutting deep into his life, dividing the right from the wrong, the thoughts of the spirit from those of the flesh.

He should be helped to see himself so well that he never takes lightly the comforting assurance of his own salvation, but sees a need of this message throughout

³⁷Chapter VII

³⁸Eph. 4:25

³⁹Heb. 13:4

⁴⁰Mal. 3:8,9

⁴¹Heb. 4:12

life.⁴²

Moreover, he should be helped to understand his position in life. He should be helped to glory in the fact that he is part of a holy nation, enjoying the blessings of salvation, and prepared for Christian witnessing in the world,⁴³ that he is a light in the world,⁴⁴ whose good works are to draw attention to themselves as coming from the life of one who enjoys close communion with God.⁴⁴ He should be helped to enjoy a life on earth in which eating, drinking, working, playing are all done to the glory of God.⁴⁵

As a Christian is helped to grow in knowledge of who and what he is and is helped to believe in the presence of the Spirit in his life, as he, to this end, sees the need of the means of grace and learns to enjoy a richer use of them, he is being helped immeasurably in Christian growth, and the servant of the Word who sees such help as a part of his calling and works toward this end is also growing each day in Christ.

⁴²Ps. 130:3,4

⁴³I Pet. 2:9

⁴⁴Mt. 5:16

⁴⁵I Cor. 10:31

The Faithful Minister Will Give
Evidence of His Concern For Men.

The servant of the Word who is at all conscious of the blessedness of his work should find no difficulty in rejoicing in the privilege of working for the Lord.⁴⁶ But difficulties arise in his work and he is not always conscious of results.⁴⁷ At such times he is tempted to think of his difficulties in terms of the people with whom he is working. They are at fault for his lack of success. Actually, his work is to strengthen and help them. His lack of success should urge him on to greater efforts in their behalf, but for this he himself needs help.

It is important, therefore, that the servant of the Word at times analyze his own feelings toward his people. Andrew Blackwood rightly states that "the pastor who feels that preaching is the greatest work in the world ought himself be the happiest of men."⁴⁸ If he is not happy, he should not pretend that he is. He should rather look carefully into his heart and see what is wrong. He may need more love for his work and more love for his people. Often it is a lack of love that stands in his

⁴⁶I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 4:13,14

⁴⁷I Kings 19:4

⁴⁸Andrew Blackwood, The Fine Art of Preaching (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 157.

way, as Phillips sees it. He feels that

No spiritual progress is made and no lasting spiritual growth occurs without honesty. If we find we cannot love, it is of no use at all to cover up our failure by pretense. It is far better to turn to God Who is Love and freely admit our deficiency and allow the Spirit of God to change our inner attitude and produce the genuine fruit of love.⁴⁹

That, of course, requires a use of the Word of God. For there God speaks to the minister as He does to the people. In the Word God will show him through the example of His first disciples what He meant when He said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."⁵⁰ Weatherspoon says with regard to these first ministers of the Lord:

All that we have in the epistles and other records of their ministry discloses a spirit, a living concern for the spiritual growth of the Church, that summons us today to examine the character of our concern for the Church and the churches we serve. Is it really for the churches or for ourselves? Is it deep enough to cost anything hard and sacrificial? If we are to set Christianity forward as the early preachers did, equipped to meet a sin-ridden world with the clear and strong challenge of truth and righteousness, let us not forget it, it will be at the cost of an unselfish and life-commanding concern.⁵¹

Scherer seems to feel that the young man is more apt to begin his ministry without sufficient love. He says:

⁴⁹J. B. Phillips, New Testament Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 66.

⁵⁰Jn. 15:12

⁵¹J. B. Weatherspoon, Sent Forth to Preach (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 136.

You may begin your career with a doctrinaire interest in theology or in preaching as one of the fine arts. But pray God you may find yourself, little by little, drawn to human lives and human hopes and human fears! You may begin with the aloofness of the scholar. But pray God you may continue with a tenderness, a warmth of affection for all the weary souls of earth, that will go far to keep you human and to make you great.⁵²

Scherer may find it difficult to substantiate his views.

Often the young pastor puts the older pastor to shame with his zeal for souls and his desire to help men with his preaching. The man who has been in the ministry for a time may be more in need of help to reevaluate his purpose and goal in the ministry. But in this no man is perfect. Every pastor needs help to grow in love toward his people.

The love a pastor or any other religious leader needs, if he is to show the proper attitude toward men, is the love which only God can give him. That is what Christ refers to when He calls on the disciples to love as He has loved them.⁵³ His love does not look at the object. It was even directed to His enemies, to men in sin and shame and vice.⁵⁴ He, the loving God, now comes to men and makes His abode in them. The Christian has this love of God in him and, giving expression to it,

⁵²Paul Scherer, For We Have This Treasure (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 23.

⁵³Jn. 15:12

⁵⁴Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8

is giving expression to the love of God.⁵⁵

But a point that needs to be stressed in this connection is that the servant of the Word should give verbal expression to his love. He should not merely show by his actions that he loves his people. He should state it in so many words. He should not fear to tell his people that he loves them. He should here follow the example of Christ. Surely Christ showed by His actions that He loved men, especially when He gave His life for His own.⁵⁶ Yet He also assured the disciples of His love, telling them that He loved them.⁵⁷ People also need such assurance of love from their leaders. But it must be offered in sincerity. Schroeder predicts that

Unless the ambassador of Christ somehow conveys the impression that he finds delight in the Law of the Lord and that he really loves God's people, even when they are loveless and unloving, his words will not warm the hearts of men. Only when the preacher's professed love for God registers itself in a genuine interest in and concern for people will his message have the warmth that kindles hearts until they burn with a glad response to the spoken words.⁵⁸

f.

The Faithful Minister Will Enlist The Aid Of
Men in Promoting Their Christian Growth

Much emphasis has been placed on the importance of the work of the servant of the Word in the interest of the

⁵⁵I Jn. 4:16

⁵⁶Jn. 13:1

⁵⁷Jn. 14 and 15

⁵⁸Schroeder, op. cit., p. 127.

growth of his members. At times this is the more important because the members seem to show so little interest in growth themselves. The Apostle Paul charged many of the members of the Church at Corinth with being very carnal in their attitude and life.⁵⁹ The writer of "the epistle to the Hebrews" regretted that so many of his readers still had need of the simple truths, the milk of the Word, and could not be given strong meat.⁶⁰ But at times the fault does not lie with the congregation that members do not assume enough responsibility. The fault lies with the pastor who does not trust them to do so. They need to heed the advice given by Miller that

true preaching is not only a function of the preacher, but of the congregation as well. The Deed of redemption is actualized as the worshipers respond to the approach of God to them through the word of the preacher, so that both God's self-giving and man's receiving are essential parts of the total process of preaching.⁶¹

Luccock points out in this connection that

the needed preaching of dependence on God may be so extreme that it overlooks the other end of the bridge between God and man, man's responsiveness.⁶²

The preacher of the Word should take this seriously and see to it that his members are alerted to their respon-

⁵⁹I Cor. 3:3

⁶⁰Heb. 5:12

⁶¹Donald G. Miller, Fire In Thy Mouth (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 129.

⁶²Halford Luccock, Communicating the Gospel (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 61.

sibility while the Word is being preached. For, as Miller puts it:

If the worshipers fail to realize what is supposed to happen through a sermon, and listen either listlessly or faithlessly, they can make it almost impossible for a minister to preach in the deepest sense. Preaching is not the function of an individual, but of the church.⁶³

Even from the psychological point of view, the listener can do much good or harm while a group is being addressed. Hollingsworth, discussing the psychology of the audience, states:

To be sure, the members of the audience influence one another. One member, failing in attention or interest, distracts his neighbors by his wrongly oriented behavior. The intent interest of a neighbor also restrains the flighty attention of the disturber.⁶⁴

Members can also do much for one another in the whole service of worship. Paul mentions the importance of edifying one another by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and songs.⁶⁵ If they add to this a general acceptance of the message of the preacher as a message from God Himself,⁶⁶ they are doing their part to make the service meaningful.

But the aid of members in the public service by no means covers the area of service of the Christian. The

⁶³Miller, op. cit., p. 129.

⁶⁴H. L. Hollingsworth, The Psychology of the Audience (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p. 27.

⁶⁵Eph. 5:19

⁶⁶I Thess. 2:13

Lord has placed a responsibility on every Christian to be concerned about his own life and the life of his fellow-Christians, as was previously indicated.⁶⁷ The Christian needs now to see the importance of such service. Peale tries to shame him into service when he says,

Don't sit around moaning about things, reading the papers, and saying, "Why don't they do something?" The man who is out doing something isn't tired. If you are not getting into good causes, no wonder you're tired. You're disintegrating. You're deteriorating. You're dying on the vine.⁶⁸

But shaming a person will not get him active for the Lord and for his fellow-Christians. Vieth has much more positive instruction. He says,

Participation in the fellowship and work of a Christian group coupled with an interpretation of the faith which motivates its life is Christian education of the highest type.⁶⁹

His entire book is worth the while of anyone interested in the church's program. Phillips also offers constructive help by reminding Christians of the example of the early Christians:

Since a great deal of the vigor of the early Church depended on Christian fellowship and was in fact given and demonstrated through Christian fellowship, there is good reason to suppose that a small God-seeking group of people might help one another

⁶⁷Chapter V

⁶⁸Norman Vincent Peale, The Power of Positive Thinking (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), p. 42.

⁶⁹Paul H. Vieth, The Church and Christian Education (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1947), p. 77.

enormously in redeveloping the faith faculty.⁷⁰

The informed Christian can do much to help himself in his Christian life. Knowing the Word of God with which he can resist Satan and the world, he wins his battles as did Joseph of old.⁷¹ He comforts himself with the promises of God,⁷² follows the instructions of God's Word,⁷³ bows under the authority of God's Word,⁷⁴ and glories in his salvation.⁷⁵ Many a shut-in has had to learn to do this more and more, as he felt himself cut off from the congregation. And in days of persecution many have had to do the same and came through the trial the stronger for their experience.⁷⁶ Every Christian needs to learn this art.

But Christians can also do much to aid each other in Christian growth. Not only the Sunday school teacher, the deacon, or deaconess, whose position in the church requires this of them, but every Christian has opportunity to do much in the interest of the Christian growth of

⁷⁰Phillips, op. cit., p. 40.

⁷¹Gen. 39:9

⁷²Is. 41:10

⁷³Ps. 1

⁷⁴Ps. 119

⁷⁵Lk. 2:30

⁷⁶I Kings 19:18

others. The parent in the home,⁷⁷ the Christian spouse,⁷⁸ the Christian in his daily contacts,⁷⁹ is urged by the Lord to work toward Christian faith and growth. Each Christian has an obligation toward the congregation and toward each member of it,⁸⁰ not to mention his obligation to speak to the unchurched concerning the faith that is in him.⁸¹ In the measure in which each Christian assumes his responsibilities, the Church as a whole is strengthened and grows in Christian faith and life,⁸² provided that proper use is made by all of the Word through which God Himself performs His gracious work in men.⁸³

g.

The Faithful Minister Will Offer
Men The Help Of God's Word

The fact that proper use must be made of the Word, if the Church is to be strengthened and members are to be helped in Christian growth, again points up the importance of the relationship of the two concepts, Christian growth and the Word of God. The servant of the Word

⁷⁷Eph. 6:4

⁷⁸Eph. 5:25

⁷⁹Heb. 10:24

⁸⁰Eph. 4:16

⁸¹Col. 4:5,6

⁸²Eph. 4:13-16

⁸³I Cor. 1:4-9

dare never ignore this fact. In his book, The Servant of the Word, Farmer emphasizes the fact that men need much more of the Word than they may be getting in many churches. He says:

Our task is to confront men and women with the Living God, the God who speaks through, and asks their obedience in this present world of automobiles, aeroplanes, radio, cinemas, big business, machine industry, mass democracy and totalitarian war.

One incidental difficulty is that people are far more ignorant of the Bible than we ministers, who use it every day, realize. We are in danger of assuming far too much, making scriptural references and allusions which to many hearers, alas, must be quite unintelligible or at least so vaguely identified as to contribute nothing.⁸⁴

The solution is, of course, a more diligent use of Scripture. But not any and every use of Scripture will be helpful. Serious attention should be given by every servant of the Word to the important place which James Stewart gives to the preaching of Christ. He exhorts that

To the supreme facts of the Cross and the Resurrection, which are really not two but one, our preaching must ever return, and from them it must continually derive fresh strength and urgency and inspiration.

Leave this out, and all your other appeals and exhortations will be as nothing: empty, useless, unsubstantial words. Set this at the centre, and it will prove itself to be, in the twentieth century as in the first, the power of God unto salvation.⁸⁵

⁸⁴H. H. Farmer, The Servant of the Word (London: Religious Book Club, 1942), pp. 104, 105.

⁸⁵Stewart, op. cit., pp. 74, 75.

In this connection, Pollard's advice is worth noting. He feels that "it is not more of the content of the Gospel, not just more words, that modern man needs to know." Men need "the living power of the Gospel," which must somehow come right down into their total life.⁸⁶ Farmer says of this:

It is your task and mine as preachers and teachers to present this grand, deep gospel so that it ceases to be merely abstract and doctrinal and becomes thrustingly relevant to everyday affairs.⁸⁷

That does not mean that all man needs is the specific Gospel, and that, having this Gospel, he will automatically live his life in accordance with the will of God. As has been shown in practically every chapter of this study, the Christian also needs guidance and instruction in Christian living.⁸⁸ The servant of the Word must, therefore, use the whole Word of God, rightly dividing it, according to the needs of men,⁸⁹ and trusting in the Lord to accomplish His glorious purpose in each, according to His gracious will.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Wm. G. Pollard, "Dark Age and Renaissance in the Twentieth Century", The Christian Idea of Education, edited by Edmund Fuller (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 20.

⁸⁷Farmer, op. cit., p. 147.

⁸⁸Col. 1:9-11

⁸⁹II Tim. 2:15

⁹⁰II Tim. 1:9,10

The Faithful Minister Will Give All Glory to God.

As the servant of the Word thinks of all that has been done and all that needs to be done for the Christian growth of his members, he cannot but be impressed with his own insignificance, his own inadequacy to do the work of the Lord.⁹¹ Yet the Lord has chosen to use men like himself to carry on His blessed work.⁹² It is a privilege that he dare not take lightly, nor will he want to do so.⁹³ But as he thinks of the work and of the blessing resting upon it, he cannot but say with all who have shared in that work, To God alone be glory forever.⁹⁴

⁹¹II Cor. 3:5

⁹²Eph. 4:11 ff.

⁹³II Tim. 4:1,2

⁹⁴Rom. 11:36; 16:25-27

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS

Christian Growth and the Word of God, as a topic of study, is justified, first of all, by the overemphasis on the scientific approach to all problems which is evident in the world today. Science fails completely in determining for the Christian either the meaning or the value of what it discovers. The Christian needs the Word of God, not only to give meaning and value to life, but especially also to make Christian living possible. In the second place, the study is made necessary by the tendency in the Church to seek to promote Christian living by means of exhortations and admonitions to people to make something of their life, without offering them the sanctifying power of the Word as the means through which God Himself must work in their lives if there is to be any Christian growth.

The Word of God itself points to its close relation to Christian growth in such passages as the fifteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the tenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians and the first chapter of the second epistle of Peter, in which guidelines are laid for the servant of the Word who is concerned about the Christian growth of his members.

A study of other means of revelation indicates that while they supplement the Word of God in revealing God to

men, they do little more than to exemplify what the Word teaches regarding Christian growth. They point, instead, to the need of the Word, if man wants to know the will of God.

Man's need of Christian growth is seen from a study of man. A comparison of man in sin with man in the state of perfection points up how much the most perfect of the children of God can still grow in Christian life, if he wishes to bring his life into conformity with the will of God. Such a comparison can be made only on the basis of the Word of God, in which these truths are revealed.

A check on man's knowledge of perfection, even in the state of grace, shows how man needs the Word of God to guide him in life.

A study of the nature of converted man indicates that Christian growth is actually growth in Christ, Christ Himself becoming more prominent in his deeds and actions through the Word as the means which the Holy Spirit uses to bring Christ more fully into his life.

The possibility of Christian growth leads into a discussion of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit in man. The flesh constantly stands in the way of growth. The spirit, enriched, strengthened, activated by the Holy Spirit working in and through the Word, reaches out for Christian growth. In this connection, the Law and Gospel are important as each is used by the Spirit for the purpose for which it was intended, to indicate the Christian

life and to accomplish Christian growth.

The responsibility for Christian growth must always be considered in the light of the fact that only God, working through the Word, can actually accomplish it, but that man is responsible for using the God-ordained means of effecting it. The responsibility for such growth is shared by the individual himself, who engages in the effort toward growth, his fellow-Christians, who in love seek to assist him, and the called servant of the Word, who is especially entrusted with this work.

The ideal Christian life is the goal toward which all efforts in Christian growth are directed. This life is set forth in the holy Law of God, which is exemplified in the life of God's children and especially in the perfect life of Christ, who is the eternal image of the Father.

The Law, however, does not produce the Christian life, nor does it of itself promote growth in Christian living. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, who through the means of grace, the Gospel and the sacraments, aids the Christian in growth in knowledge of God's will, the proper attitude toward the holy will of God, and a life lived in conformity with it.

A study of the Word of God indicates that the activity of Christians will not be the same. Different tasks are assigned to different men, so that Christians are not identical any more than are the members of the

human body. But all are equally dependent on the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God.

Man's need of help in Christian living becomes apparent when converted man, with the inclination to evil still evident in his life, is seen in a world of sin, which at times becomes so revolting that even natural man is incensed by its evil, but is often apparent holy to him who with the Spirit's aid, compares it with the requirements of God's holy will. Only such a study reveals the inherent evil in man's natural drives for social acceptance, self-preservation, education, romance, to mention only the more general ones.

Men's need for help in Christian living is seen also in their own indifference to such growth, as well as in their natural inclination to evil, thus underlining the need of the work of the servant of the Word as he approaches men with the Spirit-filled Gospel of Christ.

The relation of Christian growth and the Word of God brings up the relation of Law and Gospel in the Word, as these are to be used by the servant of the Word. The relation of these distinct doctrines is understood only by one who sees Christ as the center of all Scripture teaching and the salvation of men as its ultimate purpose. The Law serves this purpose by showing men their sins, thus indicating their need. The Gospel serves this purpose by giving the Savior to men, making His power active in their lives. Thereupon, the child of God is enabled by the

Spirit of God to look with faith into the holy Law of God, that he may know God's holy will, and in the Gospel is constantly offered the power of Christ to live the godly life.

A careful analysis of the teaching of the Word is of great importance, that its application to the Christian life today will be in accordance with the teaching of the Word, so that God is truly speaking to men when the servant of the Word confronts him with a word of Scripture.

The relation of the Word of God and Christian growth, as set forth, emphasizes the importance of the work of the servant of the Word, as he seeks and strives for Christian growth in the lives of his members.

If he is faithful in this work he will constantly ask the Spirit of God to lead him in a study of the Word, that he may see his own need of growth and be strengthened through the Word in Christian living.

He will take note of his members as individuals, each with his own needs and problems, but also as a congregation of believers, each dependent on the other.

He will help men see themselves as sinners, in need of grace, but also as the saved in Christ, whom the Lord has called to a life of service made possible by the operation of the Spirit in their lives as they apply themselves to the Word of God.

He will give evidence of his concern for men, learning more and more to love them in Christ.

He will enlist the aid of his members in promoting

their own growth through the use of the sanctifying Word and, through precept and example, working toward growth in their fellow-Christians.

He will, to this end, offer them the help in Christian living which God affords in His holy Word.

He will, as he goes about his daily work, be conscious of his own need of help and give glory to God alone for the Word which He has given and for the Christian growth which He Himself has produced in pastor and people alike.

APPENDIX

THE PROPER DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL

It was noted in Chapter VIII of this study that God has given the necessary instruction regarding the use of His holy Word for the accomplishment of His purposes in man. But it was also noted that to follow the instructions of the Lord with regard to the use of His Word is as difficult as it is important. It lies in the proper distinction of Law and Gospel and the proper application of each to the life of the fellowman.

Here, truly, is a subject on which every Christian ought to be informed but which comparatively few students of the Word of God are able to approach without the competent guidance of a theologian who has made the distinction of Law and Gospel a subject of serious and careful study.

Martin Luther was such a man. He wrote much on this important subject, constantly drawing on the Word of God as his only norm of teaching this great truth. But his writings are scattered throughout his voluminous works. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, a student of Luther and himself a great theologian, has done the church a real service with his own contributions in this field.

Dr. Walther, for many years a theological pro-

fessor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, devoted himself assiduously to the task of preparing future ministers of Christ in the proper use of Law and Gospel in their preaching and teaching. He delivered no less than thirty-nine lengthy lectures to the students on this subject alone and throughout his years of teaching he called the attention of his students to the importance of this subject. Three of his students¹ have seen to it that these lectures were made available to the public. The brief digest of his lectures offered here seeks not only to give his answer to the question regarding the proper use of the Word of God in preaching and teaching but also to impress the reader with the worth of the whole lecture series, which, though given many years ago, is still applicable to the church today. For man's environment has changed greatly since the days of Walther, but man himself is still very much the same, and the Law and Gospel of God, which were written for man's benefit, will never change.

Walther follows the guidance of the Apostle Paul in showing the relation of Law to Gospel and vice versa. In the Epistle to the Romans he finds the Christian doctrine in its entirety.

What do we find in the first three chapters? The sharpest preaching of the Law. This is followed, towards the end of the third chapter and in chap-

¹The Rev. Th. Claus, Dr. L. Fuerbringer, Dr. W. H. T. Dau.

ters four and five, by the doctrine of justification--nothing but that. Beginning at chapter six, the apostle treats of nothing else than sanctification. Here we have a true pattern of the correct sequence: first the Law, threatening men with the wrath of God; next the Gospel, announcing the comforting promises of God. This is followed by an instruction regarding the things we are to do after we have become new men.²

Accordingly, Walther outlines the work of the servants of the Lord as they preach and teach His holy Word as being directed toward five closely-related aims or goals, no one of them complete in itself, but all of them necessary for the salvation of men. He says,

Bear in mind that the preacher is to arouse secure souls from their sleep in sin; next, to lead those who have been aroused to faith; next, to give believers assurance of their state of grace and salvation; next, to lead those who have become assured of this to sanctification of their lives; and lastly, to confirm the sanctified and to keep them in their holy and blessed state unto the end.³

These points will now be taken up in their proper order, drawing heavily on the English translation of Walther's lectures, as will be indicated by the many quotations from the book containing the lectures. To make it a true digest of all of the lectures, material has been drawn from all parts of the series, giving attention to subject matter rather than to Walther's own sequence of presentation, which, due to its nature,

²C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1928), p. 93.

³Ibid., p. 248.

abounds in repetitions.

The ministers of the Word of God are "to arouse secure souls from their sleep in sin."⁴ "Man is by nature a conceited being...Wrapped in the miserable rags of his civil righteousness, he purposes to make his stand before God."⁵ He must, therefore, "be brought out of his false security, false comfort, false peace, and false hopes. He must be made to despair of his salvation and of his present condition."⁶ This can be accomplished only by means of the Law. For "by the Law is the knowledge of sin."⁷

Now, when the Law is preached, it must be done forcefully, striking man's "conscience with lightning force."⁸ It must be proclaimed "in such manner that there remains in it nothing pleasant to lost and condemned sinners."⁹

For

there was nothing pleasant, nothing comforting at Sinai...Every-where in the camp of Israel people went to pieces from dread and fright...By this spectacle God has indicated to us how we are to preach the Law. True, we cannot reproduce the thunder and lightning of that day, except in a

⁴Ibid., p. 248.

⁵Ibid., p. 97.

⁶Ibid., p. 391.

⁷Rom. 3:20

⁸Walther, op. cit., p. 237.

⁹Ibid., p. 80.

spiritual way,¹⁰

but the preacher must know how to depict "the true nature of sin in terms that are as plain and distinct as they are terrible, drastic, and impressive."¹¹

If this is done, the Law will have the proper effect upon men. They will not rejoice when they hear it. They will find no comfort in it, nor any hope, nor help. On the contrary, they will begin

to rear up against God and say: 'What! I am to be damned? True, I know that I am an enemy of God. But that is not my fault; I cannot help it.' That is the effect of the preaching of the Law. It drives men to desperation.¹²

To this Walther adds,

Blessed the person who has been brought to this point: he has taken a great step forward on the way to his salvation.¹³ Such a person will receive the Gospel with joy.

The Law thus serves to make the Gospel effective. When it has brought man to desperation, it has served its purpose.

That does not mean that the Law is not to be preached to Christians. For Christians have the Old Adam in them who delights in sinning. The devil also seeks to make them secure, telling them that minor sins need

¹⁰Ibid., p. 82.

¹¹Ibid., p. 325.

¹²Ibid., p. 237.

¹³Ibid., p. 237.

cause them no alarm, but "small sins become great when they are regarded as small."¹⁴ "As long as a person is at ease in his sins, as long as he is unwilling to quit some particular sin, so long only the Law, which curses and condemns him, is to be preached to him."¹⁵

Dr. Walther exhorts that when preaching on such texts as I Corinthians 6:7 ff. and Galatians 5:19 ff. the preacher ought to "expound them to our hearers and tell them that as God lives, they will be damned if they live in this or that sin." He continues,

If you only tell them that Christians remain sinners until they die, you will frequently be misunderstood. Some will lull themselves to sleep with the reflection that they are poor and frail human beings.¹⁶

Therefore, "do not speak of one joy of the Law, or one of the so-called least commandments, as of something about which a Christian need not be greatly concerned."¹⁷

On the other hand, Walther warns us to "be very careful not to speak as if also all Christians were living in shame and vice."¹⁸ Do not speak of Christians as "abominable sinners," "mentioning manifest sins unto death as though Christians also were living in sins of

¹⁴Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 323.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 319.

that kind."¹⁹ For there is a great difference between Christians and unbelievers.

While these distinctions between Christians and unbelievers are to be kept clearly in mind, it must not be forgotten that for both Christians and unbelievers the Law serves to terrify that the Gospel may console; the Law makes thirsty that the Gospel may satisfy; the Law kills that the Gospel may make alive.

Bringing man to the realization of his sins is "not the chief aim that is to be achieved with regard to him. The principal matter is that he attain to full assurance of his state of grace and his salvation."²⁰ This service the Law cannot perform.

It has not a drop of comfort to offer the sinner. If no additional teaching, besides the Law, is applied to man, he must despair, die, and perish in his sins. Ever since the Fall the Law can produce no other effect in man. Let us ponder this well.²¹

The Gospel must, therefore, be preached to those who have been terrified by the Law; and with that nothing else is meant than that the preacher preach "concerning the work of Christ, salvation by grace, and the riches of God's mercy in Jesus Christ in such a manner that the hearers get the impression that all they have

¹⁹Ibid., p. 319.

²⁰Ibid., p. 391.

²¹Ibid., p. 14.

to do is take what is being offered them."²² For that is all that is necessary. Even faith is not to be required of the hearers as something which they must do. It is something which God performs in them. "When a parishioner comes to you complaining of his inability to believe, you must tell him that you are not surprised at his statement; for no man can; he would be a marvel if he could. You must instruct him to do nothing but listen to the Word of God, and God will give him faith."²³

"Here is where most preachers make their mistake. They are afraid by preaching the Gospel too clearly they will be the fault if people lapse into sin."²⁴ Accordingly, they mingle Law and Gospel. They tell their hearers that salvation is in store for them after they have shown the proper contrition.

Legalistic pastors will ask their client whether he...has ever gone bowed down and mourning for a whole day; whether there has been a time when his loins were dried up; whether he can say that there was no sound part in his whole body; whether he has wailed because of the unrest in his heart; whether he has watered his couch with his tears all night long...Unless he can point to these criteria of what they regard as genuine contrition, they tell him not to imagine that he has been truly contrite.²⁵

²²Ibid., p. 260.

²³Ibid., p. 264.

²⁴Ibid., p. 38.

²⁵Ibid., p. 252.

Walther denounces such mingling of Law and Gospel in the strongest terms. "Where," he asks, "is there a text that prescribes the same degree of contrition for every one? There is no such text."²⁶ "Woe to us if, when about to expound the Gospel...we say more than, 'Accept this message!' Every addition would be Law. The Gospel demands nothing of us; it only says, 'Come, eat and drink.'"²⁷ Walther warns that "it is a false method to prescribe to an alarmed sinner all manner of rules for his conduct, telling him what he has to do, how earnestly and how long he must pray" etc.²⁸ How serious is his charge that

man a person might have been saved if the Gospel in its fulness had been preached to him immediately. Since it was not preached to him, he either gave himself over completely to despair, or he joined the world and decided that the Church was worthless.²⁹

The preacher, therefore, must preach the saving Gospel of Christ the Crucified in every sermon, holding out to all whom he has condemned with the Law the sweet comfort of salvation which has been earned for them in full by the suffering Savior. Then he may be called an evangelical preacher.

²⁶Ibid., p. 252.

²⁷Ibid., p. 38.

²⁸Ibid., p. 140.

²⁹Ibid., p. 378.

That does not mean that he has now done all he can with the Gospel. There is more to his office than this. He will find that Christians who have long believed the Gospel of Christ suddenly begin to doubt. "Like two hostile forces, Law and Gospel sometimes clash with each other in a person's conscience. The Gospel says to him: 'You have been received into God's grace.' The Law says to him: 'Do not believe it; for look at your past life.'"³⁰ "In affliction you will realize that the Gospel is a rare guest in men's conscience, while the Law is their daily and familiar companion."³¹ Learn, therefore, to drive out the Law with the sweet comfort of the Gospel. Remind your hearers that "one who desires to believe is already a believer";³² that men are saved not by their conversion, but by Christ, lest they make their former conversion their savior, relying on it, or begin to worry that their conversion was not complete. "Nowhere in the Holy Scriptures do we find the apostles treating the members of their congregations as if they were uncertain regarding their standing with God."³³ Let the preacher today follow them in their evangelical

³⁰Ibid., p. 47.

³¹Ibid., p. 27.

³²Ibid., p. 202.

³³Ibid., p. 392.

practice.

There follows now another office of the Gospel: The preaching of sanctification. Here some may object that the Law is to serve as a rule for the Christians. Good works are done in accordance with the Ten Commandments. It is true, men learn the will of God from the Law. But the Law does not help them to perform the will of God. "God does not tell you to preach the Law in order thereby to make men godly. The Law makes no one godly."³⁴ Even the promises of the Law do not help the Christian.

The promises of the Law are the more disheartening, the greater they are. The Law offers us food, but does not hand it down to us where we can reach it. It offers us salvation in about the same manner as refreshments were offered to Tantalus in the hell of the pagan Greeks.³⁵

Men, therefore, need another message besides that of the Law.

That message is the Gospel.

Let no minister think that he cannot induce the unwilling to do God's will by preaching the Gospel to them and that he must rather preach the Law and proclaim the threatenings of God to them. If that is all he can do, he will only lead his people to perdition. Rather than act the policeman in his congregation, he ought to change the hearts of his members in order that they may without constraint do what is pleasing to God with a glad and cheerful heart. A person who has a real understanding of the love of God in Christ Jesus is astonished at its fire, which is able to melt anything in

³⁴Ibid., p. 81.

³⁵Ibid., p. 10.

heaven and on earth.³⁶

"How foolish, then, is a preacher who thinks that conditions in his congregation will improve if he thunders at this people with the Law and paints hell and damnation for them. That will not at all improve the people."³⁷

The reason why congregations are corrupt is invariably this, that its ministers have not sufficiently preached the Gospel to the people. It is not to be wondered at that nothing has been accomplished by them; for the Law kills, but the Spirit, that is, the Gospel, makes alive.³⁸

That does not mean that the hearers need not be admonished to lead a godly life. The preacher must bear in mind that

a Christian retains his natural temperament even after his conversion. A person with an irritable temper keeps that disposition...Many a Christian grows impatient in trouble...It cannot be said to be a criterion of a Christian that he never commits a gross sin. That does happen occasionally (though whenever this is the case, the Christian surrenders unconditionally to the Word of God, even though he may not do so immediately)...Even pride in a very pronounced form can crop out in a Christian...Christians are even tempted with the desire to grow rich.³⁹

Walther reminds the preacher of the warning of Luther that "it will not do to think and say that it is sufficient to preach the doctrine to them and that, where the spirit and faith are at work, the fruits of faith

³⁶ Ibid., p. 389.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 384.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 388.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 312-315.

and good works will follow of themselves."⁴⁰ No, he must preach sanctification, but always in the proper relation to justification. After justification,

there follow in the course of time other fruits, namely, a life in beautiful harmony with this doctrine and in no way contrary to it. But these fruits are to be regarded as genuine fruits only where the first fruit, namely, the doctrine of Christ, already exists,⁴¹

says Walther at the very close of his series of lectures on Law and Gospel.

Walther's dependence on the Word of God as the only source and norm of teaching will become clear to all who will take the time to study the writings of this great theologian. They will find that it offers an excellent guideline for a truly evangelical ministry.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 315.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 413.

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