

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

MARCH, 1996

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

SET US AFIRE, LORD

Ralph S. Cushman

Set Us Afire, Lord,
Stir Us, We Pray!
While The World Perishes
We Go Our Way,
Purposeless, Passionless,
Day After Day.
Set Us Afire, Lord,
Stir Us, We Pray!

Set Us Afire, Lord,
That We May Be
Thy Word To The Millions
Who Hunger For Thee;
Stir Us, Empower Us
By Calvary;
Give Us The Passion
To Set The World Free!

Winston Allen now with the Lord:
see page 95

EVASION

Maxine Hancock

Evasion--I hate it. Like over coffee today . . .

It's not that I mind discussing religion, you know. Matter of fact, I guess I brought the topic up--talking about transcendentalism, union with the Supreme Mind, and so on. So when what's-her-name said that she figured the only way a person could find union with God was through "commitment" to Jesus Christ, I threw her my special curve.

It works like this. Somebody starts telling you that the only way to know God is through some kind of spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. So you lean across the table and say something like, "Don't you think you're being a bit exclusive? What happens to the intelligent humans who have never heard about your Jesus Christ? Going to have them all damned?" Usually you can relax then, and let your coffee partner sputter through some theological garble. Kind of fun, I think.

Anyhow, where was I? Oh yeah. Coffee today. So what's-her-name told me, "The way I see it, if there were any other way, would God have let Jesus die?"

I pondered a bit, then shot back: "Interesting idea. But what about all those who have never heard . . ."

She didn't even look uncomfortable. She finished her coffee and shrugged. "I don't know about them." That was all there was to that. I thought I might press the point, but she set down her cup and looked at me for a minute. "I do know about the ones who *have* heard though. It worries me. What excuse can they have?"

Then she put on her coat and left for class.

That's what I mean about Christians: evade the question every time. No straight answers. Evasion. I hate it.

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THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

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THEME:

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS!

Alex V. Wilson

"Witnessing." "Evangelism." "Soul-winning." Do those terms bring joy to your heart, or pain? Excitement, or guilt-feelings? Delight, or fear--and a desire to lay aside this magazine?

No matter what terms are used or what feelings spring to our hearts, we all know that it is a God-given duty and *should* be a joy-inspiring thrill to tell perishing people that Jesus saves. There is no higher privilege, and yet how we dodge and duck it. The destiny of our friends and neighbors, and the present and future of the church are affected by whether or not we seek the lost. Yet how careless most of us are in this matter.

Join us this month as we consider this urgent topic of making disciples for the Lord Jesus. John McNerney dispels some myths that make us tense when we think of speaking to folks about their relation to God. Paul Little reveals some other barriers to effective witnessing, and how to hurdle them. Gene Mullins presents a practical program that a number of believers have used in building bridges to the unsaved and leading them to the Savior.

But mainly this issue shares with us the burden and insights of Larry West. You won't soon forget the consuming passion this brother has for the lost. He is gripped by an intense desire to bring joy to the heart of our Lord Christ as sinners for whom He died turn to Him.

Larry West is an elder in a Church of Christ in Louisiana, and an evangelist with the "We Care" Ministries, which helps congregations reach out to their communities with the Gospel. He also edits the *World Radio News*, and his full article and several mini-articles we are running this month originally appeared there. (Actually I've condensed the mini-articles from various editorials by him. He graciously allowed us to reprint them. His address is P.O. Box 2000, West Monroe, LA 71294, should you care to write him or subscribe to WRN.)

You may be disturbed that he often urges us to "confront" people with the Gospel. That may conjure up in your mind thoughts of hard-sell, high-pressure tactics--*impersonal* rather than "personal evangelism." Let me defuse your alarm. I assure you he does not believe in that approach. He is merely making the valid point that until we tell folks clearly that Jesus is God's Son and the only Savior for sin-

ners, and that they are sinners who need to receive Him, we have not yet evangelized.

He also emphasizes that evangelism should be conducted in a context of love. He describes his "We Care" Crusades as "giving and serving crusades." He writes, "I've seen Christians give clothes, food and medicines. I've seen them clean lost people's houses, 'skirt' their mobile homes, 'roof' their residences, buy them furniture, clean their yards, repair burned out homes, make doctor's appointments for people and pay for them." Say, that sounds like genuine Christianity, doesn't it!

Read on, now, remembering Christ's call for us to make disciples and His promise to empower us for that purpose.

Teach English, Win Converts

USING THE BAIT GOD GIVES

Eugene Mullins, Sr.

I find it rather amazing the way the Lord works in our lives when we are willing to surrender to Him. Having finally told the Lord I would do what He wanted, and go where He led, I found myself and family in various places, and a variety of circumstances around this country. The longest period of our life was spent in a Christian school in Illinois. How we got there is a long story, but we are convinced the Lord led us there to bring us back to Texas to retire, as we close out the life He has given.

While in Illinois, I was principal of a rather large Christian school, and thoroughly enjoyed the time spent up there. While there we went on a number of mission trips. These were Mission Impossible trips, because we always took on more than most thought possible to finish. The week before Easter, each year, we took a group of 50 to 100 high school students on a trip south, because of the warm weather, to do some kind of construction. The blessings from God on these trips, and the trips themselves would take pages to fill.

On one of these trips we went to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and began and almost finished the headquarters building for a ministry called Literacy and Evangelism. While on this trip one of our teachers became interested in **teaching English as a Second Language**. She took the training. Then, back in Illinois she set up classes for the illiterate and those unable to read or speak English. She trained others also to teach ESL, resulting in classes being held in churches, schools, jails and prisons. I took the training too. Upon retiring from being a principal, I began to

work with ESL in one of the youth prisons, teaching young Hispanic men to read. Then God brought us to Garland, Texas. Before this, God opened the door to go to Russia twice, once teaching teachers how to teach English more easily.

Earl Mullins, my brother, began GOIN' FISHING, and I couldn't get that thought out of mind. The Lord said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Upon contacting the Hispanic minister in Garland, I began to pray for the Lord to open doors. His word "fishers of men" kept coming back. **Use the bait given you to reach the lost.** God led me to a man in California, and he offered to hold a three day seminar to train us to teach English as a Second Language. Expensive, NO. He came to Dallas, taught for three days, and the only charge was transportation while in Dallas, and food and lodging. Six people took the training; three are still being used of the Lord. Jerry Pence is tutoring one, my wife Mary Lou is tutoring two, and I am tutoring two. I have been asked to start teaching five or six other students during 1996.

This has been a real blessing to the church here at Eastern Hills. When we came two years ago there would be maybe 15 to 18 in attendance on Sunday morning. Now we have between 30 and 40 Hispanic, black and white. By the grace of God we have buried nine with their Lord in baptism, and are looking forward to one more in the very near future.

Eastern Hills has allowed me to reach out and go to Mexico to survey work being done in Monterrey. What a blessing! God has opened more doors there. A brother in the Lord there is training young men to teach and preach the Word in the poor villages of Mexico, about four hours by bus from Monterrey. In Matehula, I met six of the young men. These young men train a couple days a week, and preach on Sunday, after walking from 10 to 25 miles one way to school!

They teach and preach in their villages, much of the time with food as their only pay. The Eastern Hills congregation has been used to send finances, sleeping bags, and back packs. These young men walk from the homes, carrying what food and supplies they have, and sleep on the floor, or wherever they can.

God continues to open doors. As late as last evening, January 7, Brother Santillan from Mexico, shared with us the vision for 1996. And, believe me, only our great God can meet the needs there. Besides helping to supply funds in the Philippines, South Africa, and Russia, this little congregation is going to step up its support of the work God has opened up in Monterrey, Mexico.

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MORE PEOPLE LOOKING FOR GOD!

Larry West

According to the Gallup Poll, there are now more religious people in the United States than there were ten years ago. Among the unchurched, which is 44% of Americans (or 78 million people), 82% say they "once did go to church," but they quit. Why? Fifty-eight percent say they no longer belong because "churches are too concerned with organizational issues." Among these unchurched, 84% say they believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, a whopping 63% believe the Bible is the literal, inspired word of God, 58% believe in life after death, 41% say they pray every day, 25% say they had a "powerful" experience with God, and 48% now provide religious education for their children.

What do these facts say to us?

They say, **now is the time to strike!**

People are tired of "churchianity" and they want to get to the heart of God. They want a Savior! And we are the ones God tells, "Go take Him to them!"

In Oklahoma in one of our We Care Crusades, one of our workers knocked on the door of a young female, a woman living in adultery with a man. "What if the Lord were to come right now?" was the question. And she said, "I've been wanting someone to study the Bible with me but I didn't know who to ask!"

On the plane, after buffer talk, I asked a young executive lady, "Well, how are you and the Lord doing? I mean, what if He were to return even right now, would you know for sure you would go home to Heaven with Him?" And she burst into tears. She was concerned! Deeply concerned!

Now is the time to strike! People want to talk about it! People want to go to Heaven just like you and I want to go! They are open! There are more religiously minded people today than there were ten years ago. In fact, thirty years ago, people were in the rebellious '60s. "God is dead" was the popular decision. "Down with the establishment; up with free sex." And it was unpopular to talk about God. Now, the cry is different. People are ready to study, to talk about God. They are lost, they are confused, they are empty.

Brethren, now is the time to strike!

IT IS NOT CONFRONTING UNTIL IT'S CONFRONTING!

Larry West

Just inviting someone to church is not confronting. "Living in such a way that will hopefully prompt a friend to ask about the church" is not confronting. Waving to a neighbor as you drive off to church is not confronting. Sitting, quilting, talking to a lost neighbor about Daniel in the lion's den is not confronting. "Straightening him out on the Sabbath Day" is not confronting. Sacking groceries in the benevolent room and placing them in the dilapidated car of a needy mother is not confronting.

Just feeding the hungry is not.

Just giving a drink to the thirsty is not.

Just taking in the stranger is not.

Just clothing the naked,

visiting the sick,

calling upon him in prison . . .

Doing such things is not confronting!

These services, these discussions, are precious, are needed, are commanded; for **people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.** But it is not confronting until we get a person into "salvation dialogue!" It is not confronting until we get into discourse about his relationship with his Maker! Is he ready to meet his God? Is there any reason for him to fear Jesus' second coming? Is he still guilty of sin? Does sin still separate him from God? Does he know the gospel? Has he obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ? What if the Lord were to come right now, would he know for sure he would go home with Him to live forever?

That's confronting!

Not long ago, I was privileged to preach a gospel meeting in a precious church of wonderful brethren, where we saw 22 priceless souls obey the gospel. Now, as the visiting preacher on such occasions, I naturally do not know who all are members and who are visitors. So, after services and at the rear door, I stand beside the preacher or an elder and will feed off his greetings to the people who pass by. When he says something like, "Hello, Sally," that says to me that she must be a member, a Christian from at least one of the congregations in the area. But, if he says to someone, "Hello, I'm John Doe, and what is

your name? We are glad you are here. We want you to come back and visit us," that says to me that here is a non-member visitor. On this occasion I found myself hearing many addressed that way. So, frustrated at seeing so many passing out the door, I began stopping them and asking, "Are you in a hurry? Can you stay a little longer so that we can talk, can we get to know one another, can we even pray together? I know you love the Lord." And they would say, "I sure do. Okay, I will stay." I would ask three or four individuals or families per night to stay and talk. I would sit and talk with one while the others would wait. Yes, they would even wait for me! Then, sitting on a pew with just the two of us, or three, my first question would be, "How are you and the Lord doing? What if He were to come right now? Would you know for sure, nothing doubting, you would go to heaven with Him?" And I would present the gospel. It would even be a review of the sermon they just heard, the gospel again. Of the 22 baptized during the week, 14 were won after services at night during these confrontations! These precious people were prospects *about to get out the door!*

Brethren, it is not confronting until it's confronting!

As precious words as they are, just saying, "We are so glad you are here. We want you to come back and visit us," *is not confronting!* These people had come because they want to go to heaven! They love the Lord! They are prime prospects. And God says **confront!** And remember, it is not confronting until we get a person into "salvation dialogue!" It should be a loving confrontation, sure. It must be a caring one! But, it is not confronting until we get into discourse concerning his relationship with his Maker! Is he ready to meet his God? Is there any reason for him to fear Jesus' second coming? What if Jesus were to come right now?

That's confronting!

Brethren, it's time we tune in! We are not confronting our neighbors! We are talking about everything under the sun except what Jesus actually told us to talk about! **We will not convert until we confront!** And our job is to confront!

I'm all for a neighborhood Bible study, if there is evangelism in it. I'm all for "friendship meetings," if there is evangelism in it. I'm all for gospel meetings, if there is evangelism in it. I'm all for Christian schools, Christian camps, and college mission trips to sunny California; I'm all for youth trips to Six Flags, pizza for a hundred kids, "bring-your-neighbor" days, and singing at the nursing homes! I'm for all that . . . IF THERE IS EVANGELISM IN IT!

For it is not confronting until it's confronting!

CARING ENOUGH TO CONFRONT

Larry West

His son was a popular senator in Washington. The boy had grown up on a farm but had ended up on Capitol Hill. Dad left his farm one day and traveled to visit his famous son in Washington. It just happened to be while Congress was in session. The old man, a Christian, found himself standing at a reception one evening, talking to the Ambassador of Belgium. They had hardly exchanged greetings before the senator's father asked him, "Sir, are you a Christian?" Embarrassed, the senator interrupted and hurried his father away. Not too many months later, the old man took a cold; it turned into pneumonia, and he died. Among the flowers were roses from the Ambassador of Belgium. A note was attached. It brought tears to the senator's eyes. It said, "He's the only man in America who asked if I were a Christian."

Caring enough to *confront*! Do we *care* enough to *confront*?

I walked into Sandy's home a few days ago. Local brethren had shown much concern. They had fed her and her two abandoned babies, abandoned by her husband and their father. Members had loved her and had helped in many ways. Someone had signed her up for a Bible course. She had been given the tract "What Is The Church of Christ?" But no one had *confronted* her with the vital issue at hand. I asked, "Sandy, are you a Christian?" She said, "Yes, I am." I asked, "If the Lord were to come right now, are you ready?" She said, "Yes." I continued. "Sandy," I asked, "may I tell you how I was saved." (Turn-about is fair courtesy). "Sure," she said. I opened the Bible and presented the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel and then I proceeded to show that I had learned we must obey that gospel and how the Bible says it must be done. Her kids were screaming. I asked Sandy three times, "Would you rather I come back at a better time?" She repeatedly said, "No, I want to hear this." She was complimented! She wanted to know more! We baptized her about 12:30, Monday afternoon.

I almost entitled this article, "Ask The Question!" That's because the question, "Are you a Christian?" is the *confronting* question! Brethren, *ask the question!* For heaven's sake, *ask the question!* All the free food given when someone is hungry, all the tears shed when the neighbor's husband dies, all the genuine display of warm concern when a friend is in trouble—all that is not asking the question. In the name of common sense, dear brethren, *ask the question!* There is no substitute! *Ask the question!*

We know that people don't care how much we know until they know how much we care! But, may God help us be wise with our timing and courageous with our faith to care enough to confront. Brethren, *care enough to confront! Ask the question!*

TAKE THE RISK

Larry West

Casual conversation—we're eaten up with it! Sure, it is normal. "Let me show you my grandchildren," is the natural. It's the typical. It's the habit. "Who's going to win the Super Bowl?" "Is it going to rain today?"

Sure, it's easy to talk. We talk about . . . Weather. Health. Baseball. Money. It's easy to complain about . . . Taxes. Politics. In-Laws. Drugs. It's fun to communicate, authenticate, prognosticate and anticipate, running off at the mouth as long as someone will listen. We want to keep those friends next door. We don't want to offend that fellow sitting beside us every day, going to work. That buddy? He's been a pal since high school. So, we talk about everything under the sun, except what is most important!

The Gospel!

It's time we stop doing the easy! Convenient Christianity doesn't exist. It's time we take the *risk!*

"Jeri, you and I have been standing here side by side as bank tellers for about five years now. We've talked about everything from beauty shops to cinnamon-flavored oatmeal. I love you, and I want us to friends forever! One of these days, you know, the Lord is going to come again. I just want to ask you, are you ready? I want us to go to heaven together. If He were to come right now, would you be prepared to go? Have you been saved? How do you believe you were saved?"

"Grandpa, you have told me about how and Grandma met, about your wedding, about mom when she was born. You have told me about when the mule kicked you, about how you had to burn coal to keep warm . . . You've told me all kinds of stories. But you haven't told me how you believe you got saved! I know you look upon yourself as being a Christian because I see you go to church all the time. Grandpa, how do you believe you became a Christian?"

And get into the Gospel of Christ!!!

There comes a time, dear brethren, when we must take the risk. It's not love until you take the risk! People are lost! They need the Savior. They do not know the Gospel. They simply do not know it. Jesus says to go and tell.

LEAD ME TO SOME SOUL TODAY

Larry West

It happened just last night. I had just finished a weekend We Care Seminar in Fernandina Beach. I was on my way back home, flying out of Atlanta.

I sat down next to a young man. We were polite. We exchanged nods. In a few moments, I saw him bend over and take something out of his bag. It was a Bible. A new one. I watched. He was obviously proud of it, admiring the fine leather, the thin pages. I sat wondering where he was going to read. He turned to the book of Job. He read a little. Then he flipped to Genesis one. He read. I just sat and watched. Next, he flipped back to the glossary. He began to look up the page numbers. I thought I detected that he was both empty and hungry.

Well, enough time wasted. I spoke up, "Looks like you've got a new Bible there!"

"Yes," he said. "My family in Florida gave it to me this weekend."

"It's beautiful," I said.

After a short silence, I continued, "you know, one wonderful thing about the Bible that helped me in my own life was to find out the theme of the Bible." Then I asked, "Do you know what the theme is?"

"No," he said. And the door was open. I presented the gospel to him. And he was a little bird, eyes big and full of attention, hungry to know more. I talked until we landed and disembarked. He is a young navy man. I have his address and am sending him our Bible correspondence course and other materials. I am sending him God's local warrior to teach him further.

In my own life, I find myself on a lot of airplanes. That's just where I am much of the time these days, traveling to and from preaching campaigns and seminars. Were are you? What I mean is where do you find yourself spending most of your time? Wherever it is, there are people there too, aren't there?

Confront them. You can do it. In your own world, you can do it!

I boarded the plane, a connecting flight in Dallas, and was putting my briefcase in the overhead bin when a black lady startled me. She called my name, and did it loudly, "Larry West!" I jumped and looked at her and said, "Yes?" She smiled and said, "I read your luggage tag

on your briefcase.” Then she said, “My name is West too!” I smiled and said, “Well, maybe we’re cousins.” And with that, both she and her black friend sitting next to her giggled. I sat down next to them, and after our exchange of greetings they both began to dig into their purses and they pulled out their Bibles. And notes.

I sat and watched. In a moment I asked, “What are you two doing?”

“Oh, we’ve got to get our lesson done. We’re teachers in a small group in our church.”

“You are?” I responded, “Well, what are you studying in your small group?”

They told me some Old Testament book, and I said, “That’s good. May I suggest something? Don’t let a session go by but that you discuss the gospel!”

They looked confused.

After a slight pause, I asked, “You do know what the gospel is, don’t you?”

“I think so,” they said as they looked at one another.

And that opened the door. For the next hour I presented the gospel to two wonderful and hungry ladies from New Jersey. I drew it all out, the cross, the tomb and the arrow showing Jesus’s resurrection, all on a Delta napkin.

When I finished showing both the gospel and how to obey it, they were shocked. “We’ve got to go home and change our teachings,” they confessed, looking seriously at one another.

“Do that,” I urged as we were getting up, ready to disembark. Then, walking with them, I instructed, “Take a look at your own lives to see whether you yet need to obey the gospel yourselves.”

See? It’s easy. You can do it too. Just look for those opportunities. And take advantage of them! Wherever you spend your own days, there are people there, aren’t there? Mine just happen largely to be on airplanes.

You know, we often sing that song, that prayer-song, “Lead me to some soul today.” And the Lord is looking down, saying to us, “I am! All day long! Every day!”

DO YOU KNOW WHY WE ARE NOT GROWING?

Larry West

You know, it's amazing, the Lord never said for us to pray for the lost. He didn't! What He said for us to pray for is laborers! Workers! Why? Because the fields are white! White unto harvest!

We are suffocating in prospects!

It's time we stop "waiting for contacts!" We are swamped with contacts! It's time we talk to people. It's time we talk the Gospel to them. Confront your barber. Your next door neighbor, the husband, I mean. Even the wife. That baby sitter. How about your waitress? The postman? Sit those visitors down, those who come to services, and **confront them!** Go next door to the church building! It's time we hit the road and confront those neighbors around our buildings anyway; they are why we said we were establishing the church in that neighborhood in the first place years ago! Right? So, go next door to that house the other side of the parking lot! "How are you and the Lord doing? What if He were to come right now? Would you know for sure, nothing doubting, that you would go home with Him to live forever?"

And get into the Gospel!

Have you ever walked into Sears, shopping for a part for your dryer, but you came home with a new refrigerator instead? Know why you did? A salesman was there, and he was talking refrigerators! That's why!

Brethren, it's time we talk the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

"People know where we are, Larry. They know what we stand for. If they want it, they'll come and get it." That's what an elder told me once. Sounds irresponsible, doesn't it? But he wasn't an irresponsible person. He was president of the First National Bank in town. I wish what he said were true, but it isn't!

Enough said. Let's just go do it! We are drowning in prospects. We are drowning! Like fleas on a dog, they are all over us! But, they're lost!

It's time, brethren!

It's time we talk the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

John McNerney

One of the first things I learned as a new Christian was that there were four things that I should be mindful of and practice in order to grow and mature as a disciple of Christ.

First, Study Your Bible: I had no problem with this. As a matter of fact I had that new and insatiable hunger to study God's word that many young Christians have. I wanted to simply devour everything I could to learn more about God and his word. I not only read the Bible, I read books about the Bible! I read commentaries, articles, tracts, anything I could get my hands on. If this is what it took to grow as a Christian, I certainly had no problem.

Second, Worship: This came easy also. My life had changed so dramatically that whenever I stopped to realize who was responsible, my heart just cried forth with praise! It was easy to praise someone when you loved them as much as I loved the Lord; and thanksgiving just abounded. If this is what it took to grow as a Christian, it was a cinch!

Third, Fellowship: One of the most pleasant things the Lord did for me at that time was to lead me to a church which received me warmly and lovingly. I found new and wonderful friends as a new Christian. Folks who loved me and supported me and helped me in time of need. God's people loving God's people! I soon found that I was the first person showing up for church services and the last one leaving! If this is what it took to grow as a Christian, I was on my way!

Fourth, Witness: "What?! . . . Witness?! . . . Me?! You mean I've got to tell people about this?" Fear ran through my heart. The very thought of witnessing brought me to trembling. "I could never do that!"

Not long after that, I discovered that most other Christians were just like me. It seems we all have this intrinsic fear of sharing our faith with someone.

Why is that? Why does the thought of sharing the most wonderful thing that has happened in our life come with such terror? Why do we tremble at the thought of sharing Jesus Christ with someone who may desperately need him?

Two Myths of Terror

I believe that there are two myths that almost every Christian is convinced of, which are the reasons for such fear. And they are just that . . . MYTHS!

First there is the myth that we are mandated to share our faith with **every single person** we come in contact with throughout our entire lives. Many Christians, especially “babes in Christ,” are convinced that we are to witness to everyone who crosses our path in the workplace, the marketplace, or even on the street. This seems such an awesome and fearful task that it is easy to just never start.

Secondly, there is the myth which I call the “Myth of Responsibility.” So many of us are convinced that it is our responsibility to see to it that every person we ever meet gets **saved**. And if they don’t, it’s our fault! What a burden for someone to carry! No wonder we tremble in our shoes!

I believe that in order to take the fear out of witnessing, we must reduce it to its simplest form. It is not what we are called to “do” that’s important, but what we are called to “be.” We are called to “BE” witnesses. Every Christian is a witness; whether a good one or a bad one we are a witness. I believe that if we teach young Christians how to be good witnesses then opportunities to evangelize will soon follow.

How To Be A Witness

1. Be Attractive

Jesus told us in the sermon on the mount that we were to be “salt” and “light.” I realize that there are many properties of salt and light, and all of them could be used to illustrate Jesus’ teaching. However, there is one property from each that I feel is most important in being a witness.

When I played high school football we were required each day at practice to swallow one or two salt tablets. I never could understand the reason for this and the answers I received didn’t make sense. The most common answer was “they’ll make you sweat.” But I was already sweating. I didn’t need salt tablets to make me do that! Years later a doctor friend told me the reason athletes take salt tablets was because during any strenuous workout the body loses fluids. And the body will not take these fluids back in unless we thirst. Thus the salt tablets--to make us thirst. Are we the salt of the world? Do people “thirst” after what we have?

Recently there was a power failure at a factory where I worked. The entire place was plunged into total darkness. You could hear many of the people begin to cry out as the darkness began to arouse their fear. I pulled a flashlight out of my tool box and when I turned it on, something amazing happened. Everyone in that department came towards the light! Everyone followed me, or my light, out of the building. Light is attractive! Are people attracted to us by the lives we live? Are we the light of the world?

2. Be Aware

I believe the Christian should be aware of current events, world affairs, and prominent figures. Why? Simply because people are always looking for some biblical connection with events which are currently taking place.

During the "Desert Storm" campaign in Saudi Arabia, many people were curious as to how this related to "end times" biblical prophecy. Many had a number of questions, and knowing who the Christian was in their midst, they brought their questions to me. It's important for us to realize that every question asked, and answered, was an opportunity to share the Gospel.

The David Koresh incident in Waco, Texas was another incident that led to many questions. As you know David Koresh claimed to be the "Lamb of God," a term which many are not familiar with. When a friend asked me, "Just exactly what does that mean?" it occurred to me, what a wonderful opportunity to share who Jesus Christ was and what He accomplished as the real "Lamb of God."

3. Be Tactful

The apostle Peter tells us in his first epistle: "Always be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within you **but do so with gentleness and respect!**" (1 Peter 3:15). I'm afraid there are just too many of us who do exactly the opposite. We want to cram the Bible down people's throats until they simply try to avoid us. We don't accomplish anything, and repel the very people we're trying to reach.

A lady mentioned to her husband that a man had approached her and asked her if she was a Christian. "Did you tell him to mind his own business?" he asked. "Honey," she said, "if you had been there you would have known . . . it *was* his business!"

Our witness should be equally as tactful. Knowing that they will be treated with gentleness and respect, people will not only be drawn to us, but will also be willing to listen. And we must understand that sharing with them is not about doctrine or religion or the church. It's simply one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread. Jesus, the Bread of Life.

[John McNerney preaches at the Parksville, KY Church of Christ, and studies at the School of Biblical Studies in Louisville--for which this paper was written.]

YOU CAN WIN MEN

Paul E. Little

EVANGELISM is one of the keys to spiritual health. I like to call it the fizz of the Pepsi Cola in the Christian life. If you are involved in evangelism, the Christian life sparkles and has verve. If you are not involved in evangelism, you find very often that the Christian life is stale and vapid and tasteless. When a church congregation is not involved with people on the frontiers, they turn in on themselves and start to "pick fleas" out of each others hair. But when people are turned to the world around them, there is a whole new atmosphere.

PRAYER, for instance, is transformed when we are locked in the spiritual struggle for the souls of men. Have you ever come away from a prayer meeting feeling worse than when you went because it was so depressing and dead? You could predict who was going to say what when and in what tone of voice and the exact vocabulary with the certainty of a railroad timetable. You knew it because you had heard it so many times before. Such a prayer has lost the vision for evangelism.

On the other hand, if you have been in a prayer meeting where people are involved in attempting to win people for the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find a meeting where there is vibrancy and almost an electric atmosphere in the air.

BIBLE STUDY is transformed, too. Are you having a problem with Bible study being academic? Become involved in evangelism and your whole study of the Word of God will take on new color.

FAITH becomes revolutionized as we become involved in evangelism. To see a person transformed by the Holy Spirit in front of our eyes does more to lift our faith index and make us convinced supernaturalists than fifty lectures on the subject. In fact, it is amazing how those who are involved on the frontier seeing people changed by the power of the gospel do not have all these problems about the church's relevancy today. They are seeing God at work.

Evangelism then is one of the keys to spiritual health. There are a number of figures of speech in the New Testament that describe us in our role as evangelists and as witnesses. One is in Mark 1:17. Simon and Andrew were walking by the Sea of Galilee. Our Lord came along and said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men." That little word "become", by the way, is a great encouragement to me, because it indicates the possibility of becoming something that I may not be at the moment.

One of the first lessons we learn from this figure of speech, “fishers of men,” is the painfully obvious lesson in retrospect that in order to catch fish we must go where fish are. We are rather amused by simple Simon, who sets up a barrel, drops in his little line and is very saddened because he doesn’t catch any fish. And we think, “How stupid can you be? Fish don’t come and jump in barrels: you have to go where the fish are.” But what do we do in evangelism? We set up barrels and we invite the fish to come jump in, and we are very sad when they bypass us by the droves. As Harold Wildish said one time, “The Holy Spirit cannot save saints or seats. There have to be some non-Christians.”

Sometimes in our communication of the gospel we are speaking to ourselves and nobody else. The gospel has not lost its power because there is no response; it is simply that there are few or none there to respond to the invitation of the Spirit. There is a place for evangelistic meetings to which we invite people, of course, but basically the method of evangelism that the Lord taught was to go where people are.

Now this has several implications. One is that we must realize that separation from the world is not the same thing as isolation from the world. I believe that in our times many well-meaning and devoted people have become victims of what can only, in terms of its effects, be a heresy, and that is that the index of spirituality is the extent to which you can have absolutely nothing to do with non-Christian people.

This was a problem in our Lord’s time. The Pharisees said of Jesus, “Why does this man eat and drink with publicans and sinners?” Our Lord replied, “Don’t you understand, those that are well do not need a doctor but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:27-33). In His great high priestly prayer Jesus said, “I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). So this is not a new problem, but it is a devastating problem unless we see through it.

If you want to prevent the spread of measles, what would you do with a person who had measles? You’d put him in an isolation ward in a hospital with everybody else who had measles. If you were the enemy of men’s souls and wanted to keep the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ from spreading, what device would you use? Wouldn’t you try to persuade Christians that the essence of spirituality would be to have nothing to do with those who are around them and to spend all their life with each other? You would have won the battle without firing a shot. We must go where fish are if we are to catch fish.

There is a second implication. Sometimes the non-Christian in all good faith and generosity says, “Come with us to do such and such,”

or "Here, have such and such." And we respond almost instinctively, "No thanks, I don't do such and such. I am a Christian." Bang, you can hear the iron curtain clang down. Some think to themselves, "My, I had a tremendous opportunity to witness." But in my opinion we have done two very serious things. One, we have condemned the person out of hand as a pagan in a way that he really doesn't understand. Secondly, we have garbled the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ because we have suggested that inherent in being a Christian is not doing whatever it happened to be at the moment he asked us to do. There are thousands of non-Christians who do not do any of these things. Yet that does not make them Christians. The point is, we have not really gotten to them on the crucial issue. We haven't communicated the gospel until we get to the basic issue. The tragedy is, very often we are treating symptoms rather than the basic disease. The non-Christian's basic problem is that he does not know the Savior. Until we get him to know the Savior it is useless to try to reform these other things. And if we insist that he conform to our behavior pattern before we talk to him we are going to have a very small audience.

With non-Christians we must look for that which we can honestly commend, and if we are alert, we can find it. And when a person invites us to do something, you might say, "No, thanks, but let me know when you are going to do such and such." Immediately make an alternative suggestion so that you do not seem to reject him or his friendship. We do not need to be apologetic about it. If you invite a non-Christian to play chess and he is not interested in chess, he does not hem and haw around about it and say, "Well, no thanks, I don't play chess. I am a non-Christian." He just says, "No, thanks, chess leaves me cold, but when you are going to play Ping-Pong, let me know."

Another profound lesson that comes to us from this figure of speech, "fishers of men," is that in order to catch fish we must throw out the net. Basically, it is a matter of introducing in a conversation, in a natural way, some spiritual aspect or line of thought to see how the person responds. Some of us go into a "clerical clutch" when we get to the gospel. We tighten up and we can see people backing away, because as we clutch, they clutch. If we relax, they relax. We must ask God for wisdom to talk as naturally about the Lord Jesus Christ as we do about other things.

There is one series of questions that I have found particularly useful, though there is no "formula" of course. These questions are only springboards that may help you get to the crucial subject.

The first question can be asked after there is a reference in the conversation to anything even vaguely religious (this happens all the time if people read the newspapers; there is some religious allusion in the

press almost every day). Say to a person very casually and in the same tone of voice that you talk about the weather or sports or your children, **“By the way, are you interested in spiritual things?”**

Now that is a very simple planned question and it draws just one of two answers. One is “Yes.” the other is “No.” If the person says “Yes,” two questions follow, and knowing what you are going to say next can eliminate ninety percent of your nervousness. A lot of us may know how to make the first break, but then we don’t know what to do next, and when the person responds we fumble. An hour later we think of the perfect retort, but by that time it is too late. The second question is, **“What do you think a real Christian is?”**

The average person will define a real Christian as one who reads the Bible, or prays, or goes to church, or gives money, etc., etc. Then you say, **“Well, you know, that is what a real Christian does, but that is not what a real Christian is.”** Then go on to describe to him that a real Christian is one who is personally related to the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and explain a little bit of what this means.

If you discover there is real interest, the third question is, **“Would you like to become a real Christian now?”**

You will be amazed at the number of people who are just waiting to be asked. They are in a sort of spiritual fog. They would give anything to have certainty of forgiveness of sin and eternal life, but nobody has ever told them how. Many students have said to me, **“This is the first time anybody has ever told me how.”**

Now suppose the person is not interested. Drop it! You do not have to force the gospel on people who are not interested. You cannot do the Holy Spirit’s work for him.

We also have an opening when people share their problems and frustrations with us. We can say, if it has been true of us, **“You know, Mary or John, I know exactly how you feel. That used to be a problem for me until I had an experience that completely changed my life. Would you like me to tell you about it?”** And they will answer, **“Yes.”**

There is a third lesson to be learned from this figure of speech, **“fishers of men.”** There has to be a drawing of the net. The reason some of us have not introduced a person to the Savior is we have never popped the question. Maybe we have gotten to know people. Maybe we have built a bridge of friendship. But we have never come to the point of saying, **“Are you or aren’t you?”** Again, questions can help us.

The first is, **“Well, have you ever personally trusted Christ? Or are you still on the way?”** To say, **“Have you ever personally trusted Christ?”** defines it sufficiently that the person who does not know what

you mean will usually say, "What do you mean by that?" This is the opening you are looking for and you explain what you mean.

But more often people will say to me, "That is exactly how you describe me. I am still on the way." Then I say to them, "that is interesting. **How far along the way are you?**" Without the slightest embarrassment they will tell me exactly where they are in their thinking. They may not even believe that the Lord Jesus Christ lived. They may believe He was merely a great philosopher and teacher. Or it may be they know the gospel better than you and I do and their problem is not lack of information but simply not responding to the information they have. In either case, we can know exactly where they are in their thinking and adapt ourselves to meet the particular need.

The third question is, "**Would you like to become a real Christian now and be sure?**"

What is the next step of faith and obedience for you in the area of evangelism? Is it to pop the question to somebody whom you already know?

Is it to throw out the net with some people you have gotten to know casually? Or is it perhaps to begin to build a friendship with someone of your circle of acquaintances?

Whatever it is, I hope that what the Lord says to you today you will do with a heart that is responsive and obedient, in love of Christ and for others.

VOICES from the FIELDS

**James and Karen Ashley Box 986, Honiara, Solomon Islands
Feb. 1996**

"See this scar? I cannot ever forgive him!"

The harsh words were matched by the cold look in John Mark's eyes, the determined set of his jaws, and his clenched fists. He was telling us about the time his cousin Max had beaten him up when they were kids. It wasn't just a typical kid's argument over a soccer game. This was only a pebble from the mountain of hate and bitterness that separates some of our dearest friends here in Sa'a.

To understand the problems, one has to know a little about Melanesian culture--how the society is built up of different clans (called "canoes"). Each clan has a leader who makes the decisions any time they do something as a unit, whether it be clearing new garden land or pooling

resources to throw a wedding feast. Leadership is a matter of inheritance, and the first born sons are the lucky ones, just as in our own culture in years past. But here, if a man has no son, he may buy a child from outside the tribe to be his designated heir, thus avoiding passing the leadership to another branch of the extended family. Human nature being what it is, these by-passed branches sometimes reject the transplanted member.

In the years that we have been here we have seen this particular feud move from avoidance, to slander, to fabricated legal suits--"Your filthy son raped my innocent girl!" (The court doctor determined that she was still a virgin.) Then in court again last week a fresh insult ripped open the festering wound. One relative said to the blood members of the clan "I only see two paddles in the canoe" (meaning that your side isn't part of the clan at all). They were incensed and are threatening to move out. Fully one quarter of the village say they will leave houses, gardens, everything rather than make peace. Their hardened hearts only grow more bitter--even as both sides continue to kneel in church morning and evening repeating the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us what we do wrong just as we forgive those who do wrong to us."

Pray with us for these families. Pray they will follow Paul's advice to the Philippians, that "If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care--then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other . . . Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage."

I really hurt for them, especially as I sit at the translation desk working on passages about humility, bickering, divisions, and court cases (yes, I am currently translating 1 Corinthians). God's word is so applicable if people would be willing to listen.

Prayer requests:

- 1. Rejoice with us that our translation team has finished the book of Revelation and passed it on to a translation consultant for final checking. Praise God also for his help in translating four scripture comic books which we look forward to distributing soon.
- 2. We start furlough in less than 100 days. Pray for God's guidance as we plan for our time in the USA and make our travel arrangements.
- 3. One of our national co-translators, Timotheus, retired in January. At age 70, Timo has had to really struggle to read and write due to cataracts that cloud his vision. With the rough draft of the New Tes-

tament complete, he can now rest and leave the checking to me and the other translator, David. Please continue to pray for Timo as he adjusts to retirement and the limitations of old age.

- 4. We have been disappointed at the lack of response to our literacy materials by the Ministry of Education. The Curriculum Review Committee has yet to formally approve the books.
- 5. We hope to have 51% of the New Testament revised and checked before furlough, but still have I Corinthians, I-III John, and Jude to go. Pray for good progress, accuracy, and naturalness as work on the translation continues.

Moto Nomura "Bethany Home," Japan Jan. 29, 1996

When we get up in the morning, often our room temperature is below the freezing point, maybe even 24 degrees, but we are accustomed to this sort of temperature. Tomatoes and other vegetables in the kitchen are frozen, and it is not like Hawaii, but we are doing okay.

Occasionally from time to time some of the old members of the disbanded Hachiman-yama church in Tokyo come to the mountains to worship with us, and it gives all of us great joy to partake the Lord's Table together while thinking of and praying for all of our dearest friends all over the world. This universal Christian experience through the Lord's Table is wonderful.

I conduct two evening classes for four young adults (25 yrs.~35) during the weekdays. We made it a rule to sing some English hymns/gospel songs before each class begins. This way they not only learn English but they hear repeatedly core Christian messages in songs. We appreciate their eagerness to come to learn something regularly, for, at times, frozen icy mountain roads at dark night are quite risky.

When we consider how the Lord has been with us in His perseverance for the past eleven years since we moved into this once-openly anti-Christian remote mountainous rural community, we give praises to Him each time as we assemble together in His sweet glorious name.

I will be teaching a Church History (Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement) course in Japan School of Evangelism starting next April again. American Christian College, a college some of the Christian Church missionaries and I started some years ago in Tokyo, has had few students each year. We don't have any senior students so I do not go to Tokyo to teach nowadays.

My effort in the past 35 years to bridge the two churches in Japan brought beautiful flowers last year about this time, in that, when that ter-

rible Kobe earthquake brought much damage to Christian churches and their members' houses, many acappella churches started helping their brothers in need. To see Christian unity in love is something wonderful, indeed.

**Tim & Dawn Yates P.O. Box 2500, Blantyre, Malawi, Africa
Feb. 1996**

In April of this year, we will have our first National Conference for our churches in Malawi. This will be a time of unification and edification. Most of our churches here have never had a chance to meet churches from other districts. Many of the members walk several miles every Sunday to attend church. This will be a chance for them to unify their efforts at least once every four or five years.

We are striving more and more to include national leaders in our work. This not only helps us in our work, but it allows them the opportunity and the experience for leading the Church in the future, which is the ultimate goal of the Mission.

After our big meeting in April, we are hoping to start a new church in the city of Blantyre. This will be a church that will offer Christianity to the much neglected middle to upper class citizens. Blantyre is a city of over 400,000 people. It is the major metropolitan city of the Southern Region, which is the center of our work.

Just in the past few weeks we have started a prison ministry. One of our key leaders was once in prison with a life sentence for murder. There he became a Christian and was released on good behavior. Since his release, he has grown in the Lord and become a loving and capable leader. His desire is to go back to the prisons to witness to others about Jesus Christ.

Wisdom from Proverbs

The Confession of Sin

(Summary of a sermon preached by John R. W. Stott)

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13.)

In this verse two kinds of people are contrasted, those who cover or conceal their sins, and those who uncover them in confession. The distinction is of great importance because it is written that those who cover their sins shall not prosper, while those who uncover them in confession will find mercy.

Here is an indispensable condition of divine mercy and spiritual prosperity. Some of us are not prospering in the Christian life as we should. We are making little or no progress. We have got stuck, and are stale and stagnant. I wonder if the reason is that we have not taken seriously the message of this Scripture.

I. COVERING OUR SINS

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." Let us not suppose that this statement applies to unbelievers only; there is a common and dangerous tendency among Christians also to cover their sins, at least partially. We may use some formula of confession while the words remain empty and hollow and we do not really feel our sins or penitently uncover them in confession to God.

Some would have us believe that the whole idea of the confession of sin is morbid and unhealthy. It is unwholesome, they say, to concentrate on your sins. It only adds to the number of those who are suffering from a guilt complex. Well, some forms of confession *are* unhealthy--if we keep raking up the past which should have been long ago confessed, forsaken and forgiven. But true confession (the honest and tearful uncovering of the sins of the past day or week), far from being unhealthy, is an essential condition of spiritual health. It is covering them up which is unhealthy. There can be no spiritual or mental health without moral honesty. Psalm 32 describes the inner turmoil of a man who sought to cover his sins.

Others do not confess their sins because they imagine they have no need to. They have an unbalanced view of holiness. They suppose they have attained such perfection that they have nothing to confess. All that can be said to them is that Jesus was not of their opinion. He included in the prayer He gave us the petition "forgive us our trespasses." He evidently did not anticipate a time when His disciples could dispense with this prayer.

The real reason why we seek to cover our sins is that we cannot bear the humiliation of seeing ourselves as we are. Such is our innate pride that we prefer fiction to fact. We are in love with the fantasy image of ourselves which we have created, and refuse to escape from our dreamland. It is this which is unhealthy (the covering of sin, not the uncovering of it). Such self-deception is ruinous to all spiritual health. The very first secret of mental and spiritual health is to know the truth about ourselves and to admit it.

He who covers his sins shall not prosper either in this world or the next. For one thing, however successful we may be in concealing our sins from ourselves and others, we cannot conceal them from God. God knows us as we are and not as we like to think we are. He knows

our secret thoughts, motives and deceptions. All things are naked and open before His eyes, and nothing is hid from His sight.

For another thing, if we cover our sins in this world, they will be uncovered in the next. The Day of Judgment will bring acute embarrassment to all hypocrites who have covered their sins. Jesus said: "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known." We shall be able to retain no secrets on that dreadful day. All we *are* will become public knowledge. We shall be exposed in the poverty-stricken nakedness of our sin, selfishness and shame.

II. Confessing and Forsaking Our Sins

"Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." As the way to forfeit spiritual prosperity is to cover our sins, so the way to find mercy is to uncover them, to bring them out of the darkness of secrecy into the burning light of God's presence. This uncovering leads first to confessing and then to forsaking them, in order that we may receive the mercy of God. In these two activities (confessing and forsaking) is revealed the double purpose of uncovering our sins.

(a) *We uncover our sins in order that God may forgive them.* Psalm 32 begins with a statement of the blessedness of the man whose "sin is covered" (by God), but goes on to describe the distress of a man who refused to acknowledge his sin and tried to conceal it. As soon as he uncovered his sins, God covered them. God can only cover with His forgiveness the sins which we uncover in our confession. It is God's loving desire to cover, to conceal, to blot out, to cast out of sight, reach and mind, to bury in the depths of the sea, all our sins. But this covering of sin is for Him to do, not for us. Some people foolishly try to cover their own sins, to forget them; only to find that they continue to haunt their minds. God's way is that we should deliberately recall our sins, bringing them into the open before Him in contrition, and to let Him do the covering. There is a great need for this honesty before God. It is what is meant by "walking in the light." We must face ourselves as we are, without pretence and hypocrisy, uncovering and confessing our sins, if we desire to experience the mercy of God in forgiveness.

(b) *We uncover our sins in order that we may forsake them.* How can we expect to overcome in the future if we do not deal seriously with our failures in the past? One of the greatest snares to which we are exposed is the tendency to grow accustomed to sin. Worldliness surrounds us. The standards of the press, radio, TV and public billboards are not the standards of Jesus Christ. Sin is also ingrained in our fallen nature. The world, the flesh and the devil continuously assault us, and we cannot escape their temptations. It is easy, therefore,

to become morally insensitive, and to find that we are no longer hurt or shocked by these things.

One of the surest antidotes to this process of moral hardening is the practice of uncovering our sins and the specific forsaking of them. We must call to mind the sins we have committed which are displeasing in the holy eyes of God. Then we must not only confess them asking for cleansing, but we must deliberately, definitely and specifically forsake them. We should not be so plagued by what are commonly called "be-setting sins," if we did this. It is not enough to bring sin out into the open; we must go on to humble ourselves before God on account of it, and then to reject and repudiate it. The uncovering of sin is in itself of little value, unless it leads to an attitude of humility towards God and of hostility towards the sin itself.

In conclusion, I want to make a plea that our confessing and forsaking shall have two qualities. First, let them be *immediate*. Do not wait until the next time we go to Communion, or even until our evening prayer. As soon as we are conscious of being estranged from God, and that His face is clouded, let us get away for a moment to uncover our sin, confess and forsake it. This is indispensable if we are to abide in Christ continuously.

Secondly, let our confessing and forsaking be *detailed*. An omnibus confession is not enough, we must be specific. We need to make time every evening to look back over the past day, to ask the Holy Spirit to search us and help us to see our sins, deliberately to call them to mind and uncover them before God, seeking His cleansing and praying for grace to overcome them in the future.

Such immediate and detailed confessing and forsaking are required of every Christian. It is a question of honesty versus hypocrisy. Spiritual honesty is an indispensable condition of spiritual prosperity. The uncovering of sin is painful and humiliating. It brings us to our knees in lowliness before God as we come to see our worthlessness. But if we want to receive mercy (both forgiveness for the past and power for the future) there is no other way.

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QUESTIONS ASKED OF US

Carl Kitzmiller

At a recent funeral a very ungodly man was "preached into heaven" on the basis of a response to Christ and baptism early in his life . . . Is this not an abuse of grace?

No one who knows the reality of eternal condemnation or the Bible's teaching concerning the terrible tragedy of such a life delights in thinking that a deceased relative, friend, co-worker, neighbor or any other has died in a lost condition. When death has touched the lives of people we do not ordinarily want to say anything which will further their grief or mark us as people who lack compassion. The desire to be kind, which of itself is much to be commended, may cause some persons to say things to grieving family members at the time of death which simply are not true. Deceased ones may be declared "so much better off" when in reality about the only possible fact is that they are in torment (cf. Luke 16:22-23). There are times when silence is golden. We do not have to remind grieving people, especially while the wound is still raw, that their loved one was lost and is under eternal condemnation. Neither should we declare as comforting remarks that which is without foundation in fact.

Preachers are sometimes deceived concerning the status of a person, especially when they have not known that individual well. It is not unusual in such a case to inquire of some family member to be told the positive things relating to someone's spiritual status. Sometimes, in fact, the truth may be stretched close to the breaking point. Because any comment on the life of such an individual is based on what he has been told, a preacher may unintentionally draw a false sketch of the person's life and works. Most of us have heard the story of the abused and needy widow who sat with her several children at her husband's funeral and listened as the preacher spoke glowingly of the deceased as a wonderful husband and father. Finally, she whispered to one of the older children, directing him to slip to the casket and to be sure that it was the father's body in there. Such misrepresentation is sometimes a misguided effort to be kind, sometimes it is based on false information, and sometimes it is based on a wrong doctrinal concept.

In the particular case forming the basis for our question, I do not know how much misinformation had been given to the officiating preacher, but a good bit of the problem was the particular doctrinal position that he held. He did not believe that one having become a child of God could ever be lost. He belonged to a religious group which holds this as a doctrine, and he appeared to believe it without reservation. This is commonly known as "eternal security" or "once saved, al-

ways saved." In the Calvinistic doctrine from which it arises it is known as "the final perseverance of the saints."

Let it be established that as to its basis salvation is by the grace of God, not of works. Let it be established that the true believer in Christ is secure as a *believer*. Opponents of "once saved, always saved" doctrine have sometimes gone to foolish extremes in a opposite direction and just as false as that which they oppose, which makes salvation very uncertain and assurance impossible. This kind of reaction is not the solution to the problem. Let it be established that one is not a legalist (believing in salvation by works) because he believes that a life in Christ, given time and opportunity will manifest itself in the way one lives. We are saved by grace through faith, but that faith is a scriptural, obedient, continuing faith, not a one-time, many-years-ago act largely denied by the rest of life. Saving faith in the New Testament is always a present tense matter--continuing action--not merely a past event. Several New Testament passages support the need for a continued faith (1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 3:21-23; Heb. 3:6, 12-14; etc.). Moreover, a mere claim to belief which is not substantiated by fact and evidenced by life is a lie (Read 1 John).

A minister of mature years among us recently made this observation in my hearing: "Many people claiming to be in the church of Christ say they do not believe in 'once saved, always saved' teaching, but they proceed to show by their practice that they do." He was referring to many who once responded to the gospel and were baptized but whose life now demonstrates very little in the way of obedience to Christ. These may drink with the drunken, curse with the worst of them; lead impure lives, seldom or never attend worship services, etc. But when they die, someone recalls that "at age fifteen" or some such time, they responded in a meeting and were baptized. While believing in the essential nature of baptism in its proper place in salvation we cannot consent that it is a sure ticket to heaven, no matter what has followed.

If the conversion was genuine and scriptural at the earlier date, then the individual was saved. We do not say (as some do) that the failure to persevere shows the new birth never took place. The New Testament epistles speak of those who turned back, made shipwreck of the faith, and even denied the Lord after having been enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 6:4). It is true that some may never have done business with the Lord in spite of a profession of faith, baptism, and a period of church activity. When the "new" has worn off, they revert to the old life. There is no evidence of change. On the other hand, there are far too many warnings in scripture directed to Christian people for us to suppose that Christians cannot fall. We can draw back in faith, and our salvation is inseparably linked to faith.

We cannot here deal with all the passages which have to do with the doctrine of "once saved, always saved," but we recommend to our readers a book by Robert Shank entitled *Life in the Son*. This is one of the best treatments of the entire subject which I have ever read.

Yes, I believe great injustice is done to God and to the doctrine of grace when the impression is left that God saves even when there is no faith and when there is outright disobedience and rebellion against God. Christians do not live without sin, but the open continued life of sin which offers no evidence of repentance or a desire for repentance is another matter.

Backslidden Christians have one advantage. Even though they have been in "the far country," they can repent and be forgiven. This is not to say that they have not lost reward and dishonored God, but God will honor genuine repentance. Especially in those cases where a person realizes death is approaching, there may be time and even the desire to repent. Since this is a matter between a man and his God, we cannot always know when it has occurred. We cannot assume that it has occurred in every case, however, for sin hardens and unbelief may be so great that the time and opportunity for repentance is not used. We can hope against hope that the individual returned to God, and we need not "preach him into hell" since we do not always know what transpires between men and God, but to imply that God saves a man in his sins is surely an abuse of grace and a reproach on the name of God.

People are traveling one of two roads--either the narrow way that leads unto life or the broad way that leads to destruction. The fact that a person may at one time have started out on the narrow way does not mean that he cannot change course and travel the broad way. The destination depends on which way we are traveling when God sees fit to terminate our present earthly journey.

KNOWING GOD AND HIS PEACE

David Johnson

“Every age has its own characteristics. Right now we are in an age of religious complexity. The simplicity which is in Christ is rarely found among us. In its stead are programs, methods, organizations and a world of nervous activities which occupy time and attention but can never satisfy the longing of the heart. The shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, and that servile imitation of the world which marks our promotional methods all testify that we, in this day, know God only imperfectly, and the Peace of God scarcely at all.”

A.W. Tozer, a pastor-teacher with a passionate craving to commune with God, wrote these words back in 1948, in his classic bestseller: **The Pursuit of God**. And in 1996 we are still in the midst of religious complexity. Only the height, depth and breath of programs, methods and organizations have escalated, become more complex--ever drifting from Him!

“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning.” Hosea 6:3.

“My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand up holdeth me.” Psalm 63:8.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest in your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

Christianity’s focus, first and foremost *must* center in Christ. We draw the closest to God in Christ. Christ is a Person with personality who ever seeks you and me in a meaningful relationship. Relationship begins with reception, but really *takes off* with daily conversation, devotion and interchange person to Person. A healthy human relationship, say with a spouse or child, needs cultivation, nourishment, time; so it must be with God to really know Him. To better understand Him. To more wholly worship Him. To meet spirit to Spirit with Him.

Then relationship can be lifted to greater heights to more fully achieve communion with the Godhead. Created compelled to Creator; mortal seeking the Immortal One. Then partakers can taste intimacy; sense the Presence, and enjoy Peace with the Most High God.

WINSTON ALLEN FALLS ASLEEP IN CHRIST

Winston N. Allen, first president of Kentucky Bible College (later Southeastern Christian College) and then for 32 years a missionary in Alaska, went to be with the Lord on Friday, March 15. He was 76 years old.

He and his wife Irene spent his last months in the Atlanta area with their son David and his family. But the funeral and burial were in Sellersburg, Indiana.

Brother Winston is fondly remembered by his former colleagues and students at KBC/SCC. He loved the Lord supremely and was dedicated to His will. He loved to teach the Bible and also biology--God's Word and works. As a teacher he was both demanding of his students, holding them to high standards, yet very encouraging too. He had a dry humor that brightened his serious purpose in life. He was a very devoted family man. He loved the beauties of God's creation.

He was deeply attracted to Alaska since his teenage years. Its fantastic beauty combined with deep spiritual needs drew him like a magnet--for its crime rate is the highest and its church-attendance rate the lowest of the 50 states. He and Irene moved to Anchorage and then nearby Eagle River and established a church. It grew slowly, for a number of its members through the years were servicemen stationed at a nearby airbase. Many of them were led to Christ or built up in Him but then moved on in just a matter of months or a few years as they were stationed elsewhere. Last year the congregation chose elders (Winston was one) and deacons and the work became self-supporting as well as self-governing (under the Lord) at that time. Till then it had been a mission work of the Gallatin, Tenn. church.

Brother Winston was a clear and deep teacher of the Bible. His preaching and teaching helped many. And he backed up his beliefs by his example and character. He had the mind of a teacher and the heart of a servant.

Keep praying for Irene, and for their sons David and Norman and their families (there are 8 grandchildren). Pray also for the Eagle River church, especially its leaders as they carry on a work for the Lord in that area.

Word & Work welcomes other memorial comments about the Allens and their ministries. -- The Editor

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

Ladies Inspiration Day

Ladies, don't miss this annual time of spiritual refreshing. This year's theme: "Glorifying God through Women's Ministry." Place: Southeast Church of Christ, Louisville. Date: Saturday, April 20, from 9:00 (registration)-2:30. This is a highlight for the ladies of many congregations as they gather for mutual encouragement & practical help.

Eastern Hills Church, Garland TX

I had lunch with a young man yesterday who wants to get involved with the poor and needy. I find this rather refreshing. He wants to do what Paul did, remember the poor. It is my aim this year, by God's grace, to search out those in need--not those who can bring in the money, but those who have a need and want a solution. I really believe that the Eastern Hills congregation is ready to reach out to the needy. We are small in number, but we have a great and awesome God. -- Gene Mullins, Sr.

Wanted: Old Word & Works

The School of Biblical Studies seems to be missing the Bound Volumes of W&W for the years 1980 & 1981. Do you have those, & wish to donate or sell them to SBS?

Also Terry Gardner desires W&W magazines from 1926 - 1939. He prefers loose copies, not bound volumes. You may reach him at (317) 784-8544; or write to 4926 Candy Spots Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46237. Please help him if you can.

Should You Help Maintain This Ministry?

A Christian couple, who believe the W&W is a valuable ministry, for some years donated \$60 monthly for our expenses. But due to the husband's death they are unable to do that any more. Maybe the Lord will lay it on the heart of others to support W&W as it seeks to teach, encourage, correct & comfort God's people from God's word. This allows us to keep our price low.

Remember too our desire to publish the biography of R. H. Boll by Tom Bradshaw. We are grateful indeed for those who have donated to this (as well as those who give to W&W in general, like the couple mentioned above). But we still need about \$900 in order to go to press.

Words Of Life

In a series of events that developed quickly, Words of Life has made the transition to a new speaker for the radio broadcast. Carl Kitzmiller of Johnson City, Tennessee, has agreed to serve in this capacity. This follows the sudden news late last year that Richard Ramsey had been diagnosed with cancer in his back. Intense pain and the debilitating effects of medicine brought on the immediate need for Bro. Ramsey to give up his responsibilities with the program. Tapes of Bro. Ramsey's messages will continue through the fourth Sunday of March; Bro. Kitzmiller's first sermon will be prepared for broadcast on March 31, 1996.

Bro. Ramsey has served as the voice of Words of Life for nearly four years and was eagerly looking

forward to continuing in this role when his doctors made their discovery. He has also been active in answering mail from listeners and has, from the beginning, been on the lookout for ways to improve the program. He brought to each broadcast his unique style of preaching that presented the gospel in truth and simplicity. We are thankful for the zeal and service that he has supplied through the years.

Currently, Bro. Richard is undergoing oral chemotherapy treatments and must spend much of his time in bed. He and his wife, Virginia, desire your prayers in their behalf.

Although we deeply regret the loss of Bro. Ramsey's services, we believe that God has abundantly supplied our needs by sending Carl Kitzmiller to be our new speaker. Bro. Kitzmiller brings much experience to the microphone. He has served as a full-time pulpit minister for nearly 50 years and has, on several occasions, been involved with radio ministries. In addition, for many years he wrote a column in the Word and Work magazine and he continues to write the Word and Work Sunday School Quarterly. Bro. Carl served most recently as a preacher for the Locust St. Church of Christ in Johnson City, TN. We are thankful that he will now be using his gifts to reach an even larger audience through the airwaves.

Expressions of Gratitude Always Appreciated

Why not also send a note/letter of thanksgiving to Richard Ramsey at P.O. Box 2491, Hammond LA 70404. Keep praying for him, Virginia & the rest of the family.

Amite Church of Christ, La

The new classrooms were completed just two weeks ago and everyone really enjoys them. In addition to adding three spacious rooms in the new complex, the old classroom building was renovated and has a new

look. Also added were extra storage areas and a few changes to the preacher's study. Needing extra room for classes is a problem, but it is one of those problems we like having. And added to all that is the fact that everything is paid for.

Making a godly difference in our town is the goal of the Amite church. The members do not want to simply be another church on another corner in town. Well, it is happening and the impetus is coming from the young adults. They are witnessing to their friends of the love and grace of God, and are showing hospitality and kindness to people in their homes. People are being won to the Lord as a result. Praise God for such families!

After several months of leadership training in the Young Adult class and Sunday evening services, the congregation recently selected three young men to function as deacons for a period of one year. They will be ordained at the end of the year if they still aspire to the office and if the congregation wants them to continue to serve. Though this method is a bit unusual, it will help in overcoming some of the problems experienced in the past having to do with the selection of leadership.

A careful examination of our church reveals that the next major move will be the hiring of a full-time youth minister. A lot of folks are doing a lot of praying about this matter and we believe the Lord will bless richly. The future leadership for our congregation looks bright with the pool of men in the 20, 30 and 40 year age groups. What is now needed is focused attention upon the children and teens who will one day constitute the young adult group.

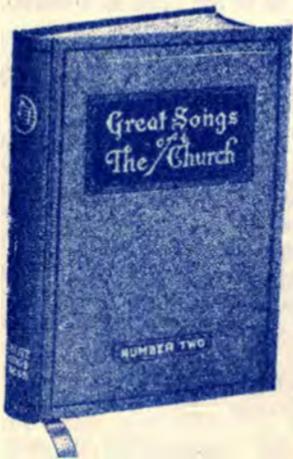
Dedication To Live By

"Lord, send me anywhere—only go with me. Lay any burden on me—only sustain me. Sever any tie but the tie that binds me to Thyself." --David Livingstone, great pioneer missionary to Africa

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