
Shield of Faith

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Repentance Unto Life

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).

When Peter returned to Jerusalem from Joppa “they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (Acts 11:2-3). “Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them” concerning how the Lord had sent him to the house of Cornelius, and how “the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

The Jews held exalted ideas of themselves and the lowest of thoughts of all other nations. They believed that Divine blessings were designed for themselves exclusively. They imagined that the Messiah was to make them a glorious people, and destroy or enslave all other nations. They had no idea that others could be saved, except by being made proselytes to their law. They were no doubt astonished that the Holy Ghost should fall on the Gentiles, and that God should grant unto them repentance unto life.

The Christians who were present were all satisfied with Peter’s account. (It does not appear that all were *ultimately* satisfied, as we know there were serious disputes in the Church afterwards on this subject.) They, at that time, saw that it was from God and they glorified Him.

Gentiles heard the Gospel preached, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word, and the church was opened to them. All this was described as God granting unto them “repentance unto life.”

“Repent” was the message of the forerunner of Jesus Christ. “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at

hand” (Matthew 3:1-2). Soon afterward, Jesus Himself would preach the same message. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17 KJV). When Jesus sent the twelve Apostles out to preach, “... they went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12).

Jesus came to “call sinners to repentance” (Mt. 9:13). Repentance was the dominant theme of His preaching. It had priority in the ministry of John the Baptist, the disciples, Peter at Pentecost, Paul, and the early church. Repentance, is to be the first step of Christian discipleship as well as an ongoing activity. Christian living involves habitual repentance—a constant turning.

Since the gospel age was ushered in with the call to repentance, this message must be regarded as of utmost importance. This subject has surely fallen from favor in our day. It has become distasteful to those who are self-satisfied and complacent in their sins. Search Christian book stores and libraries and you will likely find a few pages, rather than volumes, devoted to the subject of repentance. There has been an almost universal abandoning this basic Bible message. There is possibly a greater need for such preaching today than in any other age in history. This nation needs again to be reminded of the ancient prophetic cry, “...Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among the thorns” (Jeremiah 4:3). We need to repent of our sins.

It is remarkable that the message of repentance came at first almost exclusively to God’s covenant people, the Jews. There were, no doubt, many people who were far more wicked than the Jews. However, Jesus said “... I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). He told His disciples,

“...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). Because of the covenant relationship between God and His people, Israel had enjoyed great privileges. These privileges brought great responsibilities. “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:1-3). God delivered Israel from Egypt to bring them to a place of fellowship with Himself. He often corrected His people in order to maintain this fellowship.

The same principle is true of spiritual Israel, believers, of today. God has given us great privileges, has called us to fellowship with Himself, and will correct us in order to maintain that fellowship. Our response to His correction must be repentance.

Sadly, it is often easier to see the need of repentance in others than in ourselves. I fear that most of the church today has the idea that if the wayward and backsliders would repent, all would be well. Truly those need to repent, but repentance must begin where God’s judgment begins—at the house of God. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17-18).

Repentance is basic and essential to Christian discipleship. There are two

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Repentance Unto Life

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words in the New Testament translated repentance-- one of which denotes a change of mind, or a reformation of life; and the other, sorrow or regret that sin has been committed. The word used to describe the duty of a believer is the former; calling us to a change of life, or a reformation of conduct. It means a change of the will, or heart, new purposes, a determination to leave off sinning. Sorrow is not repentance, but "godly sorrow worketh repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:10). John did not call on the people to be sorry, but to change their mental attitudes and conduct.

That both *change of action* as well as *change of mind* is required in true repentance is illustrated in Ezekiel 18:30-32, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." Also in Ezekiel 33:11 the word states, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Repentance implies a discovery that one is wrong and hence, the resolve to change. Repentance is incomplete, however, with a resolve to change. There must be actual change. The individual who has not "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9), thus renouncing his former sinful lifestyle, is not truly repentant.

Each day, many times in each day, the follower of Christ must make a deliberate moral effort, sometimes at great personal cost, to "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow" Jesus (Luke 9:23). He must unflinchingly renounce both ungodly thoughts and sinful deeds. He must denounce unbiblical attitudes and every form of idolatry, and commit himself anew to a life of total consecration to God. Most believers today would, no doubt, deny being idolatrous. If we

would, however, examine our excuses for not doing as Christ has instructed us, in *most* cases we would find our idol. Anything we put before the service of God is an idol. Anything that draws our heart away from God is an idol.

Though many people rationalize their own actions, shift blame, avoid accountability, and pursue distractions, God calls upon man to simply repent. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established" (Proverbs 16:2-3).

True repentance is comprised of several distinct but interrelated factors. It begins always with God. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25). Until God convicts the sinner's heart, there can be no repentance. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Godly sorrow is not simply being terrified with the fear of punishment, but the feeling of having offended God our most merciful Father. Contrary to this there is another sorrow, that only fears punishment, or when a man is troubled because of the loss of some worldly goods. The fruit of the first is repentance, and the fruit of the second is desperation, unless the Lord quickly helps.

Godly sorrow is such sorrow as God approves, or such as is conformable to his will and desires. Such sorrow arises from a view of the evil of sin as committed against a holy God.

Godly sorrow is that which leads to God. It leads to God to obtain forgiveness—to seek for consolation. A heart truly contrite and penitent seeks God, and pardon from him. Other sorrow than that which is genuine repentance, leads the person away from God.

Sorrow for having offended God and seeing the result of sin should lead to a change of the course of life.

The young man who we know as "the

prodigal son" is a wonderful example of repentance. "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:17-19). He first "came to himself." By God's grace he was able to see his miserable condition. He determined a new course of action—"I will arise and go to my father." He would confess his sin and his unworthiness. He would plead for mercy. His sorrow for his sin and all his determination, however, meant little until he *did* as he had resolved. "And he arose, and came to his father" (Luke 15:20).

To the Gentiles, God granted "repentance *unto life*" (Acts 11:18). To Israel God said, "turn yourselves, and *live ye*" (Ezekiel 18:32) and commanded "that the wicked turn from his way *and live*" (Ezekiel 33:11). Repentance, then, is not just sorrow from sin. It is sorrow that leads the sinner to turn from sin. Not only does he turn *from* sin, he also must turn *to* God. Turning from sin to God is turning from the ways of death to the way of life.

"The prodigal son" turned from the hog pen, where "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him" (Luke 15:16), to the house of his father, where the father, doubtless waiting and watching for his return, welcomed him with open arms.

While we often center our attention on "the prodigal son," that parable is about *the father*, who "had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). The father, who commanded "bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet" (Luke 15:22), pictures our heavenly Father, Who waits and watches for our repentant return to Him.

"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:7 KJV)

Elder Greg Phillips

Bible Quiz

Fill in each blank with a name that begins with the letter listed.

- A _____ caught his hair in an oak tree (2 Sam. 18:9).
 B _____ was the second husband of Ruth (Ruth 4:13).
 C _____ was a centurion who believed in Jesus (Acts 10:48).
 D _____ was a woman who betrayed Samson (Judg. 16:10-20).
 E _____ was a priest with whom Samuel worked (1 Sam. 1:25).
 F _____ trembled at Paul's preaching (Acts 24:25).
 G _____ the man who appeared to Daniel in a vision (Dan. 9:21).
 H _____ was the mother of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20).
 I _____ is another name for Judas (Matt. 10:4).
 J _____ was sold as a slave by his brothers (Gen. 37:28).
 K _____ was the father of Saul (1 Sam. 9:1).
 L _____ was the brother of Mary and Martha (John 12:1).
 M _____ replaced Judas as treasurer (Acts 1:23,26).
 N _____ showed David his sin (2 Sam. 12:1).
 O _____ was a converted slave of Philemon (Philem. 10).
 P _____ denied Jesus three times (Matt. 26:69-75).
 Q _____ was a man Paul called brother (Rom. 16:23).
 R _____ was a harlot who hid Israel's spies (Josh. 6:22).
 S _____ was known for his strength (Judg. 14:5-6).
 T _____ was a young companion to Paul (Acts 16:1).
 U _____ was Bathsheba's first husband (2 Sam. 11:3).
 V _____ was a beautiful queen replaced by Esther (Esther 1:9).
 W _____ came from the East seeking a newborn king (Matt. 2:1-2).
 Y _____ directed Saul to Samuel (1 Sam. 9:11).
 Z _____ was the man who climbed a tree to see Jesus (Luke 19:2).

Answers on page 4.

Gathering of Saints

The spring *Gathering of Saints* will be held March 3-4, 2006 at Fairview Primitive Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee, the Lord willing.

The *Gathering of Saints* is a time of worship and fellowship open to all believers. Services begin at 1:00 PM EST on Friday with speakers at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, and 4:00. Dinner will be served at the church at 5:30. There will be an evening worship service at 7:00.

On Saturday morning services will begin at 9:00 AM with speakers at 9:00, 10:00, and 11:00. Lunch will be served at noon and will conclude the meeting.

Speakers will be selected at the meeting, so all preachers should come expecting to preach.

Please make your plans now to attend these services. For more information, contact Elder Greg Phillips, 807 Ashwood Lane, Chattanooga, TN 37415. Phone (423) 875-3652.

He Knows Our Inability

RECENTLY while in deep meditation about the experience of the Lord's people, I felt deep down in my heart that I wanted to hear God's children talk about their experience. I said, "I wish I knew how a Christian feels." While examining myself and seeing so much that I detest in the flesh, I asked myself the question, "Does the Lord, who is so good, pure, holy, just, wise, powerful, and loving, love such a wretch as I? Is it possible that I can be His child?" I read this sweet expression: "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." How I rejoiced and praised His holy name! He does not expect perfection in us. He knows how sinful, poor, and needy we are. We do not have to appear before a just and holy Being in our own righteousness, but in the righteousness of Jesus. We go in name of Christ, our Elder Brother, who is so good and merciful. He knows that we are depraved and all polluted with sin and cannot save ourselves; but, thank God! the precious Saviour came to earth for that express purpose: to bear our sins in His own body and put them all away by the sacrifice of Himself. He paid all the debt. His precious blood cleanses us from all sin. He knows the corruptions of our hearts, but the blood of Jesus, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, lovingly purges our consciences from dead works to serve the true and living God. Malice and hatred are removed, and our hearts filled with His pure love by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Thank God He does not deal with us after our sins; nor reward us according to our iniquities. He knows we cannot keep the law, and He kept it for us. He knew that all of our righteousnesses were as filthy rags, and He clothed us with His own spotless righteousness. He is merciful to our unrighteousness. He loved sinners. Bless His holy name! He ate with sinners, and commended His love to us while we were sinners. He knew that we had no strength, but, in due time, He died for us. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." His mercy to us poor sinners is from everlasting to everlasting. He forgives all of our iniquities; He heals all of our diseases; He redeems our life from destruction; He satisfies our mouth with good things. He is a Sun and shield to us and gives grace and glory, and no good thing will He withhold from them that walk up rightly. When I think of the awful corruption in the world religiously, morally, socially, and politically, were it not that the dear Lord is merciful to our unrighteousness, we would all be hopelessly lost. Man continues to degenerate. Pride, fashion, covetousness, worldly mindedness, formality, envy, carnality, etc., are having a blighting effect in Zion. Where is that love, forbearance, gentleness, kindness, forgiveness, that should characterize us as followers of the meek and lowly Saviour?

Elder Lee Hanks (1861-1947) in
The Life and Times of Elder Lee Hanks

WHEN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS NEEDED

[Editor's note: Parts of this article may be objectionable, but consider the overall message.]

Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee? Psalm 85:6.

THE Psalmist felt that God had been very favorable to the people, and while contemplating the goodness of the Lord in bringing them back from the land whither they had been carried away captive, and while looking at the prospects before them, he breaks out into a prayer for a revival of religion: "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" Since God in His providence had re-established the ordinances of His house among them, he prays that there may be a revival of religion to crown the work.

In my first Lecture I attempted to show what a revival of religion is not, what a revival is, and the agencies to be employed in promoting it. The topics to which I now wish to call attention are:

I. When a revival of religion is needed. II. The importance of a revival.

WHEN A REVIVAL OF RELIGION IS NEEDED

1. When there is a want of brotherly love and Christian confidence among professors of religion, then a revival is needed. Then there is a loud call for God to revive His work. When Christians have sunk down into a low and backslidden state, they neither have, nor can have, the same love and confidence toward each other, as when they are all alive, and active, and living holy lives. God loves all men with the love of benevolence, but He does not feel the love of complacency toward any but those who live holy. Christians love each other with the love of complacency, only in proportion to their holiness. If Christian love is the love of the image of Christ.
2. When there are dissensions, and jealousies, and evil speakings among professors of religion, then there is a great need of a revival. These things show that Christians have got far from God, and it is time to think earnestly of a revival. Religion cannot prosper with such things in the Church, and nothing can put an end to them like a revival.
3. When there is a worldly spirit in the

Church. It is manifest that the Church has sunk down into a low and backslidden state, when you see Christians conform to the world in dress, equipage, and "parties," in seeking worldly amusements, and reading novels, and other books such as the world reads. It shows that they are far from God, and that there is great need of a revival of religion.

4. When the Church finds its members falling into gross and scandalous sins, then it is time to awake and cry to God for a revival of religion. When such things are taking place as give the enemies of religion an occasion for reproach, it is time to ask of God: "What will become of Thy great Name?"

5. When there is a spirit of controversy in the Church or in the land, a revival is needful. The spirit of religion is not the spirit of controversy. There can be no prosperity in religion where the spirit of controversy prevails.

6. When the wicked triumph over the Churches, and revile them, it is time to seek for a revival of religion.

7. When sinners are careless and stupid, it is time Christians should bestir themselves. It is as much their duty to awake as it is for the firemen to do so when a fire breaks out in the night in a great city. The Church ought to put out the fires of hell which are laying hold of the wicked. Sleep! Should the firemen sleep and let the whole city burn down, what would be thought of such firemen? And yet their guilt would not compare with the guilt of Christians who sleep while sinners around them are sinking stupidly into the fires of hell.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A REVIVAL

1. A revival of religion is the only possible thing that can wipe away the reproach which covers the Church, and restore religion to the place it ought to have in the estimation of the public. Without a revival, this reproach will cover the Church more and more, until it is overwhelmed with universal contempt. You may do

anything else you please, and you may change the aspects of society in some respects, but you will do no real good; you only make it worse without a revival of religion. You may go and build a splendid new house of worship, and line your seats with damask, put up a costly pulpit, and get a magnificent organ, and everything of that kind, to make a show and dash, and in that way you may procure a sort of respect for religion among the wicked, but it does no good in reality. It rather does hurt. It misleads them as to the real nature of religion; and so far from converting them, it carries them farther away from salvation. Look wherever they have surrounded the altar of Christianity with splendor, and you will find that the impression produced is contrary to the true nature of religion. There must be a waking up of energy on the part of Christians, and an outpouring of God's Spirit, or the world will laugh at the Church.

2. Nothing else will restore Christian love and confidence among Church members. Nothing but a revival can restore it, and nothing else ought to restore it. There is no other way to wake up that love of Christians for one another which is sometimes felt, when they have such love as they cannot express. You cannot have such love without confidence; and you cannot restore confidence without such evidence of piety as is seen in a revival. If a minister find he has lost in any degree the confidence of his people, he ought to labor for a revival as the only means of regaining their confidence.

I do not mean that his motive in laboring for a revival should be merely to regain the confidence of his people, but that a revival through his instrumentality (and ordinarily nothing else) will restore to him the confidence of the praying part of his people. So if an elder or private member of the Church finds his brethren cold towards him, there is but one way to restore it. It is by being revived himself, and pouring out from his eyes and from his life the splendor of the Image of Christ. This spirit will catch and spread in the Church; confidence will be renewed, and brotherly love prevail again.

From *REVIVALS OF RELIGION*
BY CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY

Answers to Bible Quiz

Absalom, Boaz, Cornelius, Delilah, Eli, Felix, Gabriel, Hannah, Iscariot, Joseph, Kish, Lazarus, Matthias, Nathan, Onesimus, Peter, Quartus, Rahab, Samson, Timothy, Uriah, Vashti, Wise Men, young maidens, Zacchaeus

Devotions:

Psalms In Reflection

From the book of the same title by Elder Len Dalton

<<A Song of degrees.>> *Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud.* (Psalms 123:1-4)

It does not seem strange in most of these psalms that Jehovah should be thought of in some way as the helper of the pilgrim. In fact, it seems that this would be a good place to use that title. He has been the helper of the pilgrim all the way. So the singer, now within the city and the temple, lifts his eyes to Jehovah. Really they are not actually home, but as a result of that fact, and yet as a result of their faith, there are two beautiful figures brought out in the psalm; "as the eyes of a servant look into the hands of their master," and "as the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress." So our eyes look unto Jehovah our God.

From all this three attitudes of mind are brought to light that are worthy of special notice. These are, "dependence," "submission," "discipline." This, then, is the true way of looking for help from Jehovah. When the eyes are lifted, as were the eyes of these pilgrims, in seeking, the blessings are sure to be found.

Although these summaries are not so long as most of them, I have found them full of beauty. The experiences so common to them are common to every true pilgrim. Ponder them well in your study.

Grace Sufficient

So many burdened lives along the way!
My load seems lighter than the most I see,
And oft I wonder if I could be brave,
Patient and sweet if they were laid on me.
But God has never said that He would give
Another's grace without another's thorn;
What matter, since for every day of mine
Sufficient grace for me comes with the morn?
And though the future brings some heavier cross
I need not cloud the present with my fears;
I know the grace that is enough today
Will be sufficient still through all the years.

Annie Johnson Flint

(2 Corinthians 12:9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Hymns and Hymn Writers

He Giveth More Grace

When Annie Johnson's mother died in 1869 (at the age of twenty-three) following the birth of a baby sister for Annie, the father took the children to board with the widow of an old army comrade who had been killed in the Civil War. It was not a happy arrangement. The woman had two children of her own and her means were very limited. During the two years the Johnson girls added to the cares of that family, they were evidently unwelcome and unwanted. Her father, suffering at the time with an incurable disease from which he afterwards died, gave his two daughters to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Flint, who adopted the girls.

After finishing her high school Annie spent one year at normal school and started teaching the primary class in the same school that she had attended as a girl. Early in the second year arthritis began to show itself. She tried several doctors in turn, but it steadily grew worse until it became difficult for her to walk at all, and she had a hard time finishing out the third year. After that she was obliged to give up her work, and there followed years of increasing helplessness. The death of both her adopted parents within a few months of each other left the two girls alone again. There was little money in the bank and the twice-orphaned children had come to a real "Red Sea Place" in their lives.

Picture if you can the hopelessness of Annie's position when she finally received the verdict of the doctors of the Clifton Springs Sanitarium, that henceforth she would be a helpless invalid. Her own parents had been taken from her in childhood, and her foster parents both passed away. Her one sister was very frail and struggling to meet her own situation bravely.

Her poems were written with a pen pushed through bent fingers and held by swollen joints. She lived decades as an invalid, completely dependant on others. She suffered the indignity of being incontinent, years of being diapered.

To know all she suffered makes her poems even more remarkable as statements of her love for and faith in God.

*He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as our labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials he multiplies peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*

Current and past issues of the *Shield of Faith* can be found online at www.shieldoffaith.us

A SERIOUS CALL TO A DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE

by William Law (1728)

DEVOTION is neither private nor public prayer; but prayers, whether private or public, are particular parts or instances of devotion. Devotion signifies a life given, or devoted, to God. He, therefore, is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his common life parts of piety, by doing everything in the Name of God, and under such rules as are conformable to His glory.

We readily acknowledge, that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers; that in them we are to look wholly unto Him, and act wholly for Him; that we are only to pray in such a manner, for such things, and such ends, as are suitable to His glory.

Now let any one but find out the reason why he is to be thus strictly pious in his prayers, and he will find the same as strong a reason to be as strictly pious in all the other parts of his life. For there is not the least shadow of a reason why we should make God the rule and measure of our prayers; why we should then look wholly unto Him, and pray according to His will; but what equally proves it necessary for us to look wholly unto God, and make Him the rule and measure of all the other actions of our life. For any ways of life, any employment of our talents, whether of our parts, our time, or money, that is not strictly according to the will of God, that is not for such ends as are suitable to His glory, are as great absurdities and failings, as prayers that are not according to the will of God. For there is no other reason why our prayers should be according to the will of God, why they should have nothing in them but what is wise, and holy, and heavenly; there is no other reason for this, but that our lives may be of the same nature, full of the same wisdom, holiness, and heavenly tempers, that we may live unto God in the same spirit that we pray unto Him. Were it not our strict duty to live by reason, to devote all the actions of our lives to God, were it not absolutely necessary to walk before Him in wisdom and holiness and all heavenly

conversation, doing everything in His Name, and for His glory, there would be no excellency or wisdom in the most heavenly prayers. Nay, such prayers would be absurdities; they would be like prayers for wings, when it was no part of our duty to fly.

As sure, therefore, as there is any wisdom in praying for the Spirit of God, so sure is it, that we are to make that Spirit the rule of all our actions; as sure as it is our duty to look wholly unto God in our prayers, so sure is it that it is our duty to live wholly unto God in our lives. But we can no more be said to live unto God, unless we live unto Him in all the ordinary actions of our life, unless He be the rule and measure of all our ways, than we can be said to pray unto God, unless our prayers look wholly unto Him. So that unreasonable and absurd ways of life, whether in labor or diversion, whether they consume our time, or our money, are like unreasonable and absurd prayers, and are as truly an offense unto God.

It is for want of knowing, or at least considering this, that we see such a mixture of ridicule in the lives of many people. You see them strict as to some times and places of devotion, but when the service of the Church is over, they are but like those that seldom or never come there. In their way of life, their manner of spending their time and money, in their cares and fears, in their pleasures and indulgences, in their labor and diversions, they are like the rest of the world. This makes the loose part of the world generally make a jest of those that are devout, because they see their devotion goes no farther than their prayers, and that when they are over, they live no more unto God, till the time of prayer returns again; but live by the same humor and fancy, and in as full an enjoyment of all the follies of life as other people. This is the reason why they are the jest and scorn of careless and worldly people; not because they are really devoted to God, but because they appear to have no other devotion but that of occasional prayers. Julius is very fearful of missing prayers; all the parish supposes Julius to be sick, if he is not at Church. But if you were to ask him why he spends the rest of his time by humor

or chance? why he is a companion of the silliest people in their most silly pleasures? why he is ready for every impertinent entertainment and diversion? If you were to ask him why there is no amusement too trifling to please him? why he is busy at all balls and assemblies? why he gives himself up to an idle, gossiping conversation? why he lives in foolish friendships and fondness for particular persons, that neither want nor deserve any particular kindness? why he allows himself in foolish hatreds and resentments against particular persons without considering that he is to love everybody as himself? If you ask him why he never puts his conversation, his time, and fortune, under the rules of religion? Julius has no more to say for himself than the most disorderly person. For the whole tenor of Scripture lies as directly against such a life, as against debauchery and intemperance: he that lives such a course of idleness and folly, lives no more according to the religion of Jesus Christ, than he that lives in gluttony and intemperance.

If a man was to tell Julius that there was no occasion for so much constancy at prayers, and that he might, without any harm to himself, neglect the service of the Church, as the generality of people do, Julius would think such a one to be no Christian, and that he ought to avoid his company. But if a person only tells him, that he may live as the generality of the world does, that he may enjoy himself as others do, that he may spend his time and money as people of fashion do, that he may conform to the follies and frailties of the generality, and gratify his tempers and passions as most people do, Julius never suspects that man to want a Christian spirit, or that he is doing the devil's work. And if Julius was to read all the New Testament from the beginning to the end, he would find his course of life condemned in every page of it. And indeed there cannot anything be imagined more absurd in itself, than wise, and sublime, and heavenly prayers, added to a life of vanity and folly, where neither labor nor diversions, neither time nor money, are under the direction of the wisdom and heavenly tempers of our

(Continued on page 8)

BUYING THE WAL-MART JESUS

The new Wal-Mart Supercenter just opened up in my town, and man, what a sight! It's a mammoth structure of utilitarian architecture that houses everything from a grocery to a garden center, along with every dry good you can imagine from fashion wear to office supplies. And people just flock there because it's one-stop shopping, famous low prices, and a quick "get in and get out" affair. It is an amazing achievement in the history of American consumerism.

Oh, and don't forget about the official Smiley Face mascot greeting you on every sign. It just makes you feel all warm and fuzzy inside as you spend your money to save money.

The only problem is that the former Wal-Mart building in town is now vacant since the retail giant moved its local operation to the new Supercenter facility. Hard to believe that twenty years ago this smaller Wal-Mart store was the shining Camelot on the hill for local shoppers. Now it's just a castle ruin, an empty shell of its former glory as the company moves on to bigger and better things. Alas, a sign of the times, I'm afraid.

Prior to the beginning of this Sam Walton invasion, our town had a few Mom-and-Pop retail stores downtown, but they're gone now, too. The first Wal-Mart that landed here soon priced those little shops right out of the market and made it too easy for the faithful customers of our local enterprises to be slowly seduced by the discount convenience of the new store in town. Hometown loyalty and one-on-one service be gone! Pretty soon, those slow-paced, family-run stores with creaky wood floors and clanging brass cash registers had to close their doors for good. Nobody valued their unassuming brand of commerce anymore.

So why do I bring all this up? Because it seems to me that many Christians today have been infected with the same corrupting consumerism that has given rise to the Wal-Mart Supercenter. Their lives are no longer content with the eloquent simplicity of Jesus Christ and His Word, but now clamor for a wide variety of new and improved Christianized products to over-indulge their so-called faith. The congregations have moved out of the austere model of the small-town church, where unadorned worship to God rang forth, and

have instead built for themselves Christian Supercenters in which to sell their worldly goods and services in the name of Christ.

You see striking evidence of this Wal-Mart mentality in postmodern Christianity every time you step into your local Christian bookstore and have to walk past shelf after shelf of shiny religious trinkets and trite bestsellers before you get to that little section of plain black Bibles in the far back corner. You see it every time you watch millions of professed Christians assemble in their multi-million dollar sanctuaries to hear feel-good sermons by Smiley Face mascots who offer heaven and happiness at a discount price.

Of course, it didn't use to be like this. There was a time, believe it or not, when we survived just fine without the trappings of modern consumerism in our life. Long before the first Wal-Mart was built in my mostly-rural area, the presence of any kind of retail store was a rarity. All people really had back then was the Sears catalog. It sat there, prized like the family Bible, on the kitchen counter. Every member of the family had gone through that tome over and over again, memorizing the products that they dreamed of having one day. Yet they had no money for such luxuries and if they did, it was only due to careful hoarding of every stray penny they could scrape up. Sometimes they had to wait three years before saving enough money to buy that fancy hand-cranked clothes wringer so Mom didn't have to wear out her arms twisting the clothes dry, unaided by modern technology.

Of course, when times got really bad, even the Sears catalog brought no comfort, except to supply a need for toilet paper in the outhouse.

Back then, we had a Great Depression caused by the blind self-indulgence of the Jazz age; and rural people in this area (through no fault of their own) were especially hit hard by it. These poor country folks didn't have convenience stores, they only had each other. Families made just about everything they owned, and if they couldn't make it, they had a good neighbor who could. It was a time when farming was so bad that it was more profitable to use their corn crop to burn in their stove for heat than to sell it for a

lousy few cents per bushel. So the local families knitted themselves together and looked out for one another. It was a hard time, sometimes a desperate time. But with lots of faith, love, and patience, they got through it together as a community. There was no such thing as fast food outlets, shopping malls, or Wal-Mart Supercenters to bring swift temporal relief to their plight. It was a bare-boned existence that divided the wheat from the chaff, and forced humble folks to focus on the simple things in life that *really* mattered and to rejoice in them.

So you see, there was a time when Christians in this country were content with being lowly, meek, and poor in spirit. They served humbly in small congregations, read their Bibles faithfully, and prayerfully focused on the glory of Christ alone as they witnessed and brought aid to others. Over time, however, we became more prosperous and self-satisfied, and just like the Jazz Age, we began to borrow on a spiritual capital that we no longer possessed in order to gratify our ever-increasing desire for the things of this world. Soon, many churches became bastions of consumerism and began emulating themselves after the business world, until they finally transformed themselves into a kind of Wal-Mart Christianity.

The problem is, this over-indulgence in the churches will one day take its toll and collapse like the stock market in 1929 because it is built on a foundation other than Christ alone. And when that inevitable day arrives in which we are stripped of our fleshy provisions and thrust into a great spiritual Depression, how will this rabid Christian consumerism provide for our needs and how much of it will quickly be engulfed by the fires of God's testing?

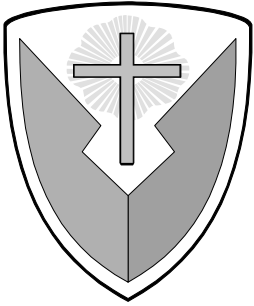
In the end, it's hay and stubble, my friends. All this Wal-Mart Christianity is just hay and stubble.

**Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.**

(Helen H. Lemmel, 1922)

(For further reference see Isaiah 33:10-12 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-12.)

[From the internet. Author unknown]



Shield of Faith
 Elder Greg Phillips, Editor
 807 Ashwood Lane
 Chattanooga, TN 37415

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And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, Hebrews 10:24

A SERIOUS CALL TO A DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE

(Continued from page 6)

prayers. If we were to see a man pretending to act wholly with regard to God in everything that he did, that would neither spend time nor money, nor take any labor or diversion, but so far as he could act according to strict principles of reason and piety, and yet at the same time neglect all prayer, whether public or private, should we not be amazed at such a man, and wonder how he could have so much folly along with so much religion? Yet this is as reasonable as for any person to pretend to strictness in devotion, to be careful of observing times and places of prayer, and yet letting the rest of his life, his time and labor, his talents and money, be disposed of without any regard to strict rules of piety and devotion. For it is as great an absurdity to suppose holy prayers, and Divine petitions, without a holiness of life suitable to them, as to suppose a holy and Divine life without prayers.

Let any one therefore think how easily he could confute a man that pretended to great strictness of life without prayer, and the same arguments will as plainly confute another, that pretends to strictness of prayer, without carrying the same strictness into every other part of life. For to be weak and foolish in spending our time and fortune, is no greater a mistake, than to be weak and foolish in relation to our prayers. And to allow ourselves in any ways of life that neither are, nor can be offered to God, is the same irreligion, as to neglect our prayers, or use them in such a manner as make them an offering unworthy of God.

The short of the matter is this; either reason and religion prescribe rules and ends to all the ordinary actions of our life, or they do not: if they do, then it is as necessary to govern all our

actions by those rules, as it is necessary to worship God. For if religion teaches us anything concerning eating and drinking, or spending our time and money; if it teaches us how we are to use and condemn the world if it tells us what tempers we are to have in common life, how we are to be disposed towards all people; how we are to behave towards the sick, the poor, the old, the destitute; if it tells us whom we are to treat with a particular love, whom we are to regard with a particular esteem; if it tells us how we are to treat our enemies, and how we are to mortify and deny ourselves; he must be very weak that can think these parts of religion are not to be observed with as much exactness, as any doctrines that relate to prayers.

Our blessed Savior and His Apostles are wholly taken up in doctrines that relate to common life. They call us to renounce the world, and differ in every temper and way of life, from the spirit and the way of the world: to renounce all its goods, to fear none of its evils, to reject its joys, and have no value for its happiness: to be as new-born babes, that are born into a new state of things: to live as pilgrims in spiritual watching, in holy fear, and heavenly aspiring after another life: to take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to profess the blessedness of mourning, to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit: to forsake the pride and vanity of riches, to take no thought for the morrow, to live in the profoundest state of humility, to rejoice in worldly sufferings: to reject the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: to bear injuries, to forgive and bless our enemies, and to love mankind as God loveth them: to give up our whole hearts and affections to God, and strive to enter through the strait gate into a life of eternal glory.

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