



1995

Preachers' Study Notes

held at Green Oaks Boulevard congregation
of the church of Christ

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Moderators:

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The views expressed in the Preachers' Study Notes are the views of the particular and individual authors, and are not necessarily the views of the editors of the Notes, moderators, host congregation, other participants of the Study, or other authors in this volume. Each article has the address of the author appended if you desire to respond. The editors of the Notes encourage every reader to test all things by the Word of God (1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11). Examine all that this volume contains in that unerring Light and you cannot go wrong.

— *The editors of the Preachers' Study Notes*

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Introduction to the 1995 Preachers' Study "Crisis in the Church"

Wm. Mark Bailey

In 2 Timothy 2:15, the Apostle Paul gave these instructions to Timothy: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Today, and Lord willing for the next three days, God has blessed us with the opportunity to study together. During this time we will study on the theme of "Crisis."

There are two kinds of crises in life: Crises that we bring on ourselves and crises that other people cause. Crises are found in the lives of everyone. Therefore, the questions we ask are: "How do we avoid a crisis situation?", and "How do we overcome these crisis situations once they are in our lives?" Finding answers to these questions is the purpose of this 1995 Preachers' Study. It is not our purpose just to acknowledge that crises exist among us, but to explore ways that we can cope as these crises take hold of our lives, and ways that we can help during a time of crisis in the life of another.

Failing to properly and rapidly deal with a crisis often leads to discouragement. In an extreme crisis a person may eventually get to the point that he or she gives up. Crises really are a test of our faith. And, our Christian character is revealed in the way we handle a crisis situation. For example, in Acts 27 the Apostle Paul faced a crisis when he was shipwrecked in the night. His response to that crisis is revealed in verse 29: "Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight." He handled his crisis in two steps: First, he stopped—he anchored himself, refusing to continue in darkness, not knowing what was before him, and second, he "prayed."

There is a tremendous need to address delicate issues openly so that we may learn how to deal with these crises when they confront our family members and/or our brothers and sisters in Christ. When any of us are faced with a crisis, it not only affects us personally, but it also affects our family. When the family is affected the crisis will also have an ill effect on the congregation that we attend. Therefore, this afternoon we will begin by studying the need to be committed to Christ and the need for positive leadership. This evening we will have a general presentation about what crisis is and how we can deal with it. Lord willing, tomorrow we will examine specific crises that can affect us (bitterness, grief, marriage problems, as well as difficult times in the lives of our youth). On Thursday we plan to study on some delicate crises that can be found in many Christian homes (different types of abuse, sexual/moral crisis, crises that come with training our children, and the problems that we must face when our children do not remain faithful). Finally, we will conclude on Friday, studying on several crises confronting many congregations throughout our brotherhood. The final topic, and possibly the most important, will deal with our need for "unity."

Introduction

Brother Joe Norton and I were asked by the Green Oaks congregation to arrange and moderate these study sessions. We agreed to do so and we appreciate the hard work and research that many of you have done in preparation for this study. We are committed to do our best and to providing a good Christian atmosphere in which each speaker may present his research so that all can profit.

May the Spirit of Christ be in us all as enter into the 1995 Preachers' Study.

Instilling Commitment to the Cause

Billy Orten

I am to talk to you about how to instill commitment in members to the church of Christ. If people are truly committed when crisis comes, they will not fall away. One of the tragedies of this generation is the high percentage of converts to Christ that are lost. Most of our church buildings would be inadequate, if all, or even nearly all, of those who obey the gospel would remain faithful. Unfortunately, many of our very own children are in this group that are lost to us and to the church and this is the most agonizing loss we can experience. So you can see this is a topic in which we are all interested.

There is an excitement among new converts about walking with God, but this somehow gets lost in the day to day reality of living. Most people realize they need a power in their lives greater than their own. They come into the church expecting to be able to live a life without sin. They fail to meet their own expectations and are discouraged. Many drop out saying, "I simply can't live it. I will never be able to meet the standards set by the church."

I want to point out, right here, that most of the thoughts that I'm going to present to you were given to me in a brainstorming session held by several members of the Conway congregation near Farmerville, Louisiana. I asked for this session. My question to open this session was, "What are the reasons why people fail to live a Christian life?" Here are some of the answers given by that group, some of whom had previous experiences of dropping out of the church, worship and other activities for awhile. Here's what they said:

Some are not willing to dedicate themselves fully to the Lord.

Some get discouraged because too much is expected of them.

Church members may criticize new babes in Christ because the newly baptized do not conform to all the rules and this criticism discourages them.

Sometimes the leadership fails to provide to nurture these new babes need.

The teachers often offer inappropriate food, giving meat when milk is needed.

Old habits reemerge and they stumble and are discouraged. They give up saying, "I can't live it."

Struggles and stresses of everyday life drag them down and they lose their enthusiasm for Christian activities and worship services.

Their hope of heaven dims and they grow weaker.

That's what a group of people simply said when asked the question, and some of these had fallen out. I do not have the statistics that show what the percentages are of people who fall away. I wish I did. But I know they are too high. Someone has said that one fourth of the members of an average church can be dropped from the roll and

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the church would be no weaker as a result. My guess is that the actual percentage is closer to one half than one fourth.

Apathy, complacency, indifference, and spiritual drowsiness are lulling many in the Lord's church to sleep. No wonder they fall away. Why is it so many churches have more empty pews than filled ones? How do you account for the fact that many churches do not even have a Sunday night or Wednesday night service? If we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and His personal message to us, why are so many members of the church knowing so little about this book? If God really is a prayer answering God and if He really tells us to ask, to seek and to knock, why is there so little genuine praying going on? If you and I believe there is a heaven that is a paradise, a hell that is a lake of fire and brimstone, why are we not out in the streets trying to rescue more people from this terrible torment?

The answer to all of these questions is tragically simple. Most people made a decision to become a Christian and a member of the church, but they never became committed to Christ. There is a vast difference in making a decision to do something and making a commitment to a person. Why are at least fifty percent of marriages in the United States headed for the rocks? Why is the divorce rate so high? Why are so many couples living together without making wedding vows? Why are so many husbands and wives unfaithful to each other? The answer is tragically simple. They made a decision to marry or live together without making a real commitment to each other. However, when a couple makes a genuine commitment to each other, marriage is a different matter. It becomes a bond in which each person is totally committed to the happiness and well-being of the other. It is a giving away of one's self to the other person. It is saying "I belong to you and you belong to me." Is not this what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 7:4?

Commitment to Christ carries with it a similar responsibility. It is a giving away of one's self to Christ. This seems to be the idea of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, where he says, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Many people have not made a commitment to Christ because they don't understand what commitment is. As in marriage, commitment to Christ means to turn one's self over to Christ, to give one's self away, to yield to Him, to surrender one's will to His and to place one's self at His disposal. Commitment cannot be half-hearted or lukewarm. One cannot be "sort of" committed or "in a way" committed. The Laodiceans tried that and Jesus condemned them (Rev. 3:14-19). Their love was divided between Christ and the world, and Jesus would not accept that. Commitment must be sincere and complete.

While commitment is either total or not at all, may I point out that there are degrees or levels of commitment just as there are levels of maturity. When I obeyed the gospel, I committed my life to Jesus. However, that commitment has certainly deepened, hopefully, over the years. There is no question about it. The twelve apostles would have frozen in their tracks if they had realized what they were going to face for Jesus

when He departed from them on Mount Olivette near Jerusalem. They had no idea of what it was going to be like. Great hardship was endured by them all and they all died a violent death except John. Jesus could not tell them how much they were going to suffer because they were not able to bear it. Peter was committed, but he denied Christ three times. The other disciples were committed, but they forsook Him and fled.

Christ works in our lives to bring us to a deeper level of commitment when we give our lives to Him. Several people, when asked why they decided to become a Christian, replied as follows: "I don't want to go to hell," "I want to go to heaven when I die," "It is the right thing to do," "I want Jesus to help straighten out my life." Probably, no one ever explained to these people these reasons for becoming a Christian *do not constitute a commitment*.

To explain the meaning of commitment let us look at some words that best describe the action we're talking about. There are ten different words sometimes translated "commit" or "commitment" in the New Testament, but the two that most accurately describe the action we're discussing are *paratithemi* and *pisteuo*.

Let's look a few examples of how these two words are used. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19). The word there is *paratithemi*, which Vine says means "to entrust, to commit to one's charge," or as the KJV says, "commit to keeping." In Luke 23:46, Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." "Commend" would better be translated "commit," because the word here is *paratithemi*—"Father, into thy hands I *commit* my spirit." The action is, "I am depositing something valuable with you for safe keeping." In Acts 14:23 and Acts 20:32, the word "commend" is *paratithemi*. The elders were "committed" to God; they were entrusted to God. In 1 Timothy 1:18 and 1 Timothy 6:20, Paul is urging Timothy to guard that which is committed (*paratithemi*) or entrusted to him. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy to commit or entrust the gospel to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.

The word *pisteuo* is a verb form of *pistus* and is often translated "belief," and it means "to belief, to be persuaded of, to place confidence in, to trust or to place reliance upon" (Vine, p. 116). However, the word is sometimes translated "commit." Look at Luke 16:11—"If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [money], who will commit to your trust the true riches?" The word is *pisteuo*. Again, in 1 Timothy 1:11, Paul said, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." An interesting passage where *pisteuo* is used is John 2:24, which says, "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." Jesus knew their hearts. He did not trust Himself to them.

All these verses taken together define commitment to mean turning something valuable over to someone. It is entrusting someone with something. You are placing yourself at another's disposal when you commit to them. When a man makes a commitment in marriage, he is saying "I give myself to you." "I am entrusting myself to you." "I am turning myself over to you." "I am at your disposal." "I am committed to you

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for better or for worse." Divorce courts would close down and lawyers specializing in divorce would be out of business if people made this kind of genuine, intelligent, and sincere commitment to each other when they were married. Similarly, if Christians make a genuine, intelligent and unreserved commitment to Christ, church houses would not hold the people crowding into them for worship.

Now what is involved in commitment? The central truth is that we no longer belong to ourselves. We have given ourselves away to God for His service. Paul asked the question in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The problem is that most people do not grasp the meaning of giving themselves over to God to be used in His service. It means more than simply attending a certain number of church services every week.

Look at also, Romans 12:1-2. Paul urges the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The word "present" is from *paristano*, which means "to place beside, to yield, to hand over" (Vine, p. 207). This word is used in reference to offering a sacrifice in the Old Testament. When the animal was presented or handed over to the priest, the person making the sacrifice relinquished all claims on the animal and handed it over for sacrifice. Commitment involves a personal, deliberate, willing presentation of ourselves to God for His use. It is as if we are saying, "I am crawling on that altar myself." Go back to Romans 12:1. Paul said, "Present your body as a living sacrifice, *holy* . . ." Holy comes from *hagios* which means "separated from the world and dedicated to God" (Vine, p. 226). The committed individual has made Christ his number one priority.

When there is a conflict, here is how you will know if you are committed. When there is a conflict between the world and the principles of Christ, the committed person has no problem making a decision because he has his priorities straight. Since a committed person is one who is giving himself away to Christ, wholly dedicating himself to Christ and His church, separating himself from the world, this person will do the following things:

1. *He will exercise self control by saying "no" to the lust of the flesh.* This committed person will strive to keep his life holy even as the one who called him, Christ, is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

2. *The committed person will submit his will to Christ in obedience.* He will answer "yes" to every command and duty that Jesus or His Apostles teach. He will strive to keep all the rules because His Master said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15).

3. *The committed Christian will become involved in doing for others.* He takes the parable of the good Samaritan personally. He cannot see someone in need and pass on his way as the priest and the Levite did, because Jesus said, "When you do for others, you are doing for me" (Mt. 25:40). Commitment to Christ is commitment to do good to others.

4. *Another aspect of this commitment is to be faithful to the Lord's church.* A person committed to Christ is committed to His church because Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. This will mean participating in worship services regularly, giving as one who has been prospered, and helping in all the works of the church.

5. *A committed person will suffer persecution.* To motivate the committed person to suffer when persecution comes: 1. A desire to share in the sufferings of Christ. 2. The reward that has been laid up for him in heaven. See Matthew 5:10-12.

6. *Commitment involves sacrifice.* Paul commended the churches in Macedonia for the willingness to sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:1-5). They gave until it hurt. The key is in verse 5—"they gave their own selves"—and that, within itself, is one of the best definitions of commitment. They first gave their own selves to the Lord.

At this point now, before we talk about some ways that we might help others commit, we pause to ask how many of us have deliberately, willingly, completely surrendered ourselves to God for whatever He wants to do to us, in us, through us, and by us. I have to ponder that very carefully myself. Are we committed to Him, no strings attached? Have we prayed, "Lord whatever you want from me, wherever you want to send me, and whenever you are ready for me to go, I'm available." Commitment is putting one's whole life at God's disposal, ready for His use anytime, any place, anywhere, and under any circumstances. I'm lingering on this point right here for just a moment for a reason. How can I instill commitment in somebody else if I, myself, am not fully committed? Preparing this discourse forced me to examine myself and I asked myself, "Am I truly committed?" I'm asking you to do the same. You may find, as I did, that you are not satisfied with what you learn about yourself.

What causes people to resist commitment? We as elders, teachers, preachers, and leaders need to understand what those people out there are having to overcome in order to be committed. I'm not going to linger on these, but just run them off to you.

One reason people fail to commit is fear. Fear of failure and fear of criticism. They begin to think, "What if I don't measure up?" "What if others see weaknesses in me?" "Will they spot my weaknesses and find out I'm not as good as I ought to be?" The one talent man here is our example of such a failure to commit (Mt 25:24-29).

Another reason some of people resist commitment is pure selfishness. It's going to take time, energy, money, and effort, and sometimes they're not ready to give it.

A third reason some will fail to commit is a poor self image. You would be surprised how this affects so many people. "Lord, not me. Get somebody else. I'm not the one you need." Many of God's servants came up with excuses when God called on them

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for commitment, because, truthfully, they felt inadequate. Moses said, "I'm a poor speaker. I'm a shepherd and shepherders are despised in Egypt." Moses may have had a natural infirmity which, at times, rendered it impossible for him to speak readily, according to Adam Clark. This inaptitude made him feel inferior. What these people are forgetting is that where God guides, He, also, provides. Some resist commitment because of lure of the world. But we must understand all of this if we're trying to get people to overcome these things.

Let us review for just a moment. We've talked about the need for commitment. We've identified the cause of some failures as the lack of true commitment. We have defined commitment. We have looked at what is involved in being committed. We named a few things that cause people from making a genuine commitment. I feel it's necessary that we know these things if we're going to help people become more deeply committed. Now, how can we as teachers, preachers, elders and leaders help others become more committed to Christ? Commitment is an action of the willpower of the heart. I want to make this the basis of what we are going to say.

The Bible "heart" is made up of the intellect, the emotions, and the willpower. All three of these have to come into making a commitment. First, there will be no commitment without a knowledge and understanding of Christ and His blessings. This comes through the intellect. Second, there must be the desire in a person or there will be no commitment. Desire is the motivator that moves one to commit and it's an action of the emotions. However, the commitment of my whole being, the placing of my life at the disposal of Christ is an action of the willpower of the heart. Let's apply this now to our theme, "Helping Others Strengthen Their Commitment". How can we help others grow in knowledge and understanding of Christ? Faith grows in proportion to how much people know about Christ (Rom. 10:17). Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me" (Mt. 11:29). People will take the yoke of Christ if they learn of Him. Long ago, God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6).

Paul informs us in Acts 20:32 that the Word of God will build us up and give us an inheritance among the sanctified. Peter tells us that newborn babies in Christ need the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:1-2). Young Christians or weak Christians are going to grow in faith and commitment as they grow in grace and knowledge of Christ. How can we help them?

1. As elders, teachers, preachers and leaders we must make our teaching applicable to the needs of the congregation. This hit home to me when one of the young men in the brainstorming session mentioned earlier, made the statement that it seemed to him that most of the preachers have a set of favorite sermons they preach everywhere they go, and they give little or no thought to the needs of the people where they are preaching. Every congregation, he said, gets fed the same food whether it's appropriate or not. Now, while that statement was not intended for me to take in personally, nevertheless, I felt the sting of it. Because, brethren, it's true.

However, I countered in defense of you and myself, by pointing to the fact that this responsibility should be shared by the preacher and the congregations. The elders and

the leaders know the needs of the congregation better than a visiting preacher. These men need to set the goals of a series of meetings and then select a preacher who can help them accomplish those goals. If the goal is to preach first principles to the lost, then the congregation should prepare by getting the unsaved to the services and let the preacher know their expectations of him. If the goal is to strengthen the members, the brethren need to work with the preacher. I believe this with all my heart, folks. We want to have a good meeting. The brethren need to work with the preacher in planning the sermons. It is high time we make our gospel meetings more effective. However, most of the teaching responsibility falls on the local teachers and preachers. We need to plan our teaching around the needs of the congregation—this is what the young man was saying. This is what he hit me right in the face with. This is going to take much more time, thought and study on the part of the teachers and preachers. It is so much easier to thumb through a sermon outline book and select a topic that appeals to us and prepare a lesson from that outline, but it may not be what those people need.

Jesus questioned Peter about his love for Him by asking, "Simon, do you love me?" When Peter answered saying, "Jesus, yes you know I love you," Jesus responded by saying, "Feed my sheep" (Jn. 21:15-17). As teachers and preachers, we are showing our love for Christ by feeding the flock. Note that Jesus asked Peter this question three times. "Lovest thou me?" Each time Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Twice Jesus responded by saying, "Feed my sheep" and once by saying, "Feed my lambs." Of course, all lambs are sheep but not all sheep are lambs. Lambs are the young, tender, and weak and they need special food and care. I believe we can assume that Jesus is saying, "Peter, feed the flock according to their need." Jesus said to His disciples in John 16:12, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Jesus is acknowledging that there is an appropriate time for all things to be taught. Babies need to be fed with milk, Peter said. Even some who had been in the church at Corinth a long time had to be fed milk and not meat, according to Paul (1 Cor. 3:1-2). These men recognized the need of making the teaching appropriate to the congregation.

Most people have very little knowledge of what is expected of them when they obey the gospel. The position that most congregations take on the hair, modest apparel, church attendance, voting, going to war, Christmas, to name a few things, are a shock to new converts. It is not realistic to think these babes in Christ can accept what most members of the church believe on these questions in a short time. Some never do. These things should be taught, yes, at an appropriate time and in a manner that does not discourage these people and cause them to feel excluded from the congregation. Meanwhile, as these babes grow, they should be received into the full love and fellowship of the congregation. Paul discusses this in Romans 14:1. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." If you will read that in the NIV it is much plainer: "Receive the one who is weak in the faith without passing judgment on disputable matters." The word "receive" there is a strong word. It comes from *proslambano*, which means to take them into your nearness and fellowship. Take these weak members into your close circle. Fellowship with them. Love them sin-

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cerely and withhold criticism from them. Allow them time to grow. Paul made confirming the churches a major part of his ministry. Each time he started a missionary journey he would go back and visit the churches he had already planted to confirm them in the gospel. The word "confirm" means "to strengthen; to establish." Paul considered this an important part of his responsibility. Brethren, when a person obeys the gospel, our job has just begun. There is a baby that needs to be loved, nurtured, and taught. Paul said that the elders watch out for our souls. Elders keep an eye on the flock and make sure each lamb is receiving the spiritual food it needs to grow and develop. In the absence of elders, we teachers, preachers, and leaders must assume this responsibility.

2. *Not all of the above teaching needs to be from the pulpit.* There's a need for private instruction. Paul said, "[I] have taught you publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). The pulpit should never be used to single out a few people. This makes those people feel picked on and they become angry. Thus, the very purpose of your lesson is lost. The people for whom the lesson was intended are not built up but weakened. Go to these people in private. Sit down with them in love, even if they do not accept your instruction. They will have to respect and appreciate you for taking time to come to them. Paul said, "Remember, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Folks, a lot of that had to be done in private. Never use the pulpit as a whipping post. The only one who benefits from that is the one who does the whipping. He feels good. He pats himself on the back and says, "I tell it like it is." But he's the only one benefiting. Look at Romans 15:14. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Note that Paul said you are full of goodness and knowledge and able to admonish one another. The word admonish literally means, "eyeball to eyeball." A lot of admonishing needs to be done on a one to one basis.

3. *In helping these come to deeper commitment, we must get ready to spend time with them on an individual basis.* There's a statement in Mark 3:14 that is very revealing. "Jesus ordained twelve, that he might be with them and send them forth to preach." Notice that phrase: "that he might be with them." Think of how weak, cowardly and vacillating those twelve men were at first. But Jesus spent time with them, day in and day out, teaching them, admonishing them, rebuking them and loving them in their commitment group. The intellectual side is strengthened by teaching, both public and private, and by spending a lot of time with them.

Let's look at how the emotions are important in commitment. Jesus is dealing with emotions when He says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mk. 12:30). To love with all the heart is commitment, and love is emotion. We are committed to those we love. Parents have no problem in being totally committed to the happiness and well-being of their children. Fear of eternal torment may motivate people to obey the gospel and attend some church services, but it will not move people to lay themselves on the altar for Christ. Commitment is born of love. The question before us is, how can we as

teachers, preachers, elders and leaders enhance in others the desire to give their whole heart, soul, mind, and body to Christ? Here's a few suggestions:

1. *We must make genuine Christianity attractive by living it ourselves.* We are an example. The early Christians were a drawing force. The number of disciples increased daily. Wherein lay their power? It was their enthusiasm, their zeal, and their total commitment to Jesus. There is something very impressive about a people who are totally committed to something and these people were. A half-hearted commitment does not inspire commitment in anybody. A lukewarm Christian will inspire commitment in no one. The truth is, such people hinder the spiritual growth of others. We have to make it attractive by our lives.

2. *We must motivate people to commit by giving sincere love.* Love is the most powerful force in the world. Christ instilled commitment in people by loving them and accepting them. Why did tax collectors, prostitutes and other outcasts of society follow Jesus? He certainly did not let any of them think for a moment he condoned what they were doing. But He gave them something they never had in their lives—a feeling of self worth. Without saying it in so many words, Jesus communicated to these people, "I think you are a valuable person and worthy of my time." After Jesus selected Mathew, a publican, as an apostle. (this is interesting to me), it says, "many publicans and sinners began to follow." They started coming out of the woodwork to follow Jesus. Why? Because they felt that here is a person who sincerely loves them. He doesn't condone what we're doing but He reaches out in love. Listen to Paul in Romans 15:1—"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

3. *Teach the love of God before you teach the rules.* We named some things earlier that new converts are expected to conform to, such as the long hair, modest apparel, and so on. Teach the love of God first. A young mother, in this session that I mentioned earlier, married one of our boys at Conway who was raised up there. She made this statement and it was eye opening: "I would certainly have dropped out of the church when I realized what was expected of me had I not been married to _____, and I knew it would cause trouble if I did." She said that she would have got out of there. This young lady and her husband are both very dedicated now, but she could have been driven away. The rules must be taught—please don't think that I'm saying they are not, but make sure you've rooted and grounded your converts in the love of God first. If they come to see God as a cold, hard, stern Being who makes rules that they, at least, think are unreasonable, they will not love Him. But if they can relate to a God who loves them and makes rules that are for their good, they will accept the rules even though it goes against their fleshly inclinations. Now, this is a personal statement and it's Sears and Roebuck stuff—I'll take it back if you don't like it—but it bothers me to hear people make snide remarks about someone preaching on love, when Jesus tells us love is everything. The whole law, including the rules, is summed up in one word: "Love."

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4. *Teach the rewards of commitment.* Make heaven real to people. If people can really believe they are going to heaven they will make a sacrifice. It's not really the fact that we have to make a sacrifice. We are told in 1 John 3:3, "He that have this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." John is saying that there is no problem getting people to purify their lives if they really have the hope of heaven. The truth is a lot of the members of the church do not really believe they're going to heaven. They may say, "Well, I hope I make it," but they're doubtful. Teach them that perfection is a goal, not a requirement, of going to Heaven. But heaven is not the only reward of commitment. Paul said, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Jesus tells us in Matthew 19:29, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

5. *Strive for more involvement in the work of the church in the ones you're seeking to strengthen.* This suggestion was offered by one of the brethren at Conway. This brother said, "get them to buy into or accept ownership of a part of the activities of the church" When they begin to accept responsibility for some activity in the church they begin to feel a part of what's going on. They are accepting ownership or buying into the work of the church and they grow as a result of their commitment. The elders and the leaders must see that everyone has an opportunity to use his talent in whatever way he can. Involve as many people as you can in the teaching, singing, visiting, ministering and personal work.

6. *Talk about commitment when you're spending time with those you want to strengthen on an individual basis.* If you're going to make a trip with someone, you get together with them and you talk and plan. The excitement builds, doesn't it? Talk about the rewards of commitment. Plan church activities that involve these members. Your enthusiasm will be contagious and you will be rewarded by seeing them become more and more involved in the church.

Finally, commitment is an action of the willpower. After you've created the desire and talked to the intellect, commitment must be a voluntary, deliberate and intelligent act on their part. You've done your part. They either will or they won't. There's no half way position. But do remind them of this. When they make a commitment, it's serious. Numbers 30:2 says, "If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." Solomon says, "It is better to not make a commitment than to make it and not keep it." *Rt. 3, Box 127, Marion, Louisiana 71260.*

Commitment: A Response

John Pruitt

The issue of commitment should be a matter of great concern to every preacher and teacher in the Lord's church. As we witness the passing of the older generation—those who appear to us to be committed to the Cause of Christ—and observe the actions and activities of the younger generation, we have reason to be concerned about the future of the church.

The noted decline in attendance at the Sunday night and Wednesday night services in most congregations of the Lord's people, and the occasional news of someone who appeared to be a strong leader having fallen away, has led me to think about the commitment of Christians today. To whom and to what are we committed?

Commitment, although difficult to define, is described as "an obligation, promise, engagement, or declared attachment to a doctrine or a cause." *Roget's Thesaurus* includes "dedication, devotion, duty, involvement, loyalty, obligation, pledge, promise, responsibility, tie and vows" as words synonymous with commitment. All of those concepts fit the profile of someone who is committed.

Commitment usually implies that one likes something, but this is a benefit and not the essence of commitment. Just because a person likes to attend gospel meetings or attends most all the services of the church does not mean that they are committed or devoted to the cause of Christ.

Commitment is not something that can be captured on paper. We can attempt to define Christian duties and delineate individual responsibilities, but the loyalty, dedication and the "tie that binds" are much more difficult to define. Commitment is not measured by the number of hours one works or the number of tasks completed. It is not measured by how often I clean the church building or mow the lawn as compared to others. Nor is commitment measured by the number of gospel meetings held or the distance traveled in order to preach the gospel. Commitment cannot even be calculated by the quantity of books published or the number of people assisted in obeying the gospel, although the essence of commitment may be reflected in all of the above.

You see, commitment is a dedication and devotion to someone or something. Most people are committed to someone (e.g., a spouse, children, family) or something (e.g., a job, school, profession, hobby). However, our highest level of commitment must be to the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, with lesser commitments to other persons or things.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:37, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." That is not to say that we can make no other commitments in life than to the Lord and His cause. Jesus encouraged the establishing, strengthening and maintaining of family relationships, because He knew that in doing so, one can make a stronger commitment to their life's work in the future. Commitment, then, is not a reason for being, but

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rather it is a life work. It is a chosen devotion to the Lord and dedication to His Cause. The important consideration in the area of commitment is to keep our priorities straight and clear in our own minds and assist others in doing the same. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

So the question that comes to us as preachers, teachers and leaders in the local congregation is: "How can I instill commitment in the lives of others where I work and worship?" Let me share with you three ways that I believe leaders of a congregation can help stimulate members to be committed to the Lord and His Cause.

1. By teaching the importance of proper values. It has been suggested in research studies that commitment is a value, and since values can be learned (i.e., transmitted to the learner through the process of education), it is within every Christian's reach to develop commitment in their own lives.

The process of value formation consists of an intelligent process directed towards the evaluation of available alternatives, the consequences of the alternatives and a rational choice of one alternative. In other words, if as preachers and teachers we present to our congregations the various options in life as Christians and the logical consequences of those choices, the result should favor proper and right values as the most obvious choice to be made.

When Paul wrote to Timothy that he was reminded of the unfeigned faith that was in him, which was first in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, and Paul exhorted Timothy to keep that which was committed to his trust (2 Tim. 1:5). We not only need to teach and educate our children as to right and wrong, but also to that which is important and of spiritual value.

2. By proper example and showing commitment in our own lives. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorted Timothy, "Be thou an example of the believers." That admonition is appropriate for teachers and preachers of the Word today. We need to be willing to take the time to teach and train those for whom the Lord has given us responsibility. By showing self-restraint and self-discipline, we demonstrate our level of commitment to the Lord and His Cause. One researcher commented that "by forgetting himself and giving himself, overlooking himself and focusing outward" a person achieves self-fulfillment and self-actualization. A committed Christian is therefore mature, self-disciplined and self-actualized.

3. By developing a servant attitude. Jesus taught, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord" (Mt. 10:25). In Matthew 20, He further said, "They that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you but whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." We need to develop and exhibit in our own lives the characteristics of a servant, in order to help those whom we lead to learn a higher level of commitment.

On the occasion of John 13 when Jesus demonstrated the attitude of a servant by washing the disciples' feet, He asked them if they realized what He had done to them and explained in verse 14:

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily I say unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if you do them.

I assure you, that when you humble yourself so much that you "wash another's feet," you will be happy in doing it, as you observe the level of that person's commitment being elevated.

Conclusion

How do we encourage our children and others to be committed to the Cause, to persist in their efforts to improve themselves, their own lot and the lot of others? By standing by them and with them and behind them; by being coaches and cheerleaders, and by the witness of our own example. 2701 N. Highway 7, Harrisonville, Missouri 64701.

Behaviors of Positive Leadership

Taylor A. Joyce

Leadership has been a matter of interest throughout history. There has always been a recognized need for leaders in politics, religion, and business affairs, although there is no consensus as to the qualities which constitute effective leadership. Plato envisioned a leader of his ideal republic as a philosopher-king who would possess all moral and intellectual virtues, as well as philosophical and practical wisdom.

In a text book which I studied in high school I found this sage advice:

He who knows not and knows not that he knows not, he is a fool. Shun him.
He who knows not and knows that he knows not, he is simple. Teach him.
He who knows and knows not that he knows, he is asleep. Wake him.
He who knows and knows that he knows. He is wise. Follow him.

The last decade has seen a proliferation of books analyzing the leadership qualities of such diverse individuals as Attila the Hun and Abraham Lincoln. The popularity of such books indicates something of the continuing interest in the theme of leadership.

Toastmasters recently published a list of seven qualities of effective leaders:

Make others feel important;
Promote a vision;
Follow the golden rule;
Admit mistakes;
Criticize others only in private;
Stay close to the action;
Make a game of competition.

The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary offers the following definition of leadership: "1. the office or position of a leader 2. the quality or a leader: capacity to lead." Warren Bennis, a widely recognized authority on modern management and organizational issues, defines leadership as "the ability to translate ideas into reality and sustain them over time." He also notes that leadership in organizations requires "a vision for the future, a commitment to the organization, and a willingness to persist."

Mortimer J. Adler, noted educator and author, says about the infinitive "to lead":

First, "to lead" means to be physically out in front, as when we refer to the lead car in a procession. Second, "to lead" refers to a skilled human action, as when we speak of a trained guide leading a party to its destination. Third, 'to lead' means to have the authority to command or direct others.

Based on his extensive reading of the Great Books of the Western World, Adler summarizes his findings about leadership:

The qualities we look for in a political leader are much the same now as they have always been. He must be interested primarily in the good of the com-

munity rather than in his own advancement. He must have sound practical judgment and whatever special skill and knowledge is required for the particular task. He must have decisiveness and the courage to take the risk of being wrong or becoming unpopular. And, above all, he must have the ability to inspire trust and confidence.

When we come to the Bible, the first leaders were undoubtedly the patriarchs, although the scope of their leadership was limited to the family or the clan. Nimrod may have been the first political leader using his organizational skills to build Babel, the antecedent to the city of Babylon.

Since we frequently speak of leaders in the church, it may come as a surprise to some to discover no such terminology is ever used in the New Testament. In fact, a *Cruden's Concordance* lists only one passage in the King James Version in which the word "leaders" occurs, and it is used there in a negative sense. "Let them alone. They be blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch together" (Mt. 15:14). The leaders described in this text are not the type we would want to emulate or follow. It can hardly be said that they demonstrate the behaviors of positive leadership.

The dearth of biblical passages in which the term occurs might raise the suspicion that our theme is not biblical. Yet, in spite of the absence of the word from the New Testament, the concept is clearly there in a variety of synonyms. Taking into consideration how the terms "lead" and "leadership" are defined it is not difficult to determine that many New Testament characters were leaders in the fullest sense of the word.

Jesus, in His roles as shepherd and forerunner, was obviously a leader. Indeed, Christians are urged to "follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). A study of the attributes that distinguished Him as a leader would be of great benefit to us. However, because He was divine, as well as human, we sometimes have difficulty in distinguishing between His divinity and His humanity. It is easy to assume that His leadership qualities were attributable to His divinity and are therefore out of reach of mere mortals. In view of this problem, it may prove more profitable for us to investigate the leadership qualities of the Apostle Paul, since he was a man like ourselves.

An excellent place to focus our attention is 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13. In this chapter Paul describes his successful work in the city of Thessalonica. At the same time he reveals those traits of character which made that success possible. (Ultimately, the success was attributable to God. Here, we are only concerned with the human contribution which successfully planted a remarkable congregation in a cesspool of idolatry and its attendant evils.)

Paul Was Dedicated to Following Christ

It may seem strange to begin our discussion of leadership by saying that in order to be a good leader, Paul had first to become a good follower. Tiorio said the same thing: "You will never be a leader unless you first learn to follow and be led."

It may also seem strange to be talking about leadership among Christians when Jesus refers to us as "sheep," and sheep are notorious for being followers. Many of us can identify with the bumper sticker which says, "Don't follow me. I'm lost too." Paul's advice to the Thessalonians was just the opposite. He spoke with approval of the fact that "Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord . . ." (1:6). At first reading it might appear that Paul was claiming that he, Timothy, and Silas (1:1) were co-leaders with Christ. However, when this verse is read in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:1, it becomes clear that Paul made no such claim. He recognized a limit on his leadership. He urged the Corinthians to follow him, but only insofar as he followed Christ.

The Lord requires all of us, leaders or not, us to be followers. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). The two requisites to discipleship are self-denial and cross-bearing. That Paul met the first requirement is evident from Philippians 3:5-8:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Self-denial led Paul to give up all that he had previously considered valuable.

That Paul met the second qualification can be seen in our text. He risked his life to preach the gospel. Having just come from Philippi where he suffered and was shamefully entreated, he had no hesitation about preaching at Thessalonica "in spite of strong opposition" (2:1, NIV). Cross-bearing involves risk-taking. In Bible times, a cross was not a piece of jewelry or a symbol for meeting-house adornment. It was an instrument of death. Anyone seen bearing a cross was on his way to be crucified. Paul clearly understood that preaching the gospel might lead to his premature death. Indeed, that threat was constant, and Paul said to the Corinthians, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31).

Alan Bonifay suggests another possible meaning. Crucifixion was never administered to a Roman citizen. It was reserved for the worst criminal element, and this often meant it was administered to those who refused to submit to the authority of the Roman government. Rebels, who refused voluntary submission to Caesar, were compelled by force to bear their own crosses as an act of submission. Viewed in this light, Bonifay believes that submission to Christ is what Jesus had in mind in requiring his disciples to "take up his cross." It appears that both meanings are inherent in the requirement, and Paul clearly bore his cross in both senses.

Paul took a risk of a different kind when he, out of deference to the wishes of the brethren in Jerusalem, agreed to participate in the ritual involved in a vow (Acts 21:20-26). Anyone engaging in such behavior today would certainly entail the wrath and suspicion of the brethren and would risk ostracism.

So, if, as we have affirmed, learning to be a good follower is the first step in becoming a leader, Paul passes that test.

Paul's Devotion Was to Truth

A second requirement for a leader among the Lord's people is that he be devoted to the truth. A perusal of 1 Thessalonians 2 will show Paul's dedication to truth.

We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God . . . we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel . . . we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls . . . we preached unto you the gospel of God . . . when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God (vv. 2, 4, 8, 9, 13).

Paul, of course, was speaking under divine inspiration (1 Cor. 2:13), and the content of the message was a divine revelation (Gal. 1:11-12). His words eventually were included in Scripture, all of which is inspired (2 Pet. 3:15-16; 2 Tim. 3:16).

Not only does Paul positively affirm his devotion to the truth of the Scriptures, but he does so negatively, as well. "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile" (2:3). The phrase "our exhortation" speaks of "persuasive discourse." Paul not only appealed to the intellect, he appealed to the emotions as well.

But the appeal did not arise out of error (deceit), an intentional, calculated effort to lead astray. Nor did it stem from uncleanness ("suggestive of the fact that sensuality and evil doctrine are frequently associated"—Vine). In Paul's day the grossest kinds of immorality were often practiced in the name of religion. Not so with the religion inculcated by Paul. There was a clear delineation between his preaching and uncleanness.

Further, Paul says there was no element of guile in his preaching. He did not bait a hook or set a snare (see Vine) to take the Thessalonians unawares. The gospel has no need for tricks in order to win converts.

Paul solicited the prayers of the saints at Ephesus, "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel" (6:19). Two things were of special concern to the apostle, that he might set forth the message in an understandable fashion ("to make known the mystery") and that he would fearlessly proclaim the truth ("that I may open my mouth boldly").

Paul viewed his responsibility to the gospel as a sacred trust. When depositors entrust their money to a bank, the money still belongs to them, although the bank has the right to invest and use the money. When God entrusts the gospel to us, the gospel still belongs to Him and we must be extremely cautious about the way we use it. Like Paul, every Christian leader must be totally devoted to the unadulterated truth found in Scripture, and must maintain it inviolate.

Since we do not speak by inspiration it is incumbent upon us to spend time in the study of the Scriptures which Paul would not have had to spend. No speaker among

us ought to accept a speaking assignment unless he is willing to spend adequate time in preparation. Someone has said that the preacher ought to worry over his text like a dog worries over a bone. Simply stated, that means that we must thoroughly study the passage we intend to use as the basis for our lesson until we are confident that we have extracted all the truth from it that we are capable of extracting. Only in this way can we be sure that we are presenting the truth of the passage as God wants it presented and that we will have something interesting and relevant enough to hold the attention of the audience.

Paul's Disposition Was Authentic

As far back as Classical Greece, there has been a recognition that you cannot separate a man and his message. When one preaches truth, there must be a corresponding genuineness of character. Paul exemplifies such authenticity of disposition as one would expect of a genuine leader among the people of God. In his first letter to Timothy (4:3), Paul warned of those whose morals do not match their message: "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: "For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ" (2:5-6). Neither the prospect of financial gain nor the pursuit of glory motivated Paul.

In contrast with the charlatans, Paul preached the truth with no thought about whether or not his hearers would support him financially. He avoided the use of flattering words "adopted as a 'cloak of covetousness,' i.e., words which flattery uses, not simply as an effort to give pleasure, but with motives of self-interest" (Vine). To the contrary, Paul worked with his own hands night and day to provide his own financial support so the new converts at Thessalonica would not be burdened (2:9).

Just as there was no effort to satisfy greed, there was no intent to seek glory. Greed and glory may be related in this verse (v. 6). As Vine points out: "glory probably stands, by metonymy, for material gifts, an honorarium, since in human estimation glory is usually expressed in things material."

Lest anyone should question the reliability of Paul's claims he calls both God and the Thessalonians to witness. Paul's life among them had been an open book, and no fewer than five times in the first thirteen verses Paul reminds the Thessalonians that as witnesses they can confirm the truth of his comments about his behavior. With reference to his motives, Paul calls God to witness.

Paul's Demeanor Was Gracious

Another mark of Paul's leadership was the grace with which he dealt with people. "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children . . . As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children" (vv. 7, 11).

Some ancient manuscripts have the word "babes" where the manuscripts relied on by the King James Version translators have "gentle." We will not discuss here how these differences might have occurred. Suffice it to say that either word makes perfectly good sense and harmonizes with what we know about the apostle's demeanor.

If he used the word "babes," he was simply demonstrating the humility described in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22.

Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law . . . that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Among the new converts (the babes in Christ), Paul became a babe. He did not throw his weight around. He did not claim all his apostolic prerogatives. He was sensitive to the needs and feelings of these young Christians and made a special effort not to intimidate them.

On the other hand, if Paul used the word "gentle," he was saying that he behaved as all preachers are required to behave, for "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24). Vine says that the word "was frequently used by Greek writers as characterizing a nurse with trying children or a teacher with refractory scholars, or of parents toward their children." Paul refrained from harshness of speech or action lest the Thessalonians should make shipwreck of their new found faith before they had developed the strength of character which would enable them to weather the storms of life.

Paul also uses two interesting metaphors to describe his treatment of the Thessalonians: as a nurse and as a father. Vine says the word

... translated 'nurse' in 1 Thess. 2:7, there denotes a nursing mother, as is clear from the statement 'cherisheth her own children;' this is also confirmed by the word *epios*, gentle (in the same verse), which was commonly used of the kindness of parents towards children.

In his comments on the meaning of "cherisheth," Vine says.

primarily means to heat, to soften by heat; then to keep warm, as of birds covering their young with their feathers, Duet. 22:6, Sept.; metaphorically, to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care, in Eph. 5:29 of Christ and the Church; in 1 Thess. 2:7 of the care of the saints at Thessalonica by the Apostle and his associates, as of a nurse for her children.

So whether the reference is to a nurse tenderly caring for a sick child or to a mother suckling her own child at her breast, the metaphor leaves no room for harshness. Love, gentleness, tenderness characterized Paul's dealings with the Thessalonians. Any modern leader who uses Paul as a model must likewise adopt this approach.

Positive Leadership

Paul also likens his work among the disciples to that of a father with his children. His fatherly relationship with them was manifested in three activities: "we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you."

Special note should be taken of the words "every one of you." Paul did not use the "one-shoe-fits-all" approach in his gospel labors. While recognizing that in making and strengthening converts there were many shared needs among the people, he also knew that each individual had unique needs which could only be addressed on a one-on-one basis. This seems to be a greatly overlooked principle among modern leaders. We present our messages to the congregation en masse and neglect to deal with individual problems of individuals. We put all our eggs in the public teaching basket and find no room in our agenda for private teaching. Because we fail to individualize and particularize, some individual needs are never met.

It is possible to differentiate between the three words Paul uses to describe his fatherly activity, but they have so much in common that differentiation is not particularly helpful. "Exhorted" is the usual word for instructing converts. "Comforted" is encouragement for the purpose of "stimulating to the earnest discharge of duties" (Vine). "Charged" also carries the notion of insistence upon obedience.

We could probably summarize Paul's gracious behavior with the word "tactful." Some view the word "tactful" as being a synonym for compromise. But no one would ever have accused Paul of being a compromiser when issues of truth were at stake. Many among us also seem to think that there is a dichotomy between truth and love, a very strange conclusion in view of the fact that God combines both attributes in His character (Deut. 32:4; 1 Jn. 4:8). If a preacher has much to say about love, he is viewed as soft on truth. Unless his speech is acerbic, he is accused of not preaching the truth. In the light of Paul's example in 1 Thessalonians 2, we ought to examine this whole issue. It is possible to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Harsh language, if ever justifiable, ought to be the exception rather than the rule. Both truth and love are critically important. As Stott noted: "Truth is hard if it is not softened with love, and love is soft if it is not strengthened by the truth."

Every leader among us ought to do some serious soul searching, some deep self-examination. We ought to ask ourselves if our public and private teaching could ever be compared to the tender loving care of a mother toward her nursing baby and the exhortation of a loving father toward recalcitrant sons and daughters. Some of us may find that our behavior rarely, if ever, could be described in this way. And if that is the case, then there is a serious deficiency in our quality of leadership.

Before leaving this passage we would do well to consider one other logical deduction which is warranted by the Spirit's words. Paul's admonitions to the Thessalonians were based on relationship. A child is more likely to respond favorably to the admonition of a loving parent than to anything anyone else might say. A Christian who falls short of what is expected is more likely to respond favorably to a preacher who has already established a relationship of love and trust. If the preacher only comes to the home of a Christian when there is some criticism or rebuke to be administered, his

words are not likely to carry much weight. This is all the more reason why leaders among us need to foster the parent-child relationship with every child of God in the congregation with which they work.

Paul's Teaching Was Relevant

In verses 12 and 13, Paul manifests another leadership quality: his teaching was relevant, not merely historical. He did not tell his auditors how to build an ark, because they had no need for an ark. Nor was it speculative. He said they should "wait for his Son from heaven" (1:10), but only because such a present hope for future fruition would bolster their ability to live faithfully in the present.

While there was some need to discuss both the past and the future, the main emphasis was on the present.

Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you . . . That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God which effectually worketh also in you that believe (2:11-13).

They walked. The Word worked. NOW! Paul did not seek only to inform. He sought to reform and to transform. His teaching dealt with current issues and each lesson was calculated to produce immediate results. The topics discussed by the various speakers at the Preachers' Study in Arlington, Texas in December 1995 and compiled in this book have that kind of currency and immediacy.

It takes a dull preacher to make the Bible boring. Its message is never boring, so long as hearers are told how the message is applicable to their current needs and situation. The message of Scripture is always relevant and up-to-date. It is the preacher's duty to show that relevance. It may be interesting to discuss issues that have faded into history or to speculate about what the future has in store. But it is imperative that there be discussions that address "where the rubber hits the road." We must present truth that has a current application, that meets a present need, and that can be used by our auditors for personal growth and development now. The Apostle Paul met this test of leadership. Let Paul's practice be our pattern!

Paul's Deportment Was Exemplary

We have already noted that you can't separate the man from his message, which is just another way of saying that we must practice what we preach. A man may preach forcefully and truthfully when he stands before an audience, but unless there is harmony between his public pronouncements and his personal practices, his leadership will be placed in serious question.

Paul set an example at Thessalonica for tireless, exhausting effort. This is seen in his use of the words "labour" and "travail." It is also seen in the fact that he did not punch a time clock, but could be observed labouring night and day (v. 9). Regardless

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of the day of the week or the hour of the day, Paul never missed an opportunity to preach unto you the gospel of God. What a rebuke to those "full-time" preachers among us who haven't yet learned to be instant in season, out of season. No wonder the congregation flourished at Thessalonica. *And no wonder few modern congregations do!* There are not enough leaders like Paul who put the church's interest above personal comfort and convenience.

Paul calls the Thessalonians to witness "how . . . we behaved ourselves among you" (2:10). The emphasis was on how Paul behaved toward them, not on how they behaved toward him. The former caused Paul to be especially careful to make his conduct exemplary. The latter might have caused him to indulge in self-pity over the maltreatment some had afforded him.

Paul also describes his exemplary deportment with the adverbs "holily," "justly," and "unblameably." Vine is again helpful in understanding what these terms mean. "Holily" means "pure from evil conduct, and observant of God's will." "Justly" means "righteously, in accordance with what is right." "Unblameably" signifies "that no charge could be maintained, whatever charges might be made."

Although we should not attempt to distinguish too neatly between these three words, yet 'holy' (*hosios*) seems to refer to our being 'devout, pious, pleasing to God' . . . 'righteous' to our dealings with our neighbour, and 'blameless' to our public reputation. Paul evidently saw his example as part of his paternal duty . . .

It is a leader's responsibility to set a good example. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith . . . Greet all your leaders and all God's people" (Heb. 13:7, 24, NIV).

Prior to becoming President and while still a general in the army, Dwight Eisenhower used to demonstrate to his subordinates this great principle of leadership. Placing a string on a table and grasping one end of it, he would first push until it became a crumpled mass. Then he would start pulling on the end of the string. With this visual demonstration before them he would say to his officers, "Push people and they will go nowhere. Lead them and they will follow you wherever you go." Although living long before President Eisenhower, Paul was familiar with that leadership principle.

One other story will demonstrate the value of leading by example. Four preachers were discussing their favorite translations of the Bible. One said, "I still prefer the King James Version with its lofty and eloquent Elizabethan English." The second said, "My choice is the New American Standard Version because I think it is more faithful to and more accurately reflects the meaning of the words in the original manuscripts." The third preacher said, "My preference is the Living Bible because I work with a congregation made up mostly of young people, and it seems easier for them to understand." The three then waited for the fourth preacher to announce his preference among the versions of the Bible. They were startled to hear him say, "I like my father's

version best of all. Every day of my life I have seen him translate Scripture into daily living." That might very well have been said of Paul, too.

Conclusion

Perhaps our list is not exhaustive. There may indeed be other behaviors of positive leadership. But any list of leadership qualities for Christians would surely include being a faithful follower of Christ, adhering to scriptural truth in all one's preachments, avoiding hypocrisy and maintaining authenticity of disposition, bestowing tender loving care on each actual or potential convert, being relevant in teaching, and leading by example. Paul possessed all of these. And his is a hard act to follow. 1713 Savannah Dr., Ft. Smith, Arkansas 72901

Leadership

Dan Wissinger

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "And the things thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." This is a very important verse to remember on the subject of leadership.

Leroy Elms wrote in his book, *Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be*:

A crisis of leadership engulfs the world. Political leaders, economic experts, editorial writers, newsmen, spokesmen in the field of education and religion raise the hue and cry: men who know the way and can lead others on the right path are few.¹

Robert K. Greenleaf said, "The leadership crisis of our time is without precedent."² Harris W. Lee examined leadership for fifty years and learned that there are over 350 definitions of leadership.³

In the church we view leaders and leadership in a number of ways. The first question that one might ask is, "Is the term 'leaders,' as we use it today, scriptural?" However, when one considers any kind of organization that has a purpose, there must be leaders. Don McCord said at the 1989 Preachers' Study, "By virtue of his function, the teacher is thrust into a leadership role; in the absence of elders, someone must lead."⁴

In every organization, leaders may be selected, elected, chosen, appointed, or self-appointed. Sometimes leaders are thrust into this position, not by personal desire, but by necessity, without training or direction. An example is Moses. He replied to God's call to leadership, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exod. 4:10). Here is a great leader, apparently with no desire to lead, not a good speaker, and not a graduate of "leadership school."

Some maintain that leaders are born, not made; while others believe that leadership is a teachable skill, and that the majority of people, with the right training, could become good leaders. Most writers today agree with the latter philosophy. The church of Christ is no longer the fastest growing religious group in America, as it was from 1945-1965. Some believe that the decline of growth is due to a lack of effective organization and leadership. If this is true (and it may be), then something can be done.

I would like to emphasize the necessity of developing local leadership: out of necessity, there must be leaders. It is at the level of leadership that the church functions. Paul said to Timothy, "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). Also, "The same commit [entrust] thou to faith-

ful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (1 Tim. 2:2). It is at this level that the church worships, works and grows.

Some of the guidelines of this topic have to do with crisis prevention and handling problems. If leaders of congregations are in that position out of necessity, with no training or leadership skills, difficulties in congregations may very well develop to crisis proportions. The better trained, the less propensity for crisis. Without proper training, what are they to do? Rather than work through difficulties themselves, they do what many do: call an evangelist in to help solve their problems. The goal is for the leader to grow to the point of guiding the flock and dealing with difficulties himself. So leaders must learn a system of dealing with the problems.

Leaders and Managers

We refer to certain men as leaders, when actually they may be managers. They may even be elders, but not good leaders. Leaders differ from managers in a number of ways: leaders think about long-term goals, consider the direction the group is heading, reach out to influence members in such a way as to meet the stated goals, and emphasize vision, values and motivation. When the Israelites saw the walls around Jericho, they complained, "No, we can't;" Joshua said, "Yes, we can." When they faced Goliath, they said, "No, we can't;" David said, "Yes, we can." When ten of the Israelite spies returned saying, "No, we can't," Joshua and Caleb said, "Yes, we can." Monuments of great civilizations show the past; the civilizations themselves show the present; but both testify to the vision in men's minds before either of these.

Organization

According to Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, no word is used more often than "leadership" in the description of organizations.³ Leadership is relational: the influencing agent and the person being influenced. Organizations are constantly changing: from what they are now to what they should be; from how they function now to how they should function. The task of leadership is to direct the change. Leaders inspire others to do better. Static electricity gives off a little light and makes a little noise, but it does not accomplish anything. Current electricity, on the other hand, is extremely powerful and effective. Leaders make things move, make things happen. People sometimes make excuses, such as, "the faithful church is relatively small in number and we are not expected to do very much." In practice, most organizations and causes work through minorities. Even those who believe in majority rule still depend on the faithful few to do the work, make the sacrifices and keep the organization going.

By looking at various types of organizations, we can see the wisdom of God's organization. The American corporate structure, of which we are most familiar, is made up of stockholders, a board of directors, a president, management, supervisors and employees. However, in the book, *The Art of Japanese Management*, we find that in Japan, the group's harmony and spirit are the main concern of leaders.⁴ The prime qualification of a Japanese leader is his acceptance by the group, and only part of his

acceptance is founded on his professional merits. In the West, work group leaders emphasize task and neglect group maintenance activities.

Notice briefly the work of the Communists. Although I am by no means advocating Communism, the leadership methods are impressive. With about fifty million people, Communists have made a tremendous impact on the world. How? The distinguishing marks are: (1) Idealism. The people are taught to believe that they can make a change in the world during their generation. (2) Zeal and Dedication. (3) Devotion to the cause. (4) Willingness to sacrifice. Most of the British Communist Party leaders earn about one-tenth of what they did before becoming a party member, and then give about half of their earnings to the party. They make it their aim that every core member should become a leader.⁷

The Purpose of Leadership

The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-12, "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Jameson, Fausset and Brown comment on these verses:

As the apostles, prophets and evangelists were special and extraordinary ministers, so "pastors and teachers" are the ordinary stated ministers of a particular flock, including probably, the bishops, presbyters and deacons. Evangelists were itinerant preachers like our missionaries. The evangelists founded the church, the teacher built it up in the faith already received. The pastor had the outward rule and guidance of the church.⁸

The role of leadership in the church is to equip Christians to be what they should be, to do what they should do, and to tell the gospel story to others. Leadership is to move them toward Christian maturity. Christians are endowed with talents to be discovered and developed to carry out God's mission. Moses led the Israelites out of bondage. Here we see the role of the evangelists. It was Joshua who then led them to the promised land; here we see the role of church leaders. Pope Paul IV, when he was still Archbishop Montini of Milan, once said that in the past, it was necessary only for the church to ring its bell for the people to come; now, however, it is necessary for the church to take the bell to the people. Communists learned this principle a long time ago.

Conclusion

Whereas business and education leadership is aggressive and authoritative, church leadership is that of serving and helping, according to the teachings of Jesus. A Christian's actions are always by choice. These actions must be controlled by his commitment to God. A ship's captain usually separates himself from the crew; an army general is usually a distance from the soldiers. But God's plan for the church requires the leader to be among the people constantly. In most organizations, the members of that organization want something different from the leader. The employee and board member often ask, "What's in it for me?" In a college setting, the faculty often does

not want what the parents or the trustees desire. However, in the church of our Lord, we all must have the same objective to be accomplished in the same way. From the Bible we could teach the world the best leadership structure. We, as Christians, are really the leaders of mankind. 1287 S. Berkshire, Springfield, Missouri 65804

End Notes

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Crisis: What Is It? How Do We Deal With It?

Wayne Fussell

To say that there are crises in the church in several areas—personal, family, congregational, doctrinal—is truly an understatement. Problems have arisen in some places that have discouraged many and have devastated the faith of some. These are not just shallow surface problems, they are problems of depth, problems that can devastate, problems that can conquer and quench a spirit, problems that can even overthrow one's faith.

To live is to have problems. As Tim Hansel says, "Life ain't no ride on no pink duck!" Problems are inevitable and unavoidable. Problems come in all shapes, sizes, varieties and levels of difficulty and they seem to grow more complex every year.

Throughout our brotherhood there are those who are hurting because of various personal and family problems. Christian love demands that we not bury our heads in the sand and ignore their needs. God forbid that there should ever be a person or a family whose hearts are breaking as they struggle and try to cope, and there be no one there to lift them up, to hold their hand, to encourage and to guide. We must learn how to feel for others, how to reach out a hand of genuine love and concern, how to lift up our fellow Christians. Satan wants us never to learn these skills. His greatest desire is for us to be a cold, unfeeling people who show no concern for the problems of others. He would like for us to kill our wounded as if the world were one great slaughterhouse and we the taskmasters whose sole job it is to destroy anything that might have the vague appearance of weakness. We must defeat Satan's wishes and heed our Lord's rousing call to "love one another" as He has loved us (Jn. 13:34-35). May we in this study be motivated to realize our potential as loving, caring people who are willing and able to help each other through our problems and crises.

Definition of Crisis

Random House Dictionary and **Webster's Unabridged Dictionary** give lengthy definitions of "crisis," but there are two I like better. **The Encyclopedia of Human Behavior** defines it:

A time of great danger or trouble whose outcome(s) will often determine whether unfavorable consequences will follow. It generally lasts for a short period of time; however, the manner in which the crisis is handled will often have both immediate and long-range implications (p. 23).

James Orton gives the best definition: "Crisis is when a person or group faces problems which are so overwhelming that a feeling of distress and inability to function in a normal way is experienced." James suggests the following characteristics of crisis: (1) A crisis will resolve itself one way or another, either good or bad. (2) It is temporary in nature. (3) We will find ways of coping with the crisis or we will blame others. (4) We must accept the blame or the responsibility if the crisis is to be resolved properly.

Crises in the Church

Is there a difference between a problem and a crisis? Definitely. Problems do not reach crisis proportions as long as a plan is in place and an effective method is being used to deal with the problems. Problems become crises for churches and individuals when their normal way of handling problems is overwhelmed, they become disorganized, cannot move, break down and are totally disarrayed. For example, a church might have its own way of handling its troubles. Perhaps a strong-willed leader exercises such power that he is able to resolve or squelch most difficulties. But one day, a problem arises in which this method does not work. The usual problem-solving method breaks down—then they have a crisis. What might be a crisis to one person or group might not be a crisis to another person or group, because a method is in place to handle the problem.

James Orten gave an example from the words of Edwin Morris about the African work. Edwin said, "We had problems, but always came through." Their methods of handling problems always worked. But suppose those methods had failed—then they would have had a crisis.

Consider another example: A husband has an affair. This will usually prompt an immediate crisis, because there is no method in place by which the innocent party can handle the situation. She will become overwhelmed and disorganized. This is also true in the untimely death of a spouse. The surviving spouse is usually thrown into a crisis situation.

In a time of crisis people are emotionally overwhelmed, unable to behave properly and are hopeless. Intellectually and behaviorally they are immobilized—unable to move. Sometimes a person involved in a wreck will experience all of these emotions. People in crisis are "stuck" emotionally and intellectually. For example, when a spouse is guilty of unfaithfulness, the innocent spouse just sits and thinks. He or she cannot go about a normal routine. This is typically true of a church when it is going through a division. A cloud hangs over the heads of its membership. The church experiences no growth, spiritually or numerically.

Although the word "crisis" does not appear in the Bible, there are several terms that might be so translated. One of the Greek words is *anagke* (Strong's, 318), translated "distress, calamity." The word is applied to the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:23: "But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people." This was a time of real crisis. Paul spoke of the "present distress" in 1 Corinthians 7:26 in which he advised that Christians not take on marital responsibilities (see also 2 Cor. 6:4; 12:10; 1 Thess. 3:7).

Another word is used in Romans 8:35 which might be translated crisis. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Distress" is *stenochoria* in the Greek (Strong's, 4730) and literally speaks of the narrowness of a room and figuratively of calamity or distress. Narrowness suggests limited mobility, which is a characteristic of crisis. Paul said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed,

but not in despair" (2 Cor. 4:8). He therefore implies that trouble is not necessarily crisis.

In the Old Testament, the destruction of Jerusalem is graphically predicted in Deuteronomy 28:53, "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee." "Straitness" is *matsowq* in Hebrew (Strong's, 4689) and speaks of a narrow place. Victims of the siege would be hemmed in, squeezed. They would have few options. They would be able neither to turn to the right nor the left. That is crisis (see also Deut. 28:55-57). In Judges 16:16, we see how Samson was so pressured and vexed by Delilah that he found himself in a crisis situation. He could no longer handle his problems by his usual brute strength methods. "And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death . . ." Samson knew how to handle usual problems, but he was not prepared for this one. He lost his ability to function as usual. He was in crisis.

Is Crisis Always Bad?

There is a false idea that there is something inherently bad in the crises we face. Crisis will either make us better or worse, stronger or weaker by the experience. It all depends on how you handle yourself and the attitude you carry into the solution of your problems. Warren Deaton says, "With the right attitude, all the problems in the world will not make you a failure. With the wrong attitude, all the help in the world will not make you a success." A pessimist sees a problem in every opportunity. An optimist sees an opportunity in every problem. Robert Weider says, "Obstacles are your friends; you can't grow without them." Without problems, much of the New Testament would not have been written. Many of the Psalms were written in times of difficulty. Several of the epistles were written in prison. In times of trouble, assume the attitude of Pogo, who announced, "Gentlemen, we are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities."

In the Chinese language, whole words are written with a single symbol. Often, two completely different symbols, when put together, have an entirely different meaning than either of the two separate components. For example, the symbol for "man" and the symbol for "woman" combined means "good." Likewise, when the symbol for "trouble" and the symbol for "gathering crisis" are put together, they mean "opportunity." The opportunities of life often lie in the problems of life. Crises can be viewed as opportunities to advance from one level of maturity to another (Jas. 1:2-4). It is a serious occasion or turning point presenting both danger and opportunity.

A crisis arose in the early church brought on by the Judaizers who were trying to force Old Testament practices on New Testament Christians (Acts 15). The church weathered that crisis through the wise leadership of the apostles and came out stronger than ever before. Standards were set which would guide the actions of the church in the future in order to avoid future crises over these same matters. In that same chapter, a personal crisis arose between Barnabas and Paul over taking Mark on a second

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missionary journey. These two men resolved the crisis by agreeing to go their separate ways in peace. Barnabas was able to maintain his confidence in Mark, and Paul introduced us to another strong servant of the Lord, Silas, who went down in the history of the Lord's church as a great proclaimer of the word. Mark was later vindicated and acknowledged even by Paul, thanks to the wisdom of Barnabas in believing in this young man in spite of his earlier weakness. We can be most helpful to people in crisis when we recognize that crisis is a point of opportunity, as well as danger. Successful crisis intervention involves helping people take advantage of the opportunity and avoid the danger inherent in the crisis.

There are three phases of a crisis. There is the pre-phase, which has to do with the conditions which lead up to a crisis. This is the phase in which crises can be prevented if problems are properly handled. Second, there is the interim phase, which is the time the actual crisis erupts, runs its course, and dissipates. This is the dangerous phase. Third, there is the post-phase, which involves the conditions after the crisis has ceased. This is a good time for examination of the conditions which precipitated the crisis and for preparing for future calamities. All of us should accept responsibility for each phase and work to either prevent the crisis from occurring, work to resolve it with the least consequences, or learn the lessons such a crisis can teach.

Examples of Crisis

There are many examples of crises which might be given from daily experience. Providential disasters such as tornadoes, floods or hurricanes can result in crisis. When one's home burns or his family is in a terrible auto crash, or when a friend or family member commits suicide or contracts AIDS or cancer, this can trigger a crisis. The list might include an unwanted pregnancy, child abuse, spouse abuse, rape, sexual harassment, verbal or psychological abuse and domestic violence. When a husband or wife has an affair, children get on drugs, a death in the family occurs, or churches are faced with division, these are crisis situations.

How Can We Recognize that a Crisis Is on the Horizon?

In times of trouble, when individuals and groups cannot function in normal ways to resolve the difficulty, this portends an impending crisis or one that is already active. If we have taken the precautions that every individual and group should take to prepare for crises of all kinds, we will be able to see the crisis coming. This might be a good time to consult the wisdom of those who are older, who have traveled the road before and can recognize the looming crisis.

In anticipating crises, it is important to recognize that a crisis can move from one level to another. It often moves from the individual level to the group level. For example, suppose a couple in the church is having marital problems. If they are unable to resolve them, they often try to involve other people in their problems in an effort to justify their actions or get people to take sides. If church members allow them to do so, members will begin taking sides with one or the other. Now the problem has moved from the individual level to the congregational level. At first it was a crisis in the

home; now it can become a crisis in the church. Churches have been divided in just this way. Now suppose this congregation consults the leaders or members in other congregations about this matter and they begin to take sides. It now has moved from an individual matter to a congregational matter to a brotherhood matter. The problem should have been contained at the individual level. This is when the potential congregational crisis should have been recognized. If the problem were handled well, the couple might have been reconciled or at least the crisis would have been settled at that level. If it were handled badly, the church could split over what should have been an individual problem.

How Can We Cope When Crises Arise?

This calls for what the professionals label "crisis management." "Crisis management" is defined as "the careful and tactful management of a situation in which there is trouble or danger that has the possibility of serious and negative consequences" (Encyclopedia of Human Behavior, p. 23). Crisis management involves the methods by which we prepare for or work through a crisis. Effective crisis management fosters growth and avoids the negative, destructive outcomes of traumatic events.

Christians should remember that the Lord has given them special equipment for handling their problems. The Bible is our greatest source of problem-solving information. It is our crisis management manual. Deep spirituality, good Bible knowledge and dependence on the Lord's help will go a long way in resolving most crises. During my lifetime I have faced several real crises that could have destroyed me had it not been for my relationship with my Lord.

Sometimes the simplest approach is the best one. In his book *In His Steps*, Charles Sheldon gave a simple solution to all of our problems. He suggested the simple question, "What would Jesus do?" That simple question proved revolutionary. In any conflict, if all the people involved will abide by the answer to this question, the conflict can be resolved. Jesus gives us a simple solution to the world's ills by assigning first and second place to two commandments (Mt. 22:37-39). Most problems can be solved and crises resolved properly if we love God with our total being and our neighbor as ourselves. Yes, Christian principles can solve our problems. But if we are smart Christians, we will have a plan in place based upon those principles to handle the potential crises in our personal lives and in the church.

There are two approaches to crisis management: prevention and cure. Prevention involves what we can do to prevent problems or crises from arising. Cure involves how we deal with them if they do arise. How do we prevent them from happening and how do we deal with them when they do occur? The better approach is prevention. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Anticipate any crisis that might arise and avoid it with careful planning and problem-solving techniques. If we will develop, practice or implement a crisis management plan before the crisis occurs, the negative impact can be greatly minimized or even eliminated. So, put a crisis management program in place. For example, prevent marriage break-ups before they occur by teaching on the subject, suggesting contingency measures and making plans for

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dealing with them if they do happen. When the time comes to go into the crisis mode, our preparedness will make it a much easier task. That is the purpose of this study—the prevention of impending crises.

Someone has suggested three rules of prevention: (1) Eliminate or modify the hazardous situation. If you can see the possibility of an impending crisis, educate the people about the nature and effects of such hazards. (2) Reduce exposure to hazardous situations. Do not expose the church or individuals to circumstances which might bring about a crisis. (3) Reduce vulnerability by increasing coping ability. This can be accomplished through teaching and practice.

To be prepared ahead of time for any crisis, have a problem-solving plan in place. There are at least seven steps that must be taken.

Accept. Recognize and accept a problem for what it is and what it can become—a crisis. Far too often people put their heads in the sand and refuse to see it. A problem is not a problem until you accept it as one. Accept the fact that it exists and then be willing to engage yourself fully in solving it. You must not say, "It's not my problem." It is your problem if it is in your home or the church, or will affect you or the people you love.

Analyze. Pull the problem apart into all of its elements. Separate the larger problem into bite-size ones. Ask questions until the answers come. You detect the problems within the problems by asking questions. Mark Twain said, "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please." One writer advises to "scratch where it itches." In other words, find out the core issue or what the real problem is.

Define. Charles Kettering said, "A problem well-stated is a problem half-solved." You need to define the problem. All problems have central themes and main issues which lead to the real essence of the problem. Sometimes it is good to write down the definition of the problem so that you can really clarify it.

Brainstorm. Brainstorming is the art of obtaining ideas. Ideas do not just happen, you have to make them happen. A scientist once said, "One way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas." In other words, just let the mind work—think first, judge later. Write down everything that comes to mind. Someone asked Newton how he discovered the law of gravity. He replied: "By thinking about it all the time." He introduced the human race to the law of gravity by brainstorming. You can also brainstorm by using the minds of others. Ask them questions, many questions, probing questions, dumb questions, questions of all kinds. You might be surprised how the answer to your problem suddenly appears. Problem-solvers encourage us to brainstorm by "clustering." By this they mean, put the definition of your problem in the middle and branch off ideas from it.

Select. From all the information you have gathered select the best problem-solving idea—the most logical and practical solution.

Implement. Give action to the best problem-solving idea. When you want to travel from one location to another you look at a road map. There are probably several ways to go, but only one best way. You must select which route to take. Then you must take action. This is also true in problem-solving. It's now time to act. All the preparatory work has been done. There is no substitute for action. Far too often we spend a lot of time brainstorming and talking and fail to take any real action. Someone has said that "to know and not to act is not to know." Another said, "Information is power only when acted upon."

Evaluate. After you have worked your way through the problem and come to a resolution of it one way or another, you must evaluate what has happened. You ask questions like: "Did our problem-solving plan work?" "How could we have been more effective?" "What are the benefits of this exercise?" "What have we learned?" "Will we be able to prevent a reoccurrence of this problem in the future?" If the problem were tackled with a good spirit, the spirit of love, and if you were willing to study the issue or question, you can learn from the process. For example, we probably know more about the Lord's Supper and how it should be observed than any other religious group because of the crisis that arose years ago in the church. Someone has said, "Evaluations are not conclusions, they are commencements." After the problem is resolved you can then decide, "Where do we go from here?"

What Kind of Crises Can We Anticipate In Individuals, Congregations and Doctrine?

History has a way of repeating itself. Whatever crises have arisen in families, congregations and doctrine in the past will surely be repeated in the future. They may manifest themselves in different forms, but they are usually the same old problems in new clothing.

I took a short poll of several preachers and leaders of the church concerning the crises they think we are now experiencing or those that might be pending. One brother said, "We are losing our children." Another brother said that he thought we were turning this around somewhat. In my opinion, it depends on where you are. In some places, they are successful in keeping their children in the church—in other places it has truly reached crisis proportions.

There is a growing indifference toward right and wrong. Sin is just not so sinful anymore.

There is a woeful lack of Bible knowledge among the general membership of the church. We used to be "the people of the book." We are now the "people in the know." We are better educated than ever before. We know about many things, sports, making money and having a good time. But our Bible knowledge is woefully lacking. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

We have a tendency to spread the rumor rather than squelch or reply to it. A preacher once told me that one reason the church does not grow today as it did in the first century is because people cannot talk to one another in confidence about their faults.

Crises in the Church

Some perceive a lack of real commitment to the Lord and His church. There was a time when the church and the Lord's work came first in the lives of most Christians. Now it is way down the list of priorities with the majority of professed Christians. This was a crisis in Laodicea that prompted a letter from the Lord. It was called lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14-22). You know, the world does not mind our being religious, they just do not want us to be committed; to go all the way.

Some note a refusal on the part of many to come to worship on Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings. The majority today balk at any insistence by the eldership or leadership that these services are important to the growth of individuals and the church.

Some believe that a fear of AIDS or other diseases may force people to make foolish decisions about observing the Lord's Supper. One congregation in our brotherhood has already experienced this crisis. The elders there with tears in their eyes will tell you they were not prepared for it. *Sanitation in Communion*, published by James Orten and Alton Bailey, should be required reading on this subject.

We have a real crisis of racial prejudice. It is rampant in our nation and it rears its ugly head here and there in the church. There are white congregations where black people are unwelcome or uninvited. This is a problem we must face and deal with lest it damn our souls.

Some personal and family crises might include: the loss of a mate or a child in an untimely death, divorce, chronic illness, birth of a deformed child, unfaithfulness of a mate, loss of one's job, one's house burns, a child leaves the faith, spouse or child abuse, sexual promiscuity, the need to know one's birth parents, false concepts of right and wrong, bitterness, and problems of youth, middle age and old age.

Congregational crises might include: immorality in the membership, division, schismatic people, false teachers, breakdown in leadership, lack of respect for the eldership, and unscriptural practices.

One potential doctrinal crisis that I see has to do with the tendency to swing like pendulums from one extreme, doctrinally, to the other. We tend to be either too liberal or too conservative on certain issues. J. D. Phillips said many years ago that "usually between two extremes lies the truth." Through the years, I have found that to be a true axiom.

What Kind of Changes Can People Expect In Their Lives?

We live in a changing world. We face all kinds of changes: technical, economic, social, cultural and political changes. We call this "the space age" or "the information age" or "the electronic era." We talk about living in "the global village" because of our ability in travel and communication. The church and Christians are always affected by the changes in society.

We have seen and are seeing a new civilization emerging. We see new family styles, new ways of working, loving and living. Words cannot express the full force, scope

and dynamism of the changes rushing toward us or the pressures and conflicts they trigger. Changes have resulted in tearing families apart, shaking the foundations of our society and shattering our values. It is difficult to accept a new way of life or adjust to it. Changes in society always affect the church. It seems that we are always gradually moving in the direction of the world. For example, the way we dress is often determined by the dress of the world. It is sometimes alarming to see the immodest dress which is displayed, even in our assemblies, simply because we have been desensitized to immodesty by our society.

Changes in one's role such as when one goes from high school to college, gets married or has children often produce crises. When children are born or leave home, changes occur. When you move, get a divorce or you change your profession, these are changes that often produce crises. For some people, these changes produce nightmares. These turning points become crises with destructive effects, rather than normal periods of change and challenge. Some people greet adolescence, middle age and old age with suicide attempts, depression, or withdrawal to a closed or more secure and familiar world.

The word which is used for these role changes is "transition," which refers to the passage or change from one place or stage of development to another. Naomi Golan, in *Passing Through Transitions*, says that transition is "the leaving of an old familiar world and the entry into an unknown new one, the passing from one relatively stable state into an interval of strangeness and uncertainty on the way to a new stable state." She goes on to say that it is a "normal yet frequently upsetting life experience" (pp. 3-4). Anthropologists and psychoanalysts have referred to transition states as "life crises." They certainly are "turning points" which can lead to crisis.

How Can We Prepare for Those Changes?

First, accept the fact that change is inevitable. Second, realize that change is not always bad. If it is not unscriptural or anti-spiritual, it might be used for spiritual growth and progress. Take advantage of these changes, but do not allow them to take advantage of you and your relationship to the Lord. One technological change that many of us have seen in our lifetime is the introduction of television into our society. In my opinion, this invention has robbed the church of its spirituality more than just about any other single device. It has contributed to the lack of interest in the worship services and has probably lowered the moral standards of people more than any other invention of man. We can do one of two things: we can get rid of it or we can control it and use it for good. Some have chosen to do the first, and I praise them for it. Most of us probably will try to control it. It can be used for good. The truth has been preached on TV where it probably would never have been heard. Congregations and individuals have been won through this medium. VCRs have made it possible to use this apparatus as a teaching and learning tool to share the truth with others. Yes, this change can be used for good in spite of its negatives.

How Can We Prepare to Deal with Changes?

We must learn problem-solving methods. If changes cause problems or threaten crisis, apply those methods carefully and prayerfully. Above all, we must always allow the Word of God to determine the attitude we will maintain toward any changes that affect society, the church or ourselves. Four steps are suggested in dealing with change: (1) Adaptation. After acquiring the right information to serve as a guide for your action, adapt to the changes of life in a godly manner. Also, adapt the changes you encounter to your spiritual purposes. (2) Defense. Defend yourself against any negative impact changes may make. Respond decisively to any danger or attack on principles of right. (3) Mastery. Stay in control of the situation. Do not allow changes to master you, you master them for good. (4) Coping. Coping involves dealing with fairly drastic changes or problems which defy normal ways of behaving. With the help of God, you can manage or cope with any change.

Conclusion

To be sure, crises will occur in the lives of Christians and in the corporate life of the church. We should never allow ourselves to suffer from what one writer called the "Niagara Syndrome." He said that life is like a river. You can just take the first boat that comes along without deciding where to go. Quickly you get caught up in the current of events, circumstances and challenges. At the forks of the river, you simply "go with the flow." Then you hear the sound of the raging falls. The crisis is here and you are unprepared to cope with it. We must not wait until the crisis strikes to prepare for it. Develop problem-solving techniques and adopt a crisis management policy which will guide you through any problem and help you resolve any crisis with the least consequences. 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, Louisiana 71119

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Personal Crisis: Allowing Change to Challenge

Don Pruitt

We live in an ever changing world and the only thing that does not change is that everything seems to change. Change always brings on anxiety. Do you remember when you were a youngster and you were moving from elementary school to junior high and for the first time you were going to be changing classes? Do you remember the anxieties that you suffered? You were always wondering, will I find my class? Will I find it on time? Will I be in the wrong room? Am I going to get the right teacher? I confess to you that that has been a recurring dream that I have suffered with from the time I started junior high school until this very day. In fact, about two months ago, I dreamed that I was back on my college campus. The education building was on my right. Science hall was immediately in front of me. The administration building with its upstairs classrooms was on my left. It was time for class to start. I didn't know where my room was. I woke up disappointed. I woke up frustrated. I woke up embarrassed. It's been a long time since I've been in that college classroom, and I still suffer from the anxieties of just that kind of change.

The maturing process in our life brings natural changes. Our educational development brings greater responsibility. When we leave school, we go to the real world, as it's called, and we enter the world of the work force. We land a job and our increased experience prepares us for a promotion, or maybe, even a better job with another firm. We sometimes move from one geographical area to another. That means selling our house we're so comfortable with and looking for another house to rent or to buy. In addition to the problem of changing place of residence, we leave the home congregation that we identify with and are comfortable with, and immediately begin worshipping in another location with another group of people; people who are absolute strangers to us, in many instances. Our relationships change. We outgrow some of our friends and move on to discover new ones. Sometimes, our interests or hobbies change. And because of that, we lose friends. In the process, sometimes, they die. That's also true about our loved ones. Mothers and fathers grow old and die, or sometimes, they lose their mental capabilities because of stroke, Alzheimer, cancer or other problems. And they are made to linger in a lifestyle that is not really desirable, and perhaps, that is even worse than losing them to death. Even closer still, how do you cope with losing your spouse? How do you cope with losing a child?

There are so many changes like these that we go through almost daily in our lives. Some are big, some are small, but daily we are bombarded with changes. Some of us, quiet frankly, do not deal with change as well as others. On occasion, so many things seem to go wrong in a short period of time, that even those who are well adjusted begin to have difficulty in coping with the increased pressures upon their life, bringing mental, physical and spiritual problems that may affect them very gravely. These may affect us for a long period of time. In fact, maybe for eternity.

Change

Not all changes bring crises, but all crises bring change. How can Christians prepare for these changes? Some changes are not crisis situations, and some people would consider them very small. Others would consider that same change in their life a very difficult change. To others that change may become a crisis.

How do we prepare Christians for those changes? In reaction to these problems that we've talked about and have been discussed in this study, often times it is a matter of perspective. It's how you see them.

If I had a half a glass of water on this table, I would ask you to view it. Is that glass half full or is it half empty? It would be interesting to go down the rows of this room and ask each person how they view that glass. I promise you, there would be some who see it half empty and there are some who would see it half full.

Every crisis has two elements. The first element is a danger. Some psychiatrists refer to it as risk. It's always there in a crisis. The other element of a crisis is that it presents opportunity. Sometimes those opportunities may not be visible immediately, but they are always there. It is a truth that every crisis has two elements, danger and an opportunity. Every crisis also has pain. You, as a human being, get to choose how you will deal with that pain. Many fail to use the opportunity that's provided and they succumb to the pain that is brought on by the crisis and begin to suffer very serious problems in their life.

Moses, you remember, sent out twelve spies to the Promised Land. Ten of them came back with the report and said, "We can't go". Two came back and said, "We must". Twelve men looked at the same thing. Ten saw giants. Two saw the promise of God. I remind you, that they're all God's people. I remind you, that all twelve of these men had seen the miracles that God had provided. These were men of faith. They were men of commitment. They were men who took responsibility seriously. They would not have been in the position they were in were they not capable men. But ten of them saw giants and two of them saw opportunity. Two of them were able to look beyond the physical miracles that God had performed in the past and make application to a personal life. I was thinking about this the other day, you know they came to the Red Sea and they saw God's deliverance. They had seen the plagues that He placed upon Egypt. But the plagues that God had placed upon Egypt were for the most part natural phenomena. They were things that had to do with God's control over nature. Even the parting of the sea was that kind of power. But now, this one was different. It was a change. These men are looking at the task of going into a new land and conquering it. They are having to fight for it. They're going to have to go against giants. These are not locusts. This is not darkness or water changed to blood. This is us having to fight big people. They didn't make the connection between the power of God over natural things and the power of God in their own life. These men of faith, these men of great responsibility, succumbed to the pain of that crisis and the people wandered in the wilderness until they perished.

In Acts 5, the apostles were put in prison for preaching about Jesus. The council wanted to kill them. Later, it says that they departed from the presence of the coun-

cil rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (vv. 41-42). "And daily in the temple and every house they ceased not to teach and preach about Jesus Christ." These men were yanked off the street for preaching about Jesus and stood before the great Sanhedrin Court of the Israelites. When they escaped with their lives, they went back to the same streets, to the same place that they knew, the same people they had preached to and preached the same doctrine. I want you to examine their attitude. They faced a crisis that involved them personally and intimately: their lives were at stake. But see their attitude!

Paul and Silas were in the Philippian jail, almost beaten to death, for the same purpose. The Bible says in Acts 16:25, that at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God and the prisoners heard them. Look at their attitude. Beaten almost to death, put in the center of the Philippian jail, in maximum security, and they're singing and praising God that they could suffer in His Holy Name.

In the James 1:2-4, James said, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Again brethren, I remind you that we human beings get to choose how we deal with pain that is presented to us in the crises we face. How do you do that? Let me give you three ways that will be helpful.

1. *Anticipate these crises.* All the speakers that have proceeded me, and those that are going to follow, will be showing us that crisis and change is going to happen in your life or in the lives of somebody you love. We have learned that this thing that we are talking about is not unique to any of us. It will affect all of us. Since we know that now, then think ahead. Attending this study is helpful. Anticipate crises in your life and prepare for those crises.

2. *Think positive.* Since you know these changes and crisis are going to come, develop a positive attitude in your life. Develop the attitude of Paul and Silas in Philippi. Develop the attitude of Joshua and Caleb at the Jordan River. Develop a positive attitude and know that God will enable you to overcome every obstacle that is placed in your path. Your own attitude will determine, for the most part, your success or failure in dealing with the crises in your life.

3. *Teach your children to think positive.* I think this is so important. Please don't be put off by the simplicity of it. Especially teach your teenagers how to think. Teach them how to think ahead. Teach them by the examples of a positive attitude in your own life. Go through various crisis situations that may arise in life with them. Instruct them step by step. Show them how they ought to anticipate certain things occurring in the various situations they find themselves in. Help them to prepare to deal with that so that when they reach adulthood, when they sit in chairs like these, or when your sons sit in business meetings, they'll be able to lead and guide the flock of God.

Change

Another question that was suggested to me that I address in this study was "How do Christians handle these changes so as not to destroy them spiritually?" I contacted my good friend and mentor, my favorite professor during my college career, who has remained a good friend of mine through the years. He's the chairperson of the Psychology Department at Eastern State University in Ada. I asked him that question. He responded immediately by saying that we must learn to turn outward and not inward.

Let me demonstrate. One crisis that we face is grief. That is one of the topics we are going to talk about today. Grief shared is grief diminished. One of the real problems that people have in dealing with the grief process is that they don't release it. They don't talk about it. They don't get it out. Grief shared is grief diminished. See that you turn that grief outward, not inward. When you allow the grief to just remain inward, you often find yourself growing frustrated, even angry, with God. All kinds of problems begin to come into one's life. Why did they die and we live? I often ask myself that one. Why did this one die when God knows I need them so badly? All of those questions that we sometimes have difficulty dealing with are a result of our turning inward instead of turning outward. Guilt is anger turned inward. Often times, the bitterness that we experience in our lives comes from guilt that we have turned inward, that we have not allowed ourselves to work through. The Bible tells us that we are to provoke one another to love and good works. Do you know what that means brethren? Do you know what that passage really says? That means that we are to turn outward and not inward. We are to share the treasures, the responsibilities and the joys of the Kingdom of God with others. The Bible teaches us that we are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. There are many passages of Scripture that affirm this concept.

In the prayer a moment ago, our brother asked God to help us to remember that the keys to dealing with these crises in our lives are found in the Bible, and they are. That fact has been mentioned several times. But consider this illustration: I have a power saw in my hand. Does that mean I can use it? Does that mean I can use it well? See, there are applications of the Word of God that we are incapable of applying to our own selves sometimes, and to the lives of others also. Yes, we need to use the Word of God. It is the rule of our life. And we need to develop the ability to use that tool more profitably in the Kingdom of God.

James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The word "visit" in this passage comes from a Greek word that means "to look upon our after, to inspect, to examine with the eyes" (Thayer). You have to be able to look upon a widow; you have to be able to examine someone's life, to be able to "visit" them as this passage says. You need to be able to lay your eyes upon them. You need to be able to relate with them in a way that you can understand their needs so that you will be prepared to assist them in their needs. How can we bear one another's burden, when we don't know what each other's burdens are? How can we comfort one another when we don't know who's grieving? How can we be the assistance to one another in the Kingdom of God as the Bible instructs us to

be, if we're not aware of where we are spiritually, or if we're not aware of the problems that people have? The Bible teaches us that we are to rejoice with those who rejoice. We are to weep with those who weep. So, there are times in our lives that we face crisis. There are good times and there are bad times, as well. We have to know each other well enough to know when we're going through those times, so that we can assist and be a part of that, because we are the family of God. The Bible says that we must know those that labor among us. That is often applied to the fellow that comes in and holds a gospel meeting. Brethren, how much more important is it for us to know those that labor among us in our congregations, where we exist as a Christian, and try to serve the Lord and grow in grace and knowledge?

Jesus was the Good Shepherd. Remember that in His discussion about His role as the Good Shepherd, He says:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine (Jn. 10:11-14).

Earlier in John 10, Jesus makes the statement, "I know my sheep, they hear my voice and they follow me." Ancient shepherds found that the sheep followed the shepherds because they knew their voice. They would not follow a voice that they did not know. There is a lesson here for church leaders and preachers. Sometimes we wonder why brethren don't follow the admonition and instructions that we give, and sometimes it is because they don't know our voice. They don't know you. They don't know you well enough to know that you are leading them in the way that they need to go. Sometimes the only time they hear our voice is when we're at the top of it, kind of like the way we deal with our kids. It was mentioned yesterday: as preachers, sometimes the only time we ever drive into one of the brethren's driveway is when there is a problem and you've gone there to clean his clock. You need to go visit him in good times. You need to be able to talk to him about enjoyable things. You need to be able to share things with him in a normal setting in the proper tone of voice, so that when he hears you as a leader he'll be able to follow you.

Jesus gives us the picture of judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. He talks about those on the left and the right. He tells us that the difference between heaven and hell is not who committed murder or who committed adultery. Now, don't misunderstand me brethren—you commit those things and you are lost. We don't diminish the grievous things that are found in the Word of God. In that picture of judgment that Jesus gives us, however, the difference between those on the left hand and the right hand are things like a cup of water, a sick bed visited, religious prisoners visited and assisted. It's people who are turning out to others instead of turning into themselves.

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The prodigal son in Luke 15 was in a crisis situation and the problem was of his own making. Don't miss that. The problem is of his own making. What's the solution? He said, "I will arise and then I'll go." Instead of lying in the mud of the hog pen feeling sorry for himself, he says, "I will arise and go." He turned out instead of turning in.

Finally, what can preachers and church leaders do to help members of their congregation through periods of crisis? Let me give you a quick list:

1. *Prepare yourself to be a servant.* You can do that in several ways. I think you need to prepare to help others get through their crises through education. I want some of you young people at this study; some of you that are here today, to consider, as you go through high school and college, taking some courses on counseling. Take some courses on psychiatry. Take some of the things that will help you to relate to people who are dealing with problems. Some of you that are older and have already finished school, there are colleges and universities in your community that offer continuing education courses. Many of them would be germane to problems that we face in the church. A few years ago, I returned to my professor (the one I mentioned awhile ago) and I sat down with him and said, "You know what I do and you know some of the problems that I have to face. Could you help me and some of the other preachers deal with some of the problems that we have to face? Could you give us kind of a seminar on those kind of things? What would you charge us to do this? How many sessions would it take? How many hours would it take for you to assist us in some of these things?" We came to an agreement and the fee was nominal. I called all the preachers in town—Baptists, Methodists—I called everybody in town; ours, too. I put together a group. We had a little seminar by a professional who's in that business, and it was very helpful in helping us deal with problems that we face in our work. Your community has numerous professionals that would be able to help you be better prepared to assist others in times of crisis.

2. *We need to use our preachers better.* I've heard a lot of comments, so far, about the presentations that were made yesterday. A couple of those presentations in particular blew some of our socks off, didn't they? Do you know there wasn't a man that spoke yesterday who was a psychiatrist or a counselor or what we would call a professional? But everyone of them were professional, weren't they? Everyone of them shared with us some information that would be very helpful. Why don't church leaders, in anticipation of gospel meetings that are scheduled, about three months before the meeting, call a fellow and tell him that you're putting together a session on Saturday. Meet Saturday morning from 10:00 to 12:00. Break for lunch. Let the ladies bring a picnic, sandwiches, or potluck. Go back in and work from 1:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon and then break and go home for supper. Come back for church Saturday night. Have the preacher assist you with some of the things that you need in your local congregation. We have capable men. We could better use the talent of our brethren.

3. *We need to be available and to prove ourselves to be trustworthy.* What I mean by that is: keep a confidence. Several years ago I asked Diane to think about who she would go to, which one of our preachers or which group of our preachers she would go to talk to, if she had problems with me. If she needed to talk to somebody, to whom would she go? I was amazed. Do you know she gave me a list of preachers she would not go to before she gave me list of preachers she would go to. Do you know the list of the preachers she would not go to was much larger than the list of the preachers that she would go to. Do you know why? Because many of our men can't keep their mouths shut. Diane knows from experience the things she has observed in the brotherhood. You tell many of our preachers something and it will be across the brotherhood the next day. Prove your credibility! Prove your trustworthiness! Prove that you can keep something to yourself, so that when somebody has a problem they can come for to you for assistance. You church leaders also need to do that. Gossiping wives have hindered a great deal of crisis management in our congregations, because our people know that when you talk to one of the brethren about problems, he tells his wife, and then it's going everywhere.

4. *Don't procrastinate in dealing with crises.* Our son, Greg, worked in the rescue effort after the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City last April. During that rescue effort, at the end of every shift, it was mandatory for each rescue worker, both professional and volunteer, to go through a debriefing session. Every shift ended with a debriefing session immediately afterwards. Problems still persist with many of those workers, both volunteer and professional. The lesson for us? Don't put off what needs to be done about a crisis! A situation arises in somebody's family, you see a couple who are struggling in a marriage, you see a child that's wayward and facing serious trouble and you don't know what to say. You think, I'm going to think about that. I'm going to pray about that. That's good. That's wonderful. But don't think too long, because in a matter of a few days, in a couple of weeks, you've waited so long that now you're going to be embarrassed because you've put it off too long. Consequently, many times you do not react to a crisis situation as you should react, because you do not react quickly enough. So prepare yourself, be available and do not procrastinate.

5. *Lastly, brethren, help those that are experiencing crises with love and acceptance.* Do not condone the sin that brought about the crisis, but show love and acceptance to the brother or sister who is in that crisis. One of the wonderful things about the public ministry of Jesus Christ is you get to see His unique ability of separating the sin from the sinner. For example, the woman at the well (Jn. 4), or the woman caught in the very act of adultery (Jn. 8). Did He condone their sins? No. Did He love them? Yes. Would He accept them? Yes. Consider the woman who washed His feet with the tears of her eyes and dried them with the hair of her head (Lk. 7). She was a prostitute. Simon, sitting across the table was saying to himself, "If you're a prophet, if you're really so smart, then you ought to know the kind of woman who is touching you." But Jesus loved her. He accepted her when Simon and all other Pharisees would not. Sometimes, brethren, we have a hard time loving and accepting the people who disappoint us and we do not react when the crisis occurs in their lives. You treat them

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like they're your children. Have you noticed that people make a difference in their kids? If their kids get in trouble, they love them, they accept them, and they forgive them. If my kid gets in trouble, oh man, they're down on them heavy, aren't they? Well, do me a favor. You deal with my child just like you deal with your child. You love them and you accept them because they're God's child. 617 Phelps, Houston, Missouri 65483

Helping Others Cope With Bitterness

Johnny Elmore

Before we come to matters of discussion, I think it important to define what I mean by "bitterness." The primary definition of "bitter" is, "having or being a peculiarly acrid, astringent, or disagreeable taste suggestive of an infusion of hops that is one of the four basic taste sensations—compare salt, sour, sweet." In its metaphorical sense it speaks of "exhibiting intense animosity," and "marked by cynicism and rancor."

When I think of bitterness, I think of deep-seated, settled resentment. It is a character flaw that must be remedied if we are to enjoy peace on this earth and inherit eternal life in the world to come. There are three words in the New Testament for anger:

(1) *thumos* (thoo-mos'). It is defined by Strong as "passion (as if breathing hard)." Synonyms in the KJV include, "fierceness, indignation, wrath." It is described as "passionate anger, boiling over." This is forbidden (Eph. 4:31).

(2) *parorgismos* (par-org-is-mos'). It is defined by Strong as "rage," with "wrath" as a synonym. It is described as "embitterment, exasperation." This is forbidden (Eph. 4:26).

(3) *orge* (or-gay'). It is defined by Strong as "properly, desire (as a reaching forth or excitement of the mind), i.e. (by analogy,) violent passion (ire, or [justifiable] abhorrence); by implication punishment." Synonyms are "anger, indignation, vengeance, wrath." Descriptive terms include: "wrath, righteous indignation."

"Anger" is not always used in a pejorative sense, because it is used of the Wrath of God (Mt. 3:7; Christ, Mk. 3:5). However, when that anger, exasperation and wrath have been allowed to deepen and settle, then bitterness sets in. Bitterness is from *pikria* (pik-rec'-ah) meaning "acridity" (especially poison), literally or figuratively. In the KJV, the translation is "bitterness." This is also forbidden (Eph. 4:31).

The Major Causes of Bitterness

What are the major causes of bitterness? We have all seen people who are captives of bitterness. It may be that some snub, some mistreatment (real or imagined), some criticism, some word of reproach occasioned hurt feelings. It may have been caused by our own jealousy and envy. Maybe someone else has been chosen for some honor or good fortune and we have been bypassed. Maybe there is someone we just do not like; maybe there is someone that Will Rogers never met. We might feel as Jimmy Durante felt toward one man when he said, "I couldn't warm up to that guy if we was cremated together." Perhaps we need to take the black dot test. Do you remember the lecturer who held up a white sheet of paper with one black dot in the middle and asked his audience what they saw? Every person saw only the black dot and not the white sheet of paper. In the same way, we tend to overlook many good qualities in people we do not like and see only the quality that we find offensive. If we find qualities or char-

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acteristics in another person that we do not like it may be that the reason we recognize those qualities so well is because we are so familiar with them in our own lives. It is said that parents are most critical of their children over the faults that they recognize in themselves.

Now if the angered, snubbed person could handle these matters in the way Jesus taught, it would never cause bitterness. But the reason he does not do so is because of a character flaw. It is because of his own character and not because this is the proper reaction. Brother Batsell Barrett Baxter asked a blind executive he met on a plane what caused his blindness. The blind man said a competitor hired a gangster to throw acid in his face. Asked if he knew who it was, he said, "Yes, but I could not prove it in court." Asked if he did not feel resentment, he said, "I did for years, but it dawned on me that I was doing myself the real injury. I forgave this man and have actually done him some favors in recent years."

Not everyone can handle resentment in that manner, and, of course, we need to remember that all anger is not condemned. There are some things we are not to countenance or endorse. In fact, anger is commanded in some things, but it must be controlled. It must be coped with on a daily basis. It must not be allowed to spill over into wrath, resentment and bitterness.

In July of 1991, a male employee of the Metropolitan Transit Authority in Houston, Texas became outraged when a female colleague was promoted to supervisor. He fatally shot the supervisor outside the company building and then was killed by the woman's husband, who had come to drive her home.

In October of 1991, a disgruntled man in Woodlawn, Maryland, who had been fired from his mechanic's job at Fox Chevrolet, murdered two co-workers with a semi-automatic handgun and injured another before killing himself.

In January 1992, a long-time employee of General Dynamics in San Diego, California smuggled a gun into his grievance hearing and killed a state labor board representative and wounded his own supervisor when he learned that his termination was final.

In recent times, bitter mass-murderers have shot customers in Luby's at Belton, Texas; students from a tower in Austin, Texas; and postal workers in Edmond, Oklahoma. These are extreme cases, but some of them differ only in degree. It has been estimated that violence in the workplace costs American business \$4,200,000,000 annually.² Dr. Theodore Dalrymple, who practices medicine in slums and prisons in a large British city, says, speaking of bitterness and resentment,

Among my patients, it is clear that this emotion fulfills an important function: to disguise from themselves the extent to which their own decisions and conduct have been responsible for their unhappiness. People prefer the role of immaculate victim of circumstance to that of principal author of their own misery.

The true cause of such behavior is described in Proverbs 26:23-26:

Fervent lips and a wicked heart are like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips; but he layeth up deceit within him: when he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart: though his hatred cover itself with guile, his wickedness shall be openly showed before the assembly (ASV).

Those who harbor grudges, resentments and bitterness in their hearts are described here. They may cover that bitterness with an outer gloss, but inside there is a seething, simmering cauldron of bitterness. Like "a potsberd covered with silver dross," the embittered person may attend the services of the church and may appear respectable and responsible, but inside he may be churning with hatred. He may teach, preach, sing, pray, and even have words of praise for others, but be warned by Solomon. He may "speak fair" but "believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart." Yes, Solomon said that anger, hatred, resentment and bitterness bottled up can be the root of a half dozen other problems. "There are seven abominations in his heart."

When there is finally an explosion, caused by the roiling nature of these "heart sins," "his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation." In other words, there is an open rupture of fellowship or something infinitely worse. Things have happened in church services, business meetings and other gatherings, which were a shame and a disgrace to professing Christians because of the way raw emotions were allowed to take over and spew their poison upon others.

A great many cases of bitterness may be attributed to a failure to accept the chastisement that comes upon us as Christians. I believe that we may be disciplined by the circumstances of life as well as by the teaching of God's Word. Some of the Christians to whom the book of Hebrews was written were on the verge of returning to Judaism. Some of them seemed to think they had made a mistake in becoming Christians because of the persecution heaped out upon them.

The divine writer of the book of Hebrews stresses throughout the book the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, and then he reminds them in Hebrews 12:4 that "ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." He also reminded them of the passage in Proverbs 3:11-12: "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." He argues that "we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence," and then he asks: "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. 12:9).

Much of our bitterness could be eliminated if we could accept oversights, cold shoulders, snubs, and petty, spiteful actions, as well as overt attacks upon us as part of the discipline and chastisement of a Christian. Many problems could be solved in this way, and it would be for our benefit and good, for the divine writer says that although no chastisement "seemeth to be joyous" when it happens, "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11).

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Now notice the command in verses 14-15: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." In other words, Christians must pursue peace with all men; they are to seek it and chase it until they obtain it in the pursuit of holiness. But he has not finished yet. He warns: "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."

There is the problem. A "root of bitterness" had sprung up among them and that meant trouble. This root of bitterness could cause the loss of large numbers of disciples who were on the brink of returning to Judaism. Do we not know that to be the truth? Have we not seen bitterness and resentment cause major problems in the church? Have we not seen wonderful congregations destroyed by resentment? Maybe one person thinks another is taking too much authority. Maybe some people do not like another person or persons and use some other excuse, but all of the time it is bitterness—resentment.

How much better to accept the chastening of the Lord. How much better to let such matters teach us discipline in holiness. Surely not all discipline comes from persecution. God's Word offers discipline. How much better to accept the discipline of God's Word than discipline by providential pressure, such as persecution, trouble and sickness.

But this bitterness must be uprooted; it cannot be allowed to go on. A root cannot be dealt with by simply cutting off the top. If a man tries to rid his field of Johnson grass, he has not solved the problem when he burns the field off. No, no, there are thousands of roots that will spring up immediately. In the same way, bitterness of sin must be dealt with. Ecclesiastes 9:18 says, "One sinner destroyeth much good." That certainly is true. One sinner—one bitter person—can destroy the efforts of a gospel preacher in a meeting; he can destroy and defeat all attempts toward the resolution of a problem; he can block and debar all positive projects which a congregation may undertake. The poison and bitterness can spread through the whole congregation as sides are taken and lines are drawn. He needs the discipline and chastening of the Lord. Solomon said in Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Helping Members Root Bitterness Out of Their Hearts

How do we help members root bitterness out of their hearts? Most of us do not regard ourselves as counselors and feel that counseling for bitterness and other sins should be left to "professionals." However, this is probably a mistake. The "professionals" have a poor track record, especially in dealing with sins such as bitterness. That is because much of "professional" counseling consists of listening to the tale of woe that is spun by clients and in some cases commiserating with the client to reassure the client that he or she is not crazy. No spiritual advice is given to overcome the sin in the person's life.

Have you noticed that secular psychology has convinced most people that whatever they do wrong is not their fault and that someone else is to blame? If I spill a cup

of hot coffee in my lap, it's not my fault; it's McDonald's' fault for getting it too hot. If I stumble and fall in the church building, it's someone else's fault besides mine. A folk song by Anna Russell characterizes the day in which we live:

I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed
To find out why I killed the cat and blacked my husband's eyes.
He laid me on a downy couch to see what he could find,
And here is what he dredged up from my subconscious mind:
When I was one, my mommy hid my dolly in a trunk,
And so it follows naturally that I am always drunk.
When I was two, I saw my father kiss the maid one day,
And that is why I suffer now from kleptomania.
At three, I had the feeling of ambivalence toward my brothers,
And so it follows naturally I poison all my lovers.
But I am happy; now I've learned the lesson this had taught;
That everything I do that's wrong is someone else's fault.

James Orten has said that it is his personal conviction that any successful preacher should be able to counsel and advise, because all that psychology consists of is the ability to use common sense and clear, logical thinking. Realistically, any Christian should be able to give good advice based upon the Word of God. We know the mind of Christ and his will as expressed in the Word of God, and so we should be able to help people with personal problems.

I think this may be one of the things most lacking in the church today—people who are willing and able to give counsel about personal problems. We do not want to hear people's problems and even if we do, maybe we are afraid to tell them plainly what they should do, that is, what the Word of God demands. Yet, as I began to study this subject, I learned that this is clearly an activity that the New Testament assumes that all Christians, not simply preachers, should be doing. So how may we help members root out bitterness?

By Confrontation

The Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:31, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Note especially the word that Luke used to describe Paul's activity. It is *noutheteo* (noo-thet-eh'-o), which according to Strong means, "to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) to caution or reprove gently: KJV—admonish, warn." Vincent says this means literally "to put in mind, admonish." He also quotes what Cremer says on this word: "Its fundamental idea is the well-intentioned seriousness with which one would influence the mind and disposition of another by advice, admonition, warning, putting right, according to circumstances."

I want to look at other passages so that we can understand the nature of this work.

We think of Paul as an evangelist, sailing the seas, adventuring into unknown regions, and establishing churches. Of course, he did all these things, but he did something else. Somehow we do not think of Paul as a counselor, visiting people, fulfilling the role of a shepherd, gently admonishing and warning people about their sins and faults, but this is what this word teaches. If he did it for three years, night and day, it is reasonable to say that he spent a large part of his time engaged in such activity, building up people in the faith. This is a role that we grow weary of and give up on too easily. No doubt the reason that the writings of Paul are so full of the names of individuals is because of his intimate association with them on so many occasions.

From the places where this word, or some form of it is used, we conclude that *noutheteo* is something that all Christians are to engage in, not simply evangelists and preachers.

Note Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another . . ." The word for "admonish" is from *noutheteo*, which Thayer says means "to admonish, warn, exhort," or literally, "to put in mind." This has been rendered "confronting one another nouthetically."

Note also Romans 15:14: "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Paul here pictures Christians "confronting one another nouthetically" as normal, everyday activity. They were able to do this because they were filled with all knowledge and goodness.

Paul also considered this something that was important in his own ministry. Colossians 1:28 reads: "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Again note: "warning every man."

A. T. Robertson, in his comments on Acts 20:31, renders the word for "warn," "to put sense into one." I am indebted to Jay Adams for these thoughts on the word *noutheteo*. He says that there are three basic elements in this warning, admonishing, or "nouthetic confrontation."

(1) The word implies a problem or an obstacle which must be overcome. There is something in the life of the person that must be straightened out. Inherent in this idea is that there is a problem which must be acknowledged with the result being a change of personality and behavior.

(2) It also implies that the problem is to be solved by verbal means. Of this word *noutheteo*, Trench says,

It is the training by word—by the word of encouragement, when this is sufficient, but also by that of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, where these may be required; as set over against the training by act and by discipline, which is *paideia*.

Trench quotes Plutarch who said that this word "had continually, if not always, the sense of admonishing with blame."

Therefore, the second element in this confrontation which is expected of every Christian is verbal discussion with the purpose in view of bring a change of personality and behavior. There is an appeal in one of Lynwood Smith's songs which suggests this idea. He wrote:

If you would be a friend, a friend forever,
Don't act as if my faults you do not see;
But tell me of the Friend who leaves me never,
And point me to the cross of Calvary.'

(3) The third element in this confrontation must not be lost and that is that it is to benefit the person being confronted or counseled. The Apostle Paul used the verbal form of this word in 1 Corinthians 4:14 "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you." You will note the fatherly tone expressed by the apostle toward the Corinthians.

Even in the most extreme situations, this tone is to be kept. Paul also used the word in 2 Thessalonians 3:15, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." This is not thought of as punishment, but as counseling, admonishing verbally with the good and salvation of the brother or sister in view. In fact, Paul used the word in Colossians 1:28 to teach that every man must be counseled, admonished, or warned so that they may be presented to Christ mature and complete. Note the passage again. Colossians 1:28, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

The Scriptures were given for this purpose. In the familiar passage in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle said: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Although we usually quote this passage in speaking of the inspiration of the Scriptures, the primary purpose of this passage is to stress that the Scriptures are given to counsel, admonish and warn.

Paul discusses the same theme in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." Contrary to theories of secular counselors, who maintain a neutral, non-judgmental approach, God's Word teaches acceptance of responsibility, admission of guilt, confession of sin, prayer for forgiveness and help in overcoming such sins as bitterness. If we are dealing with sin, we must not allow minimizing and rationalizing sin and error.

By Establishing Communication

Many of the problems among Christians are the result of a communication breakdown. Much of the bitterness is due to a failure to communicate. Only by communication can problems between Christians be solved. The Apostle Paul teaches in

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Ephesians 4 that Christians have been called to walk in newness of life with Christ. He argues in verses 22-24 that the former manner of life must be changed and that the new self must emerge. Accordingly, from henceforth, the Christian must lay aside lying and speak the truth. Now, there may be problems preventing effective communication, and one of these is anger and bitterness. There is a way of handling anger. Note Paul's solution in Ephesians 4:26, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." In other words, anger must be dealt with on a daily basis.

I have already pointed out that anger is not a sin. Anger must be controlled. Biblical passages abound that show that anger that is undisciplined and uncontrolled, resulting in airing sinful feelings and saying or doing anything that comes to mind is what is condemned in the Scriptures. Solomon warns in Proverbs 22:24-25, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."

Perhaps many of the weaknesses we see in others should be covered with the mantle of love. Remember that Peter said in 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves; for love covereth a multitude of sins" (ASV).

If there is something that cannot be solved in this manner, then it must be dealt with directly. If I have resentment, yet I talk and act as if nothing is wrong, then I am not telling the truth and there is a breakdown of communication. We cannot practice deceit as the people of this world might handle the problem. We must be forthright and honest.

Surely we have noticed the progression of thought as Jesus deals with anger in Matthew 5:21-22. He speaks of the way of handling anger that leads to a murderous heart. Matthew 5:23-24 reads, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

With Jesus it is an urgent matter. Note that the one presenting his offering at the altar remembers something that someone has against him, and he must go, leaving his gift, and seek reconciliation. Please notice who it is that must do the going. You will also remember that in Matthew 18:15 Jesus commands: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

Here, the wronged brother must take action. When both passages are put together, we learn that whenever alienation takes place, both parties are required to take action in seeking reconciliation, regardless of who is at fault.

It is also important in approaching another to confess any sins and ask for forgiveness. For reconciliation to be effected, it is necessary to specifically ask for forgiveness and attempt to get a clear statement of it. If he cannot gain forgiveness, at least he has the satisfaction of knowing that he has done all he can do under the circumstances.

By Modeling

The solutions I am proposing may overlap some, but it is clear that modeling is a useful biblical principle which we may apply. The Apostle Paul often proposed himself as a model or example. When some were not working and were sponging off of others, he reminded them of his own example when in their midst, saying,

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for naught; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Without laboring the point, I might mention some other passages along the same line: 1 Corinthians 11:1; 4:16; Philippians 3:17; 4:7. Paul also states that the Thessalonians had become imitators (ASV) of "us and of the Lord," and that they, in turn, had become "ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:6-7).

Surely the world needs to see in us a broad, benevolent spirit, and above all, other members of the church need to see such a spirit shown. If we would attempt to counsel and admonish others, let us make certain our lives are free from bitterness and unforgiveness. This is something that we are teaching implicitly, if indeed our lives are free from it, but it is also something that may be taught explicitly. In other words, we may wish to tell someone how we overcame bitterness or other character flaws. There are inherent dangers involved in such explicit teaching. For example, we do not want to make our problems or ourselves the focus of attention, and we do not want make it a "Can you top this?" session. However, if a confession of our own shortcomings can elicit a confession from another, it would serve a worthwhile purpose.

While we may be frustrated in dealing with someone who harbors bitterness and unforgiveness, it might help us to think about what that person is doing to himself. Imagine the unhappiness, isolation, and misery which the bitter soul is inflicting on himself. It reminds me of a scene from *Amos and Andy*. Andy became fed up with a big man who always greeted him with a slap across the chest, but he said to Amos: "I'm fixed for him. I put a stick of dynamite in my vest pocket and the next time he slaps me, he's gonna get his hand blown off." What Andy didn't realize was that it would also blow his heart out. In the same way, anger, wrath, and bitterness do far more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than anything upon which it is poured.

I think we may be able to help others by counseling (admonishing), by opening avenues of communication and by exhibiting the proper conduct in all situations ourselves. 419 K S.W., Ardmore, Oklahoma 73401

End Notes

1. **Websters New Collegiate Dictionary**, 1977, p. 113.
2. **USA TODAY**, "Violence Costs Run Into Billions," Aug. 1995, Vol. 124, p. 3.
3. Jay E. Adams, **Competent To Counsel**, (Grand Rapids, 1974), p. 8.
4. M. Lynwood Smith, "Point Me To The Cross," **New Songs No. 9**, (Wesson, Miss.: M. Lynwood Smith Publications, 1971), p. 2.

Helping Others Cope With Grief

Carl M. Johnson

Grief is the most universal and the most painful of all human experiences, and yet it is one about which we hesitate even to think. A consequence of our society's refusal to think about grief is that we are almost without knowledge about it. A mid-western newspaper conducted a man-in-the-street survey that asked people how long they thought it took to mourn the loss of a loved one. The answers varied from "forty-eight hours" to "two weeks." Clinical tests reveal it takes from eighteen months to two years. The answers given to the survey, however, are a startling revelation of our society's general ignorance about grief. No one has told us what it feels like, nor how long it lasts.

When confronted with the grief of others, we usually feel at a loss as to what to say and do. For ourselves, we seem to take the attitude "it won't happen to me, at least not yet." When we do experience grief, we seem helpless in taking hold of it, looking at it, accepting it, and mastering it. We have no resources to meet it and we use all kinds of mechanisms to avoid dealing with grief.

Definition of Grief

Grief can be defined as the painful and natural reaction to loss. We spend a good portion of our lives working diligently to acquire those things that make life rich and meaningful—friends, a spouse, children, a home, a job, material comforts, money, and security. What happens to us when we lose any of these persons or things which are so important to us? Quite naturally we grieve over the loss of anything important. Anything that holds such possibilities for joy, fulfillment and mutual strength must have roots that go so deep that its loss will inevitably produce overwhelming pain and grief.

At the deeper level, it feels like this: Your world has become a chaos of dark feelings, questions without answers, fears without names, nights without sleep and memories with pain. Doug Manning writes:

Right now your chest hurts—the numbness has worn off and real pain has replaced it. You wonder if you will ever be well again. A thousand questions flood your mind. A thousand hurts pop up every day. Every day you find a new thing to cause memories and bring tears. You find it hard to sleep. The awful loneliness seems to be there every moment of every day. The finality of death leaves a hollow feeling all over your body. Loneliness comes in only one size . . . extra large (41).

Stages Of Grief

Thanatologists tell us there are various stages through which each person must pass while grieving. I am reluctant to list the various stages of grief because it is a mistake to describe reactions to grief or to any other experience in neat, well-defined steps. Each death is different. When a parent dies, one loses the past. When a spouse dies, one loses the present. When a child dies, one loses the future.

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Each survivor is also different. Even though grief is a common human experience, it is as individual as fingerprints—it shows itself in widely differing ways. You may go from stage one to stage five and then go to stage three. There is no set pattern. You may be in stage five this morning, and be in stage one before noon.

It is more important to know there are stages than to know how many stages there are or in what order they usually appear. The stages have been written in various forms and varying numbers. I have found these stages expressed in three major steps and I have also found them expressed in ten steps. Three steps or ten, there do seem to be some very natural stages we go through in our recovery from grief. These are not well-defined steps, which identify themselves as we pass. They are generalized patterns of growth you will experience.

A State of Shock At this stage we may say, "This can't be! This is not happening!" Physical shock and emotional denial are nature's way of blunting reality just long enough for the body to get its resources together to deal with some problem bigger than life. This shock stage may last anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours to a few days.

Sometimes at the funeral home we see the sorrowing wife and find she is almost radiant as she greets those who have come to offer their sympathy. People say, "What serene faith she has!" We tend to equate faith with a stoical attitude, not with tears. Yet the truth of the matter may well be that this woman is experiencing a temporary anesthesia which is helping her along until she is ready to move on to the next stage of grief.

A minister (preacher, elder, friend, etc.), upon seeing this woman in what at least appears to be shock, will arrange to visit her after the funeral, knowing that one day soon this strong exterior may break down and he will have to help her face her true self.

Emotional Release. Tears are one of nature's safety valves—use them. When the body is cut, it bleeds. When the inner person is devastated, tears are natural. Don't let someone tell you how you ought to feel.

Men struggle under a double standard when it comes to grief. We have been taught in our society that "Big boys don't cry." And yet the one verse in the Bible that virtually every child first learns by heart is the two-word verse, "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35). These words describe a man, who, when grief came, was able to weep, for He wanted and needed to express the feelings within Him.

One out of fifteen males has a person with whom he can share his most intimate feelings. Men talk about work, sports, hunting, etc., but they do not talk about their feelings. Our society teaches us to rejoice with our friends at the birth of a baby, to celebrate when someone gets married, but to act as though nothing has happened when someone dies. And yet, to bottle up our grief unnecessarily is to do ourselves harm. Grieving people need the opportunity to acknowledge the pain they are suffering, and they need to be able to express the pain. If you have one good friend who will listen to your expressions of hurt, you are lucky.

Depression. At this stage we ask, "God, where are you?" It feels like God doesn't know or doesn't care or can't help. Depression is not something unique to you or me; it is an experience that seems to come to all people when something they love and treasure dearly is taken away from them.

In the Scriptures, we hear strong men like David crying out in their isolation, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? . . . My soul is cast down within me . . . I will say unto God, my rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? . . . Mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" (Psa. 42:5-6, 9-10).

And deep inside, it is as if we are saying during the times when we are depressed, "Where is my God?" Jesus Himself faced this loneliness on the cross when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34).

What we must never forget about a depression experience is that one day it will pass. Dark days do not last forever. The clouds are moving, though very slowly. The person in the midst of a depression is certain, of course, that the clouds are not moving. He is convinced this is a state in which he will remain the rest of his life. Any attempt to convince him otherwise is useless. The experience of people through the centuries, however, is that the clouds of depression are moving, and that they do pass.

For some people, the clouds seemingly roll away all at once. Something happens within them, or some important event triggers a movement toward the next stage of grief. For others, it takes longer, stretching the weeks into months. Such people can be immeasurably helped by the constant, consistent concern of those who really care about them. Just know that God will walk with you through it. You will make it; you will see the sunshine again.

Physical Distress. You may say, "I'm sick." That is probably true. A great loss is so disrupting that you may well be physically ill. But it becomes much more serious when you turn your emotions inward. Those "ingrown" feelings may later surface with a vengeance. Physical reactions to the death of a loved one may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. You may find you have very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest, and moderate exercise are especially important for the whole family at this time.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.

Panic. We find ourselves becoming panicky because we can think of nothing else but our loss. We try so hard to get our minds off the subject, and perhaps for a moment or two we can be distracted from our worries, but soon we are right back where we started. We are unable to focus on our work and people have to repeat their words to us. We simply cannot concentrate. We begin to worry about our mental health, which may cause us to panic.

The inability to concentrate during time of grief, however, is just as normal as it can be. In fact, it would be abnormal if we could easily put aside our grief for routine matters. When something has been terribly important to us for a long, long time and it is taken from us, we cannot be expected to do anything but be constantly drawn to the lost object and suffer daily as we struggle with the gradually dawning realization that it is gone forever.

To help ourselves through such a period, we must be open to new and different human relationships. At a time like this, all we want to do is run away from life. The last thing we care to do is to try anything new. We can think of a hundred different reasons why we prefer to stay home and be gloomy rather than to go out and be forced to be nice to people and think new thoughts. Such an attitude is natural; it is to be expected. We must not wallow in our gloom, however, because it will only prolong our grief work. And to work through grief is very hard work!

Guilt Feelings. You may feel a sense of guilt about the loss. Guilt feelings are perhaps the most demanding, erratic, and the hardest to cope with reactions to death. There is a difference between normal guilt and neurotic guilt. When we lose a loved one through death, it would be hard to conceive of any of us who had lived closely with the departed one who would not feel guilty about some of the things we did not do for this person when he or she was alive, or the things we did do that hurt this person. We know we have sinned against this person by thought, word and deed, and our religious training says we should face up to our sin, and we ought to feel guilty about it.

Guilt is not something new for mature Christians though. Christians have experienced the remarkable sense of release that comes when we admit guilt in confession and prayer. We know real guilt must never be glossed over, nor should it be repressed (Jas. 5:16; 1 Jn. 1:9). We have learned to come to terms with it, and these terms include a sense of being alienated from God, genuine repentance followed by honest confession. Contrite confession of real guilt is a part of every worship service. We all have need to say, "Have mercy upon me, O God. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:1, 10).

There is also such a thing as neurotic guilt and it is often intertwined with real guilt. Every person has some neurotic guilt feelings. It is a matter of degree. We should all be aware of these tendencies and not be lulled into thinking it is only the other person who experiences them. An example of this type of guilt is the daughter who stays by her aged mother's bedside in the hospital for days and days without sleep. The doctor now orders her to go home and get some sleep. This turns out to be the night her mother dies, and she will never forgive herself for not being there when it happened. She broods endlessly about it and blows it all out of proportion to the real situation.

Grieving people who manufacture this type of guilt for themselves usually find themselves beginning sentences with the four word phrase, "If only I had . . ."

If only I had been there.

If only I had forced him to go to the doctor.

If only I had been a better husband.
If only I had been a better wife.
If only I had been a better father.
If only I had been a better mother.

If the "If onlys" are not handled, they can grow into reactions. You can begin to punish yourself with these feelings until you become your own worst enemy.

Unfortunately, some people have sentenced themselves to years of suffering as payment for these feelings. One man who lost two children by drowning became an alcoholic because of the guilt he felt over not teaching his children to swim. For thirteen years he locked himself off from the world. He divorced his wife, would never talk of the children, would never go to the cemetery, and would never deal with his feelings. He thought he deserved to suffer, and suffer he did.

One lady actually became a hermit; a prisoner in her own home. She has unresolved feelings of guilt because she did not force her husband to go to the doctor when he showed signs of heart disease. She has sentenced herself to loneliness to pay for her "sins."

Others have spent the rest of their lives making the person who died into a saint. The person who died becomes larger than life—they become the perfect mate. All the person can talk about is how wonderful the one who has died was. Often this is a guilt reaction—an effort to make up to the person for some slights, either real or imagined.

These feelings of guilt are common but they will not bring your loved one back to life. The past is over. You don't change circumstances by replaying the ninth inning over and over. In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.

Hostility. "Why me?" This question often betrays anger and resentment. When you feel helpless and forsaken, you may be angry with the doctors, or yourself, or the loved one who just died, or even God. When we have something very precious taken away from us we inevitably go through a stage where we are critical of everything and everyone who was related to the loss. No one is spared. This resentment is not a healthy emotion and, if allowed to take over, it can be very harmful. Yet it is a normal part of the grief process. It is to be expected, it is to be wrestled with, and it can, by the grace of God, be overcome.

Inability To Function. Although we may be quite well along in our grief work and really want to get back to our usual activities, something inside us resists returning. Our loss has been something special and we feel that other people just do not understand how great the loss was. They are off talking about other things and we are left alone with our sorrow. Everyone has forgotten our tragedy. Somebody has to keep the memory of it alive. We must not allow things to get back to normal. Putting life back together is no easy task. It will take time and patience. Letting your feelings run their course will help you reenter life again.

Hope's Return

Now and then we get a little glimpse of hope in one experience or another. The cloud which has been so dark begins to break up, and rays of light come through. As your sense of humor returns and you find yourself laughing, you're feeling better. As you begin to make major decisions about your life, you're getting better still. When you are able to take out the mementos of your loved one and smile through your tears at memories of happiness together, you're much improved. And when you learn that no one can bring back your loved one, that it's your job to pick up and go on living, then you'll know you're truly growing and recovering yourself.

What Can I Do To Help?

There are no easy answers, no standard approaches that are universally helpful. There are no magic formulas which will make the pain go away. It is natural to feel helpless when the loved one of a friend or a relative dies. Remember that showing your loving concern can be very comforting to a grieving family. Please don't avoid them because you feel inadequate. Families are more likely to reach a healthy, positive resolution of their grief if they receive continuing support and understanding. The following suggestions may help you provide that support.

1. *Don't try to find magic words that will take away the pain.* There aren't any. Much of the tension between those who are grieving and their friends could be removed if friends could understand it is not necessary for us to say anything. The most important response to the grieving is to listen, and reach out and touch.

When someone tells us his problems, we think we must have an answer. If we have no answer, we feel as though we have been no help at all. The frustration of having no answer can cause us to give either shallow answers or just run from the question.

2. *Avoid saying "I know how you feel."* You do not know how they feel. You know how you feel, but everyone is different. You can say, "I wouldn't be surprised" if you feel this way or that way. Avoid using "It was God's will," and other cliches that attempt to minimize or explain the death. Don't try to find something positive in the person's death, such as, "At least you have other children." There are no words that make it right that their child has died.

Our friends do not really expect us to give them the answer to the whole problem of grief. They mainly need someone with whom they can talk. Grief has to be lived through—it cannot be just "answered."

3. *Listen.* Let them express the anger, the questions, the pain, the disbelief and the guilt they may be experiencing. Understand that grief-stricken people may need to talk about their loved one and the circumstances of their death over and over again. It may be helpful to encourage them to talk by asking a gentle question such as, "Can you tell me about it?"

4. *Be non-judgmental and caring.* If you really don't care, then get out of the role of care-giver. Avoid judgments of any kind. "You should" or "You shouldn't" is not

appropriate or helpful. Decisions and behaviors relate to displaying or removing photographs, reliving the death, idealizing the person, or expressing anger, depression or guilt may appear extreme in many cases. These behavior patterns are normal, particularly in the first years following a child's death.

5. *Be aware that the death of a loved one may raise serious questions in the minds of the survivors about God's role in this event.* "Where was God when my son died?" "The same place He was when His son died." Share your religious convictions as to faith, God, immortality, prayer, life, and death.

6. *Never enforce an artificial time-frame on your friends for recovery.* Everyone is different, and the process will vary. If your friends have no knowledge about grief, they may be uncomfortable around you. They are in the dark and feel it. When your grief extends beyond a few weeks, they may begin to think you should be well by this time. When you do not get well, they may begin to think you are odd in some way. They may tell you to "get on with your life; it's time you got over this!"

Your options are to pretend you are well long before you are, or go on in your grief and let them be uncomfortable. I hope you will not pretend. The more a mourner must live a life of pretense, the more difficult it is to adapt to the normal functions of living.

Others may try to put you in a double bind by telling you that if you grieve too long, you are weak; if too briefly, you do not really love. You can't win!

7. *Be there.* Run errands, help with household chores, provide child care and help in whatever way is needed. Don't say, "Call me if there is anything I can do." That call will probably never come. Be aware of what needs to be done and offer to do specific tasks.

8. *Write down the day of the death of the loved one.* On the anniversary of that day, call your friend on the phone and say, "I'm thinking of you during this difficult moment."

9. *Continue your contact with the family.* Grief does not end at the funeral or on the first anniversary. Stay in touch often, and don't forget to mention the name of the loved one who died in conversation as easily as you would the name of any other member of the family.

10. *Give special attention to surviving children.* They are hurt, confused and often ignored. Modern adults favor honesty in discussing the biological process of birth with children, but when it comes to life's end, health professionals as well as parents fall strangely silent. The feelings and perspectives of children are overlooked, perhaps because of denial, a belief that children cannot understand, fear of the unknown, or simply a wish to escape responsibility.

But children are more aware of death than most adults realize. Death education begins soon after life begins. A pet is killed, a funeral procession passes, a grandpar-

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ent dies, and television pictures death in living color every day. Most children will have witnessed 17,000 deaths on TV by the age of sixteen.

But children may not understand what they see because of adult secrecy. Parents and grandparents, teachers, preachers, health professionals, and friends can heighten the child's feeling of isolation by acting as though nothing significant has occurred, when an arm around the shoulders, a warm handshake, an expression of sympathy or simply recognition would bring great comfort.

The Hungarian psychologist Maria Nagy has explored the meaning of death for children of different ages. At ages three to five, they deny death is final; it is like sleep, or like a parent going to work or on a brief vacation. Between five and nine, children accept the idea that someone has died, but not until the age of ten do they understand they themselves must die.

Adults trying to explain or avoid explaining death to children are often tempted by half-truths or fantasies because they want to appear to know all the answers. But a secure adult does not have to profess infinite knowledge. There is no greater need than trust and truth. It is far healthier to share the joint quest for wisdom with a child than to appease immediate curiosity by fantasy in the guise of fact. Let me share some examples:

"Grandfather became sick and had to go away to a hospital." We hope the child's memory will gradually fade and the absence will be accepted as normal, but we encourage the development of a capacity to 'forget about' things instead of dealing with life's realities. And will the child also die when hospitalized?

"Mother has gone on a long journey." Hearing this, children often think they have been abandoned without even a good-bye. They may become angry, concluding that "She really didn't care enough about me." And "If mother only went away on a journey, why is everyone crying?"

"God took Daddy because your father was so good that God wanted him for Himself." The child may become deeply resentful of a God who capriciously robbed her of her father, and may think: "But God loves me too; maybe I'll be the next one God takes away."

"Your grandmother has just gone to sleep." This is a natural parallel. Sometimes the Bible uses "sleep" as a metaphor for death. We must be careful, however, to explain the difference, or we run the risk of causing a pathological dread of bedtime. Children have been known to toss about, struggling to remain awake, fearful they too may "go to sleep" forever.

"Don't cry." Crying is natural. A newborn enters life crying for oxygen. Tears are an infant's means of expressing its needs, pain, and discomfort. Even after children are able to talk, they weep to release painful emotion. Tears are wordless messages, a vital part of grieving, and children who stoically keep their grief bottled up may later release it in a dangerous explosion. Crying helps to express the despair following the

slow realization that the death is not a bad dream. The expression "Big boys don't cry" should always be avoided. People of all ages and both sexes should be entitled to express their emotions without shame. Nor should parents think they have failed their children if they weep in front of them. The opposite is true. It is better to say "I could cry too" than to insist, "There, there, you mustn't cry."

The facts of death should be discussed naturally and lovingly, without lurid or terrifying descriptions. It is important to proceed slowly, simply, with patience and gentleness. Nevertheless, children should be informed immediately, if possible by a parent or someone close to them, and preferably at home or in familiar surroundings. Delay makes it likely that the child will learn in the wrong place, at the wrong time, from the wrong person. Not that there is any single right or proper way to learn; how the explanation is given matters even more than what is said. Above all, children need to feel the affection of adults; hugging and physical closeness may be better than any words.

Conclusion

The Scriptures teach us to "weep with those who weep," and to "bear one another's burdens." But our society has been woefully ignorant about the best way to go about fulfilling these commands. In many instances we have put forth our very best effort to help people in times of crisis, but we have not always been well-informed. As Mark Twain said, "It's not what people know that gets them into trouble; but it's what they know that isn't so." There are some good sources of help available today to assist the bereaved to cope with grief and loneliness, and to provide continuing reassurance and understanding. The time has come to inform ourselves, and to put this information to work in a practical, beneficial way. 1400 Northcrest Drive, Ada, OK 74820

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Preventing Marriage Problems

Gerald Hill

Have you noticed? People seem to be falling out of love as surely as they fall in love. One young lady told me that she did not love her husband anymore: "I've fallen out of love with him." But may I suggest to you, that is not as big a problem as it may seem. The reason is, God has given you the ability to learn to love your husband or wife again. Just as you have fallen out of love, you can fall in love again. Far too often we hear this same line among those who are members of the body of Christ.

The average couple spends two hundred hours getting ready for their wedding and less than three hours in any type of premarital counseling. Furthermore, it is far easier to get a marriage license than it is to get a driver's license.

One of the major problems confronting us today is that many are coming into their marriage having had no healthy role model during their growing-up years. We are told that fifty percent of all marriages fail in the United States. That means that half of all young adults old enough to marry have seen nothing but conflict in the home. They have felt the distance and heard the silence between their mother and dad. One young lady asked in frustration, "Can anyone tell me what a healthy marriage really looks like? That's what I want, but I don't know where to start."

Another problem is that many are marrying virtual strangers. They spend hours together and talk a lot during the dating period. As result they think they know each other well. However, the dating relationship is generally used to conceal rather than reveal. Each partner hides embarrassing facts, habits and temperament flaws.

For these reasons I will begin this discourse by considering the importance of compatibility in a marriage relationship. The purpose of this part of our study is to encourage couples planning to marry to identify in advance where the difficult areas in their relationship are likely to be, then work on bridging the gaps before marriage. In the second part of this study I will address the principle of "honor" and its importance in our relationships.

The Importance of Compatibility

There are two outstanding characteristics in those relationships that seem to be the healthiest:

1. A strong commitment to marriage as opposed to a strong attraction to the other person in the relationship.
2. Compatibility in the following areas: background, temperament, goals and dreams, values, the ways in which individuals manage and order their physical, material and spiritual lives.

Couples need to see in advance of marriage where the difficult spots will likely be in their relationship. Then learn ways of addressing and resolving difficulties as they

occur. The key to a good marriage relationship is being compatible, not just being in love.

What does it mean to be compatible? Every couple should initially focus on three facets of their relationship:

1. Availability
2. Excitability
3. Compatibility

Availability

Availability means being available in all areas of life. Making oneself vulnerable and accessible to the other person emotionally, materially and spiritually. It also involves time and presence. Availability is the foundation on which compatibility is built. If two people do not spend enough time together, if they don't communicate about what is happening emotionally, mentally or spiritually in their lives, it is impossible to find out how compatible they are or are not. These questions should be asked at some point in a developing relationship. Is each person fully available to the other? If not, why not? Is each willing to become available to the other? If not, why not? If so, when? Availability is the foundation on which compatibility is built. It keeps a person building, bridging the gaps. Availability is not compatibility, but it is a major key in discovering and developing compatibility.

Excitability

Excitability involves more than sexual attraction. Sexual attraction is important. In fact, it keeps the human race alive. Sexual attraction is part of what makes a marriage fun, meaningful and fulfilling. However, the excitability facet of a marriage should not be exclusively sexual. There are at least four other areas that you should find your husband or wife to be "exciting".

1. *Mental.* Is s/he often in your thoughts? Do you find yourself anticipating what s/he might say or do? Do you daydream about your beloved, your being with him/her in life's situations?

2. *Conversational.* Do you enjoy talking and listening to your loved one? Are his/her opinions and ideas interesting? Do you look forward to talking about what is going on in both of your lives? Do you talk about the future? the past? Remember, when communication breaks down, so do other areas of a relationship.

3. *Visual.* Do you enjoy watching your spouse? Do you like the way s/he moves, laughs, walks, talks and gestures? Part of the initial attraction between men and women is usually based on visual cues.

4. *Accomplishments.* Excitability includes being excited about your spouse's potential and accomplishments. Excitability is important to compatibility because it encourages people to search for ways to bridge differences.

Compatibility

Compatibility helps the marriage endure. It is the capacity for harmony and agreement that leads to a consistent way of life. It is the ability to get along well.

There are times in all relationships when you cannot be fully available to the other. You cannot be as available as either would like, mentally, emotionally, physically or spiritually. There will be times when the excitement diminishes, as result of health issues, stress and other circumstances. However, if two people are truly compatible, they will be able to endure those times when full availability is not possible and when romantic love is at one of its many low points. But when two people are compatible, they will make themselves more available and do whatever is necessary to rekindle the excitement of their relationship.

Five Areas of Compatibility: Physical Compatibility

1. Sexual Compatibility. Those most sexually compatible are couples who choose to remain virgins. They do not carry into the marriage the guilt and distrust associated with indulging in premarital sex.

The Apostle Paul wrote concerning the sanctity of the marriage bed, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Heb. 13:4). He also wrote that the Christian should avoid the sin of fornication at all cost:

Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body . . . Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:13, 18-20; cf. 5:1-13; 7:2; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3).

If either or both has committed fornication, there needs to be mutual forgiveness. Part of the cleansing process should include a period of celibacy and purity before entering into a new sexual relationship within the bonds of marriage. Six months to a year is recommended. This allows time for trust to be restored to the relationship.

2. Management of Material Goods. This includes work and spending habits. Problems involving money comprise the second most reported cause of marriage problems. Some people manage money well, some do not. Every couple should ask, "What are our spending priorities and who will control them. Is s/he honest in business dealings." Every couple intent on marriage should discuss how chores will be divided.

Compatibility of Background

1. Race and Tribe. Many people throughout the world believe that there should be no interracial or intertribal marriages. Most racial and tribal prejudice is deeply ingrained and has been for generations.

However, it is a historical fact that interracial and intertribal marriages have existed for thousands of years. In the Old Testament, Moses married a woman who was not a Hebrew (Ex. 2:21). In the United States, the majority of the population is of mixed tribe. For example, those who have German and English ancestry. And of course, there is a significant part of the population who are of mixed race.

Attitudes about interracial and intertribal marriages vary throughout the world. In Japan, they are taboo. Here in the United States, it is not uncommon to find a family with high racial prejudice living next door to a family of low racial prejudice. So it is important to know each person's attitude about his or her own race or tribe, as well as his or her potential spouse's race or tribe.

2. Cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is an important consideration. Keep in mind that, if you are marrying a person who's native language is different from your own, the way each of you process information and form opinions (your thought patterns) will be different. The greater the language difference, the greater the difference in thought patterns. This can present problems in communication.

Some families are close knit, some are not. So an important question to ask is: "What is the structure of the family? Is the man or woman dominate?" Don't discount family structure. Your intended spouse probably envisions a family structured like his or her own.

It is still important that Christians marry Christians for obvious practical reasons. If you are a Christian and your spouse-to-be is not, here is a serious consideration: If you are blessed with children, in which religion will they be reared? It is difficult to raise children in the Lord if either parent is not a Christian.

From a scriptural perspective, it is important that Christians marry Christians because it is the will of God. Historically, God has insisted that His people marry from among His people. In Genesis 6:1-6, the sons of God marrying the daughters of men resulted in the wickedness that caused God to destroy the world by means of the great flood. Abraham, and later Isaac, insisted that their sons choose wives from among their own people rather from among the Canaanites (Gen. 24:1-4; 28:1). Then later, during the Mosaic period, His instruction for marriage was the same (Ex. 34:12-16).

Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly (Deut. 7:3-4).

Preventing Marriage Problems

We should not be surprised to find that God's attitude toward marriage has not changed. Notice Paul's instruction: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14; cf. 1 Cor. 7:39; 9:5).

God's Word in both the Old and New Testaments teaches us His will concerning the second most important decision one makes in life (the first being your obedience to the gospel). Marry only in the Lord!

3. *Socioeconomic Factors.* Prospective mates should consider one another's financial background: rich, poor or middle income. Remember this, when one individual sees another as being "less than" or "not as good as" because of their economic status, a very unhealthy condition exists in that relationship. This question should be considered: "Does s/he ever put me down for what perceived inappropriate behavior, attributing it to social class?"

4. *Education.* It is not so important what degree either of you has earned. What is important is to what degree each values education. It could present a problem if one of you places a high value on education and the other does not.

5. *Life Experiences.* Here are some life experiences that can be very troublesome in a marriage: past drug abuse, a previous marriage, children from a previous relationship, a criminal record, cult involvement, bankruptcy, psychological problems, abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional).

A disappointing past resulting in poor self-esteem is a source of many of the problems in marriage today. For example, a person with poor self-esteem may marry to prove to self and others that s/he can be loved. These same people may spend money beyond their means for things they do not need in order to prove they are worth something. However, the Christian must come to realize that there is no purchase that will remove the hurt of rejection or other trauma from one's past. Some of these experiences may require professional help (e.g. drug and alcohol abuse). These questions must be answered: "Has s/he resolved the difficulty resulting from these experiences, emotionally and spiritually? Does s/he blame others for what happened? Is s/he still living with feelings of bitterness, anger, hatred, or no forgiveness?"

Relationships with family and friends are an important background concern. One question that should be asked is: "What is his/her relationship with the parent of the same sex?" It is likely that your beloved will be like this parent in the years to come. So if that relationship is marked by good communication, mutual admiration, and warm memories, s/he will likely demonstrate the same in your marriage. If not, problems will likely occur in the marriage. What about the parent of the opposite sex? This relationship is likely to indicate how your spouse to be will treat you. If a man shows great respect and tenderness toward his mother, he probably will treat you the same way. If a young woman trusts her father and demonstrates love and admiration toward him, you will likely enjoy the same treatment.

You need to be concerned if your husband or wife to be insists that the past does not matter. It does, because the past is the foundation on which your marriage will be built.

Emotional Compatibility

Two people who are vastly different in temperament will likely have a relationship full of arguments. For a marriage to work the couple must agree and put into practice before the marriage how to resolve arguments peaceably. Notice these six areas of emotional compatibility.

1. *Conflict Resolution.* Here are six things necessary to resolve a conflict fairly: (a) no threats or ultimatums, (b) no physical violence, (c) a cooling off period before the situation is discussed, (d) stick to the issue—do not bring up the past, (e) no personal attacks (e.g., insults, name calling), (f) no absolute statements (e.g., always, never). After the disagreement is resolved, you should be able to resume closeness and continue to build your relationship.

2. *Flexibility.* Are you able to change directions, make new plans? Change in plans is inevitable. Unplanned overtime at work and automobile breakdowns are examples of things that may change plans. It is important for both partners to be able to handle these situations and then move on to plan "B".

3. *Generosity.* "Generosity" is the ability to give and forgive. A generous person gives of his time, and self. He has a listening ear, an encouraging word, compliments, hugs and kisses, and nice surprises. Generosity includes availability. A part of generosity is the ability to forgive. To forgive is to let go, not holding grudges, not seeking revenge. Confrontation is a necessary part of any relationship. But what happens after the confrontation is what is most important.

4. *Sense of Humor.* "Humor" is another important ingredient of a good marriage. Are you able to laugh at the goof-ups that naturally occur in life?

5. *Courtesy.* Courtesy is one of the characteristics of **agape** love. Love has good manners (1 Cor. 13:5). Good manners are a manifestation of respect. It is showing the other person, "I honor you: who you are and what you say is important."

6. *Self-assurance.*

Compatibility of Goals and Dreams

A goal is a goal only if it is achievable. Some goals are personal and achievable on an individual basis. Please understand that the goal of a successful marriage is not one of them. Here are some questions involving common goals: What about children? How many children? How will the duties involved in raising and training the children be divided? What if having children is not possible? What about work and careers? Do both partners expect to work outside the home? If the home is blessed with children, do both partners intend for the mother to give up her career in order to work at home taking care of the children?, etc.

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Even when couples share the same goals, there are many unpredictable circumstances that may interrupt and even change goals and redirect dreams. The following questions can help to appraise compatibility, prior to marriage, in dealing with unexpected delays or failures. How do you respond when a goal or dream has been interrupted? How does your spouse-to-be respond? Do you usually reach your goals as result of planning and hard work? Do you seldom finish what you plan?

Remember that a significant aspect of failure is the ability to rebound and deal with loss in a healthy way. Patience, diligence and responsibility are traits of a mature, psychologically healthy person.

Compatibility of Values

While personality traits seem to be defined at birth, our values are learned. Our values are pretty much ingrained by the time we reach adulthood. Values are who we are. They are at the root of our ability to learn, grow, change and adapt. All of these must happen if the marriage is to be lasting. Here is a list of core values to seek in a potential husband or wife: (a) truthfulness, (b) selflessness, (c) realistic optimism, (d) empathy, (e) work ethic, (f) willingness to communicate.

Some Comments on Communication Skills

In chapter one of the book, *Growing a Healthy Home* entitled "Prescription For A Successful Marriage," Dr. James Dobson offers the following advice: For a marriage to be successful it must be Christ-centered, both husbands and wives must be committed to the marriage, and there must be good communication between them.

In chapter two of the same book, Gary Smalley and John Trent write about the differences in the communication skills of men and women. One study showed that even in the hospital nursery, girls have more lip movement than boys! That propensity keeps right on increasing through the years, giving them an edge at meaningful communication! They then quote from a Harvard Preschool Program's research of communication differences between the sexes.

After wiring a playground for sound, researchers found that 100 percent of the sounds coming from the girl's mouths were audible, recognizable words. As for the little boys, only 68 percent of their sounds were understandable words! The remaining 32 percent were either one-syllable sounds like "uh" and "mmm", or sound effects like "Varoom", "Yaaaaah!" and "Zooom!"

Medical studies have shown that between the 18th and 26th week of pregnancy, something happens that forever separates the sexes. Using heat-sensitive color monitors, researchers have actually observed a chemical bath of testosterone and other sex-related hormones wash over a baby boy's brain. This causes changes that never happen to the brain of a baby girl. Here's a layman's explanation of what happens when those chemicals hit a boy's system.

The human brain is divided into two halves, or hemispheres, connected by fibrous tissue called the corpus callosum. The sex-related hormones and chemicals that flood

a baby boy's brain cause the right side to recede slightly, destroying some of the connecting fibers. One result is that, in most cases, a boy starts life more left-brain oriented. What occurs in the womb merely sets the stage for men and women to "specialize" in two different ways of thinking. This is one major reason men and women need each other.

Reaching Agreement in Areas of Difference

How can you come to agreement (bridge the gaps) in areas of incompatibility? "Agreement" is finding solution that works equally well for both you and your spouse to be. Agreements cannot be found in a book or in the relationships of others. Find out what works for the two of you. Narrow the gap through mutual change. Agree to accommodate the differences. There must be change by both persons. In healthy marriages a husband and his wife grow closer with every passing year. Full bonding cannot be accomplished in a month, a year or ten years. Therefore, it is important to maintain an environment that will allow the marriage to grow continually.

When confrontation is necessary in order to reach agreement in an area of difference, timing is very important. Do not discuss change when either partner is:

1. under extreme stress
2. feeling anger or frustration out of the ordinary
3. under the influence of any chemical including medications
4. physically exhausted
5. ill
6. experiencing a significant loss (e.g., loss of loved one, job, etc.).

Always allow time to cool off after an argument. Do not press for too many changes at one time. Never threaten the other person. Focus on the solution not the problem. Sometimes consulting a third party is helpful in reaching a solution in an area of incompatibility where the couple cannot stay calm enough for a rational discussion. Always be willing to back up and find another solution if one does not work.

Remember this: Those couples who find a purpose that is greater than themselves will usually find a way to become compatible, and live together as husband and wife until death parts them. Also, those couples who keep God in their marriage will be successful in that marriage. Solomon said: "a three-fold cord is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:12).

The Principal of Honor and Our Relationships

"Honor" is the foundation of all healthy relationships. The action with which we demonstrate honor is agape love.

The subject of love is one of the most abused, corrupted, and misunderstood of all Bible subjects. This is true because most people do not know what the Bible concept of love is. Should I ask the question: What is love? I no doubt would receive a variety of answers. Most of these would have to do with feelings or emotions we associate

with love. I believe that with proper understanding and application of this grand subject, we can all be spared the tragedy of broken homes and ruined lives. We need a fundamental understanding of what love is and then make the decision to make Christian love our way of life.

What is love? Love in the English language is singular in expressing what it takes four Greek words to express.

The Greek word *eros*, from which we get the English word "erotic," expresses sexual desire. This word does not appear in the Bible. However, the sexual relationship between a husband and his wife is discussed in a number of passages in the New Testament (Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7:1-5). But again, the Greek word *eros* is never used to describe this loving marital relationship. Many of today's marriages are based on the ancient Greek *eros*, love motivated by sexual attraction. These marriages are doomed to failure because *eros* is shallow, it is volatile, it is erratic, it is not stable!

Then, there is the Greek word *storge*. This word does not appear as such in the Bible. However, it combines with other words and means "family affection".

Another Greek word translated "love" that does appear in the New Testament is *phileo*. Thayer says: "It denotes an inclination prompted by sense and emotion" (p. 653, #5368). Lenski tells us that *phileo* is: "The love of personal affection or liking, including even the passions where the context requires" (Commentary on John, p. 1419).

Then there is *agape* which is an ingredient of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). *Phileo* is experienced by all men but not all men experience or understand *agape*. The reason being, *agape* is "Christian love". *Agape* originates with God. It is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). *Agape* is not an emotional, affectionate, passionate response. Lenski says: "*agape* is the love of intelligence, reason and comprehension coupled with corresponding purpose" (Commentary on John, p. 1419). *Agape* is a determination of the mind producing deliberate conviction and policy of life. It is the love of doing right simply because it is right! Paul tells us that this one great principle of *agape* is: patient, kind, generous, humble, courteous, unselfish, of good temper, guileless, sincere, has spiritual strength, has an open mind, and is optimistic (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

I now want to define "honor". Honor is at the heart of our relationship with God. Notice with me Jesus' statement to His disciples:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt. 6:19-21, 33).

Jesus tells us that we honor God by seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus is simply saying to us, that we must put God first in our lives, we must honor Him.

But what does the word "honor" mean as it is used in the Scriptures? According to Gary Smalley, in Christ's day, to a Greek something of honor called to mind something "heavy" or "weighty." For example, gold was both valuable and heavy, thus something of "honor." The word "dishonor" would bring to mind to this same Greek something insignificant. The word "dishonor" in the Greek meant "mist" or "steam." The reason being, that steam was the lightest, most insignificant thing the Greeks could think of (*Love Is a Decision*, p. 21).

When we demonstrate honor toward a person, we are letting them know that what they say and who they are, are very valuable in our eyes. They carry great weight with us. When we dishonor them by what we say or the way we act, we are saying that they are not valuable to us—who they are and what they say is not very important.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, the Apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian Christians to repent of the sin of fornication: "You were bought with a price [literally, "with honor"] therefore honor God with your body" (NIV). God demonstrated His "honor" and love for us in giving His only Son for us. Paul also writes, "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8, NASV). Yes! We were bought with "honor". Therefore we should honor God with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's.

One day every believer along with the angels in heaven will say with a "loud voice," "Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12). Honoring God in these verses means to recognize that nothing on this earth or in heaven is as valuable, as weighty (heavy), as significant as He.

But how does the concept of honor specifically apply to a marriage relationship? Peter powerfully challenges husbands:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

The word "honor" in this passage is from the same Greek word translated "price" in 1 Corinthians 6:20. Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:1-2, Peter teaches that a woman must honor her husband, and in so-doing, she can motivate him spiritually.

Is your prayer life being hindered? Perhaps it is because you are not honoring your spouse as you should. Husbands, your wife should be the highest valued person on this earth. But how many things come before her? work projects, sporting events, TV, hunting, fishing, a little white ball? Preachers, how about church work, writing assignments, gospel meetings that take you away from your wife and children? How many things take the place of honor that should be reserved for your wife? What is your

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wife's "priority status," her place of honor, compared to other important things in your life?

May I suggest this practical way to put our relationships in proper order. Prioritize your life from zero to ten, zero being something of little value, ten something of highest value. First, we must establish God and our relationship with Christ as the highest—a ten. Consider these questions: Where is my spiritual life? How highly do I value the Word? prayer? sharing the gospel with others? Then place your husband or wife above everything else on this earth. Your spouse should be way up in the "nines". How about you? If you were to rate the "honor principle" of your marriage right now, where would it be? Where would your spouse rate?

I am sure that we are all convinced that we must give God the honor He deserves. But we must also make honor a non-negotiable principle in our homes. The question is, how can we honor those we love in a practical way?

First, we must decide that the people around us—our spouse, children, friends, parents—are worthy of honor. We are stricken with "awe" when we consider the awesomeness of God. When we hold the significant people in our lives in honor, we will experience the "awe" principle. Have you ever noticed how parents exclaim over the accomplishments of their young children? That first word, or first step? We should demonstrate that same kind of excitement, expression of honor, at the accomplishments of our spouse, a friend or parent. We are letting them know that we honor them.

Second, when we make a decision that a person is special and important, we should honor that person. In order for the honor principle to work in improving relationships, we must understand that honor is not always something that is earned. Paul wrote, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus honored us when we were not honorable. Sometimes we have to make the decision to honor someone despite the way we feel.

Third, it takes a lot of hard work to overcome dishonorable actions of the past. But it is worth the effort. We should not expect immediate appreciation for the changes we make for the better. It will take time for a spouse to believe that their partner has made a significant, lasting change.

Please notice this list of dishonorable acts in the home. Any one of these can be a relationship killer.

1. Ignoring or degrading another persons opinions, advice or beliefs.

2. Ignoring another person who is trying to communicate with us. (e.g., by watching television or reading). Every man and woman needs to know that by nature women are generally better communicators than men. One study indicated that the average woman speaks 25,000 words per day while the average man speaks only 12,500. Therefore, on a given day, if the woman uses only 12,500 words by the time her husband comes home from work and he has already used-up his normal 12,500 words, a

communication problem is likely to occur. She wants to talk and he wants to watch TV or read the newspaper.

3. *Making jokes about your spouse's weak areas* (e.g., appearance, or shortcomings). Powerful word pictures are produced by sarcasm and jokes. This behavior can do lasting harm to your marriage relationship.

4. *Verbal attacks*. Harsh criticism, being judgmental, and delivering insensitive lectures can be very damaging.

5. *Treating in-laws and other relatives as unimportant when making plans*.

6. *Not expressing appreciation for kindnesses done for us*.

7. *Practicing distasteful habits even after we are asked to stop*.

8. *Over committing ourselves to projects and people outside of our family*. This demonstrates to our spouse and children that we do not consider them as important as these.

9. *Treating your spouse in a way that leaves him/her feeling that s/he is a child*.

10. *Refusing to admit that we are wrong or to ask for forgiveness*.

Fourth, after the decision is made to honor a person, making **agape** love our plan of action must be our next decision, regardless of the cost, regardless of our feelings.

God said: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:26, NASV). 1 John 4:8 tells us that "God is love" (**agape**). Since God made man in His image and according to His likeness, and since God is love (**agape**), we must strive to become what God is.

To open the door to needed changes in a relationship, one must honor the other person in that relationship (husband, wife, boy friend, girlfriend). Once the decision to honor is made, **agape** is the action we take no matter how we feel. Real love is honor in action regardless of the cost.

The Agape Principle: 1 Corinthians 13

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 what **agape's** action is:

1. *Agape is patient*. Even when provoked to be impatient. Jesus said: "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Lk. 21:19). Patience is the key to honoring the other person consistently. And it is the key to exercising the other characteristics of **agape**.

2. *Agape is kind*. Kindness is a language the deaf can hear and the blind can see. It is goodness in action. Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life. It takes on many forms. Concerning the virtuous woman: "In her tongue is the law of kindness" (Proverbs 31:26). This law guides our words. Remember Solomon said: "A soft answer turneth away wrath (Prov. 15:1).

Kindness also comes in the form of little deeds. We have a wonderful example in Matthew 10:42: "Giving a cup of cold water". Here are several ways a husband can

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show his appreciation for his wife: (1) Provide her with some time off at home. (2) Give her a gift on an ordinary day. (3) Praise her and tell her you love her. (4) Put her first in your life second only to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. *Agape is generous, free of envy or jealousy.* Someone has said: "As a moth gnaws a garment, so doth envy consume a man". Envy sometimes turns husband and wife against each other. Where envy is agape is not, because love envieth not. Agape is generous. Envy desires to take, but agape wants to give. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 3:18).

4. *Agape is humble.* "Love does not brag and is not arrogant" (v. 4, Goodspeed). Love does not put on airs. Solomon declared: "Before honor is humility" (Prov. 15:33). Humility is a recognition of our dependence on God.

5. *Agape is courteous.* It has as a characteristic of "good manners". Agape will not belittle. Remember this: one belittles another because he is little. The terms "old lady" or "my old man" in reference to ones spouse should not be part of the Christian's vocabulary. Why? Because love does not act in an unbecoming way. Agape is not rude. Love will exercise itself by being considerate. For example, opening the door for your wife and receiving a "thank you" in return. Courtesy is putting into practice the "Golden Rule". Jesus taught, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Mt. 7:12).

6. *Agape is unselfish.* "Love does not insist on its own way" (v. 5, RSV). Love does not seek her on advantage. Agape will put the Lord first (Mt. 22:37-38). In Philippians 1, Paul tells us that we must put Christ first in our lives. In 2:3, he declares that we must put others second. One of the primary reasons for problems between a husband and his wife occurs when both partners attempt to place self first. On the other hand if each has a submissive (unselfish) mind, neither will expect the other to serve. Instead each will gladly serve the other. Agape gives others the advantage and is happy over it. Paul wrote, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10).

7. *Agape has as a characteristic a good temper.* "Love is not touchy" (v. 5, Phillips). "It is not irritable or resentful" (RV). The wise man said, "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly (Prov. 14:17). And James declares, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:19-20).

Anger is contrary to what love stands for. We honor one another by always demonstrating a good temper, even when provoked to be angry.

8. *Agape is innocent minded.* "Love thinketh no evil (v. 5). "Love does not keep account of evil" (Phillips). An early Christian writer said, "It [love] forgives those who have erred, having no suspicion that they have done so with a bad motive". We tend to attach a great deal of importance to the tone of the voice or a look of the eyes. But not so with the innocent mind. How many arguments occur because a husband or wife

or loved one imputed an evil motive to an action by one or the other? "His motive was wrong!" "He didn't really mean what he said when he apologized." Remember, agape demands that we give others the benefit of the doubt. Love honors others by thinking no evil.

9. Agape is sincere. Sincerity will never show favor to sin in our relationships. Sincerity is something that is, in reality, what it appears to be. We can tell about the inside by what is demonstrated by one's patience, kindness, good temper, etc. It is consistent regardless of the feelings involved. Love "rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth."

10. Agape love has spiritual strength. This is true because love beareth all things. This characteristic enables one to honor a spouse even when he or she is not honorable. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Paul instructs us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Eph. 6:10). We accomplish this by putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11-18). It takes spiritual strength to endure and overcome the trials that are sure to come in all marriages. It is difficult to honor a husband or wife who speaks or acts in an unbecoming way. But remember, Jesus said, "Love your enemies" (Mt. 5:44). The word "love" in this passage is the verb form of agape. Christ is not saying we must love or even like the actions of another, but that we must love the individual as God loves us. It takes a great deal of discipline to be patient, kind, and demonstrate a good temper toward an enemy. But agape can do it because it has spiritual strength. Paul tells us in practical terms how to treat an enemy. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:20-21).

If I demonstrate agape toward my enemy, one day I may be able to call him my brother. Now if God expects me to treat my enemy in a loving way, how about the one I have chosen to be my wife, for better, for worse, till death parts us. If we stop loving each other, God would have us to learn to love again, by honoring each other through practicing the action of agape, the love of the intellect.

11. Agape believes all things. What does Paul mean by this statement? Love is open minded. It accepts that which evidence supports. Is your mind open and able to receive all the truth that comes your way? What about this grand subject of agape? There is no hope for you to gain the truth of God and make it part of your life unless you do. Remember this: It takes an open mind as well as an open Bible to become the person (husband or wife) whom God would have you to be. Love believes all things. Love gives truth a chance. It allows us to grow healthy, honoring relationships.

12. Agape hopes all things. Agape is optimistic. The only person in the world who has the right to be an optimist is the Christian. This characteristic of love is one that the Christian would be dead without. The word "optimism" comes from the Latin

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which means "best." Optimism places the best possible construction on actions and happenings and expects the best possible outcome. Christian optimism begins with a desire for the best and regardless of the circumstances, confidently expects to receive that desire. You cannot love without being optimistic. What is Christian optimism? It is the confidence that everything will work together for the Christian's good. The person in the world must leave the outcome of his optimism to chance. The Christian leaves his to God. Paul instructs us: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Christian optimism is the full persuasion that God will rule over and over-rule all things for our good, including the good for our relationships.

This one great principle of agape is made up of these twelve characteristics. We demonstrate honor in our relationships through the action of agape. If two people, desiring to be united in marriage, practice the honoring action of agape on a daily basis during their courtship, they will be truly compatible with one another. It is vitally important that couples bridge the gaps of incompatibility before marriage. I want to encourage every man and woman while planning a wedding to include pre-marriage counseling in those plans. With the right plan of action, the relationship can be long and fulfilling. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:6). *127 W. Spring Circle, Red Oak, Texas 75154*

Crisis in Marriage—Conflict Resolution

Greg Gay

Introduction

When conducting premarital counseling I always have a session on "How to fight." To introduce the topic I ask the innocent couple, "Have you had a serious argument yet?" While a few have said yes, the usual answer is a giggle, a loving glance at each other, and then one says something like, "No, and we never will." To which I reply, "Oh yes you will, and I want to help you prepare for that time."

We learn from our parents and other adults, usually at a very early age, that being married includes disagreements. If we are fortunate, we learn that disagreements are a little scary, but they do not stop our family from existing or our mother and father from loving each other. If we are unfortunate, we learn that disagreements can be very scary, our mother and father stay angry with each other much of the time, they do not act like they love each other, and may even separate, divorce, or live emotionally separated lives in the same home.

A woman related an incident involving the six-year-old daughter of a neighbor who had just heard the story of Cinderella for the first time. The little girl retold the story up to the climax, and then asked, "Do you know what happened then?"

The woman said, "They lived happily ever after."

"No, they didn't. They got married!" her little friend replied.

As the child seemed to sense, getting married and living happily ever after are not necessarily synonymous (Osborne 70).

Cocoris writes:

While dating, some couples buy the fairy tale about getting married and living happily ever after. Then they get married only to discover problems, problems, and more problems! Marriage is like a phone call in the middle of the night. There's a ring and then you wake up. Even after some couples wake up, they persuade themselves that after they mature they will no longer have problems. Of course, that is also a fantasy. Let's face it. Married people have problems. There will be problems in marriage. The question is, How do you handle them? (Cocoris 43-44).

Onetia Watson was a dear friend of ours from the church in Yuba City, California who died of cancer earlier this year. She wrote about marriage:

I'm always amused when people tell me, "You are so lucky that you've got a good marriage." The implication is that it just fell into our laps with no effort on our part. Those who have known Bill and I from the beginning are aware of how rocky our relationship was in the earlier years. If we hadn't been totally committed to the belief that marriage was a sacred vow we took before God and mankind we would never have stayed together. We worked toward making a Christian home. God has blessed us beyond measure for any sacrifices we made along the way. The romantic notions we had in the beginning have been replaced by a relationship that is infinitely deeper.

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richer and more exciting. We can all have that kind of marriage if we use the following motto: God first, mate second, self last (Watson 3-4).

For a marriage to be "good" takes a lot of work. That is why God tells us that when we marry, our interests are divided: "But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife . . . she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband (1 Cor 7:33-34, KJV). When we marry, God intends that a portion of the energy previously put into serving Him, is now expended serving our spouse. God is still first and is to be loved more than any family member (Mt. 10:37; 1 Cor. 11:3), but our spouse becomes a strong second priority. This becomes a new priority that God approves (Heb. 13:4).

Conflict resolution is only one aspect of a strong family, there are many other components of family relationships that must be considered in order for a family to function well. At a minimum, the husband and wife in a strong family "are committed to the family, spend time together, have good family communication, express appreciation to each other, have a spiritual commitment, and are able to solve problems in a crisis" (Stinnett).

Perhaps it is problems in most of these areas that led "38 percent of married women who were still with their first husband to say they would not marry the same man again." The *Women's Day* magazine survey also reported "while 50 percent would, 12 percent were undecided." That means up to half of married women would likely say, "No thanks," if given the choice to marry their current husband again.

How Important is Conflict Resolution?

Seattle researcher John Gottman believes that enduring marriages are the result of spouses' ability to handle conflict in their marriage. In pursuit of the truth about what tears a marriage apart or binds it together, I have found that much of the conventional wisdom—even among marital therapists—is either misguided or dead wrong. A lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship. We grow in our relationships by reconciling our differences. That's how we become more loving and truly experience the fruits of marriage (Gottman, Collins 111).

There is a difference between minor quarrels and minor disagreements, which are natural and expected in the home, and problems which develop into a crisis.

In fact, some have even gone so far as to encourage minor, friendly, "trivial fighting," which takes on more the form of a debate than an argument as a means to stimulate love. "It is fortunate that sometimes the very absence of major fight issues makes intimates 'pick' fights. They may bicker to upset the marital applecart just to be sure there are no rotten apples in the load" (Bach 359-360).

Much of the time however, there is no "absence of major fight issues." There are plenty of emotional "buttons to push", and fights can start with just a word or a glance.

Conflict is normal and natural in the development of relationships—especially in marriage, where two unique individuals enter into an intimate union. In marriage conflicts arise because husbands and wives have different opinions, values, philosophies, and methods. Conflict in marriage may be developmental, or it may be devastating—depending on how it is handled. The art of resolving conflicts is a key to keeping a marriage healthy. It is a measure of maturity, and part of the lifelong process of “two becoming one” (*Husbands & Wives: God’s Design for the Family* 45).

What Creates a Crisis in a Marriage?

To apply Wayne Fussell’s definition of crisis from his summary to marriage: “Crisis in a marriage is when the husband and wife face problems which are so overwhelming that a feeling of distress and inability to function in a normal way is experienced.” Peter Daniels writes:

When a major crisis hits, a reaction can form in many different ways. It may be a cold feeling deep in the stomach followed by despair. At other times it may be panic followed by fear or calmness, or guilt.

But there is one thing for sure—there will be a reaction depending on the size of the calamity and the direct relationship it has upon your family, yourself and your livelihood (15-16).

There are many things, large and small, that individually or collectively can create a crisis in a marriage. Crisis triggers can include:

- a move,
- a job transfer,
- the loss of job or income,
- the death of a close friend or relative (parents or children),
- retirement,
- the birth of a child,
- the leaving of adult children (empty nest),
- a promotion which results in more time at work or away from home,
- extreme expectations in any area including financially or sexually,
- differences of opinion over child rearing and discipline,
- an unfaithful child who leaves the church (parents blame each other),
- a child in trouble: drugs, pregnancy, with the law,
- a spouse who leaves the church,
- a spouse who is sexually unfaithful,
- a spouse who is discovered to be a criminal,
- a spouse who won’t work,
- a spouse dealing with having been abused as a child.

Divorce can be considered one of the ultimate marital conflicts. Couples interviewed after divorce listed their reasons for their divorce. The top ten most common reasons are:

1. Growing apart, losing a sense of closeness
2. Not feeling loved and appreciated by spouse

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3. Sexual intimacy problems
 4. Serious differences in values or lifestyle
 5. Spouse unwilling or unable to meet partner's needs
 6. Frequently felt put down or belittled by their spouse
 7. Emotional problems of spouse
 8. Conflict about spending and handling money
 9. Severe and intense conflict and frequent fighting
 10. Conflicts about roles (e.g., division of labor)
- (Gigy, Collins 217)

Another author says:

[F]actors which can help cause disunity in marriage: fatigue, unfulfilled needs, financial difficulties, busy schedule, family background, relatives, lack of fellowship with God, unrealistic expectations, unwillingness to communicate, sarcasm or demeaning remarks, making false assumptions, jumping to conclusions, inflexibility, irritating habits, tactlessness, nagging (*Husbands & Wives: God's Design for the Family* 48).

Dr. Safilios-Tothschild writes:

A wife can prepare the husband's favorite dishes or torture him with badly prepared food, can take good care of his clothes or neglect them; keep a neat and attractive house or leave it sloppy and disorganized; be a great companion and host or a miserable one; be a responsive sexual partner or a frigid one, or totally refuse to have sexual relations with him; be sweet, affectionate, understanding, supporting and loving or sour, cold, distant, critical, demanding and unfriendly . . . Of course the husband has at his disposal a similar range of 'resources.' A husband may share household tasks with his wife or refuse to do anything because of his 'heavy' schedule and spend that time with friends; he may go out often with his wife or hardly at all (Safilios-Tothschild, Cadden 207).

While the things we have listed can cause and contribute to marital crises, there is certainly no guarantee they will or even that they must. Much depends on the attitude of the husband and wife about themselves and their relationship. Each couple must ask themselves, "What are those areas in our relationship where there are problems, but we cannot talk about them?" These are the areas where the couple is most likely to have problems that lead to a crisis.

Cecil Osborne writes:

There are three basic kinds of marital situations: the impossible, the personal, and the situational. I would define the "impossible" situation as one in which the two should never have married in the first place, and in which there appears to be little or no willingness on the part of one or both to make any significant change in their personalities or procedures. The second category of marital difficulties involves the "personal," that is, those individuals with personality problems who are sufficiently realistic to work toward the goal of greater emotional growth. The third category involves the "situational," where a husband and wife are basically mature, reasonably well suited to each other by temperament and background, but have not learned some of the important techniques by which daily issues are resolved (20-21).

Sometimes people rock along in their marriage for years only to wake up and discover they do not know each other. With our busy lives today a couple can easily go for weeks and not have spent any time together. "Married but lonely would describe the condition of many people today. Conflicting work schedules, differences in upbringing and expectations, selfishness, unexpected difficulties, and countless other factors conspire to isolate marriage partners from each other" (Homer 115).

"Sociologists say the top five reasons for problems in marriage are: money, sex, children, in-laws and religion. There is no doubt that these five areas of conflict crop up in a marriage like weeds in a yard" (Cocoris 43-44).

We will consider these and a few others individually:

1. *Money.* Dean Merrill writes: "Long after our sexual lives have been harmonized, our major career choices have been agreed upon, and the size of our family has been determined, we can still be hassling over money, with no solution in sight" (53).

In my growing up years, my father and mother had a checking account. They were very careful to record every check, and check and double check the balance. Every month my mother always balanced the account to the penny. When my wife, Cassie, was growing up, her family also had a checking account. They wrote checks, but they rarely wrote them down and never kept a balance. When Cassie became a teenager, she was added to the account and was able to write checks around town. When we got married, we opened a joint checking account. In my wildest dreams I could not imagine her perception of a checking account. In her wildest dreams she could not imagine my perception of a checking account. Imagine my shock after we were married when I looked at the checkbook and checks were missing but not written down. Imagine her shock when I demanded to know to whom she had written checks and in what amounts. Many years later she still writes a lot of checks, but she is very good about writing them down.

The family that never disagrees over money is very rare. Perry writes: "Money has caused disagreements, broken relationships, suspicion, division, and pain" (7). Money is usually one of those topics that is ignored as long as humanly possible before it is brought up, because each spouse can correctly point out so many problems the other has in handling money. I tell Cassie, "You can spend a thousand dollars a month on gum and breath mints." She says, "You can spend a thousand dollars a month on books." The problem is, we are both right, although she is nearer correct than I am. But, blaming each other does not solve the problem. Instead, a couple must come to agreement on the issue, and that can be very difficult. Every home needs financial understanding, agreement, and a plan in order to avoid having continuing crises over money.

With the availability of plastic money, couples can easily get themselves into long-term debt that will interfere with their lives for years and affect their relationship. This is so prevalent in our society, it effects the church and the money that is given in the contribution for the Lord's work. Swindoll says, "Alas, for many couples, long before death separates them, debts will" (Swindoll 133).

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2. *Sexual Problems.* God wants a husband to desire his wife and a wife to desire her husband (1 Cor. 7:3-4), but there is no guarantee this desire will always happen at the same time.

Tim and Beverly LaHaye write:

One of the most common misconceptions in the minds of young married women pertains to the sexual needs of their husbands. Due to their lack of experience and preconceived notions many young wives do not share their husbands' enthusiasm for lovemaking. This trend seems to reverse itself later in the marriage, but in the earlier years the frequency of sex is often cause for conflict and disagreement (23).

Sometimes a spouse, usually the man, uses natural sexual conflicts as an excuse for real or threatened unfaithfulness. It is not uncommon for a man to tie his promise of fidelity to his wife's appearance or his own happiness and contentment. James Orten says:

If the only reasons one is sexually faithful to his spouse are that he feels good toward her and finds her more alluring than anyone else, that relationship can never be secure. In the final analysis, spouses are faithful to each other, if they are, because they make a commitment to be so, and each takes the responsibility to see that he keeps it (Orten, *Marriage* 158).

Dr. James Dobson answers the question, "Would you say that most marital problems are caused by sexual difficulties?" He replies, "No, the opposite is more accurate. Most sexual problems are caused by marital difficulties. Or stated another way, marital conflicts occurring in bed are usually caused by marital conflicts occurring out of bed" (*What Wives Wish* 129).

3. *Children.* When children first enter a marriage there is an immediate redefining of roles in the home. B.C.(before children), the husband and wife are able to devote all of their spare time to each other. Now, they must share. They do not just share themselves with another person, but with a demanding infant, who will take hours and hours of attention, morning, noon, and night, sometimes even all night. No wonder marriages can get turned upside down during this time.

No man can compete with a child for the attention of the mother, and win. If he demands more of her time, he is a selfish and an uncaring father. If the wife attends to her husband reluctantly, both will be resentful. Faced with this dilemma, many men withdraw emotionally. They may turn to work, sports, hobbies, friends, or to other women to find the emotional acceptance they feel themselves denied in their marriage. "It is a wise woman who recognizes this natural insecurity and makes adjustments to be sensitive to her husband" (Lund 47).

After parents survive their children's terrible two's they may think nothing can be worse than this. Then, before they know it, their babies are teenagers and they long for those days of babyhood once again. These are tough times for a marriage. "So many crises come about the time kids enter their teens. Like any other conflicts, they can tear

your whole marriage apart. Or your marriage can grow stronger as parents help each other and the kids" (Minirth 121).

There are also special relationship problems if a child is not healthy. I found this following quote from *The Wall Street Journal* particularly interesting since my son and his wife have a six-month-old baby boy (Hayden Gregory) who has already had major heart surgery.

A 1988 survey of children's health indicated that couples whose children were blind or had cerebral palsy or congenital heart disease before they were five were three to four times more likely to split up than those with similar educational and economic backgrounds but with healthy children. Couples whose preschool children had delayed development or showed substantial learning disabilities or emotional problems had divorce rates 35% to 80% higher than those whose children didn't have those problems.

4. In-Laws. Interfering in-laws can cause many problems in a marriage. Sometimes because they invite themselves into the relationship, other times because they are invited into the relationship by a child who has not truly left the nest. If the in-law relationships survive the wedding without problems, the marriage is off to a good start; however, that is only the beginning.

The following summary is offered as an outline for in-law relationships.

1. Share your feelings about your families respectfully.
2. Show your families you care about them.
3. Try to cultivate a positive relationship with new relatives.
4. Always consider alternative solutions and try to compromise.
5. Demonstrate to relatives the relationship you want with them.
6. Don't take everything relatives say at face value.
7. Present a united front. (Arond 49-53)

5. Religion. Many conflicts are created when Christians marry outside the church. These problems include issues with time, money, entertainment, language, and priorities. The problems only intensify when the Christian does not live according to 1 Peter 3:1-7 in the relationship.

There are also problems if a Christian marries someone who has been recently converted. Even though both are Christians, the spouse who is more experienced in the church will likely carry the brunt of the religious focus in the home. If that happens to be the wife, she ends up trying to be the spiritual teacher and leader of the home at the same time she is the loving, submissive wife. This creates problems.

Even if both have been "raised in the church," there will still be differences in how religion is expressed. Are they totally dedicated to God? Will the couple attend worship one, two, or three times a week? Will they attend area gospel meetings? Will they contribute very little or a lot? Will they pray and study the Bible at home? All of these are potential areas for many problems.

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6. *Communication.* One of the greatest needs in a relationship is communication. If it is missing after a couple marry, they will never know each other as they should. True communication is a great risk because of the possibility of rejection or judgment. How much should a married couple open up to each other?

Jan and Bob Horner respond:

The word "transparency" is often used to describe two people who are committed to each other, who trust each other and thus are able to know each other well. Not all people want to be transparent with one another. In fact, many feel that being transparent is one of the greatest risks they can take (35).

Most couples today sail into marriage assuming that they do know one another, most are anxious to communicate and eager to listen to the other, but each partner is capable of blocking real encounter with a barricade of fear (Huggett 19).

Even if "transparency" is a great risk, it is still necessary to prevent problems in the marriage: "If we don't hear one another, we can't achieve understanding. And without understanding, it's impossible to resolve conflict. So becoming a good listener is a key step toward resolving conflict and opening the lines of communication" (Horner 51).

7. *Men and Their Communication.* It is well known that men and women communicate differently. I've heard it said men communicate best "side-by-side," as in riding in a car or sitting in the stands watching a game. Women on the other hand communicate best "face-to-face," as in visiting across a table. Just being male and female creates tension in this very important area of communication, because when one is physically ready for their best communication the other never is. Without understanding, neither one will communicate, but most of the time, the one who fails in this department is the husband. One woman who had been married several times reached this conclusion: "All husbands are alike, they just have different faces so you can tell them apart" (Bergler 21).

Marriage counselors estimate that at least one half of the cases they see involve a silent husband. Men have a tendency to avoid conflict in discussion. Ironically, the issues they avoid are often the ones that indicate where adjustments and changes need to be made-and fast (Wright, *Communication* 139).

The silence of men is not a new problem. I see it often in couples I counsel. The woman is usually more than willing to share every detail of their troubled relationship. On the other hand, the man is usually more than willing to say nothing. Not only is this problem not new, it even goes back to the first man, Adam.

After Adam and Eve were created, Satan came along and tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). While we are not told for certain, it appears that Adam was with her during this time of temptation. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, [who was with her, NIV] and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6, KJV).

Dr. Larry Crabb likens Satan's entrance into the garden to the chaos of darkness that God spoke into in the beginning. When Satan tempts Eve,

[W]hat happens in the face of chaos? Ironically, it is Eve who reflects the image of God more clearly than Adam, because she speaks with the serpent. But what about Adam? If Adam was there, he was not speaking. Chaos had entered his perfect world, and he stood dumbfounded in its confusion and darkness. The Scriptures record no instruction from God to Adam about what to say to the serpent. So Adam said nothing.

God's speaking brought creation out of chaos; Adam's silence brought chaos back to creation. Remember that God used language to establish relationship; Adam used silence to destroy relationship. Adam ruined paradise by failing to do something. Adam, the image-bearer, did not reflect his God, because he chose to be absent, silent, and forgetful of God's command (91).

Like Adam of old, men today who fail to communicate can allow silence to destroy their relationship.

Neither are men likely to be very observant, even of the obvious. Dr. James Dobson humorously illustrates the problem with men's communication:

I'm reminded of the night my father was preaching in an open tent service which was attended by more cats and dogs than people. During the course of his sermon, one large alley cat decided to take a nap on the platform. Inevitably, my father took a step backward and planted his heel squarely on the tail of the tom. The cat literally went crazy scratching and clawing to free his tail from my father's 6-foot 3-inch frame. But Dad could become very preoccupied while preaching, and he didn't notice the disturbance. There at his feet was a panicky animal, digging holes in the carpet and screaming for mercy, yet the heel did not move. Dad later said he thought the screech came from the brakes of automobiles at a nearby corner. When my father finally walked off the cat's tail, still unaware of the commotion, the tom took off like a Saturn rocket.

This story typifies many twentieth century marriages. The wife is screaming and clawing the air and writhing in pain, but the husband is oblivious to her panic. He is preoccupied with his own thoughts, not realizing that a single step to the right or left could alleviate the crisis. I never cease to be amazed at just how deaf a man can become under these circumstances (Straight Talk 96).

8. *Decision making.* Much of the adjustment in marriage is over the decision making process. Who has the right to make what decisions in the home? In our nation's culture much effort has gone into the "equality of the sexes." We must understand "equality" is never an issue with God. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) but he has assigned a separate role for the husband and wife in the home (1 Cor. 11:3). Many times problems in the home are caused by each not taking their God given place. The man abdicates his place, the woman does the same, they have a continual power struggle, and their home is headed for trouble.

Again, most of the time, in my opinion, the man is the primary one at fault. Whenever the man, the husband, fails to take his proper place as the submissive, servant-leader, head of his home, the results are always tragic.

Imagine how the church would drift without Christ as its faithful, reliable head. Could the church stay on course without Christ's faithfulness? Of course not. Neither can a home be all God wants it to be without faithfulness on the part of the head of that home.

Please know, all the things we have discussed can certainly be factors in a crisis. But, in order for a crisis to occur, many choices must be made deliberately. In my experience, after the shock of a crisis goes away, rarely are a couple surprised they have arrived at a point of crisis in their relationship. They have usually been working toward that end for a long, long time.

How Can A Couple Sense That A Crisis Is Developing?

Obviously, if a major crisis occurs a couple will not have to worry about sensing it—it will hit them up side the head. But that is not the way all crises come. Some crises develop from small problems that accumulate and creep up on the relationship, seemingly "overtaking" the marriage. In that respect, it can be said a marriage can be "overtaken in a fault" (Gal. 6:1).

When doctors from the Minirth-Meier Clinic in Richardson, Texas deal with marital problems, "they deal with three entities: the husband, the wife, and the marriage itself, as if the marriage were a living, breathing organism. For it is. If a marriage is not growing, it is dying" (Minirth 16).

A marriage is not growing and headed for a crisis when the husband and wife:

- find themselves not giving their mate the benefit of the doubt when small problems come;
- do not choose to love in word, thought, or in deed;
- attempt to "get even" at every little thing;
- allow the little things that originally attracted them to one another to become repulsive;
- would rather be with almost anyone except their spouse;
- would rather be almost anywhere except home;
- have no happiness in the relationship;
- deliberately choose to stop giving of themselves in the relationship.

Couples can also sense a crisis is developing when they decide they really do not care about each other any more. I have seen this taken to the extreme of one spouse not taking the other food when they were ill.

When these things invade a home, there will always be a tragic reaction. Even if the couple stay together, there may be an emotional divorce where neither spouse makes an effort to keep the marriage alive.

1. Expectations. When a couple marries, they must adjust their expectations to the reality of the relationship. Part of the family process is "leaving" and "cleaving" (Mt. 19:5), but this does not mean the new husband and wife know each other extremely well. For example, if the couple has been less than honest with each other in their

courtship, all those deceptions will come to light and will need to be dealt with in the marriage. After all, during the courtship is when both put on their "best face." It is only after marriage that the real individuals are seen and known.

Swindoll writes:

Inventory your premarital understanding of one another. Did you know he liked TV sports? Did you know she liked to go to bed early and get up early? Did you know he was not handy with tools? Did you know she craves a clean house? Did you lead each other into thinking incorrectly about your likes and dislikes? Were you really honest? (Strike 35).

When expectations are not met, the tendency is to withdraw emotionally from the relationship one small step at a time. This eventually becomes an emotional divorce while the couple are still together in the home.

There are events, circumstances, and situations which qualify as prime times for emotional divorce. These include but are not limited to the honeymoon, the first year, employment of mothers outside of the home, arrival of the first children, departure of the last child, severe arguments, and the forties fantasy (mid-life crisis).

These critical times for emotional divorce are often associated with frustration and unmet expectations—all frustration is based on expectation. If you did not expect a clean house, you would not be frustrated by a messy one. If you did not expect a compliment, you would not be disappointed when it isn't forthcoming. If you did not expect to be held, hugged, kissed, talked to, or worked for, you would not be frustrated when such things do not occur (Lund 43).

Many times expectations are nurtured and increased by the courtship process only to be dashed after the "I do's." Expectations do not cease after marriage—often they increase over time to the point of ridiculousness. By the time a couple seeks help their expectations of one another can be so high Superman could not please the woman, and Superwoman could not please the man. Instead of being happy and thankful for their marriage and God's blessings, they have unreasonable expectations of one another and are miserable.

2. *Trivial complaints.* In one of their public-opinion surveys some years ago the pollsters of the Louis Harris organization asked couples across the country, "Most of the time, what is the single source of friction between you and your spouse?" The two main fight issues mentioned by husbands and wives were money spending and child-raising. However, as a close third they listed a variety of remarkably trivial-sounding complaints. Husbands objected to too much petty criticism from the wives. Wives complained because their husbands were too sloppy around the house (Bach 352). These trivial complaints are the "little foxes, that spoil the vines" (Song of Sol. 2:15). Swindoll observes,

I'm convinced it's not the big things that weaken a marriage. On the contrary, big problems frequently strengthen marriages. The loss of a job, sudden illness, the death of a child these more often than not deepen our love and enhance a relationship It's the little things. The slow leaks, not the blowouts. The insidious "pests" we sel-

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dom even consider that cut away at the heart of a home until finally, it crumbles as two people walk away (Swindoll, *Strike* 87).

3. *Romance.* Another sign a crisis is developing is when there is no romance left in the marriage. While romance as a necessity in the longevity of a marriage can be debated, I believe there is always a place for it. The other side of the debate says there is a "marriage myth that lasting romance is the key to a successful marriage and that reality is romance can't help but fade within the routines of married life" (Laxarus).

Even if romance can't help but fade, it is wonderful to keep romance alive in a marriage. Do not discount the value of a bouquet of flowers, and other small gifts that say to your spouse, "I care." I occasionally stop at the store and buy Cassie, my wife, a bouquet of flowers. Not often enough to be predictable, but often enough that she keeps a vase handy. I love the way her eyes light up at the sight of flowers. One of the sweetest presents my wife has ever given me was several cards secretly placed in my suitcase when I went to Russia for an extended trip. Each card's envelope was dated when I could open it and contained a sweet message inside. Needless to say, I looked forward to "mail" day.

Remember, when we first get to know each other in courtship, the woman is beautiful in everything she wears and must be helped in and out of the car. The man always thinks and says just the right things. While that must fade, must it fade away completely? I don't think so. In counseling, I often urge the couple to remember the happy hours of their relationship in the beginning when they just could not get enough of each other's company and just to hear the sound of their voice brought happiness. While they may not be able to recapture that feeling, at least they can remember when they wanted to be together. That is not a cure for the couple's problems, but it can be a beginning step toward better communication.

James Orten asks the question: "You often hear couples in troubled marriages advised to spend more time together, go out to dinner together, and so forth. Does that really help?" James replies,

Spending more time together may help troubled spouses, but it also may hurt if it is not done thoughtfully. Such advice reflects prejudices that many Americans have about marriage. One of them is that there are magical things that husbands and wives can do: and if they do them, they will automatically have happy marriages. That really is not true. If a marriage is working poorly, the reason is not that some magical formula was forgotten but that that particular couple has not acquired the attitudes and skills to live together well. Nothing can substitute for the patient work of changing themselves in these necessary ways (Orten, *Marriage* 200).

4. *Chose wrong mate.* Many become so disillusioned in their marriage they end up thinking they have chosen the wrong mate. This accompanies the age old belief, "There is only one for me" and, if I'm not happy, then I must not have found the right "one." One of the fallacies that religious people fall into when they are involved in adultery is this false line of reasoning: "God wants me to be happy. I'm not happy with my spouse. I am happy in this adulterous relationship. Therefore it must be correct for

me to divorce my spouse and marry this person I'm happy with. God wants me to do this." Obviously, that reasoning is seriously flawed, but it is a pattern that repeats itself over and over again, even in the church.

Edward Hindson writes:

Many depressed couples become deceived into thinking that they may have married the "wrong person." This is a tragic misconception. You must learn to trust the God of the circumstances of your life. A powerful scriptural example of this is seen in the life of Jacob. His choice was Rachel, but God's choice was Leah. As adverse as the circumstances of his marriage were, Jacob still should have accepted God's choice. Let me prove this to you. While at first Jacob loved Rachel and hated Leah, he later changed his attitude. When he died, he was buried with Leah, not Rachel (Gen. 49:31). It was Leah, the mother of Judah, who became the progenitor of the line of Christ. She was definitely God's choice for Jacob. Learn to trust God's choices for your life (38).

5. Communication. Communication, particularly the type of communication that occurs in a home is a key factor in determining whether or not a crisis is developing.

Dysfunctional families have learned faulty communication processes . . . The three dysfunctional roles are as follows:

1. *Placating:* Attempting to avoid a conflict situation by being overly agreeable or giving-in to another person. Non-assertive, passive, accepted behavior is the norm. This person is sometimes referred to as the martyr in a relationship
2. *Blaming:* Avoidance of conflict by increasing the stress temporarily and forcing the other person into a passive-defensive position. A person in this role will overreact in an aggressive way in order to protect a weak personal position on a particular issue or to guard a poor self-concept. Acting out behavior may be part of the blaming role. It may also be seen as a power play in a relationship.
3. *Irrelevancy:* This role is an attempt to reduce stress by avoiding the conflict situation. This person distracts the other participant(s) from the conflict. By shifting the focus from the immediate conflict situation, confrontation is avoided and stress is temporarily reduced. Common irrelevant behaviors include psychosomatic illness, inappropriate talking or playing in a counseling session, abrupt changes in the topic of conversation, and temper tantrums (Walsh 13-14).

It is not uncommon for a couple who are miserable with each other to not talk about anything other than surface issues for months and years at a time. Theirs is a shallow relationship where neither dares to "plumb the depths."

6. Power Struggles. When either the husband or the wife step out of their God-assigned roles, the relationship will be dominated by power struggles as each seeks to force their will on their mate. The resulting problems will eventually become a major crisis for the relationship. Those problems will usually be "gunny-sacked" until something triggers an all out battle.

Every use of power, whether open or veiled, whether perceptible or imperceptible, is a tiny step or a giant stride toward the dissolution of the marriage and or the eventu-

al vanquishing of one partner. Power politics turns marriage into a cold war To the extent that a marriage is governed by power and decisions are made on the basis of that power, it is characterized by conflict and rift or by the emotional pain of the powerless partner (Cadden 208).

How should decisions be made then, if not on the basis of power? Ronald V. Sampson writes in *The Psychology of Power*:

Every human being may seek to order his life and his relations with others on the basis of love or on the basis of power." To the extent that power is the prevailing force in a relationship-whether between husband and wife or parent and child, between friends or between colleagues-to that extent love is diminished. We can develop our capacity for power, or we can develop our capacity for love. We cannot do both. Nor can we opt out of making the choice between the use of power and the use of love in our relationships (Cadden 209).

If this sounds familiar to the Christian, and it should, it is because God operates in our lives from a basis of love rather than power (Jn. 3:16).

Tolstoy wrote, "All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion." Since each individual is unique, there is some degree of truth to this statement.

The husband and wife are each unique. They have different responses and reactions. One may be more logical and objective, the other more emotional and impulsive. One may be active and aggressive, while the other is more sensitive and emotionally stable. Whatever their differences, the husband and wife must work together to understand and support one another (*Husbands & Wives: God's Design for the Family* 45).

While there are many similarities in situations, the uniqueness of each individual means there can be no cookie-cutter approaches or solutions for all the possible problems a husband and wife will encounter.

How Can a Preacher Help As a Crisis Is Developing?

1. *Preachers must acknowledge there is a place for this private work in the church.* Preachers need to be sensitive to the entire needs of the congregation. This goes beyond essential public doctrinal teaching and extends into private teaching of individual families and the way we are to be in our families. This is part of declaring "all the counsel of God" (Acts: 20:27).

A preacher can help family relationships by preaching publicly on the subject of the home as a regular practice. A congregation that is not fed God's word on this subject will not grow in this area. Since God has honored the home by making the husband and wife relationship parallel to the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5), we should honor the importance of that relationship with frequent teaching. However, there are many things that are not easily presented publicly, if in fact they should be presented publicly at all.

Paul said in Acts 20:20, 31, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house.

Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (KJV).

When Paul told the Ephesian elders, "I have taught you publicly, and from house to house," I believe this includes private teaching. When you look at the problems the early church members had to overcome in such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 we can know Paul spent a lot of time "in the trenches" helping individuals privately work out the conflicts in their lives. This same work can be done today.

Whether we call this work a "study" or a "counseling session" or "preaching" is of no consequence to me, just so it is done. Jay Adams writes,

Counseling must be understood and conducted as a spiritual battle. The counselor must consider himself a soldier of Christ engaged in spiritual warfare when counseling. For that battle the "full armour of God" alone is sufficient. In fact, since they (unbelieving counselors) are soldiers in the army of Satan, they are on the other side and, therefore, hardly can be relied upon to free Christian counselees from Satan's grips (117).

2. Preachers must be willing to devote necessary time. Each situation can either be a short or long-term commitment of time. Many times I will meet with a couple for a few meetings and then we will agree they are to call if they need additional help. I may not hear from them again for a long time, if ever. That is not always the case. A current situation I'm dealing with has involved meeting about every two weeks for the last eight months. That is unusual though. There are families I have dealt with off and on for over ten years on an irregular basis. If we are not willing to devote the time to complete the task, we should not start. We must count the cost (Lk. 14:28) to make sure we can make counseling a priority with our available time.

How much time a preacher devotes to private studies of any kind becomes a difficult judgment call. While we must want to help, we must not sacrifice our own family in the process.

The problem (of time) is especially acute for people in the ministry. Here the motivation is not so much financial as theological. What can be more important than doing the work of God? There are billions of people who haven't heard a decent presentation of the gospel . . . there are swarms of needy, confused, and/or questioning people right at the doorstep . . . how can a pastor or missionary take time even for a cup of coffee with his wife?

There is no denying that all of this drives ministers, missionaries, church executives, and other clergy to unhealthy and even dangerous life styles. This toll is often most apparent in their wives and children. They find themselves with all kinds of feelings of resentment, isolation, and disillusionment not only against the man of the house, but against the God and the institution he serves (Merrill 94-95).

These feelings of resentment, isolation, and disillusionment can become crises in husband-wife and parent-child relationships. Sadly, because of these feelings, many preachers' children do not love the Lord. They do not know their father because he is always doing the Lord's work somewhere else instead of spending time at home.

While every preacher should help others bear their burdens (Gal. 6:2), we must not be overwhelmed by the problems of others. There is a big difference between helping someone and allowing your own life and family to be consumed by someone else's family crisis. It is not unusual for a troubled couple to soak up help like a sponge and be very demanding. If this is very short-term, as in a few days, that can be OK. But it must be stopped if it draws on for weeks and the preacher's family ceases to function because the troubled couple is taking all of the preacher's time on the phone or in studies. The relationships we so often take for granted at home deserve careful consideration. Time is a precious commodity—we must guard it carefully. Remember, we cannot live others' lives for them.

3. *Preachers must be honest with themselves before starting this work.* A very important rule of Christianity is self-examination. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5, KJV). Preachers must know themselves well before they attempt to help a troubled relationship. I would advise, if a preacher's marriage is not as strong and secure as he knows how to make it, he should not attempt this work. The tragedies in our brotherhood of preachers being unfaithful to their wives are just sickening when they happen. Every preacher engaged in any kind of counseling must be very careful to safeguard his marriage.

Consider the example of righteous Job. Job is a good example of a man who protected his marriage. If you recall, in the beginning of the book of Job, he loses all of his possessions and his children. All he has left is his wife and his friends. Please notice when Job's blessing are listed (Job 1:2-3), his wife is not mentioned. Perhaps that silence is intentional.

We first meet Job's wife after all of their possessions are gone. Job is sitting in the dust, scraping his sores. Job 2:9-10 reads,

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (KJV).

It is very serious for a wife to tell her husband to blaspheme God to hasten his demise. This looks rather like a major conflict to me. Whether or not we are to surmise Job's wife sinned with her words we are not told. Job called her "foolish" and did not "sin with his lips," so we can know he was telling the truth.

Obviously Job and his wife communicated again during this ordeal. We see her mentioned when he later reports: "My breath is offensive to my wife" (Job 19:17) (NAS). This does not paint a very flattering picture of Job's wife, or of their relationship. But look at Job's commitment to his wife—"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1, NIV). And consider: "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged (Job 31:9-11, NIV).

Job may not have had a perfect relationship with his wife, but he was completely committed to his marriage. Similarly, a preacher may not have a perfect relationship with his wife, but he must be completely committed to his marriage. To do anything else is shameful and a sin to be judged.

A safeguard of a preacher's marriage includes not meeting alone with a woman. If a woman wants help with a problem, a preacher should first see if there is an older woman in the church who can help her. After all, this is God's plan (Tit. 2:1-6). If that is not possible, the preacher should take his wife with him to sit in on the session. A single preacher should arrange for someone else, such as a church leader, to go with him. If that is not possible, my advice would be, "Don't get involved." James Orten advised, "there should be two people, take someone with you and then continue with them" (Yuba City). A preacher should never put himself in a position where he would be tempted and he should avoid being in a situation like Joseph where he cannot prove his innocence (Gen. 39:1-20).

Sadly, it has been proven time and time again, women who seek help for a very troubled marriage are especially emotionally vulnerable. If they are in the company of a man who listens to them, offers helpful suggestions, and helps them feel good about themselves, it is very easy for bonding and affection to occur which can lead to sin.

I once studied counseling with a Christian Church preacher who told me early in his counseling career he did not protect himself and he made a mistake. He shares his mistake with everyone he trains so they will not have the same problem. Our preachers are not immune to this problem. We must not be careless!

4. *Preachers must respect others' right to privacy.* Counseling means a preacher is likely to hear many very private details about others' lives. He should not become "puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4) by that knowledge. He should not think, this could never happen to me or my family. 1 Corinthians 10:12 states, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (KJV). A preacher may also be tempted to think ill of the people who confess their problems to him. He should rather love their souls "with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22), as he hates the sins that are causing the problems.

5. *Preachers must be equipped to do this work.* Having the desire to help a couple as a crisis is developing in their marriage is good, but more than desire is needed. If someone were to come to me with a broken leg, while I may want to help, the best thing I could possibly do for them is to send them to someone who is equipped to help them. If a preacher is not equipped to help a couple in the midst of a crisis in their marriage, they need to be sent to someone else with prayers and best wishes.

6. *Preachers must remember the necessity of depending on the Word of God.* Part of equipping ourselves to help is making a commitment to depend on the Word of God. No matter what conflicts a couple may have, we can know and trust those problems are either addressed directly or in principle by the word of God. There must be no confusion on this very, very important point. The word of God is sufficient to guide us thru marital conflicts. It is very easy when studying counseling to be led away from

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God's Word. Don't be deceived by false theories of who we are and why we do what we do. That has led to a nation filled with irresponsibility where no one is to blame for anything any more.

I do not mean to say that merely reading the Word of God will solve every family's conflicts. Obviously, if that were the case, there would be no marital problems. I think the Word must be explained and diligence must be given to understand it so there can be a proper application in the lives of the individuals involved. "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Neh. 8:8, NIV).

When we help someone with a marital conflict, our purpose is to give the couple the "sense" or the clear meaning of God's Word, and to help them understand what God's will is for them in each situation and what the consequences are for their decisions.

This is where books and guides by other authors can be helpful. Not first, because God's Word must always come first, but as a means of helping us understand and explain God's principles. The simple rule is: understand God's principles first, then use helps from others to explain and apply those principles.

Do not minimize the value of education in counseling. We are fortunate to have individuals in the brotherhood who are highly educated in counseling. This is a real blessing. They can help those of us who attempt to do the work but do not have the education. I must mention Bro. James Orten and the great service he has given the church. He is and has been a mentor for many.

In 1982, James held what he called an "Advice Session" for individuals interested in counseling at Yuba City, California area, where he was holding a meeting. Bro. Bennie Cryer was working there then and arranged the session. This sufficiently aroused my interest to start equipping myself to "practice" on my dear brethren.

7. Preachers must be sensitive to warning signs of crisis. Public confessions of "I'm not being the mother, father, husband, wife, I should be" are usually signs there is something going on in the home that is not being dealt with successfully. There are many problems people can develop in their lives that do not go away just because of a public confession. They must be dealt with in an appropriate way. This is nothing new. If a man confesses to being a thief, while we accept his confession, we also insist he makes restitution for that which he has stolen.

If a preacher notices someone breaking down and crying during a sermon it may be a signal something is wrong in his life and he needs someone to ask him, "Would you like to talk?" Sometimes a drastic change in behavior can be a signal all is not well. For example, a couple used to stick around and visit, now they leave immediately after the last "Amen."

Also, these questions and statements can be signs a crisis is near.

- "I don't think I love my spouse anymore."
- "My spouse does not appeal to me anymore."
- "My spouse doesn't treat our children the way they should."
- "My spouse spends too much money."
- "My husband won't work to provide for the family."
- "My wife won't keep our house clean."
- "Help, I feel like a prisoner in this relationship."
- "My spouse won't talk to me about anything."
- "My spouse criticizes everything I say."
- "My spouse won't have sex with me as often as I like."
- "My spouse hit me today. It is not the first time."
- "We have just grown apart—how can I get out of this marriage?"

8. *Preachers must have a method of helping others.* While I make myself available for counseling, I do not force my services on anyone. If someone says something about their relationship or asks a question that I believe warrants investigation I will ask them, "Would you like to make an appointment?" If they say yes, we arrange the time and place. Many who know I counsel just call and ask if I have an opening. If someone does not show up for an appointment I do not call and ask them why, I assume they worked out the problem in another way.

I prefer to have the troubled couple travel to my home. This gives me more time with my family (which is important to me since I work a secular job), and also forces the couple to commit to going to some effort for help with their relationship. Since I do not charge for my services, I attempt to "create value" in this way. Also, time spent in the car gives the couple time to talk to and from the appointment. Children are not allowed in the study unless the session is a family meeting where the children have been invited. My wife often volunteers to provide baby sitting.

I make every attempt to create a serious atmosphere for the session. After all, there is much to accomplish in as little time as possible. Glasser says, "Therapy is a special kind of teaching or training which attempts to accomplish in a relatively short, intense period what should have been established during normal growing up" (*Reality Therapy* 24). So, the object is quickly to help the couple take responsibility for their lives so they can start their relationship in the right direction.

When the couple arrive, we go to my study. I do not use the "visiting" part of the house for counseling. The people I counsel are often people I see and worship with regularly—I do not want them uncomfortable coming to our house to visit. My family stays away from my study and I am only interrupted if there is an emergency. I offer soft drinks, tea, water, or such like. I have tissues in the room by the couple's chairs. My tools are a Bible and a pad and pen for taking notes.

After some small talk to help everyone be as comfortable as possible I ask the couple, "Why are you here?" I want to know their reasons for asking for my help. I want to know what their expectations are from each other and from me. Usually, each wants

me to “change their spouse” in some miraculous way so their relationship can be “fixed.” Many times I will have no previous warning of what the problem is. It is important not to be overly shocked or surprised at anything that is revealed as you find out what each of them want in their relationship.

A typical wife wants a husband, home, children, security, affection and tenderness, companionship and strength. She is really asking for a kind of husband-father-lover-friend. Usually the young wife is expecting all this of a man much too young to be emotionally mature, and therefore, he is normally incapable of satisfying all of her needs. Consequently she may feel frustrated and cheated.

A typical man wants affection, emotional support, sexual fulfillment, a companion, a hostess, a wife-mother-companion-friend. But the young woman whom he has chosen is, like himself, usually too young and emotionally immature to be able to fulfill all his needs. When the realities of marriage set in, they try to change each other, either through criticism, manipulation, or some form of domestic blackmail. It is not uncommon for a wife to withhold affection as a form of punishment, and for the husband to seek to control or manipulate his wife through the use of money, or the refusal to communicate.

A far more creative solution is for them both to sit down with a competent marriage counselor and learn to communicate about real problems. Long before they are likely to do this, however, she may have him cataloged as either manipulative, stingy, sarcastic, or just plain difficult. And he may complain that she is a sloppy housekeeper, given to frequent temper tantrums, or sexually frigid. If they battle about these symptoms without ever getting down to the real basis of their problems, it is highly probable that they are headed for either a lifelong power struggle or the divorce court (Osborne 166).

Examples of what a couple might say include these stories:

One author described a bad relationship: “It’s like living with a rattlesnake. If you don’t disturb it, you are safe. If it moves, you maintain your distance. All you trust is your ability to get away” (Kilgore 13).

A husband reports: “I remember the anxiety and pressure I felt driving the car when Jan was with me. I had to make sure I was going the right direction, the right speed and to the right place, to avoid her criticisms. One day we drove to the mall, and I remember thinking, there are three thousand parking places here and I’ve got to choose the “right” one (Frank 150).

Next, I explain my role in the meeting. I want to share God’s principles with them to help them with their problems. I promise to be straight and not beat around the bush with them. If I disagree with them, I am going to say so, and I expect the same from them. I promise confidentiality unless authorities must be notified because of a crime, or the leaders of the church must be notified because of the sin that is involved. I may discuss their situation with my wife because a woman’s perspective is invaluable in relationship problems (I can trust my wife completely to keep whatever is discussed confidential.) I may consult a licensed professional if I need additional help with the case. I promise not to discuss their situation with inquiring individuals and not to use

them as examples in sermons or everyday conversation. I encourage them to talk to anyone they want to or need to about our time together, but I won't. I couldn't begin to keep straight who I have talked to and who I have not, so I just don't talk about the sessions I have. James Orten urges confidentiality, even to the point of saying "if two church leaders work together they must not even tell their wives" (Yuba City Advice Session).

If the couple's problems have been developing over a long period of time, I seek to understand their past appropriately. This includes their childhood and how their families functioned. I want to know about their parents, whether or not there was any abuse or alcoholism or other problems they were raised with as a child that may need resolution. I want an overview of background information so I can have an image of what it is like to be the person I am hearing.

I want to know about their dating, courtship, and their early relationship as husband and wife. If there are children involved I want to know about those relationships. How is, or was, discipline administered and by whom? I also want to know if there have been any recent changes in the major areas of life. Has there been a death in the family? A job loss? Any changes financially? Any changes in health that have warranted a trip to a medical doctor? If, for example, a wife has just gone through a hysterectomy, she may experience medical problems with emotional symptoms. Is either on any new medications with unknown side effects?

I also want to know what the problems are from each spouse's perspective. I want to know when the problems first started and what happened in the relationship when each problem first occurred. It is important for both to speak during this time and for me to listen at least 90 percent of the time. It is very important not to overly react as I listen. I have found if I am judgmental as I listen, the reporting stops and is not likely to continue. There will be plenty of time for me to express my opinion later. If the couple is particularly troubled, there may not be enough time to hear about all of their problems in one session. I may be given a "teaser problem" while the real problem is not mentioned at all. Sometimes the "real problem" is not known and that is why they are asking for help.

H. Norman Wright, in his book *Marriage Counseling*, describes a relationship inventory tool, the Marital Assessment Inventory (MAI) that is a detailed eleven page questionnaire to aid in understanding the couple and their differences. This is available from Christian Marriage Enrichment, 17821 17th St. #190, Tustin, California 92680 (87-89).

As I ask questions I try to observe the listening and answering style of each spouse. Some will almost interrupt the question to give their answer. Others will need to think for a long time before they reply. Honor each style, especially those who need to think silently. Don't interrupt the silence, no matter how uncomfortable it may seem, and don't allow the other spouse to do all the talking or break in and answer for the one who is thinking. Sometimes a spouse will talk and talk, but avoids or even refuses to talk about the "issues" addressed by my questions. After I notice that happening I will

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quietly and as respectfully as possible tell them it will be necessary for them to answer the questions in order for the session to continue.

As I listen I make notes of things that are being said. I want to note those areas of the relationship that appear to warrant further discussion. In this way I attempt to estimate the number of times we will need to see each other. James Orten advised, "set up one interview, then if all goes well, agree for four more times" (Yuba City). I will make a special note of anything that jogs my memory of scripture to discuss.

After the interview, I introduce the Bible into the session as quickly as possible and get agreement that it is our authority. This agreement is essential. I usually introduce Ephesians 5 into the first session with an overview of husband and wife relationships.

Based on what I hear I may decide not to help. If, for example, one of the individuals has been a heavy user of drugs in the past and they are on continuing medication and they want me to help them with the voices they hear and the persecution they think they are enduring, I am not going to be able to help much. While I will attempt to comfort them from the Scriptures, I will refer them to a licensed professional for the help they need. If someone is currently on drugs and having problems in their marriage and only wants help with their marriage, I cannot proceed until they agree to get help to stop taking drugs.

After hearing about some problems, I will encourage the couple to see a doctor and me at the same time. With mutual permission they share his advice with me and mine with him. The doctor provides the educated advice and I provide the scriptural. If I disagree with his advice I give the couple the scriptural basis for what is right and seek their agreement. They then relay that information to the doctor. Examples of when I would refer a couple to a doctor is when one spouse has a disease that effects emotions or when a spouse was severely abused as a child. An example of when I would send the doctor my disagreement with his advice is if he advised the couple to divorce merely because the couple are not happy with each other. Usually, once the Doctor understands the value system the couple say they possess, there can be excellent cooperation. Not always, though, which makes referrals quite risky.

Some areas of the country have digressive church counselors which have been used with limited success. I would really be careful using them. While they use a scriptural basis for their counseling, they will not help in areas where we have doctrinal differences. I used to refer couples to a preacher in the Christian church who is an excellent counselor, but always eventually minimizes our doctrinal differences and attempts to woo our members. I have stopped giving him any referrals.

In each session, I usually talk about the role of husband and wife in the home. Many problems in the home are over misunderstandings of headship and submission on the part of both. "One marriage counselor told a troubled couple, "It doesn't matter what it is that starts the fight: in-laws, money, children, vacation—what you are really fighting about is, 'Who will be the boss' " (Christenson, *The Christian Couple* 137). Helpful verses to study with the couple include 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:21-33.

Generally speaking, in a troubled relationship, the man does not know how to be the servant-leader in his home, and the wife does not know how to be his submissive helper. The Christensons write:

If God's order is going to work, husbands must get a grip on how a Christian man exercises authority, and wives on how a Christian woman submits to that authority. Jesus said, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk. 10:42-44).

Headship is a means of serving others. That is its essential function. One who exercises headship must understand it first of all as a position from which to serve. This does not mean that one in headship is under the authority of those he serves and takes orders from them. On the contrary, the particular kind of service he gives them is the service of leadership.

As head, a husband serves his family by giving them intelligent, sensitive leadership. His headship is not meant for domineering and stifling his wife and children, but for leading, protecting, providing, and caring for them (Christenson, *The Christian Couple* 125).

I also talk to the couple about taking individual responsibility for their role in the home. After all, God did not say to only love and respect a perfect mate. Each is to love and respect the other by virtue of being married. This is so very, very difficult to trust when a couple has experienced a lot of pain in their relationship. I encourage the couple to choose to love each other and to choose to be committed to each other after the example of Christ.

If our appointments continue for some time I will likely do a Myers-Briggs-temperament test. The one I am familiar with is from the book, *Please Understand Me*. This instrument can point out natural differences that can cause irritation and problems. I have also used the Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis (TJTA), but that requires a licensed administrator to interpret the test. H. Norman Wright describes the TJTA in his book, *Marriage Counseling* (323-330).

When a preacher gives advice to a married couple the easiest source for examples is obviously his own marriage. James Orten advised, "Do not do that." It was his suggestion that a preacher not set himself up as the example to be followed (Yuba City).

Once the counseling relationship is established, the pattern I follow for meetings is:

- Review the relationship since we last met;
- Review the success of previously agreed upon solutions to a problem;
- If appropriate, identify a new problem;
- Discuss the problem;
- Discuss what each can do to start solving the problem;
- Plan a solution and seek agreement;
- Prayer.

It is a tremendous responsibility and privilege to be asked to help a couple in a time of crisis. Souls are at stake and a preacher must not take that responsibility lightly. I don't presume to know all of the answers in dealing with a couple in a time of crisis. Many times I have encountered situations where I am not sure of the best course of action. Sometimes sin is so piled upon sin in a relationship, it appears there are no "good" choices left and the only thing left is to select the best of the "bad" choices that remain to start the relationship moving in the right direction.

I am sure there are as many methods of dealing with a couple in the midst of a crisis as there are preachers and counselors who attempt to help. Methods and books I have studied include: James Orten's suggestions, as explained at the Yuba City meeting, *Marriage Counseling* by H. Norman Wright and other books by him, *Reality Therapy* by William Glasser, *Competent to Counsel* and *The Christian Counselor's Manual* by Jay Adams. These and many other books offer step by step ways to counsel others.

For example, the eight steps of *Reality Therapy* are:

1. Make friends. Ask what do you want? And then ask: what do you really want?
2. Ask: What are you doing now? What are you choosing to do now?
3. Ask: Is it helping? Or, is it against the rules?
4. Make a plan to get what you want or what you really want.
5. Get a commitment.
6. Don't accept excuses.
7. Don't punish but don't interfere with reasonable consequences. Don't criticize.
8. Never give up. Do not confirm the failure identity

(Glasser, *The Basic Concepts of Reality Therapy*).

The Church's Reaction

How should other church members react when a marriage crisis occurs so that it does not have a negative effect upon the entire congregation?

The worst thing other church members could do is pretend the crisis did not happen. Since our marriage relationships are to be like the relationship between Christ and the church, we only cheapen that relationship if we ignore marriage crises.

The congregation should react with sorrow that a sinful situation has affected the peace of the family and the congregation (1 Cor. 5:2). If the case is extreme, as in a spouse ran away with someone else, this will hit the congregation very hard and much bitterness may be directed toward the sinful brother or sister. There will be a time of mourning as the congregation adjusts to the loss. As long as the congregation does not get stuck in mourning for too long, there is no cause for undue concern. What "too long" is becomes a judgment call. As soon as possible, the bitterness must fade and a forgiving spirit must eventually prevail.

If the crisis is less than the one described but still severe, rather than taking sides and speculating about the whys and wherefores of the problem, I would urge other church members to give both husband and wife reassurances of their love and support during this time. This can be done in person or with a card.

Many times it will be impossible for the congregation to tell who is at fault without investigation. Surface information is often not sufficient. If, for example, a sister who has always had long hair cuts her hair, it will be very easy to point out that sin (1 Cor. 11:3-16). Obviously she is wrong and should not have cut her hair. However, what the congregation cannot see may be that the sister is reacting to an abusive situation or unfaithfulness at home and cutting her hair is a cry for help.

Members should volunteer to help the couple if they can, but they must be careful not to be trapped into becoming a game piece if each spouse in the troubled marriage tries to win the congregation over to their side. Also, members should not become the unending sounding board for an unhappy spouse who has no intention of changing the quality of his or her relationship. Some have no intention of changing who they are, yet they seek for others who will listen to them complain long and loud about their spouse. Such becomes gossip that was condemned in young widows in 1 Timothy 5:13 —“And whilst they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not” (KJV).

Members should be supportive of both, but cannot attempt to live their lives for them, or totally disrupt their own family life to take over the life of the couple in trouble.

The congregation needs to be supportive, but must not condone any sin. For example, an offending husband may say, “Yes, I hit her, but she nagged and nagged until I had to hit her to shut her up. I just had to.” No one should fall for that and think the husband is without fault. Neither should anyone think the wife is OK because nagging is a lesser sin than hitting. Sin does not excuse sin. The entire congregation should be urged to pray every day for the husband and wife.

Members must not be filled with pride. They should remember the old saying, “There but for the grace of God go I” and examine themselves and their own relationships. They should use this time of crisis in someone else’s relationship as an opportunity to examine the depth of their own relationship and recommit to the vows they made when they married.

Positive Prevention Steps

What positive steps should a couple take to prevent a marriage problem from becoming a crisis?

1. Get help with the issues that cannot be resolved on their own. Many times people are afraid or ashamed to seek help. While they would not hesitate to call the fire department if their house caught on fire, they will hesitate to ask anyone for help as their marriage goes up in flames. Sometimes they think there is no one who will keep their problems to themselves and they don’t want their dirty laundry spread all over

the brotherhood. (This has happened far too many times.) Other times, the couple is so filled with pride they just cannot ask for help. They may have always appeared to have the "perfect" marriage and to admit otherwise would be just devastating.

The couple should swallow their pride, take whatever risks they must take and ask someone they trust to help them with their problems. If the person they ask cannot help, perhaps they can direct them to someone who can.

2. *Realize there are no quick, easy fixes to marriage problems.* I always ask the couple I am counseling, "How long have you been married?" After the answer I tell them, "You have been preparing for this moment in your relationship for that same number of years. If it took you this long to be this unhappy with each other, please do not expect all of your relationship problems to go away easily or quickly."

3. *Determine to change and learn new relationship skills.* If a troubled relationship is to change, it will be because each is willing to change who they are. If they are not willing to change, chances are the counseling will not do any good. When I bring up change being essential in the beginning, I usually get excellent attention and complete agreement. Each sits there thinking, "That's right, my spouse does need to change." Later, when I remind them they both must change, agreement is much more difficult.

If the relationship is to change, it will be because the people in it change the way they act and react with each other. Since change is very difficult for most people these new relationship skills must be committed to and learned over time. Like riding a bicycle, there will be many spills as the new skills are learned.

4. *Be willing to rebuild the foundation of the relationship.* Our Master Teacher reminds us of the value of the right foundation:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. and every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Mt. 7:24-27, KJV).

Many marriages are built upon the wrong foundation, especially as it pertains to headship and submission in the home. Larry and Nordis Christenson write:

Headship and submission are the superstructure upon which marriage is built. The strength and stability of the marriage depend upon this relationship being maintained. If a wife loses her submission to her husband, she loses her unity with him. If a husband abdicates his responsibility as head, he strikes at the very core of the relationship which God has established between him and his wife.

The relationship is designed to build up both husband and wife, according to the divine model. The Father exalts the Son. He delights to lift Him up, to honor Him. This is the way headship behaves when it is grounded in love. The courtesy which a husband shows toward his wife, the way he honors her before the children, his open and evident esteem for her, is the foundation upon which the wife's respect and trust

in her husband is built. And then she, in turn, will acknowledge and exalt her husband, gladly submitting to his authority-as Jesus exalts the Father and submits to His authority (Christenson, *The Christian Couple* 157-158).

Many times a husband wants to be the head of his house, but he does not know where to start. The husband's best example to follow is Christ. One of my all-time favorite books on the family is *The Christian Family* by Larry Christenson. As far as I know it is out of print, but I see it often in thrift-stores. I buy every copy I see and give them away to anyone who will take them. Here is the outline of what he explains in great detail to the husband: "Husband, love your wife-sacrifice yourself for her, care for her spiritual welfare, go the way of the cross before her, and exercise authority in humility" (126-135). While no husband can measure up to Christ, nevertheless He is every husband's example.

Similarly, a wife may want to be submissive, but she does not know where to start. "What is submission? Practically speaking, it means recognizing that the husband has the responsibility for making the final decision when you do not agree" (Christenson, *The Christian Couple* 135). When a wife is treated as she should, it will be as easy as possible for her to be a submissive wife. In fact, when the husband is who he should be, submission from his wife is rarely an issue, she will respond with love to love and with respect to respect. How else could she respond to her husband who proves every day he is willing to "go the way of the cross before her" after the example of Christ.

Just as Christ loved us when we did not deserve it, a husband should love his wife and go the way of the cross before her even when she does not deserve it, just as the wife should love and respect her husband even when he does not deserve it.

5. Determine to return a blessing for an insult. No Christian is to return evil for evil in any relationship. Somehow many forget that truth when they get behind closed doors. 1 Peter 3:9 reads, "not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (NAS). A couple is very wise if they will determine to return a blessing for an insult in their relationship.

The blessing-for-insult relationship can be defined as "continual, active kindness." It is rooted in a forgiving and gracious heart. It means that when your mate disappoints you or hurts you, your responsibility is to find a way to bless him or her. Giving a blessing means that your hope is in God and His Word and that you choose to do good to another regardless of what he or she has done to you (Horner 108).

The contrast between an Insult-For-Insult relationship and a Blessing-For-Insult Relationship is as follows:

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Insult-For-Insult Relationship

Human Perspective

Based on selfishness and circumstances

Results: punishment, anger and barriers

Reactive, emotionally centered
following natural instincts

Attitude: tear down, depreciate;
provoke the other person more

Blessing-For-Insult Relationship

Divine perspective

Based on God's Word

Results: purposeful action, transparency

Responsive: God-centered, supernatural
response

Attitude: build up, appreciate
the other person; provoke
confession, godliness,
and blessing

(Homer 109)

When we strike out at our mate returning an insult for an insult we are, in a sense, taking vengeance on them for a perceived hurt. Vengeance belongs to God, not to a husband or wife.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21, KJV).

6. Forgiveness. Often a couple keeps track of every problem they have ever encountered. This ends up being a huge pile of unforgiven trespasses. Each guards their pile very carefully and is able to recall every straw in the stack with amazing accuracy. When faced with the need to forgive these trespasses, the couple is often unwilling to do that. This has become their foundation, the core of their relationship. In order for bitterness to be replaced with love, this core must be replaced. That means forgiveness is absolutely essential because love cannot grow where there is harbored resentment from past problems. When counseling, I often ask the question, "Have you forgiven him or her for that?"

I know of nothing that is more therapeutically effective than forgiveness. Are you looking for the "silver bullet" of counseling? You need look no further. Forgiveness is the "miracle drug" that can heal the heart of bitterness, anger, pain, hatred, violence, and other deep and abiding wounds (Bulkley 170).

7. Knowledge of God's Word. When we want to know about a medical problem we consult a physician. In times of marriage problems we must consult the Great Physician (Mt. 9:12) for help. When a marriage problem occurs, God's Word must be consulted because we can be assured we are not in compliance with God's will somewhere.

If you are experiencing trouble at home, then God is not in control of your marriage! Stop trying to pretend otherwise. Stop trying to place all the blame on your partner. Finding a solution to your conflicts begins by admitting your own mistakes. You must

yield your own personal "rights" to Christ and let him be Lord over your home. Surrender your lives to his control (Hindson 39).

Ed Bulkley writes:

One of the deepest needs of the wounded heart is peace. Note in our passage from Philippians how Paul connects peace with a spirit of thanksgiving. He writes, "With thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7) . . . His peace guards the heart, our emotional center, from the discouragements and fears that inevitably strike when we are faced with the uncertainties of life. And it is significant that part of this peace comes from sheer obedience—that is, righteousness: simply doing what God says to do. Paul affirmed that truth when he said we are to protect our heart with the "breastplate of righteousness" (Eph. 6:14) . . . The point is this: We will never experience peace of heart when we are disobeying the Lord. Husbands, we will never have peace when we are harsh and unloving toward our wives. Wives, you will never experience peace when you are in rebellion toward your husbands (226-227).

8. *Have a correct understanding of love.* Love is often only associated with a warm feeling of general good will toward others. In fact, biblical love is far more complicated than that and needs to be understood well in marriage.

The first and most important component of love in a marriage is the *agape* love. This love is introduced to us in John 3:16 and is commanded in the home: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25, KJV). This is the love of sacrifice and is not based on feeling. This love is a complete and total choice.

When a couple tells me they do not love each other, I always respond with, "You can if you choose to," referring to this kind of love. This is the love that gives for the good of others by the sacrifice of self. All other love in the home needs to be based on this foundation. Vivian Cadden writes, "If power politics in marriage consists of applying pressure by withholding something that is needed or desired, the politics of love are exactly the reverse. They consist of taking off pressure and giving as freely as possible of oneself" (210).

The next area of love in the home is the love of affection. It is referred to in Titus 2:4 —"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands" (KJV). This love is *philandros*, which is a love of fondness and good feelings. Barnes says, "No wealth or splendour in a dwelling—no gorgeousness of equipage or apparel—no magnificence of entertainment or sweetness of music—and no forms of courtesy and politeness, can be a compensation for the want of affection" (275).

A marriage without this type of love will be very unpleasant. "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: . . . an unloved woman who is married" (Prov. 30:21, 23, NIV). I encourage couples to be good friends. When they are not, it is usually because they do not do the things that good friends do, such as spend time together and talk without harsh judgment.

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A husband may embarrass his wife in front of her friends. He may belittle her all the day long. He may act careless and unconcerned about her welfare and make unreasonable demands on her time and again and then before retiring at night, he may say, "I love you." Under the circumstances, his statement is empty and hypocritical. It is good for husbands and wives to tell each other, "I love you," but it is equally essential that each partner conduct himself in a way that reflects and proves his love" (Barnes, Irvin).

The next area of love in a marriage is the physical, eros or erotic love. God blesses physical oneness in marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5) and it is so important that each spouse's body does not belong to themselves alone, but also to the other. While this aspect of love is very important in a marriage, it is not more important than the other two areas of love we have discussed. This love can only be as intended when the other two areas of love are firmly in place. A marriage that is only based on physical desire is destined to be very miserable and ultimately will fail.

James Orten in his book, *Marriage In A Chaotic World* asks the question, "Is it possible to restore lost love?" James answers, "If you mean is it possible to restore the euphoria of romantic love once it has been lost, the answer is probably not. But if you mean is it possible to restore lost love of the mature type, the answer is yes" (196).

9. *Do not use things or children as a means of problem solving.* I have seen individuals move from one city to another or from one end of the country to the other thinking once they get to another city or state, everything will be fine with their marriage. I have witnessed couples who have said, "When we get a new house everything will be fine with our marriage." I have also seen couples think their relationship problems can be solved if they have a child. James Orten discusses that issue in *Marriage In A Chaotic World*:

Sometimes individuals whose marriage is in trouble are advised by friends and relatives to have a baby in the belief that it will strengthen their marriage. I think that is bad advice. The extra burden seems about as likely to hurt a marriage as to help it. Then, too, children do not need the job of making their parents happy. They ultimately sense the expectations their parents have of them, and it feels like exploitation to know one was wanted for something other than himself (199-200).

Not only is having a child to save a marriage bad advice, moving to a new state or occupying a new house does not change the individuals involved in the troubled relationship. Just as soon as the "honeymoon" of the new experience wears off, the same old problems are there.

Methods of Dealing With Conflict

The best time to think about how to solve a problem is when the problem does not exist. While peace-time problem solving might not cover every possible angle of marital problems at least it can lead to an agreement that the couple will work together to solve their problems, and that they will not give up on each other. That is why I start teaching a couple how to resolve problems even before they are married whenever possible.

David and Vera Mace, in their book, *We Can Have Better Marriages If We Want Them*, divide couples into three categories. They speak of conflict-excluding, conflict-avoiding and conflict-resolving couples. Conflict-excluding can happen when the Bible's teaching about submission is misunderstood or misappropriated. The couple adopts a one-vote system, in which the husband assumes total authority and in which the wife's opinion is considered to be of little worth. This attitude erects a blockage to intimacy. The conflict-avoiding attitude encourages the fear that there are certain subjects that a couple dare not discuss because on previous occasions confrontation led to the sort of tension that neither of them can tolerate. The danger of avoiding conflict is that you distance one another. Conflict-resolving couples discover new and sometimes amusing pathways through conflict by making disagreement work for them (Huggett 93-94).

If a couple will agree to use a method of dealing with problems, they have a much better chance of working through them. While the problem might not be pleasant, it can be dealt with. I have included several methods for conflict resolution. What they all have in common is a crisis does not have to be the end of the relationship.

Charles Swindoll writes on "how to have a good fight"—

1. Be committed to honesty and mutual respect.
2. Make sure the weapons are not deadly.
3. Agree that the time is right.
4. Be ready with a positive solution, soon after the (verbal) swing.
5. Watch your words and guard your tone.
6. Don't (verbally) swing at your mate in public.
7. When it's over, help clean up the mess. This involves kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness (Swindoll, *Strike* 111).

Bob and Jan Horner write that there are four possible ways of dealing with conflict:

Fight to win: The "I win, you lose/I'm right, you're wrong" position. Domination is usually reflected in this style; personal relationships take second place to the need to triumph.

Withdraw: The "I'm uncomfortable, so I'll get out" position. Viewing conflict as a hopeless inevitability kills the interest in even trying to work out a resolution. Personal relationships take second place to avoiding discomfort.

Yield: The "Rather than start another argument, whatever you wish is fine" position. People who take this approach assume it is far better to be nice, to submit, to go along with the other's demands than to risk a confrontation. To them, a safe feeling is more important than a close relationship.

Lovingly confront: The "I care enough about you to deal with this issue as it really is" position. This approach offers the maximum possibility of satisfactory resolution with the minimum of threat and stress. The relationship is valued as higher than winning or losing, escaping, or feeling comfortable (69-70).

H. Norman Wright says, "Every married couple needs to know how to deal with conflict in a creative, constructive way."

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Objectivity, flexibility, willingness to compromise (Is squeezing the toothpaste tube at the bottom rather than in the middle really one of the big issues of life?) and the willingness to let the other person be himself, all need to be developed if couples are to enjoy a satisfying and growing marriage relationship.

When conflict comes, it should be faced with the understanding that disagreements do not mean that the entire relationship is on the verge of breaking down. Nor should a disagreement be a trigger for a knock-down, drag-out scrap (verbal and/or physical). Husbands and wives need to know how to “disagree agreeably” or to put it in a little stronger terms, “fight fair.” Unfortunately, few couples get any training on how to “disagree agreeably” and “fight fair” before marriage. As a result, their disagreements often turn into spats, heated arguments and quarrels. All of this really isn’t necessary. Any couple can cope better with conflict if they use the following ten principles.

1. Don’t avoid conflict with the silent treatment.
2. Don’t save “emotional trading stamps.”
3. If possible, prepare the setting for disagreement.
4. Attack the problem, not each other.
 - back up accusations with facts
 - remember to forget (stay in the present)
 - no cracks about in-laws or relatives
 - no cracks about your mate’s appearance
 - no dramatics (crying, threats)
5. Don’t throw your feelings like stones (at your spouse).
6. Stay on the subject.
7. Offer solutions with your criticisms.
8. Never say, “You never” or “You always.”
 - turn down the volume
 - don’t exaggerate.
9. Don’t manipulate your mate with, “It’s all my fault.”
10. When you’re wrong, admit it, when you’re right, shut up. Be humble—you could be wrong (Wright, *Communication* . . . 138-157).

Jay Adams recommends a “Problem-Solution Sheet” with columns headed “What happened (describe the problem), what I did (my response to what happened), what I should have done (Biblical response), and what I must do now (steps to rectify matters)” (*The Christian Counselor’s Manual* 311).

Special Relationship Problems

Through the years, there have been many attempts to label certain characteristic combinations in order to have a common basis for discussion. We are comfortable and accustomed to this when discussing religion. When we discuss the digressives or denominations, we have a common basis for discussion because of our common knowledge of the definition of these terms. This also happens in counseling. Certain characteristic combinations are defined with a title in order to have a common basis for discussion about those problems.

1. Codependency. One of the more popular terms in use today is codependency. It is described as follows:

In its broadest sense, codependency can be defined as an addiction to people, behaviors, or things. Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside. To the codependent, control or the lack of it is central to every aspect of life.

The codependent may be addicted to another person. In this interpersonal codependency, the codependent has become so elaborately enmeshed in the other person that the sense of self-personal identity is severely restricted, crowded out by that other person's identity and problems.

Additionally, codependents can be like vacuum cleaners gone wild, drawing to themselves not just another person, but also chemicals (alcohol or drugs, primarily) or things—money, food, sexuality, work. They struggle relentlessly to fill the great emotional vacuum within themselves. Our patients have described it as “walking around feeling like the hole in the center of the doughnut. There is something missing inside me (Hemfelt 11-12).

Codependency brings with it a kind of radar. A person scoring, say, 80 on our scale will gravitate unerringly to someone who is perhaps between 75 and 90. Two hundred people mill about in a grand ballroom. One ranks 85; all the others are below 20. An 80-scoring codependent who walks into the room will single out that one other codependent in the crowd. Every time, beeline (Hemfelt 117).

The ten traits of a codependent are listed below.

1. The codependent is driven by one or more compulsions.
2. The codependent is bound and often tormented by the way things were in the dysfunctional family of origin.
3. The codependent's self-esteem (and, frequently, maturity) is very low.
4. A codependent is certain his or her happiness hinges on others.
5. Conversely, a codependent feels inordinately responsible for others.
6. The codependent's relationship with a spouse or Significant Other Person is marred by a damaging, unstable lack of balance between dependence and independence.
7. The codependent is a master of denial and repression.
8. The codependent worries about things he or she can't change and may well try to change them.
9. A codependent's life is punctuated by extremes.
10. A codependent is constantly looking for the something that is missing or lacking in life (Hemfelt 28).

2. *Mysogynistic relationships.* Author Dr. Margaret Rinck describes misogynistic (literally, hatred of women) relationships.

A woman should examine whether her marriage relationship has most of these characteristics:

1. The man assumes that he has the “God-given” right to control how she lives and behaves. Her needs or thoughts are not even considered.

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2. He uses God, the Bible, and church doctrine to support his "right to tell her what to do," and demands that she "submit" unquestioningly to his desires, whims, decisions, or plans. There is no sense of mutuality or loving consideration. It is always his way or nothing.

3. She finds that she no longer associates with certain friends, groups, or even family members because of her need to keep him happy. Even though these activities or people are important to her, she finds herself preferring to avoid them in order to "keep the peace."

4. He believes and acts like her opinions, views, feelings, or thoughts have no real value. He may discredit them on general principle or specifically because "she is a woman and easily deceived like Eve was." Or, he may give lip-service to respecting her thoughts, but later shoot them down one by one because they "are not logical."

5. He acts charming and sweet at church and is well-liked at work, yet at home the family has to "walk on eggs" to prevent setting him off. People who do not see him at home find it hard to believe that she really is suffering emotional abuse. He reinforces this feeling whenever she points out the differences between home and church by saying something such as, "Oh, quit exaggerating. I'm not like that!"

6. When she displeases him and he does not get his way, he yells, threatens, or sulks in angry silence.

7. She feels confused by his behavior because one day he can be loving, kind, charming, and gentle; the next he is cruel and full of rage. The switch seems to come without warning.

8. No matter how much she tries to improve, change, or "grow in the word," in her relationship with him, she feels confused, inadequate, guilty, and somehow off balance. She never knows what will set him off next, and no matter how much she prays, he never changes. She almost feels she must be "crazy" and she is sure it is her fault.

9. He acts possessive and jealous, even of her time with the children. He may even try to restrict her normal church activities because "a woman's place is in the home." If other people, especially other men, notice her or talk to her, he becomes very angry or jealous.

10. When anything goes wrong in the home or in their relationship, the problem is always her. If she would just be "more submissive" or "obey me like a good Christian wife," everything would be fine. He seems blind to any cruelty or misbehavior on his part. He actually sees himself as virtuous for "putting up" with a woman like her" (20-22).

Conclusion

When Christ is loved, honored, and obeyed from the heart by all in a home, the husband and wife of that home will have a confidence that cannot be shaken by the storms and trials of this life. While they will have their share of problems, they will know they can work through the problems because that is what Christ wants and deserves from their lives. May every husband and wife live the words of Jesus who said in Matthew 19:6—"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man (and we add: nor any crisis) put asunder" (KJV). 7821 Saybrook Drive, Citrus Heights, California 95621

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Being Different in School

Glenn Ballard

We live in an exceedingly wicked world at a time when morals are remarkably low. The statistics regarding child and teenage runaways, suicides, pregnancies, abortions, and childhood deaths related to alcohol, drug abuse and gang activities, are literally unbelievable. Trying to raise children in a country where traditional family values are rapidly evaporating, and in fact, are being attacked with unprecedented zeal, is a frightening undertaking. Some have even questioned how a caring person could choose to bring a child into a world like this.

And yet, Christians have always had to serve God in an unchristian environment. There has always been unbelief, sin, and wickedness in the world. It has always been the plight of Christian parents to teach biblical values and virtues to our children while the world was frantically trying to pull our children in another direction. In many respects, things are not really that much different today than they were in the days of Noah, or the days of the Lord.

In the *Gospel Advocate* (Nov. 1992), J. P. Sanders, Dean and Vice President Emeritus of Pepperdine University, wrote that the failure of Christian parents to teach their children the ways of the Lord has had a sad impact on the churches. He said, "As a result, we are losing 45 percent of the children who grow up in our Christian homes." I will not venture to guess what percentage of our own young people have been lost to the world, but we are probably not too far off that pace as a brotherhood. Every congregation, and almost every family, has experienced the spiritual loss of a young person. That is an incredibly disheartening thought.

The purpose of this study is to identify some very specific and practical measures that parents can use to increase the likelihood that their children will not only be different in the school setting, but will prepare them to deal with the attacks against their faith, and help them grow up to be faithful Christians. These suggestions are based on at least two generalizations. God has always required His faithful children to be distinct from the world in which they live. Every Bible passage that relates to the holiness or sanctification of the people of God underscores this truth (2 Cor. 6:17; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9) and few Bible themes are taught more emphatically than this. We also understand that God has given to Christian parents the responsibility to bring up children that are likewise distinct from the children of unbelievers. We believe, as one author wrote, "The home is of divine origin; being a parent is a divine privilege; a child is a divine trust; and child rearing is a divine responsibility" (*Gospel Advocate*, May 1988). This being true, every Christian parent should prayerfully consider their God-given duty to be the best parent they can possibly be.

Rearing children who are different from their worldly counterparts is ultimately a matter of training. Solomon wrote, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). There is an interesting word in this passage that is so small it is usually overlooked. Solomon said that a child

should be trained up "in" something. I believe the word "in" is a reference, not just to the teaching that is imparted, but to the environment or the setting "in" which that instruction takes place. We cannot divorce the training from the environment in which it is done. A parent can issue commands at will, but if their own life is not Christ-like, and if the home situation is not what it ought to be, it is highly unlikely the children will embrace the teaching. Solomon was saying to train up a child within the setting and lifestyle that you want him to eventually adopt as his own.

A true story illustrates the point quite well. There once were two boys, both raised in homes in which church attendance was a top priority. One boy observed his parents participating in the singing of the church, and heard the same songs at home during the week. He saw his parents embrace their brethren at the assembly, and also saw them associate frequently during the week. He often heard them speak words of encouragement and went with them to visit brethren in the hospital. He sat with both of his parents on a daily basis to read the Bible and pray together. The other boy was likewise regular about attending the worship services of the church. However, gospel songs were not enjoyed at home, the Bible was rarely if ever opened during the week, family prayers were nonexistent and he often heard the brethren criticized and the work of the church berated by his mother and father. They were just too busy to help in the work of the congregation. When the boys reached adulthood, the first was a faithful member of the local congregation and active in its work. The second boy had left the church. The parents of the second boy lamented, "Where did we go wrong? We always took him to church!" In fact, neither of the boys had departed from the way in which he had been trained up. The Lord admonished the multitudes regarding the Pharisees, "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not" (Mt. 23:3). It is sad but true that some children in the church need this same warning. "Do what you are taught, because it is biblical and right. But do not follow the example of your parents, because they say one thing and do something altogether different."

There is another verse that relates to this theme. In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Moses impressed upon Israel the necessity of teaching the children the ways of the Lord. He said that God's Word had to first be in their own hearts, and then they were to diligently teach these words to their children. They were to talk about the Word when they were sitting in the house and when they were walking here and there. The Word of God was to be talked about at bedtime and first thing in the morning. The Word of God was to be a conspicuous part of their daily attire and was to be written on the doorposts of the house and on the gates leading into their yard. There were to be constant reminders always before them pointing to the Word of God. And today training children in the way of the Lord is no less a full-time job. Christian parenting involves teaching on a daily basis and cannot be satisfied in the church building during a public assembly of the church. Reaching our children with the gospel of Christ is a part of living, it's talking and walking together, eating together as a family, it's bedtime stories and family devotionals in which the Bible is read and during which youngsters are

taught how to pray. The problem in many Christian homes is that our hurried lives just don't allow time for this kind of training.

Countless books have been written and scores of video and audio cassettes have been produced dealing with Biblical principles of child rearing. There have been hundreds of magazine articles devoted to the subject, a multitude of seminars and parent workshops, and many surveys. In fact, as a part of my research for this topic I conducted my own survey of Christian parents in our brotherhood who have been blessed with faithful children. And in all of the materials and in response after response to survey questions, some of the same ideas were repeated over and over again. Because these measures are so conspicuously a part of successful parenting, I want to share them here. Professional psychologists, Christian counselors, preachers, teachers, and Christian parents everywhere agree that there are certain things that must be done if we expect our children to be different and to retain Christian principles in an ungodly world.

Start the Training Very Early in the Child's Life

Malachi drew the Old Testament to its close with these words, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:6). The heart of a child is a pliable thing, but as it grows it becomes more and more set in its ways and more difficult to mold. Developmental psychologists generally agree that by the time a child is six years old, eighty-five percent of his adult personality is already formed. By the time a child is school-aged, then all we may reasonably expect to do is whittle away at that last fifteen percent. But this points up the urgent need to do the necessary training during those very early years when the heart is tender and receptive. The training that makes children different in school does not begin in the first grade or kindergarten, but in the child's infancy. Numerous studies have been done that prove that even in the womb, the unborn child responds to music, caressing, and other stimuli. It was an extreme case, but Luke 1:41 reveals that an unborn child, John the Baptist, leaped for joy in his mother's womb. Samson was dedicated to God in his infancy (Jgs. 13:5-7), as was Samuel (1 Sam. 1:24-28). Jeremiah was likewise ordained of God from the time of his birth (Jer. 1:5-7). So to help our children be different when they get to school, we must begin shaping their hearts from the first day of their lives.

Establish Their Spiritual Identity

One of the earliest needs to be observed in young children is the need to belong, and to have a sense of identity. Although they are unable to verbalize it, even small children develop an awareness of their roots, both physically and spiritually. There is a book that comes highly recommended titled, **Grandparents, Grandchildren: The Vital Connection**. It underscores something that the Bible took note of a long time ago (2 Tim. 1:5), that parents and grandparents who instill their faith in the children increase the likelihood that a child will feel good and confident about who and what he is. Children who are exposed from the time they are babies to Bible stories about great men and women of the faith, gospel music, and Biblical ideals grow up with a sense of who they are spiritually before they ever go to school. The story of Moses in

Exodus 2 illustrates how important the first years of a child's life are in establishing a spiritual identity. By the time Moses was weaned, his mother had instilled in him a faith that all the wealth and wisdom of Pharaoh's house could not undermine. And our children have to know what it is they are part of. 1 Peter 2:9 describes Christians as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." Our young people need to know that in Christ we are royalty, we are the family of God, and we have nothing to be ashamed of. The story has been told of an African prince that was captured during the days of slave trading and brought to America to be sold as a slave. Even though he had been stripped of his dignity and his position, when he ascended the auction block to be bid upon, he held his head high and stood tall and straight. Someone in the crowd remarked that he did not look or act like the other slaves who were bent and humbled by their circumstance. And then another onlooker explained that this slave had never forgotten that he was a prince.

Our children will be confronted by unbelief early in their lives, probably long before they arrive at high school or junior high or even the first grade. The faith of most youngsters is first challenged in our own living rooms as they watch the cartoons on television and as they play popular video and computer games that make sport out of violence and glamorize superhuman heroes. Movies books, music, and television commercials are not at all subtle about materialistic, hedonistic, and humanistic values. The Bible says, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." The great challenge for Christian parents is to get the right kind of thinking started early in life. Monitor what the child watches on television. When they are infants begin to sing the great songs of our faith: "This Is My Father's World," "Faith Is the Victory," "Faith of Our Fathers," "He Leadeth Me," "Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah!," "Our God, He Is Alive!," and on and on. Educators have long known that we remember well the things that we sing, so sing songs that reinforce faith in God and in His people. Encourage your children to have Biblical heroes—men like David who, as a lad, slew a mighty giant and rallied a discouraged nation. Joseph is a wonderful Biblical role model, a young man that God used to preserve His people. And there are others. As leaders in the church and as Christian parents, we need to arrange opportunities for our young people to serve the Cause of Christ so that they will realize they are needed and that their contribution is vital to the future well-being of the church. If they are made to understand and believe they are part of God's family, then when they are ridiculed or made fun of as a "do-gooder," they will be able to feel as the early Christians did who "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted-worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 4:41).

Set a Good Example Before Them

In survey after survey designed to monitor the problems of America's youth, one question was repeatedly asked—"What do you think contributes most to the moral conduct of teenagers?" From educators, judges, psychologists, convicted criminals, preachers, and even the teens themselves, the answer is consistently the same—"It's what the parents do, or don't do, that makes the difference." A child says, "Show me thy faith!" A teenager says "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." So par-

ents must be good examples of Christian living (Prov. 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:1). The idea of a child imitating his father is certainly Biblical. In Ephesians 5:1, Paul said, "Be followers of God as dear children," which must be a reference to the universal practice of small boys imitating their fathers.

The frightening truth, though, is that children will imitate a bad example as readily as a good one. So the task for Christian parents is to *show* their children that the Christian life is a beautiful, happy, and blessed life; a life characterized by joy; a life "having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). If we consistently manifest the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives and show how satisfying the life of a Christian is, the child so raised will not want to depart from it when he is old. Jacques Ellul has said, "Children seem to be an excellent barometer of their parent's inner reality." It is sometimes painful to admit, but our children are able to see the devotion (or lack of it) and commitment (or absence of it) that we have for the Lord, and only in very rare cases does a child manifest a greater zeal for spiritual things than do his parents.

Communicate (Listen)

Everyone wants to be heard. It somehow makes us feel important and worthwhile when someone cares enough to listen. It is true of preachers, and parents, and no less true of children. The parent who wants his children to be different in school will make a conscientious effort to set aside time to discuss things that are important to his child, to share matters of faith, and to answer ethical questions from a Biblical perspective. When you consider that the average church family attends no more than three worship services in a week, during which each member receives about one and a half to two hours of Bible teaching, and when you consider that the public school system has our children for about thirty-five hours every week, the need for family devotions and daily Bible study with our children is obvious. One of the most frequent responses on the survey which I conducted had to do with the family meal. Many parents attributed at least part of their success in raising their children in the Lord to the fact that they sat down at the family table on a regular basis to eat their meals together. Of course, the important thing was not that they were chewing their food simultaneously, but the time around the table gave them a chance to do what Deuteronomy 6 commanded of the Israelites—to talk about God's Word and other matters of interest with their kids as they sit in the house. If this is done regularly it can become a welcome and interesting learning experience for our children and parents alike. There is even a commercial being aired on national network television which advocates families sitting down "at least once a week" to eat together. As a child grows into the teen years, psychologists say that good communication becomes more difficult to maintain, but even more important to a sound relationship with our teens. So make sure you are available to your children. Be a good listener, be truthful with your teen, and most important, make *time* to talk.

Use Consistent Discipline

Almost ten years ago a national poll of PTA presidents was taken in which they were asked to list the contributing factors of juvenile delinquency on the campuses they served. The number one response on the survey was "weak, permissive parents who are afraid to say 'no' to their kids. Too few parents are willing to insist on standards in the home, and too few expect their children to abide by high standards." And in a similar survey made of a group of teenagers in 1992 the teens said, "We need two things from you (parents). First, a set of guidelines so we will know what you expect of us, and second, consistency in how you enforce these." The results of these surveys are in perfect harmony with plain Bible teaching. It is God's will that parents set limits on their children and properly discipline them when they disregard those limits. God punished Eli for his failure to restrain his sons (1 Sam. 3:13). A sample of the passages in the Proverbs illustrates God's view of discipline: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly [early]" (13:24), "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (22:15), "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (23:13-14), "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (29:15). Solomon taught that discipline is one evidence that a parent loves his children, and that its ultimate purpose is to correct a child's behavior and save his soul. In Hebrews 12:9, Paul said that the discipline of our earthly fathers resulted in greater respect for their authority. While it is never pleasant, it "yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (12:11). To fail to discipline our children sends a message to them that says "I don't care what you do!" which is another way of saying "I don't care about you!" Furthermore, youngsters learn quickly what they can get away with. Most children will push the limits of authority and as they stretch for more independence will challenge the authority of their parents. If they get away with that, they will challenge the authority of their teachers, and then law enforcement officers, and ultimately they may even challenge or lose respect for the authority of God.

Demonstrate Your Love

Jesus said that love is an emotion which must be expressed in action. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). Similarly, the parent who truly loves his child will express that affection in a multitude of ways which leaves no doubt in the mind of the child that he is loved unconditionally. Studies done in the field of Developmental Psychology have shown that in the absence of caressing and other forms of body contact, the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth of a child will be stunted. If we want our children to be different at school, we better make certain they know they are loved at home, and that no matter what happens, they will find acceptance and understanding and refuge at home.

Be Involved in their Lives

All across the country teachers have said that parental involvement in children's studies is the number one factor in a child's academic success. But more important than academic achievement is the bond that develops between a parent and child when they share experiences and make memories together. Children who have maintained their distinctive Christian character during their school years have this in common with each other—they have parents that took the time to be involved with them and support them in their school activities.

The profile of the average American home has changed dramatically in our lifetime. More times than not, both parents work outside the home and after school the children are left at a day care facility, in the care of a baby-sitter, or worse yet, they are allowed to stay at home by themselves until mom or dad get home several hours later. Ultimately, the children spend more time with their teachers and care providers than they do with their own parents. It is a disgrace, but many moms and dads get so wrapped up in their own affairs and projects that they are just too busy to spend time with their children. And then as the children grow older they spend more time in school activities, sports, and with their school friends with the result that quality time as a family becomes more and more rare.

The Problem of Peer Pressure

Youth counselors affirm that peer pressure is probably the biggest single factor in a youth's decision to get involved with drugs. And in light of Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 15:33, it is imperative that parents know who their children's friends are. A parent has the right to know where his children are going and who they will be with and when he might expect them to be home. There is only one reason why a child would not want to share such information with a parent. The Bible says, "A child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15). With proper supervision, most young people will choose to do what is right. But without guidance, the same young people can easily be led astray.

One of the best solutions to this potential problem is to open your home to your children's friends. Many parents who responded to my survey revealed that their children were always allowed to have their companions over to play or socialize at their house, which gave the Christian parents the opportunity to monitor the play and get to know the other youngsters. When possible, try to get acquainted with the parents of your children's friends, and especially before allowing your children visit their home or stay overnight.

Conclusion

In Matthew 18:1-10, Jesus told His disciples that God and His holy angels take notice of the children and will severely punish any who sin against a child causing him to stumble. It behooves those who are parents to be diligent about the rearing of their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. 11291 FM 346 W, Flint, Texas 75762

Crises Among the Young: University Life

Jim Crouch

There is scarcely any single place more liberal (morally, socially, religiously, politically) than a state university campus. This is formed by a deadly combination of: (1) thousands of young people who are away from home for the first time and anxious to spread their wings and engage in new experiences; (2) these same young people, generally excited and thirsty for knowledge; (3) a group of largely liberal, activist professors who make it their agenda to re-mold the thinking and values of right-thinking students. It is an atmosphere that holds many dangers, temptations and challenges for the most mature of Christians; how much greater the dangers, temptations and challenges for young Christian adults! It has become the "far country" for many of our young people. For example, of the nine Christian undergraduates who entered the University of Missouri between the years of 1985-1992, three were still in the church when they graduated. We must not underestimate the challenges that the university life can present: peer pressure, freedom from parental authority, financial and general living responsibilities, direct attacks on the authority of God and His Word, the opportunity for sin, and the opportunity for anonymity.

In an ideal world, one would wait until he was quite mature and married before tackling such challenges. But not only is this infeasible, but in itself poses challenges of other kinds. The fact is, most of our young men and women, upon graduating from high school, will enter the higher education system. So these challenges do not become so much, "How do we avoid them?" as "How do we prepare our young people to cope with them? How can we increase the odds that our young people will survive the experience and perhaps even be the stronger for it?"

Some Pertinent Questions

1. Should some universities be avoided?

Yes. Which ones? Any university that seems likely to prove spiritually devastating to the individual. This rule of thumb should always be followed. God's will is that we put Him first and that we grow spiritually. Parents should never encourage their children to place themselves in a situation where the spiritual health of the child would be compromised, and young people should not willingly place themselves in such a situation.

Naturally, some universities are going to pose more challenges than others. Larger universities tend to be more liberal than smaller universities or colleges; state universities tend to be more liberal than private universities, and these more liberal than small religious universities. Some are going to be located close to home; some are going to be located many miles from home. Some are going to be located in communities where we have strong congregations; some are going to be many hours from the nearest congregation. Thus, the best college choice for young people, in terms of reducing spiritual challenges, is a small religious-oriented college in (or near) their

hometown where there is a strong local congregation. The worst choice would be a large, state university many miles from home or any faithful congregation. The latter should be avoided altogether.

Thus, in selecting a university, the primary concern should not be finances or scholarships. The foremost concern must be: Where does the student have the best opportunity to survive, and even prosper, spiritually. Once this is ascertained, one should consider other less important matters.

2. Should Christians participate in fraternities and sororities? Dormitory?

Once a university is selected, one must consider living conditions. Fraternities and sororities have generally been frowned upon in our brotherhood. And rightfully so, in most circumstances. However, one can expect many of the same influences and temptations in a dormitory: peer pressure, sex, drugs, alcohol, poor influences, etc. In many cases, the cliques that form in a dormitory do not differ much at all from a fraternity. In fact, one advantage of a fraternity/sorority is that one can select the type of people that s/he lives with, thus having some control over their environment. In a dormitory, one never knows the type of people with whom s/he will end up associating.

Am I advocating fraternities? Certainly not. I am simply saying that parents should not assume that because their child is living in a dormitory that they are in a good living atmosphere, or that the atmosphere is necessarily better than it would have been in a fraternity/sorority. My limited knowledge would suggest that, if one is discriminating in selecting a fraternity (academic or religious based), this can be a better living arrangement than some dormitories, and can provide some positive influence.

So, what are best living conditions? (1) Live at home. Facing mom and dad each evening can be a powerful godly influence. (2) Live with a Christian family or relative. (3) Live in an apartment with another Christian who shares the same values. (4) Live in an apartment alone (though this poses its own challenges). (5) Live in an academically or religiously based fraternity/sorority. (6) Live in a substance-free dormitory (free of alcohol, drugs, cigarettes). (7) Live in an indiscriminately chosen dormitory. (8) Live in an indiscriminately chosen fraternity/sorority.

If one is living away from home, the student needs at least one strong ally that shares his/her spiritual and moral values. Psychological studies show that young people who have an ally are much less likely to violate their consciences than those who do not.

3. What classes are most likely to present doctrinal challenges?

Hard Sciences: biology, physiology, zoology, chemistry, physics, astronomy

Social Sciences: sociology, psychology, anthropology

English: literature

Politically Correct Courses: women's studies, sexual studies, ethnic studies, etc.

Philosophy: (most all)

Most any class could pose spiritual challenges, depending on the approach the professor takes to the subject matter, but these are especially noted for the challenges they present. Should these classes be avoided? It is impossible to avoid all of them, and the degree to which Christians are challenged largely depends on the professor's personal agenda (most professors have personal agendas that guide the course material). Professors have an extremely wide freedom in choosing the curriculum to be used in their courses. For example, I had zoology course in which the first two weeks of the course was an attack on the creation account and any "fools" who would believe it.

On a university campus, it is highly unlikely that a student of any major would not have to face a handful of classes in which doctrinally challenging material is presented. For example, even in business classes, students must face the temptation of greed, covetousness, and an unhealthy relationship with the material world. However, majors in the liberal arts, hard sciences, and behavioral sciences can be especially devastating for immature Christians.

How should a young person respond to unscriptural material presented in the classroom? There are five choices.

Confront the professor publicly when the material is presented. While this shows a display of strength, it is likely to do more harm than good. The classroom is the professor's domain and by signing up for a class, the student is agreeing to behave as a student in the classroom. The professor will consider such an outburst as a challenge to his authority and his class, and will likely respond accordingly.

Confront the professor privately. If the student is concerned about the presentation of unscriptural material, a private conversation can be fitting, if for no other reason than to explain one's personal beliefs to the professor. However, let me caution that the professor is generally prepared for such a confrontation and generally has many "proofs" to support his/her material. Thus, if the young Christian is not very strong, s/he will possibly be overpowered by the professor's proofs and could be discouraged.

Listen politely, but critically. Critical thinking skills are among the most important assets that a young Christian can possess in the university environment. Like the Bereans, young people need to be taught to politely question the things taught to them, to research their validity, and to come to their own conclusions based on the evidence. A young person needs to be able to respectfully disagree with the conclusions of their professors and peers.

Listen politely and accept the material indiscriminately. This is a most dangerous response, nevertheless, it is the one adopted by many of our young people and often leads to spiritual destruction. Many young people are overwhelmed by the education and knowledge of their professors, and unconsciously dismiss the possibility that such a smart person could be mistaken about anything, including social, political, moral and religious matters.

Drop the course. This should never be ruled out. If a young Christian is being challenged to a point that s/he is beginning to doubt the faith, s/he should drop the course

and re-take it (if necessary) under a different professor or after preparing themselves to deal with the material. Parents should encourage their children in this matter.

It is important to respect the authoritative position of the professor in the classroom. On the other hand, this does not translate into believing everything that the professor says, or taking a passive response to what the professor says. Many professors will solicit responses from the students: this is the perfect opportunity to respectfully express disagreement, preferably supported with evidence. Other times, the Christian student, upon researching the professor's presentation and finding it false, might discuss the matter with other students, or even prepare a written statement of disagreement to present to the other students.

What about exams? How can a Christian who disagrees with the material presented in the classroom (e.g., evolution presented in a science course) conscientiously respond to questions on an exam without failing the course? Remember that the responses on an exam do not have to reflect the personal beliefs of the student. The student can respond by writing, "The textbook teaches that evolution . . ."; or, "The professor taught us that evolution . . ." A professor cannot mark such responses as incorrect, since the exam can only test the student's comprehension of the material that is taught, not whether the student believes the material.

How to Survive, and Prosper, at the University Level

1. Begin preparing very early. Many of the challenges that university students face, junior high and high school students must face to a lesser degree. In fact, beliefs and values begin to be challenged and molded, often in insidious ways, at the elementary level. Thus, training and preparation must begin early and at home. Far too often, Christians have the tendency to turn their children's education over the public school system. Parents must ultimately take responsibility for the education process, beginning at the elementary level and going through the university level. This requires active participation in the education process, monitoring the curriculum, and preparing the child to deal with moral, social, political and religious pressures.

Critical Thinking. Students at all levels should be taught and encouraged to think critically. They should be encouraged to consider consciously and actively whether a matter is right or wrong, good or bad. They should be encouraged to research the evidence before reaching conclusions on issues that affect their sense of values, morals and religious beliefs. And they should feel comfortable with disagreeing with teachers and students, if necessary.

Relevant Bible Teaching. There is a real danger that we, as a group, tend to use the Bible only to deal with matters regarding worship, church government, presentation of doctrine, etc. Thus, there is a group of young people who can quote Acts 2:38 and explain why we use one cup, but have not learned to love the truth and apply it to daily behavior. In our studies at church and our studies with our children at home, we must show them how the truths of the Bible should guide their thinking, motivations, attitudes, and behavior. If young people do not learn how to apply the Bible to their daily

lives, the Bible becomes a dead, meaningless book that, at best, has relevance in the public worship service. There must be an emphasis on application. This begins with parents and church leaders who have made an obvious attempt to make the Bible relevant to their lives.

Apologetics. One thing that is certain about the university experience: the spiritual beliefs and values of our young people will be attacked. This means that they will be put on the defensive. And there is nothing more unnerving and faith-shattering than to be faced with "evidence" that denies the truths of the Bible; and not be able to respond. Thus, a conscious effort must be made, not just to indoctrinate our young people, but to prepare them to face the opposing views that are likely to arise. Especially important issues include: the existence of God, the inspiration of the Bible, creation vs. evolution, the problem of suffering, morality vs. immorality.

The problem is, few Christians (few evangelists?) are prepared to teach apologetic material. There is a real need to encourage study in this area among adults. There is a real need to develop study material that parents can use. I would suggest a series of apologetic studies with questions published by the Apologetics Press as a start. Parents should have open discussions with their children about apologetic issues. "What if your teacher presented this evidence (name a specific evidence) that evolution is true?" Parents could even have role-playing situations to prepare their students for what they might face at school. Psychologists call this "attitude inoculation." Just as a flu inoculation strengthens the body's defense against sickness, so attitude inoculation strengthens the mind's defenses against false or destructive teaching. An individual who has heard the evidence beforehand and is prepared to respond to it is far less likely to be adversely influenced by false teaching.

2. *Live at home for at least the first year or two following high school.* This gives the young person a chance to mature a bit more. And while there may be many more freedoms available to them, there is still the accountability of facing mom and dad at some time during the day. Home, and a relationship with one's home congregation, provides a spiritual, moral and emotional anchor for young people as they face the challenges of university life.

3. *Consider a small, religious-oriented school.* Religious-oriented schools provide their own challenges, but generally provide fewer challenges than other private schools, and far fewer challenges than large state universities. In a small, religious-oriented school, there is generally much less of a politically-correct agenda: less emphasis on homosexual rights, ethnic segregation, women's studies, etc. Further, there is generally an emphasis of Judeo-Christian values, most professors at least claim to believe in the Bible (this affects their agendas and curriculum selections), and most of the students profess a faith in God. These factors go a long way toward reducing the spiritual challenges that are present at a state school.

4. *Only attend a university where there is a strong church.* If a student attends a school away from home, s/he should only attend where there is a strong local congregation. Further, parents should be contact with the leaders of the congregation to eval-

uate any spiritual detriment stemming from the university experience. And parents should make it a point to visit their child very often.

5. Arrange favorable living conditions. If students live away from home at some point of the university education, they should be careful to select favorable living conditions. Preferably, students should live with another Christian who will provide emotional and spiritual support. If this is not possible, other living conditions should be considered carefully. The living environment should provide a safe-haven from the challenges of the classroom and peer-pressures and campus activities. Parents should take an active role in helping a student determine the best living conditions.

6. Take a part-time job. University students should maintain a part-time job, even if it is only a few hours per week. There are many benefits to this. First, *responsibility*. At the university level, a student's learning should not be limited to reading textbooks. Among the more important lessons to be learned is responsibility. Part-time employment can teach many lessons in this regard.

Second, *education responsibility*. A part-time job allows the student to participate materially in his/her education. And as we know, young people generally appreciate the value of something that they purchase themselves (or at least in which they have a material interest) more than something that is "handed to them on a silver platter." Students who participate materially in their education generally do better in the classroom, in addition to the other benefits.

Third, *money management*. Students should learn to live on a set income and to budget their money. These funds should include the money earned at a part-time job, along with money acquired through scholarships and parental support. Parents should help the student set up a budget and live within his/her means (including an appropriate contribution to the Lord each week). Budget education should begin at home: parents should live on a budget and even involve teens in the family budget so that they can see that there is a limited amount of money to be spent and how it should be allocated to various aspects of life. Students should be provided with an adequate amount of money to live on, but not an abundance of money, as this can provide an undue temptation.

Fourth, *time management*. In addition to managing money, students should learn to manage their time. A part-time job encourages this. The less "spare time" one has, the better budgeting of time one must do. Also, too much "spare time," like too much money, can provide undue temptation.

Conclusion

In many ways, the goal of the university life is survival. Satan throws many of his darts at our young people through the university system and the challenges that come from being away from home in such an environment. Thus, we must consciously prepare our children to withstand these attacks. Paul said:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand (Eph. 6:10-13, NIV).

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5, NIV).

However, the university experience should not be looked upon only with trepidation, either by the student or the parent. As a Christian, if one is properly prepared, the university life can be a positive growth and education experience, and can provide open doors of opportunity to influence others for Christ. 9955 W. 82nd Pl., Arvada, Colorado 80005

Facing Temptation on the Job

Thomas B. Shaw

"The deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Mk. 4:19). What is the greatest temptation that the Christian must face on the job? While the enticements are many, it is greed that poses the greatest risk to most people. The sin of materialism is threatening to eviscerate the zeal from inside the North American churches of Christ. We find ourselves, like the rich young ruler, hypocritically righteous, but still lacking in the sight of God. Jesus told that outwardly religious man, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mt. 19:21).

Do we truly desire to be perfect in God's sight? Or are we more concerned with providing for our future comfort? How will we stand on the day of judgment when God examines all the possessions that we spent so much time gathering during our lives?

How should the modern Christian face this temptation? The most important rule is to prepare to serve the Almighty with your occupation. Peter wrote, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Use great caution and deliberation when choosing an occupation. Of all the decisions a Christian makes in life, choosing a job ranks second only behind choosing a mate. Children should learn early in life that their future job should be in complete accord with God's will. Teach the young that there are many jobs in this wicked world that are not suitable for the follower of Christ. There are obvious ones such as con artist, gambler, gangster, thief, or prostitute. Less obvious, but jobs that involve jeopardy, include: soldier, policeman, lawyer, politician, and actor. While some may debate, the clear-minded Christian can see the dangers of these positions and how they can conflict with the Christian life.

Finally, there is yet another group of jobs that are much more difficult to see clearly. While they are not wrong by their nature, they may (by the amount of time they require or the responsibilities they impose) interfere with a Christian's ability to serve God. Being a doctor, professional athlete, or astronaut are but a few.

When I was a child, I desired to be an astronaut. One of my first memories is watching the Apollo mission set foot on the moon. My obsession was so intense that when I was six years old my mother decided that it was time for some parental correction. She carefully explained that it would be impossible for me to be an astronaut because I would miss Sunday worship services! Nothing (even going to the moon) was more important than worship. She explained that it is more important to keep the ordinances of God than to fulfill one's own wishes. The half-committed Christian rebels at the thought of such requirements and asks 'Why should I be so restricted in my personal liberty and pursuit of happiness?' The Scriptures answer: "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'" (Lk. 4:8).

Biblical teaching concerning gender is at the bull's-eye of Satan's attack on the family in recent years. Gender roles have all but been abolished in the American work force. Unfortunately, Christians have not been immune to the re-education of the public by humanist philosophers and social engineers opposed to the truth. Christians should realize that facing temptation on the job actually means facing temptation to do something other than God's job. Servants of God should not and cannot abandon scriptural principles because they seem outmoded in this two-income nation. Thus, we direct separate admonition to both men and women when facing "temptation on the job."

Men and the Workplace

There was a moment when Jesus faced the issue of materialism:

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only' " (Lk. 4:5-8).

Satan will offer power and wealth to men today just as he did to Jesus nearly two thousand years ago. He will entice with promises of wealth and success, authority and splendor. The danger of this temptation is that Christian men need not completely forsake the rituals and customs of religion. No, the enemy is content to allow the pretense of godliness while career objectives become paramount to all other considerations. He wants men to forget God's promises and teachings, to forget to meditate daily on the Scriptures, and to forget to place spiritual obligations first. If Satan misdirects the affection of the father away from God and the family, then he has achieved all that is necessary to bring ruin and destruction.

The family has a God-ordained head so that it will have stability, peace, and order. The husband has responsibility for the destiny of the family and must carefully tend his family so it will grow spiritually and physically. He cannot minister to his family properly if he is allowing his occupation to take charge of every spare moment. Paul addresses this very serious issue and gives the ultimate example of love and devotion for husbands to imitate:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Eph. 5:25-28).

What an awesome responsibility! Paul says here that just as Christ desired (as the head of the church) to make the church holy, the husband must desire (as the head of the wife) to make her perfect through his sacrificing love. A husband is not a tyrant or a dictator. The depth of love that a husband must have for his wife is the same as he

has for his own body. In fact, Paul teaches that by loving your wife you are also loving yourself. Listen to what God said of Abraham in Genesis 18:19:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

One of the characteristics that made Abraham great was that he guided his wife and family in the way of the Lord. How can a husband command his family if he is not at home?

Husbands, do not let your occupation interfere with the most important job in this world. Carnal employment is meaningless compared to God's divine institution that he has given you to direct and love. At the end of life a man does not care what worldly achievements he has made, only the family he has built.

Women and the Workplace

America has almost forgotten the great significance and meaning that a godly mother plays in the shaping and molding of a person's life. As a result, society is beginning to reap the fruits of a corrupt concept of the home.

Please consider the following: When in your life have you ever outgrown the influence of your mother? Does her hand not reach out to you even to this day and affect the way you think and act and feel? Can you estimate the value of the service that she has performed on your behalf? How often do you rely on instruction that she gave in the dim past without even realizing? Abraham Lincoln said "All that I am or ever hope to be I get from my mother. God bless her!"

Only in the home does the mother become noble. It is in the home that the woman reaches the full potential that God gives her. She is possessed by strength and grace as she directs the affairs of her household. A mother is a person with great courage, fortitude and legendary bravery. "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown" (Prov. 12:4).

The wife is ever faithful and does not flinch when disaster strikes, but remains stalwart and true. She is a heroine during lean times and provides an example for her children to emulate as she leads and points the way. She will transform a shack into a palace of splendor with care, attention, and love.

The mother provides peace and security to her children, prepares a place of rest for them to lie down, and feeds them physically and spiritually. She teaches the precepts and principles of God's law. She gives a face to conviction and duty. She is loyal and faithful and refuses to compromise her values while raising her children.

One writer said about mothers: "It is to her we look in days of gloom, and hours of sorrow; from her we draw the inspiration of strength in time of trials, and on her we rely for sympathy and comfort."

The father may be the "bread-winner," but the godly mother is the soul, the essence, the center of a home. She is balm to the wounded when the heart weeps and when the spirit is weak. Her hand calms with a touch while her words bring peace. Her vision

of the future gives light in the darkness. Wisdom and counsel one can find at the feet of a mother. Proverbs 31 gives God's image of the perfect wife and mother.

She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate (Prov. 31: 25-31).

Despite the beauty and holiness of God's design, the biblical picture of the wife and mother is blurred and faint in modern America. Even in the church there are many who decry the biblical standard as outmoded and archaic. Pay attention young women, God's expectations for you have not changed with the times! God still requires the same of you as he did of Sarah long ago.

In his letter to Titus, Paul said that young women were to be taught: "to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Tit. 2:4-5). Paul further designated the role of the woman, some say he "fixed" the role of the woman: "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety" (1 Tim. 2:15). Note that Paul does not say that women will be saved through academics or high-power business politics, but through childbearing. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house" (1 Tim. 5:14).

Society is writhing in the agonies of decay even now for one reason. Current thinking denies such Scripture which designates the godly role of the woman as keeper of the home. "Politically correct" dogma teaches that the woman has just as much right to be the bread-winner as the man and the man should feel guilty for even thinking that his wife should stay at home with the children.

The focus of social engineering for thirty years has been to remove the woman from the home and place her in the center of commerce and business. A society cannot disregard the precepts and laws of God with impunity. If a person decides to ignore the law of gravity and step off a roof, he will find that pain and suffering follows. If a person decides to disregard God's law concerning physical relations between the sexes, or even between the same gender, disease and despair will follow. A husband who decides that he will ignore God's teaching to "love his wife as himself" will soon find his marriage in shambles. And young ladies, if you decide that God's will concerning the wife and mother is too outmoded and antiquated for you to follow, you are laying the foundations of future heartache.

With these matters in mind, I offer the following humble advice for young people considering their future occupations.

1. *Pray.* Seek the guidance of the Father with humility and sincerity.

Facing Temptation on the Job

2. *Prepare, Prepare, Prepare!* When is it too young to plan for the future? It is never too early! Young people must plan for the future with one goal in mind: to seek to follow God's will concerning the family. This means that the wife will not have a worldly career, but will have a godly career. How can you avoid the money crunch which demands two incomes? Sacrifice, do not incur debts you cannot pay, and save your money.

It is often true that a young couple gets married and fails to plan for the future. They have a vague idea that when they have children the wife will stay at home, but there is no thought given as to how that will be accomplished. Do not wait until you have had children to figure out how she will stay at home with them. If you do not plan and prepare to serve the Lord, then the enemy will steal away the greatest blessing any family ever has—a godly mother. Plan for the future! If that means driving the old car another couple years longer than you would like, if that means not buying that expensive entertainment center, if that means not getting cable and saving that money for a rainy day, it is worth it! The family that respects God's rules will be blessed. Laughter, peace, and harmony will rule the day.

3. *Young men, support your wives!* They deserve every ounce of praise and thanks that you can muster for their sacrifice. It is not an easy thing in our society, raised and educated in the godless public school system, to "give up" the carnal pursuit of worldly success. The world is not going to pat them on the back and say, "Hey, congratulations on your decision to stay at home." Many will criticize, find fault, and question her motivation. Young men, your wife will need your support and grateful love when she has moments of doubt about her importance. She deserves your utmost respect and esteem for her decision to serve the Lord. Let her know that absolutely no one has a more important career than the godly wife and mother.

4. *Parents, put the emphasis where it should be!* Too often church leaders (even elders) make plans for their daughters as if God's plans were inadequate. Many have asked advice on how "my daughter should best go about getting into medical school." This is a deception of Satan. Spending thousands of dollars (even hundreds of thousands) and years of life learning a career that a Christian mom cannot scripturally perform leads to sorrow and regret. Women in professional positions are emotionally torn apart by the demands of the job at work and the job at home. They face guilt on a daily basis as they leave the kids at day-care, and then again at night when they are too tired to interact with their own children. The children and the marriage suffer because the wife's loyalties are divided. Parents, avoid heartache for your daughter. Teach her first to follow after God's will to be a wife and mother.

I believe if more pulpit teaching and home discussion on this issue were made a priority in the brotherhood, we would avert the disaster that awaits the church in the next century. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). 4002 A Lamar Court, Columbia, MO 65202

Facing Temptation

Glen Osburn

The Apostle Paul said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27, NASB).

If the Apostle Paul, a mature man physically and spiritually, had to practice daily caution and self-control in order to overcome the temptations of the flesh, how much more then our young brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to become aware of the ways we can help our young people face, and then overcome, the temptations that confront them.

Our discussion will focus on teaching how to recognize a temptation, how to respond to a temptation, and then how to use spiritual tools for successfully overcoming a temptation.

I. Knowing what is and is not spiritually acceptable.

A. A conscience is designed to work based on knowledge (1 Cor. 8:7-12; Rom. 2:15-16).

B. If we are unaware of the truth, either willfully or ignorantly, our conscience will not function correctly. This can result in our being deceived (1 Cor. 4:4-5; Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 1:12-16). Ignorance causes us to be unable to recognize temptation because we simply do not know what is and is not sinful.

C. We may be tempted to go ahead and act upon a desire fully aware that we do not know whether the specific act is right or wrong. There may be a hesitation, an awareness that we are unsure. To this the Bible warns, "to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean . . . he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:14, 23, NASB). So, when we are tempted to do something and we are unsure if it is right or wrong, we must choose to do that which will not offend our conscience or cause us to lose our confidence before God.

D. Our responsibility then becomes to compare (1 Thess. 5:21) the doubtful act with the Scriptures so that we can "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7) and "live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Romans 10:17 tells us that our faith comes from the Word of God. Walking by faith then means living in agreement with the instruction of the Word of God (1 Thess. 4:1). The Bible is only a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105) if we are guided by and follow its teachings: "For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light" (Prov. 6:23). When we know what is right, and then do what is right, we have "confidence before God" (1 Jn. 3:19-22).

E. We must allow the Word to instruct us as to the nature and character of temptation and sin (Jn. 17:17; Heb. 5:14). We cannot depend on an uneducated conscience to serve us effectively.

Facing Temptation

F. Even though we must be able to identify temptation if we are going to deal with it, knowledge alone will not bring about victory over temptation.

II. Facing or confronting our temptation

A. Overcoming temptation is not possible without a personal commitment to do what we have learned and know is right (Rom. 12:1-2). Once our conscience has been instructed by the Word of God, we must actively and deliberately obey the Word, not be a passive hearer who would "delude" himself into thinking that knowledge is obedience (Jas. 1:22-25). Someone who understands the Word and yet will not act upon it soon forgets "what kind of person" he is (compared to what he ought to be), and decimates or sears his conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). We must make an unqualified personal commitment that when tempted, we will do what we know is right, without reservation.

B. We must focus on our areas of personal temptation before the opportunity presents itself, and make a decision as to what we would do. Role play; "What would I do if . . . ?" If we find ourselves vacillating, then we need to "purify" our hearts. James 4:8 records, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Double-mindedness (cf. Jas. 1:7-8) implies a lack of purity or focus (single-mindedness) in our hearts.

C. We must allow God's judgments to restrict our choices (Mal. 3:2-3), or we will not overcome temptation.

III. Helpful tools for overcoming temptation

A. We must actively stop impure thoughts in order to end impure actions (Mt. 15:19). 2 Corinthians 10:5 reads, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (NIV). Proverbs 23:17 reads, "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the Lord always."

B. Memorize specific Scriptures that have to do with your problem area (Jas. 1:21; Heb. 10:16). The sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) needs to be where the battle is, that being in our hearts and minds (1 Jn. 2:14; Col. 3:16). Jesus, when tempted, was helped by God's Word in His heart (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10). Psalms 119:11 reads, "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee."

C. Pray (Heb. 4:16). Matthew 26:41 reads, "All of you must keep awake (give strict attention, be cautious) and watch and pray that you may not come into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Amplified.).

D. Make yourself accountable to another (Jas. 5:16; Gal. 6:2). Regularly check up on each other's progress.

IV. Common problems and God's provision

A. We need to take responsibility for our weakness, and spiritual growth (Jas. 1:13-14). We need to stop shifting blame for our failures to others, or our environment. We

need to take responsibility for and control of our spiritual environment, i.e. music, TV, friends, etc. (1 Cor. 15:33-34).

B. Remember that the moral aspirations that God has provided for us are not out of our reach or beyond the limits of our ability to keep. Look for the providential way of escape: "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13, NASB; cf. 1 Jn 5:3; 2 Pet. 2:9). Philippians 4:13 reads, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

C. We may get discouraged because of the habitual nature of sin. Often, sinful behavior has been reinforced with temporary pleasure (Heb. 11:25). Therefore, we need to attack and break the routines that make sinning easier. We must not make "provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

D. Remember and practice the presence of God (Ps. 139:7-12; Prov. 15:3; 1 Jn. 3:19-20; Heb. 4:13). In Proverbs, the father reminds his son, "For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths" (Prov. 5:20-21; read vv. 15-23). Just because we may forget the presence of God does not mean that He is not always present. Remember the song, "There's an All Seeing Eye Watching You." In a negative way, remembering God's presence allows the God-given feelings of guilt and shame to motivate us not to choose sin (1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Thess. 3:14). And in a positive way, it encourages us to know that God is always for us (Mt. 28:20), and is always prepared and willing to "help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

E. Do not neglect Christian fellowship. Fellowship is part of God's design to help us in our struggle to overcome sin. We help each other through encouraging one another (Heb. 10:24-25; Gal. 6:2).

F. Remember who you are. You are God's. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, 'The two will become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:15-20, NASB).

G. Remember Christ. "Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin" (Heb. 12:3-4).

H. If it seems that all else has failed, remember the Judgment (Rom. 14:12; Eccl. 11:9), and fear God (1 Pet. 1:17; Mt. 10:28; Heb. 10:26-31).

Conclusion

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:14-15, NASB).

"Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

Young Christian, if you are caught up in a sin, remember the prodigal son. He knew things were better back at his father's house, but he had to act on his decision to "get up and go" (Lk. 15:18) back to his father before things would change. Once the young man made up his mind to go home (repent), "he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him" (Lk. 15:20, NASB). Remember, when we fail, God wants us to come home through repenting of our sin (Acts 8:22), confessing our sin (1 Jn. 1:9) and asking for prayer (Jas. 5:16). 3261 Cambridge Rd., Cameron Park, CA 95682

Moral Crisis: Understanding Right from Wrong

Raymond Fox

What are Morals?

Moral principles are statements that describe specific forms of behavior and make a judgment as to whether the behavior is right or wrong. "Do not kill!" is a command forbidding someone from killing. This same command stated as a moral principle takes the form, "One ought not to kill." Any principle that is truly a moral principle can be stated in this form using the word "ought," because "ought" expresses moral obligation. If we say, "One ought not to steal," we have obligated ourselves to not steal. Then if we steal, we have contradicted ourselves by not acting in accordance with what we know we ought to have done. Whether we are right or wrong morally depends on whether we have acted in agreement with the conduct we have obligated ourselves to follow.

Changing the principle "one ought not to lie" to "one should not lie" or "one might not lie," takes away the obligation. Such statements express values or personal opinions but have no moral power. Morals are not values. Values express the relative importance of something. For instance if we say, "One should exercise," all we are saying is that we believe exercise is important compared to other activities that one might spend his time pursuing. Morals cannot be personal opinions either. An adequate system of morality provides universally acceptable moral principles that govern the conduct of members of a society to enable them to live together. If morality were nothing more than personal opinion then one person in a society would have no logical reason to judge the behavior of another.

What is necessary in any moral system is a means of deciding which forms of conduct are right and which are wrong: what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. Many people make moral decisions without trying to support their decisions with adequate reasoning. They simply follow their desires and emotions. Abortion is an issue that people often treat with more emotion than reason. But a certain behavior is not wrong just because we want it to be wrong. Neither is it right just because we love to do it. So in addition to the problem of understanding how moral principles function, there is the fundamental question of how to determine the basis for stating that certain conduct is morally obligatory. A "moral code" is a system of moral principles, such as the New Testament, that provides the basis for making moral decisions. The question people need to answer today is: Which moral code is right?

Increasing violence, drug abuse, marital infidelity, theft in all its forms, dishonesty, sexual license, selfish greed, are symptoms of the moral crisis in the world today. The moral crisis exists on several levels. On one level people lack an adequate basis for making moral decisions. They are not just violating accepted norms, but are rejecting the very idea that there might be norms for everyone to follow. On another level the crisis exists among people who accept a certain moral code, but do not know how to

make moral decisions consistent with their convictions. Still on another level, Christians who accept the teachings of Jesus as the grounds for moral decisions, do not find sufficient motivation for following their moral principles and choosing right over wrong. The purpose of this paper is to examine the crisis on these three levels and understand where the solution lies.

The Need for Moral Absolutes

For day to day decisions, most people resort to tradition, culture, religion, community enforced laws, or intuition to tell them the difference between right and wrong. But when the time comes to make a moral decision that has a major impact on their lives, for which they have had no experience, they are lost and without direction in determining what they ought to do. What to do when a son or daughter wants to move in with a boyfriend or girlfriend? What to think when a family member or friend declares their homosexuality? What to do when a loved one is on life support systems and the doctor declares that there is no chance of recovery? Such circumstances cause people to either look for a source of principles to tell them what to do, or doubt that such a source exists. In the case of doubt they usually decide to do what "seems right" to them.

When people actually do reason about morality, their process of thought may follow one of several well-traveled courses to arrive at their decision. Unfortunately these methods of moral reasoning cannot produce reliable decisions.

The failure of utilitarianism. Without necessarily knowing the language of utilitarianism, people often reason in utilitarian terms. They think of how useful a certain action will be or what kind of results it will produce. Conduct is right or wrong depending on the consequences, the amount of good produced by the action. Different systems of utilitarianism measure the "good" in different ways. The inherent weakness of utilitarianism is the problem of defining the "good." If that problem were solvable then another would arise concerning who is to receive the "good"—the minority, the majority, the individual or the group? When confronting moral issues the needs of these different parties are often disparate and even contradictory. Whom will utilitarianism please? Totalitarian states have historically resorted to utilitarianism to justify their actions, but the "common good" turns out to be the good of the leaders, although in theory the leaders are supposed to be seeking the good of the "masses." An analysis of two forms of utilitarianism—situation ethics and hedonism—reveals the weaknesses of the system.

Situation ethics was popularized by Joseph Fletcher in the 1960's. He maintained that if our accepted principles in a certain situation prohibit us from showing love, we should lay aside our principles and do the "loving thing" instead. In other words morally correct conduct is conduct that results in showing love. The showing of love is the "good" in this case. But the question is, who or what will determine what the "loving thing" to do really is? Who will determine the kind of love, the amount of love and the recipients of the love that morally right conduct should produce? One of Fletcher's examples illustrates the dilemma of situation ethics and of utilitarianism in general. A German woman was separated from her family in West Berlin at the end of

World War II and retained at a prison camp in East Berlin. She could only hope for release if she became ill or pregnant. So she seduced a prison guard and became pregnant. Fletcher justifies the act as the most loving thing to do in order to be reunited with her family. But was it the loving thing to do for her children or her husband or for the prison guard and his family? Utilitarianism cannot answer this question of how to determine which consequences are loving and which are not.

Hedonism experiences a similar failure. Hedonism judges the rightness or wrongness of an action based on the amount of pleasure it affords. "If it feels good, do it" is probably the most popular way people make day to day decisions. Dishonesty in politics, greed in government, the lack of moral principles concerning sexuality are the results of hedonistic thinking. Hedonism encourages the moral breakdown of society in general because everyone is left to pursue their individual pleasure as the goal of moral decisions, while resenting anyone who would deny them. Here is the same problem appearing in different terms: who should determine what counts as pleasure and who should be the beneficiaries of this pleasure? The reality is that only a few can afford to judge good based on pleasure because only a few have the resources to pursue pleasure. What is pleasurable for the few who have the power is not usually pleasurable for the majority.

Often, we cannot even predict the long term consequences of our moral decisions, let alone judge the good of those consequences. From our limited human perspective we do not have the capacity to make moral decisions based on utilitarian consequences.

The failure of progressive morality. Another popular method of making moral decisions is progressive morality, the view that right and wrong is not absolute, but changes with the times. What was wrong two thousand years ago may not necessarily be wrong today. Many modern religious denominations subscribe to this view because of their basic doubt that the Bible is completely inspired by God. Their councils and synods have assumed the authority to legislate laws that contradict the morality of the Bible. Progressive morality is really saying that moral decisions are based solely on what happens to be the accepted norm at the present moment in a given society. It supports the blindly optimistic belief that mankind is constantly advancing morally. Progressive morality assumes that the present perspective about right and wrong conduct is always better than any past perspective. Examples of supposed moral advancement is the acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative life style, premarital sexuality as a healthy introduction to marriage, and divorce for any or no reason because life-long commitment is no longer practical.

Progressive morality fails to provide the truth about moral decisions because as a system it cannot provide any means for judging whether moral advancement is actually taking place. Judging moral advancement would require another set of moral principles, or a higher system of moral absolutes that are unchanging, to determine whether changes are for the better. It is a false assumption to think that moral change is always for the better.

Many proponents of evolutionary theory believe that morality evolves upward just like they believe that physical characteristics of living things evolve. But survival of the fittest supposedly drives the evolutionary process. Would survival of the fittest produce a superior morality? Most believe that one of the highest moral principles is altruism, unselfish sacrifice for the good of others. But would survival of the fittest motivate someone to sacrifice themselves for the good of others in a purely altruistic manner? Of course not! Actually, the increasing moral acceptance of homosexuality, divorce, and sexuality outside of marriage is contributing to the breakdown of the family, a fundamental pillar of stability for society. In reality, modern moral views are diminishing society's ability to survive, contrary to the suppositions of evolutionists.

The failure of relativism. Relativism holds that moral truth only has meaning within a cultural or social group. The definition of right and wrong depends on the culture or society one lives in. One believes in and practices a certain set of moral principles simply because those are the principles accepted by the majority of the members of one's society. Despite all the reasoning and debate that takes place in the interpretation of law, the Supreme Court in the United States actually works on the level of relativism. The Court interprets the law and the Constitution, not with reference to some higher moral authority, not by consulting some collection of moral absolutes, but in view of the current moral perspective of society. For this reason, politics easily enter the discussion and opinions reflect political persuasions and influences.

Relativism has the inherent tendency of being very nearsighted. If we seek moral justification by referring to what is culturally acceptable, we will not be prepared to meet neighboring cultures and avoid conflicts with them. Each culture will have its own set of moral principles, justified with reference only to that culture. Only a morally nearsighted person would accept such an isolated moral system. Even within a given society, a variety of cultural groups can exist with very different moral perspectives. Furthermore, in a global sense, with constant interaction and communication between different cultures in the world, relativism is wholly inadequate. Constant moral conflicts are inevitable within one particular society and between different nations of the world because there is no common set of moral principles to govern the behavior of everyone if relativism is true. How can one nation condemn the behavior of another (as in the case of world censures against ethnic cleansing in Bosnia) if morality has no higher foundation than the social or cultural group?

Actually, the problem of relativism reduces to an individual level. Even in the same neighborhood, individuals from different cultural backgrounds must interact. Our moral decisions usually affect others. Abortion is not an individual decision because there are at least two people involved, the woman and the fetus. The decision of individuals to view pornography affects society as a whole because of the social behavior pornography encourages. Whose moral system will society accept? Will each faction of society try to force the others to accept its own moral principles? This problem of moral conflicts is irresolvable with relativism, because no higher set of moral princi-

ples exists that can judge the behavior of human beings in all neighborhoods, cultures, and societies.

The most obvious false assumption of relativism is that a moral principle is right just because the culture accepts and practices it. The death of six million Jews in Europe during World War II verifies that culture is not the final judge of right and wrong. Describing the moral practice of a culture cannot translate into moral obligation. What is needed is some moral system that rises above culture and to which all cultures must submit in order to have peace and harmony. Such a moral code would not change from culture to culture.

Why do people accept relativism despite its clear failure to solve conflicts? Mankind is searching for autonomy without the need to submit to any higher authority than himself. Autonomy not only means rejecting God, but also implies a rejection of any moral code that does not originate from man himself. Relativism is thus the result of man's desire for autonomy, because autonomy leaves every individual with the same inherent authority to invent his or her own set of moral principles. Autonomy has left man in moral anarchy.

The failure of determinism. The historical course of science and philosophy has tended towards the denial of the soul. After the Renaissance and Enlightenment, while science postulated that everything in the universe is controlled by unbreakable laws such as gravity, philosophers rationalized that if man has a soul, his soul does not have an impact on the material world. From that point denying the existence of the soul and believing only in a materialistic universe was a simple step. For materialists, moral decisions represent only desires and passions. They call things "good" only because they desire them. Psychologists and sociologists from a materialistic viewpoint explained moral decisions as determined by an individual's genetic characteristics and environment. Denying the soul led inevitably to determinism, that the individual's actions are determined or programmed by their genetic code and environment. Man is really not free to make moral choices. Supposedly scientific literature has described homosexuality, alcoholism, and even extra-marital affairs in deterministic terms. Of course, if man does not have a choice, then the individual is not responsible and there is no reason to condemn behavior that might otherwise be labeled "immoral." The literature however does not reflect actual scientific laboratory conclusions (no gene has been found that determines homosexuality). It only reflects the suppositions and assumptions that color the work of scientists who hold a materialistic, deterministic view of human behavior.

The hypocrisy of this thinking is that determinists really do not live by the clear implications of their tenets. If you stole their car, claiming survival of the fittest, they would still prosecute you.

By robbing man of free choice, determinism also robs man of the possibility of dignity that comes with free choice. Man becomes nothing more than an animal reacting to stimuli just like Pavlov's dogs.

Moral Absolutes.

Moral absolutes are moral principles that are true despite culture, history, utilitarian concerns or individual desires. The failure of the previously discussed moral systems arose from their common lack of moral absolutes. Without moral absolutes, the principles of any moral system become just subjective value statements. Value statements, since they are only opinions, cannot obligate the conduct of everyone in similar circumstances. Utilitarianism lacks the necessary moral absolutes that determine how to measure the "good" that right conduct is supposed to produce. Progressive morality lacks the moral absolutes necessary to judge moral advancement from one time to another. Relativism is a rejection of moral absolutes and for this reason lacks the power to resolve moral conflicts between cultures or individuals. Since determinism relegates morals to the status of emotions, no moral absolutes are logically possible, neither is moral obligation.

Is there not a common nature to man that supersedes culture, history, and language? Based on this common nature, are there any moral obligations that man shares no matter where he has come from or where he is going? The central principle of Jesus' teaching answers "Yes!" to these questions. "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk. 6:31) This most fundamental principle compels us to ask about our conduct, "What would the world be like if everyone behaved the way I behave?" But the frustration that moral philosophers face is in trying to discover what this common nature and what these common moral obligations ought to be. This frustration is an inherent weakness of man. No man is capable of occupying a morally superior position to all other men and determine what conduct is right for all mankind. Human beings are moral equals and therefore one human being cannot obligate all others on the basis of his or her own particular view of the world. Who or what can be the source of moral absolutes?

God, The Foundation Of Moral Judgments.

By definition God is morally superior to man. As the Creator He knows exactly how we ought to live in harmony with how He made us to live. He alone has the authority to give us moral obligations. God, in His infinite nature, is outside of time, history, and culture and therefore does not have the limited perspective that hinders man's judgments. God alone knows what the "good" is and what "love" would truly dictate in every situation, because His character defines goodness and love. The character and nature of God is the foundation for moral principles. Honesty is right because God is true. Forgiveness is right because God is forgiving. Sexual immorality is wrong because God is pure. As Josh McDowell, in his book, *Right from Wrong*, put it, "It is not enough to say, 'You and I both know that what you're doing is wrong!' It's not what I know, not what you know that makes a thing wrong; it's what God is that makes it wrong" (McDowall 82).

Of course, some would criticize the idea that God is the source of moral absolutes by claiming that this view assumes that God exists. The existence of God cannot be assumed just for the sake of moral justification. The existence of God is a question

prior to a discussion of moral absolutes that cannot be covered in this present paper. However, those who reject the existence of God must realize in what straits they place themselves. Without God there is no adequate foundation for moral absolutes. Man on his own cannot discover them. Without moral absolutes one man cannot logically compel another to behave in a certain way. A rejection of God as the foundation of morals leads to a further rejection of any standard for moral decisions. This is the very crisis which is present in the world today. People are slowly waking up to the fact that the denial of God's logical role in the structure of a moral system leads to the absence of any satisfactory and compelling norm for moral behavior. Moral decisions become an entirely subjective process because there is no means to judge between competing moral systems.

The tremendous impact of the moral teachings of Jesus rests upon His claim to be the revelation of God's moral will for man. He came to teach the moral absolutes that originate in the character and nature of God. There have been many religious leaders who have taught moral doctrine, but Jesus was able to prove His claim to be the revelation of God. His resurrection, the prophecies He fulfilled, and His miracles, not only provide reason to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but also authenticate His authority to teach us moral principles that rise above culture and history. At this point, however, another level of the moral crisis surfaces with respect to the teachings of Jesus. People who accept Jesus as the Son of God differ on what Jesus taught about moral behavior. Disagreement sometimes reaches the point to where people throw up their hands in frustration, despairing of ever knowing what Jesus taught. Is there some method by which we can correctly interpret the moral principles of Jesus in order to know how to apply them today, almost two thousand years after Jesus lived here on the earth?

Applying the Moral Principles of Jesus

Two aspects of moral thinking make careful interpretation of Jesus' teaching essential: the comprehensive nature of moral principles and apparent conflicts between moral principles. Christianity's moral code does not include hundreds of precisely defined moral precepts that apply only to very specific situations. Furthermore there are no moral principles that specifically mention obviously moral issues such as gambling, abortion, dancing, specific forms of apparel, watching movies or soap operas, social drinking, etc. To morally prohibit such conduct, we would have to find some comprehensive moral principle that includes these forms of conduct along with other similar forms of conduct.

Therefore, understanding how the structure of moral principles enables them to be comprehensive is critical in applying the teachings of Jesus. The possibility of conflict between accepted moral principles also makes correct interpretation of those principles imperative. For instance, the Pharisees believed that healing was a violation of the moral principle prohibiting work on the Sabbath. In conflict were the moral obligations to keep the Sabbath holy and to show mercy. Jesus resolved the conflict by stat-

ing, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In fact, correct procedures of interpretation eliminate moral conflicts.

The Structure Of Moral Principles

Moral principles in the New Testament are found in many forms such as: examples of conduct (the case of the good Samaritan), commands stated in the imperative ("Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery"), and statements describing moral conduct ("... the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."). But every principle that is a moral principle can be stated in the same grammatical and logical form with the words "One ought to": "One ought to love his neighbor as himself"; "One ought not to get drunk"; "One ought to worship the Father in spirit and in truth." The purpose of wording principles in this manner is to analyze their structure and appreciate the force of their teaching.

Moral principles are in the first place "prescriptive." A prescription describes how one must act. A prescription for taking medicine, for instance, tells us exactly how we must take the medicine to improve in health without incurring danger. Moral principles are prescriptive because they prescribe conduct. Moral principles do not express opinions or preferences, but lay down rules for conduct instead. Moral principles are obligations for conduct. If a statement indicates a preference, desire, or a value, it is not a moral principle. "I wish you would be silent" is, strictly speaking, not a command. To remove ambiguity we need to say, "You must be silent!" "I think it is important for people to be honest" is not a moral principle. Value statements cannot be moral principles, because values express what you think is better to do and not what you ought to do. Expressing a principle in the form, "One ought to . . ." makes the principle a moral principle because "ought" denotes obligation. The word "ought" is not only a grammatical necessity but also has logical power in a moral principle. If we say, "One ought not to steal," and then we steal, we have logically contradicted ourselves. If we were to say, "I prefer not to steal," we have left ourselves an escape, allowing ourselves to steal without self-contradiction.

Secondly, moral principles are "universal." The purpose of a moral code is to present moral principles that can govern the conduct of all members of society, despite cultural differences. If one commits himself to a principle as a moral principle that can judge his conduct, yet does not accept that principle as judging the conduct of other persons in relevantly similar circumstances, then his principle is not a moral principle. The idea, "What is right for me is not necessarily right for you," misunderstands the true nature of morality. A person who makes a statement about what they believe they should do, but at the same time does not want to bind that conduct on someone else, is not making a moral statement. This element of universalizability is precisely the point of Jesus' saying, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." About any moral principle that we hold, we must be able to ask, "Can I obligate others to behave in the same manner?"

Thirdly, moral principles are "comprehensive." Moral principles are always comprehensive to some degree because a moral principle never applies only to one spe-

cific case or action at a particular point in time and space. They apply to all similar conduct in relevantly similar circumstances. Jesus, for example, taught that the moral principle, "Honor your father and mother," implied not only the obedience of their instructions but also the economic care of one's parents (Mk. 7:10). Jesus taught that the meaning of this principle was broader and more comprehensive than the Pharisees thought it was. Providing for one's parents is relevantly similar to honoring them. Likewise the principle, "One ought not to divorce except for the cause of fornication," did not apply just to one person at a particular point in time, in a specific set of circumstances. Understanding the principle requires an understanding of the meaning of divorce and the descriptive qualities of fornication. To interpret and apply the principle one will have to understand the meaning of its terms. This fact is true of all moral principles. Any moral principle includes terms whose relevant characteristics must be described in order to understand the principle. Understanding the principle, "One ought to honor one's parents," requires a description of the relevant characteristics of "honor." What do we mean by the word "honor?" What kinds of similar actions are comprehended by the word "honor?" Those characteristics that are relevant are those that cannot change without changing the principle. Once we have described the terms of the principle, we can identify other similar behavior that would fall within the scope of the moral principle. Although Jesus did not specifically mention the obligation to speak to our parents with respect, speaking with respect would fall under the comprehensive nature of the principle because respectful language is a form of honor. The key to properly interpreting and applying the moral principles of Jesus is understanding the relevant, descriptive characteristics of each principle. Disagreements about the application of moral principles are usually disagreements about the relevant characteristics of the principle.

Interpreting The Moral Principles of Jesus

There is a logical relationship of identity between a moral principle and the specific moral action that the principle judges. In other words, the relevant descriptive characteristics of the principle must be identical to the relevant characteristics of the specific action in question. When this identity exists then the moral principle applies to the action. So the task of interpretation is to define the descriptive characteristics of the moral principle, by employing correct methods of contextual interpretation. The question is: What did the author or speaker mean by stating the principle? What behavior did he refer to by the moral principle? Following is a summary of the steps of interpreting the moral principles of the New Testament:

First, state the principle in the form of a moral principle: "One ought to . . ." or "One ought not to . . ." Since the moral principles of the New Testament are sometimes found in the form of examples, imperatives, or descriptions of action, the principle needs to be stated in order to know exactly what principle is under consideration. For instance, Jesus said at the end of the parable of the good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37). This statement is an imperative, but what is the principle? The

principle stated earlier in the passage and illustrated by the parable was, "One ought to love his neighbor as himself."

Second, discover the author's intention. What was the author's purpose in teaching the principle? Did the author intend to teach a moral principle that was prescriptive (moral obligation), universal (for everyone in relevantly similar circumstances), and comprehensive (including all similar forms of conduct)? Information from the context supplies the answers to these questions. The context of the passage can reveal the identity of the people to whom the speaker was talking, the purpose of his instruction, and the historical and geographical circumstances that might have limited the teaching to a certain group. If the author intended to teach a moral principle, then that principle would obligate everyone in similar circumstances to behave the same way. In addition, the moral principle would exclude all other ways of behaving in similar circumstances.

Third, define the meaning of the terms contained in the principle. The meaning of words depends upon their use in the immediate context. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the key terms is "neighbor." The parable was Jesus' response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The parable teaches that our neighbor is not necessarily the person who lives next door to us, but anyone whom we encounter who has a need that we have the opportunity and ability to fulfill. Another key term in the principle is "love." The Samaritan illustrated the nature of love; his conduct defined the meaning of love as self-sacrificing.

Fourth, distinguish the relevant characteristics of the principle from mere extraneous, contextual details. Remember that those characteristics are relevant that cannot change without changing the principle. When Jesus said, "Go and do likewise," he was not telling his listeners to become Samaritans in nationality, find someone left for dead by the roadside, take him to an inn, and take care of him. Although these details of the story help us understand the meaning of "neighbor" and "love," they are not necessary characteristics of the principle, "One ought to love his neighbor as himself." The definition of terms helps us understand what the relevant characteristics of the principle are. The meaning of "neighbor" and the meaning of "love" cannot change without changing the principle.

Lastly, apply the moral principle to various forms of conduct within the scope of its comprehensive meaning. These forms of conduct must share the same relevant characteristics of the principle. In the case of the Good Samaritan, we ask, "In what ways can I behave today like the Good Samaritan?" Accepting the principle, "One ought to love his neighbor as himself," what kind of conduct does this principle obligate me to perform? We cannot possibly answer this question to its fullest extent because we may not be able to imagine all the applications. However, understanding the principle and how we can apply it will help us to have it ready to use when new applications arise. This ability to have the comprehensive moral principles of Jesus ready to use in new circumstances as they arise is the power of Jesus' teaching. We cannot imagine all the

circumstances for their application, but understanding their comprehensive nature allows us to have them ready to follow when the situation confronts us.

Conflicts and disagreements about how to apply the moral teachings of Jesus have occurred ever since Jesus taught in the first century. Disagreements often reflect a confusion about the nature and structure of moral principles. Division, and a diminished confidence in the New Testament, has resulted from incorrect reasoning about moral principles. Often, people discussing moral questions completely miss each other with their arguments because they are not using the same structure to analyze moral principles, such as carefully stating the principle, properly defining the terms and characteristics of the principle, and applying the principle to other similar conduct. Once there is agreement on the meaning of terms in the moral principle and agreement that the principle is a moral principle, then what remains is simply applying the principle by logically identifying it with similar conduct. People tend to argue about the applications of a principle. But if they truly agreed on the meaning of its terms and its relevantly descriptive characteristics there would be no argument about its application. So discussion about a moral principle (a principle the author intends to be a moral principle) must focus on the meaning of terms.

Even among those who accept the moral principles of Jesus and properly interpret them—a crisis still exists, a crisis of conviction. Just because someone knows what Jesus taught does not mean they will follow it. A moral crisis exists in the church today because Christians lack the conviction to follow Jesus despite the cost.

A Crisis of Conviction

This crisis is most evident in young people today. Young people are always at the edge of moral change because their moral principles are still in flux, in a stage of formulation. Adults, on the other hand, are not so likely to alter their basic concepts of morality once they have fixed their viewpoints over time and experience. Because young people are “at risk,” morally speaking, they need much more intensive moral training than we may be willing to admit. A recent survey shows how morally weak even religiously oriented youth are. The Barna Research Group conducted a survey of 3,700 young people among thirteen evangelical denominations in the U.S. and Canada in 1994 (McDowall 8). According to the survey, within a three month period,

66% lied to a parent, teacher, or other adult.

59% lied to their peers.

45% watched MTV at least once a week.

36% cheated on an exam.

23% smoked a cigarette or used other tobacco products.

20% tried to physically hurt someone.

12% had gotten drunk.

8% had used illegal drugs.

In addition, according to the same survey, 27% had experienced sexual intercourse outside of marriage, 55% had engaged in fondling of breasts, and 29% thought that fondling genitals was morally acceptable (McDowall 55). The interesting aspect of the survey done by McDowell's group is that these young people generally knew the difference between right and wrong but failed to do right: a crisis of conviction. These findings reflected youth in evangelical denominations. How would youth in the Lord's church fair? No survey has been done on young people in the church of Christ; however if they are suffering from the same lack of moral education as youth in the denominations surveyed, then we can expect similar results. And of course, speaking as one who has traveled around the country visiting congregations, I can say that the sad reality is that youth in the Lord's church are committing the same moral sins as children in denominations.

McDowell's conclusion is that this moral weakness exists because Sunday school, youth groups, and worship services are not teaching or inculcating moral principles. In the Lord's church we do not follow the Sunday school system of teaching, but gather everyone together for teaching according to the Bible pattern instead. However, the problem is that most parents rely too heavily on worship services to teach their children about morality. When their children fall to moral temptations, parents often complain, "I don't understand! I always took them to church and to meetings! Why have they done this?" Sermons rarely touch on the moral themes that children most need to understand. When sermons do touch on relevant moral subjects, they may explain what is wrong or right about a specific moral issue, but a forty-minute sermon cannot train young people in moral reasoning. What young people need is not the rhetoric of sermons but extensive training in moral reasoning and decision making. They are faced with daily moral dilemmas; just a sermon or two now then will not give them the moral power to survive against the constant pressures they face in the world.

What children need most is comprehensive teaching in the moral principles of Jesus, training in the practicalities of moral decision making, and education about how to deal with temptations and peer pressure. This level of training can only, and should only, come in the home. If parents in the church do not take seriously the responsibility to adequately train their children to act morally, they can expect the same results that McDowell discovered among his evangelical denominations.

Not only the lack of sufficient education, but also other social factors have diminished moral conviction as well. Although young Christians may know that the moral behavior they see on TV sitcoms and in movies is wrong, viewing and being entertained by immorality can only lead to a lessening of moral conviction, whether consciously or unconsciously. We live in an environment in which immorality is accepted, practiced, and flaunted by teachers, sports heroes, politicians, actors and actresses, musicians, and by nearly every person outside the church that our children may be

tempted to look up to as a role model. For this reason, Christian parents need to be more sophisticated in the moral training they provide their children.

On the positive side, teaching the beauty of the moral system of Jesus can give our youth the confidence to follow the teachings of Jesus without wavering. Sometimes Christians doubt that the Christian life is the best life, because sinners seem to prosper from their evil decisions, while Christians suffer due to their strict moral life. Because of the tremendous social pressure our young people are under to accept immoral behavior, they especially need to realize for themselves that the Christian life is the best life. As parents we must teach them the beauty of God's way so they will have the conviction to choose His way without reservation. Teach them the beauty of integrity: a free conscience, a transparent life with nothing to hide, the confidence and respect of others. Teach them the beauty of forgiveness: no grudges, no bitterness or resentment, no need to criticize or demean. Teach them the beauty of compassion: the ability to understand the suffering of others and lift them up.

Moral training should be a daily effort. When children leave for school every day, they need to be prepared for the moral decisions that either bring failure or true success in the Christian life. Here are some ideas: Always look for opportunities to explain the superiority of Jesus' teaching in practical life. Compliment your young people when they demonstrate the beauty of the Christian life. Teach them how to reason about moral questions using the principles of Jesus. Teach them in practical ways how the Christian life works. (For example: Doing good to those who bother you or treating others as you would have them treat you.) Remind them that living the Christian life to its fullest can make them successful as God's instruments, showing the world the beauty of the His will.

I recently heard a story that illustrates how important our role as parents is in solving the crisis of conviction. The story went like this: When Tommy was five and his family went for drives in the country, his father rolled through stop signs with the excuse, "Nobody is around." When Tommy was twelve his mother told him to say he was eleven so he could get into the movies for less money. When Tommy was sixteen, he overheard his dad telling a friend how he had cheated on his taxes, saying, "They'll never find out." When Tommy was eighteen he was caught cheating on an exam and thrown out of college. His mother cried, "How could you do this to us? We raised you right!" His dad said, "Son, you have embarrassed your mother and me. Why did you do it?" Clearly, one essential part of moral training is to model holiness in your own life as a parent.

Conclusion

We are in the midst of a moral crisis on several levels: a social crisis because of a rejection of adequate moral standards, a crisis among Christians because of a lack of understanding about how to interpret the moral principles of Jesus, and a crisis in the church due to a lack of conviction about right and wrong. What are we willing to do to respond to these serious moral straits that we find ourselves in? How will we respond to the culture we live in? What will we do to be personally committed to the

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moral education of our young people? What will we do to promote the beautiful practicality of Jesus' moral teaching? 753 Saucito Ave., Salinas, California 93906

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Voids in a Child's Life: No Father, No Mother, Adoption

Ted M. Warwick

This is the season when our thoughts turn to children, in whose eyes we see our ideas still shining, our dreams still glowing, our hopes still bright. At this time of year, it is perfectly acceptable to be sentimental, yet we know that only sentimentalists have ever regarded childhood as a time of untroubled innocence. Today, there is more trouble for children and less time for innocence than in recent generations.

Pick up the newspaper and every day you see something about teens and parents and their difficulties. As I looked at the research, interviewed professionals, and talked to parents and their children, several issues were apparent. Today's children and adolescents are growing up in family units that are vastly different from what they were just thirty years ago, and researchers are finding correlations between specific family structures and adolescent problems.

One problem that continued to surface was the lack of parental involvement in the life of the children. This was especially true when it came to the father's involvement.

In the topic assigned, "Voids in a Child's Life: No Father, No Mother, Adoption," the following questions will be addressed:

1. "What are some problems that can develop when these situations exist in a home?"
2. "How can the parents anticipate and prepare for these problems?"
3. "What can we do?"

My prayer is that we can share some things together, deal with some insights from our research, hear from you in the latter part of our discussion time today, and reach some consensus as to how we believe God can help us serve our families better.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the command to teach one's children about God goes far back in the life of God's people. When Moses, the leader of the Israelites and giver of the Ten Commandments, spoke to his people about entering the Promised Land, he told them they were to keep alive the story of how God had led them out of slavery in Egypt. God spoke to parents in Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 11. He told parents,

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth (Deut. 11:18-21).

There was an obligation for these parents to create a teaching situation. There was nothing optional about this teaching; it was absolutely imperative. The passages do not say, "If you can." They say it is mandatory that you teach your children. Paul reinforces the obligation on New Testament parents when he says, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Since it is God's plan for parents to teach their children, what happens to the child's spiritual, moral and emotional development if the parents are absent from the child's life? When I speak of "absent" fathers and mothers, I am including the following:

1. Parents who are literally and physically absent, because of death, desertion, or divorce;
2. Parents who, because of their own personal problems, are so emotionally detached from their children that they are as good as absent;
3. Parents who are present in the home and involved in their children's lives, but in unhealthy ways.

Some of you may have been fortunate to have been reared in ideal circumstances. You may have had parents who had the time, energy, interest, patience, and warmth it takes to raise kids; however, a lot of kids simply aren't so blessed. They grow up in troubled households where parents have failed them or let them down in some way and to some degree. Some have parents who are absent because of death, divorce, or abandonment. Some have parents who are so emotionally detached from their children that they are as good as absent. Some have parents who violated them in some way, whether physically, psychologically, or sexually.

Studies suggest that the kind of family a youngster lives in has a direct correlation to his behavioral problems, his academic achievements, and to a greater degree, his perception of God, Christ, the church, and the spiritual disciplines.

First, I would like to focus for a few moments on the void created in families by the absentee father. Some fathers are present physically, but absent in virtually every other aspect. They don't factor into family activities or discussion. In fact, they seldom speak at all, unless it is to punish. Careers, professions, success become the compelling drive in their lives.

Dr. James Dobson (1984) is correct when he says, "The Western world stands at a great crossroads in its history. It is my opinion that our very survival as a people will depend on the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes."

There is no question that the absence of a father in the home brings serious consequences. For example, U.S. News & World Report (1995) reported, "Dad is destiny. More than virtually any other factor, a biological father's presence in the family will determine a child's success and happiness."

David Blakenhorn (1995), author of a provocative new book **Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem**, argues that, "Fatherless is the most destructive trend of our generation."

Is a fatherless America a cause for alarm, and is it the most destructive trend of our generation? What do others say?

One of the more recent terrorist threats to our way of life is the proliferation of young men and women into gangs. In interviews with members of the Wichita Falls Gang Tactical Units, I asked, "What, in your professional opinion, has most contributed to the rise of organized gangs?" Their answer: "Several factors—but the number one cause is the lack of parental control and families headed by mothers. Gangs predominantly derive membership from homes with absentee fathers. Like cults, gangs are counterfeit families. The father's responsibility is to provide intimacy, discipline, love and value. Gangs and cults provide all four."

Former Wichita Falls probation officer, Don Wallace, told me that ninety-five percent of all cases referred to his office were children who came from fatherless homes, or homes that had a stepfather and occasionally a stepmother, and the child seldom liked his stepparent.

Dr. Hillary Montsinger, who has a private counseling practice in Dallas, works closely with the inmates at Huntsville Department of Corrections. He told me that, without exception, every young man he interviewed over a period of ten years responded the same when asked, "What is the one reason you are where you are today?" He said, "Without exception they told me, 'My dad was not a strong positive force in my life while I was growing up.' " Additionally, *U. S. News & World Report* (1995) reported that only forty-three percent of state prison inmates grew up with both parents, and that a missing father is a better predictor of criminal activity than race or poverty.

The Director of the Job Corps of the State of Oklahoma told me that over a period of twenty-five years of working and interviewing young men for the Job Corps, each one told him (with few exceptions), "I never had a parent who cared what I did. No one ever said they loved me and my parents told me I would never amount to anything. My dad was never around." The Director went on to say, "Most of the young people referred to my office are coming from dysfunctional homes where the father is absent, the kids are out of control and the mother has had to work."

Derek Miller (1986), a Northwestern University psychiatrist who specializes in adolescent problems, believes the situation is getting steadily worse. He stated, "If you want to know what tomorrow will look like, go and look in the ghetto. They've had no family structure for years, no fathers and single-parent mothers, and look at the mess that's there. Then go look in the suburbs; the same trends in family breakdown are there."

There are other critical areas as well. For example, how a child relates to his dad will determine to a large extent how he perceives God. If dad is patient, forgiving,

warm, and loving, his child is likely to see God that way. If dad is critical, harsh, and demanding, he is likely to think of God having similar characteristics.

Norman Wright (1989) a well-known author and marriage and family counselor, states that, "What a father gives to his daughter affects her expectations toward the men in her life. Similarly, what a father withholds from his daughter can also affect her expectations toward other men." Author Heather Harpham (1991) agrees. In *Daddy, Where Are You?*, she talks about "daughters who struggled to relate well with men, to trust God, to stop searching in all the wrong places for what they failed to receive from their dads," and "daughters who needed to find another father in God."

The father's parenting role is unique and important. God has entrusted the primary responsibility for their children's material provision to the father, not the mother. Paul wrote, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). Dad is responsible, as we have read from Ephesians and Deuteronomy, for the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of the family. Nowhere is it more beautifully exemplified than Moses' admonition in Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 11, and nowhere is it more tragically portrayed when God's admonition is ignored than in the accounts of Eli, Samuel, David, and Hezekiah's children.

Eli was a great priest but a poor father. 1 Samuel 2:29 contains a sad statement. It says he honored his sons Hophni and Phinehas above Jehovah. That is nothing new, is it? That sounds like the front page headlines. Who was calling the plays? Hophni and Phinehas were. They told their daddy what they were going to do. They were running the show. In 1 Samuel 3:13, the Bible says that "... his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them." The family was going to be disgraced. There was nothing Eli could do about it because he waited too late. In verse 14, God spoke to him through Samuel and said, "... the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." That was the penalty he had to pay. He was too busy in temple affairs and judging Israel to be a daddy to his children. He was the male parent to those boys. He was not their father. He was just too busy. While committing their lives to the service of God, some parents have observed their children grow into faithless adults. As some of God's most effective people have reached out to others, they have somehow failed to reach into their families. Some confuse service to others for passing on faith to their children.

It was the problem of Samuel—his sons did not walk in his ways (1 Sam. 8:1-13). It was the problem of David—his son Absalom led a conspiracy against him (2 Sam. 15:6). It was the problem of Hezekiah—his sons did evil in God's sight (2 Kgs. 20:3, 2 Kgs. 21:2-3, 11).

Today, it's the problem of a hard working preacher or elder who never has time to play with his children or talk with his wife. He believes that's the price he has to pay. He faithfully serves God and helps many people, but he sacrifices his family on the altar of service. It's the problem of the sincere worker who spends more time with others than with his own wife. Those he serves greatly benefit from his time, effort and

energy, but his wife grows lonely and resentful, and longs for some of his time, effort, and energy. Without the presence of dad in the home, mother becomes the spiritual leader and there is no strong male influence serving as a model for the kids.

If we make superhuman efforts to save others, while at the same time losing our own families, we have created a credibility problem for ourselves. God's plan is to develop strong families out of which will come a strong church. Whenever we sacrifice our families, we immediately tamper with the future of the church. If we do not achieve some sort of balance in our giving to others, we may train a Samuel, but rear a Hophni and Phinehas.

After I have become a New Testament Christian, God prioritizes my ministries: (1) He gives me my wife; (2) He gives me my children; (3) beyond them, He gives me others.

Despite all the talk about fathers sharing child-rearing responsibilities equally with mothers, the fact is mothers still give most of the attention in Christian homes. It is apparent that if a father is the head of the home, the mother is the heart, and without a heart there can be no life.

I once heard about a cartoon where the dad and his several kids were trying to survive while the mother of the family was away temporarily. One of the kids was on the phone telling a friend that she was there with her father, her brothers and sisters, and even the family dog, but that "Mommy has left us all alone."

One of the saddest statements I have read was made by Sir Winston Churchill when he said about his mother, "She shone for me like the Evening Star. I loved her dearly, but at a distance."

Mothers traditionally give unconditional acceptance to their children, but children look to their father for the approval. Studies show that the person who has the greatest influence on a child being baptized is his mother, number two is dad, and number five is the preacher. The least influential person is in a step-family; the least one is the stepfather. Few people get good training on how to be a stepparent.

The question at this point may be: "If mothers traditionally assume most of the child rearing responsibilities, what is the affect on children of mothers being employed outside the home?" Since the number of mothers working outside the home is increasing dramatically, it is a good question and of deep concern in most homes.

Derek Miller (1992) of Northwestern University states, "One parent families do not provide what is needed for healthy adolescent development, and children in families where both parents work get second-quality parenting."

What Do the Kids Say About Working Moms?

Lewis, Tipples and Dodd (1992), in their questions submitted to three thousand kids, were able to define four types of mothers. Type one were mothers who stayed at home and were highly invested in their children. Type two were mothers who stayed at home but were poorly invested in their children. The third type were mothers who

Voids in a Child's Life

worked outside the home but were highly invested in their children. The fourth type were mothers who worked outside the home and were poorly invested in their children.

Not surprisingly, the homes in which the mother is not employed outside the home and is highly invested with her children reared children who showed a greater degree of abstinence from substance abuse. Working mothers who were highly invested in their children ranked higher than stay at home mothers who were emotionally neglectful of their children. The mother who does stay at home, but fails to invest time and energy in her children, is the worst of the four models.

This information contains an important message for parents. For twentieth century parents the biblical instructions are pertinent, true, and always best when observed. Paul instructed women "to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Tit. 2:5). It is reasonable to assume kids would like for mom to be home; further, the Bible teaches it is best, and obviously the chances of rearing kids who respect God and the Christian disciplines are far greater when kids are parented according to the pattern.

With all the talk about biological children experiencing conflicts with their parents, little has been focused on the adopted child, his/her bonding to the adopted parents, and the void in the child's life. Bonding and attachment and the adopted child is a study within itself.

It is very natural for children to wonder what it would be like to live with their birth parents. Almost all children—even children who are parented by their biological parents—have a fantasy that someone else would better understand them. This is called "the perfect parent fantasy" and it's an age-appropriate defense mechanism for a child to handle the anxieties that anger with a parent provokes.

When an adopted child slips into that anxiety, the child gets the feeling that someone out there would better understand him or her. For a biological child, that someone might be an aunt or an uncle. For an adopted child, that someone is often a birth parent.

When a child begins to search for his/her birth parent, many people do not understand that the adopted child is not searching for a new family; one already exists. All that an adopted child doesn't have is a complete sense of connectedness with the past. There's a blank wall drawn against it. They may feel cut off from a piece of themselves by that wall.

S. Norman Sherry (1988) wrote that "the desire to know and identify with one's genealogic past is now seen as natural and desirable for normal personality development." He notes that "the teen's desire to search is not a denial of adoptive ties," but is, in fact, "an attempt to weave the adoptive bonds into a complete life experience." He continues, "Adopted children may say they only want their medical histories when they start their searches—because it is safe to say that, and they are afraid of hurting their parents. But later, they'll admit otherwise. They'll say, 'I do want to know what she looks like.' 'I do want to develop some sort of relationship with her.' or 'I do want to know why I was given up.' "

Warren Watston (1989) reports that in his experience as both an inpatient and outpatient therapist, he has found that all of the adopted kids he has worked with deal, on one level or another, with a sense of loss, abandonment, or rejection, and may display their feelings through negative behavior. He indicates that "Some adopted children hold to extremely negative and dangerous core beliefs: 'I am so much garbage to be thrown away,' for instance, and 'If my own (biological) parents can't love me, then no one will keep me, or love me.' "

There are some helpful hints in *Gathering the Missing Pieces in an Adopted Life*, by Kay Moore (1995). She says, "Be completely prepared for the day when your child asks for more information about his or her birth family. Avoid negative comments about the birth family. Do not presume that children are not interested because they do not ask. Do not think you are going to do such a great job rearing children that they will not want to know about their birth family or even search. And, when children shout hurtful things, do not presume it is because you have failed as a parent."

Adoptive parents know more than anyone of the void that adopted children experience, and with understanding and love, they can help their child on his voyage of self-discovery through the dark, unknown past and back into the arms of his/her only "real" family—yours.

What are our kids telling us? In studies conducted by Dodd and Lewis (1992), they found even the best of our kids are saying: "Here's what I really want to see changed in my dad"—

1. I want him home. I want him available. I wish he would spend more time with me. James Dobson (1994) in responding to a question concerning the breathless pace parents are living stated,

The inevitable loser from this life in the fast lane is the little guy who is leaning against the wall with his hands in the pockets of his blue jeans. He misses his father during the long days and tags around him at night saying, "Play ball, Dad." But Dad is pooped. Besides, he has a briefcase full of work to be done. Mom, meanwhile, had promised to take him to the park this afternoon, but then she had to go to that women's auxiliary meeting at the last minute. The lad gets the message—his folks are busy again. So he drifts into the family room and watches two hours of pointless cartoons and reruns on television.

2. I wish he were self-controlled. I wish he could get a grip on his anger and temper outbursts. (We don't talk much about that do we?)
3. I wish he cared more about spiritual matters than he does his career. That real difficult task of integrating seems still to be a struggle for us.
4. I wish he could be more honest about his past, as well as his present. Isn't that interesting? It is amazing how much our kids want us to tell the story. Tell me how it was, tell me of the struggles you went through and tell me if God made a difference in helping out. We need to reveal our vulnerability and His power. Adolescents often hear us talk about our power, and so when they make mis

takes and they need love, praise and support, we're the last people they turn to because we haven't said something about the times in our past where we desperately needed Jesus as well.

5. Acceptance of me. Kids need to feel respected even when they mess up.
6. Be genuine.
7. A boldness with faith commitment. I wish he was not so embarrassed to talk openly about his own Christian commitment.
8. Show confidence in God and me. I wish he were more confident about my making good decisions and God's taking care of me.
9. Be respectful. I wish he would listen first to my opinions and needs before making up his mind or jumping to conclusions.
10. Be approachable. I wish he could made me feel safe and comfortable in sharing my real struggles with him.

And from mom:

1. Open—I wish she would be more open about her past.
2. Loosen up. I wish she would lighten up as I get older and allow me to make many of my own decisions.
3. Confidence in God. We need to talk a whole lot more about the Lord, not leaving the impression that we are making it on our own power, but by His power.
4. Let go. When do you let them start making decisions? Teens talk in codes. When they say, "I don't want any rules", what they are saying is, I really want some rules. The key is teaching them to make decisions so along the way the rules are lessened by the time they reach 16 or 17.
5. Energetic. I wish she weren't so tired at the end of the day and had time for me and my problems.
6. Confidence in me. I wish she would understand that I need privacy: she is too nosy.
7. Moodiness. I wish she weren't so moody and temperamental.
8. Music tolerance. What parents don't realize is, the issue isn't about music—its about space, their autonomy and identity. They'll choose a music that you detest, and if they can't get you to back off, they'll crank it up. When you see yourself breaking away, just tell yourself that is all they are after.
9. Communicative. I wish she were easier to talk to and would spend more time listening to me than talking to me.
10. Accepting. I wish she could accept my friends and care more about what I think than about what her friends think.

How may we identify our kids who are spiritually at risk?

1. Compounded stress
2. Toxic music
3. Low self-esteem
4. Sexual activity
5. Substance abuse
6. Alcohol among friends
7. Adoption. Dodd, Tippen, Lewis (1995) reported that only 21% of the adopted teens in their survey reported that God was the most important issue of their lives, while 35% of the non-adopted kids describe God as most important. This 14% variance highlights the need to explore, understand, and effectively minister to the special needs of adopted children.
8. Age and gender. As teens approach the mid-to late teen years, they depend less on Christ.

What can we do? Dobb, Tippen and Lewis (1995) offer the following suggestions:

1. Become thoroughly acquainted with the children of this generation.
2. Pray for your children and your children's friends and peers.
3. Engage your children frequently in conversation about matters of faith, morals and ethics. It is true that by the time the child becomes an adolescent, he knows exactly what his parents believe. But he does not always comprehend the reasons behind the beliefs.
4. Talk with your children about "core" beliefs.
5. Tell your children the story of your own spiritual pilgrimage.
6. Evaluate yourself. Determine how much time you spend with your children.
7. Get serious about practicing the spiritual disciplines in your family life.
8. Involve youth in the mission, service and worship activities in the congregation.
9. Introduce your children to their spiritual heritage.
10. Trust in God and forgive yourself.

If it is true, as I believe, that many of our values and beliefs are caught more than taught, the imperative of being together is even more essential. Dr. Royce Money, as quoted in *The Gospel According to Generation X* (1995): "... adolescents seem to reflect their parents' private view of God. Teenagers mirror what their parents privately believe." As Lewis, Dodd and Tippens (1995) state, "The point is that young people do not mysteriously adopt a set of values. *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. They come from somewhere and that somewhere includes the home." They conclude, "... our

teens are openly declaring ideas which their parents privately entertain. Consequently, we are slow to say that our children are 'drifting' from their parents' values. Quite the opposite, they may be embracing and enacting them!"

We can't make ultimate faith decisions for our children, but there is plenty we can do. First, we can clarify our own theology. It's time we clearly articulated what we believe the Bible teaches about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, the nature of humanity, sin, redemption and "the last things" (i.e., heaven, hell, and the last judgment).

Second, we must be in such relationships with our children that we can hear them, understand them, and share in their faith struggles.

Third, we must model Jesus' life to them. We must show them daily what it means to imitate Christ. In other words, we don't hand them a theology to read—we join them on a life-changing journey. We connect them so intimately that they become our spiritual apprentices. This was Paul's method for developing faith in Timothy, and it is a good method for training our children.

... you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance . . . But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them (2 Tim. 3:10, 14, NKJV).

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Coping with Abuse in the Home

Greg Gay

In jest, I once asked a man in the church if he had ever heard of that old question that could not be answered: "Are you still beating your wife?" Obviously embarrassed, the man replied, "That's a good one, isn't it." Strangely, a few Sundays later his wife appeared at worship in sunglasses. As it turned out, he had been beating her for years. Spousal abuse was just one of the family's many secrets.

Is there abuse in homes in the church today? I am sad to report the answer is "Yes." What kind of abuse is in homes in the church? Every kind that can be named or imagined. This should not surprise us, since all of us are capable of every sin. Abuse in the church is obviously not out in the open for everyone to see, or else it would certainly be stopped just as soon as it is known.

Most of the time, when abuse exists in a family it is the best kept secret in the house. We need to understand there is tremendous pressure in an abusive family for the abuse to be kept secret. The abuser and the abused will often go to great lengths to keep their secret hidden. The abuser wants the secret kept so they can continue their evil deeds. The one being abused is usually threatened into silence or so ashamed they do not want to say anything. Both will likely evade questions, even deceive and lie rather than reveal the family's dark secrets. In abusive families, as an author has said, "The world of the living is always fraught with deception. Beneath the placid surface, ugly mechanisms grind away at secret tasks" (Koontz 55).

We may think that if a child is molested it was just an unfortunate accident, a spur of the moment decision that happened to be wrong. From my studies, I don't believe that is possible.

Molestation is not merely a chance occurrence that comes into the mind of offenders in a short time. Instead, they carefully and deliberately train their victims for offense. Observation and research have led psychologists to see sexual abuse as a coldly calculated and carefully planned crime of opportunity in which other family members may collude.

Before the crime can take place, the offender has carefully set up a situation in which he can make the crime happen; he has groomed both family and victim to a state where they will not object too strenuously (Vredevelt & Rodriguez 69).

When all family members "agree" to keep quiet about such secrets, those secrets become powerful, though unacknowledged, shapers of behavior. Claudia Black, in her book *It Will Never Happen To Me*, has identified three almost universal rules in dysfunctional families. They are: "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel." When those secrets become known, all who are involved need a lot of help to recover from their problems.

We have families in the church today who are mired in the midst of an abusive situation. Some have been disclosed and are in the slow, painful process of recovery. Other abusive situations, I am sure, have not yet been discovered, but they exist, damaging lives today and tomorrow and through future generations. For any family to keep abuse secret and not talk, not trust and not feel; robs each family member of the dignity and self-respect God intends them to have.

Here are some typical abuse reports:

A mother says, "A teenage boy in the congregation has molested my son."

A little girl tells her parents on the way home from seeing relatives, "Uncle _____ always hugs me funny."

A family tells you, "We just found out our son and daughter have been abused by a relative who has been staying with us."

A wife comes to worship with her arm in a sling. You are told she fell. She falls again a month later, only this time she has a black eye.

You are speaking to the little children at worship and see bruises on the back of a little girl's legs. You mention the bruises to the parents and they tell you, "She won't cry so we used a wire coat hanger on her."

You hear a father saying to his child, "You are the most worthless child I have ever seen. How can you be so stupid?"

The mother of a confessed teenage child molester tells you, "I don't want the congregation to know my son is a molester. Will you keep it a secret?" You later see the molester holding a little girl.

A wife says to you, "My husband has admitted fondling our little girl."

A wife says, "My husband got mad and knocked a hole in the wall. Last time he broke a lamp."

A husband tells you, "My wife started spanking one of the children and couldn't stop."

You are visiting a home and the wife says, "My husband really doesn't treat me like he should, he yells at me and pushes me." The husband interrupts to say, "We don't need to bother the preacher with that. We'll talk about it later."

A broken-hearted, gray-haired sister tells you, "Our thirty-five year old daughter just told me my husband sexually molested her for five years when she was growing up. I did not know."

Please know, these situations are very real in the church. I personally know of far too many abusive situations in the church from the past and present. Even one is too many. We must stop this horrible sin and not have it named among us. I would love to think just mentioning the sin of abuse would cause it to go away. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that is not realistic.

For many years abuse of any kind has been hidden and denied in our nation. In the past, children were not considered believable if they told a story of abuse. Also in the

past, a wife was not considered credible if she dared speak out against her husband. Not anymore.

In fact, today the pendulum of belief has swung to the other extreme. Today a wife is considered a very credible witness, even against her husband. And it is not uncommon for a child to be believed before an adult. Sadly, it has been proven time and time again, that if a child is not properly interviewed when abuse is suspected, he or she can be coached and manipulated into saying and believing abuse has occurred, when actually it has not. This, by the way, is only one reason why a preacher should never, never counsel a child or a woman alone. It is just not wise.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported about Wenatchee, Washington:

[A] town nestled in the foothills of the Cascades, population 59,000. Since the child sex ring investigations began here, more than 40 people have been arrested—several charged with 2,400 and more counts of sex abuse. One woman was charged with 3,200 counts of child rape—a lifetime's work. Child Protective Services has by now placed some 50 children of the accused in foster homes. Among those tried was 31-year-old Sunday School teacher Honna Sims, accused of raping and molesting children during the group sex adventures at Pastor Roberson's church every Friday and Sunday night—charges of which she was later acquitted. One child testified he was so tired from having to engage in sexual acts with all the adults at the church on weekends that the pastor would write a note to the school to get him excused on Mondays (*Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 1995).

Remember, the Sunday School teacher in question was acquitted, but at tremendous cost, not only financially but emotionally as well.

There has been a popular movement the last ten years or so for therapists to help patients recall abuse that happened at such an early age it cannot be remembered, or was so painful it was repressed and cannot be recalled without extensive help. This theory of repressed memories has achieved such popularity that by 1993 some 21 states had altered their laws allowing an extension of the statute of limitations so individuals can be charged with abuse they are accused of committing two or three decades earlier. In March 1992, the False Memory Syndrome Foundation met for the first time and at that time consisted of the parents of 4,000 families who say they have been falsely accused of sexually abusing their children (Networker 20).

Even though the possibility of false accusation is real and does exist, we must not deny, nor can we minimize the reality of abuse in our society and in the church.

There are many different forms of active and passive abuse including: sexual abuse, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and substance abuse, which includes legal and illegal drugs and alcohol. There is child abuse, spousal abuse and the abuse of those who are older, known as elder abuse.

In my research I even found a book entitled *Churches That Abuse*. The book's cover states its purpose is to help those "hurt by legalism, authoritarian leadership, and

spiritual intimidation" (Enroth). By the way, the Boston Movement of the church of Christ is listed in that book.

A Bible character who could have been listed in that book, but is not, is the evil Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9-10):

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church (NASV).

The word in verse 10 translated "puts them out" in the NASV, or "casteth them out" in the KJV, means "literally, to cast forth, with the suggestion of force" (Vine 340).

An author writes:

Churches and families often mirror one another. Secrets, abuse, and immorality tolerated in the one can be practiced in the other. Anything that can run in families can run in churches. The pastor who lives in immorality will attract families who tolerate immorality. Similarly, abusive families will tolerate abusive church leadership (Carder 141).

On the other hand, families who are not abusive will not tolerate abusive church leadership. This can sometimes explain the migration of Christians away from a congregation when there is a change in the leadership and the new leadership can be described as domineering tyrants, or "lords over God's heritage" (1 Pet. 5:3).

The dictionary defines "abuse" as: "n. 1 Improper or injurious use; perversion; misuse. 2 Ill-treatment; cruel treatment; injury. 3 Vicious conduct, practice, or act (Funk & Wagnall's).

Society and law have further described abuse to mean anything that goes beyond the bounds of proper behavior in any relationship. Each form of abuse must be carefully studied and compared to the principles we know from God's Word.

H. Norman Wright reports:

When Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in 1974, the act identified four kinds of abuse: (1) physical, (2) neglect, (3) emotional and (4) sexual. Neglect occurs more than we realize, and includes abandonment, neglecting needed medical treatment, inadequate provisions for the child's basic physical and educational needs.

Physical abuse usually refers to brutal physical contact rather than accidental. This can include any behavior that either intends to inflict, or actually does inflict, physical harm. It consists of pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, kicking, biting, choking, punching, hitting with an object or attacking with a knife or gun.

Emotional abuse has a multitude of expressions. Scare tactics, insults, yelling, temper tantrums, name calling and continual criticism fall into this classification. Threatened violence is a form of emotional abuse, too. Holding up a weapon, swinging a fist near the person's face, destroying property or kicking a child's pet falls into this category.

Withholding privileges or affection or constantly blaming one family member for the family's difficulties is abuse.

Domestic abuse is much more common in couples who come for counseling than ministers and therapists may be aware. The violence is directly related to the patterns of power and communication between spouses that have been influenced by each person's values, esteem and family background (Wright 242).

One definition of child molestation is by Anna Saltzor in *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims*:

Child molestation is: sexual activity between a child or adolescent with an adult or another child five years or more older than the child. Sexual activity will include exhibitionism, voyeurism, fondling, oral genital sex, (any form of) intercourse, photographing or otherwise exhibiting children sexually, exposing children to pornographic literature, and forcing or manipulating children to engage in sexual acts with each other or with animals. Sexual experiences with relatives and violent or coerced experiences will automatically be considered sexual abuse regardless of the age differential. There are exceptions to the age-differential criterion when common sense will indicate that a particular situation is abusive, for example, manipulated consent of a retarded child by a non-retarded child of a similar age.

It may seem strange that child abuse is such a huge concern in a nation which believes and encourages the ultimate child abuse, abortion. Nevertheless, our country has a conscience in the area of child abuse for which we should be thankful. We can only hope and pray that same conscience will extend to unborn children in the future as well.

Society, in an attempt to overcome extreme, abusive, punishment of children has bent completely the other direction, and "some psychologists and psychiatrists have stated explicitly that no parent should ever spank a child" (Dodson 61). This popular theory causes a great deal of problems for parents. When parents punish their children how are they to know when punishment stops being normal behavior and becomes abusive? Obviously, we do not seek this knowledge to see how close to abuse parents can be and get away with it, but so they can avoid the problem altogether.

Charles Swindoll answers this difficult question:

Since ours is a day of extremism, it is necessary to clarify a few distinctions for there to be complete understanding. First, there is a distinction between abuse and discipline. Invariably, when someone desires to find fault with a person who believes in the disciplining of children, the most effective way to do so is to claim abuse.

Let us not forget the Bible requires the discipline of children: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die: thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell (Prov. 23:13-14, KJV).

Zerr comments: "We thus see that the beating does not necessarily call for harsh or brutal use of the stick, but only such use as to accomplish the correction needed" (191).

Abuse

Unfair and unexpected
Degrading and demoralizing
Extreme—too harsh, brutal
Torturous-leaves scars
Results from hatred and
resentment
Creates terror, emotional
damage and resentment
of authority
Destroys self-esteem;
leads to horrifying,
permanent damage and
the inability, later in life,
to maintain responsibilities

(Swindoll 94)

Discipline

Fair and expected
Upholds dignity
Balanced—within limits
Painful-but leaves no scars
Prompted by love and concern
Leads to healthy respect of and
for authority.
Strengthens self-esteem;
leads to the individual's
ability to later discipline
himself

This Old Testament general rule about discipline must be reconciled with passages like: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4, KJV).

We can conclude, while punishment for a child is appropriate, it is not intended to result in severe harm or death for the child, and should not unnecessarily provoke them to anger. Any parent who abuses a child in the process of punishing them is wrong, just as anyone who abuses a child for any reason is wrong.

Abusive situations in the Bible involving children include: Cain who slew his brother Abel (Gen. 4); Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 37); Pharaoh who ordered young boys killed in the days of Moses (Ex. 1); Herod; who did the same thing in the days of Christ (Mt. 2); and Tamar who was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13). While the Bible is not replete with examples of abuse, nevertheless, we can learn that abuse of children is wrong by the positive commands and examples of the Scriptures.

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children" (NKJV). Also, in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory" (NIV).

Fathers and mothers are to be gentle, and to encourage, comfort, and urge their children to obedience and correct behavior. These verses then must be reconciled with

other passages that explain the consequences to children when they do not obey their parents. Since children are commanded to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1), there obviously must be consequences for the lack of obedience. The consequences can be found in Hebrews 12:5-11.

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (NIV).

Can a father be encouraging and exercise discipline? Can a mother be gentle and discipline her children? Yes, obviously. Every child is to be disciplined (v. 7). The discipline is expected to hurt (v. 11), but will ultimately produce respect (v. 9), righteousness and peace (v. 11).

Popular methods of child discipline today vary quite a bit from a few years ago. Here are the results of a 1962 survey of how parents disciplined their children under the age of 14: 59% spanked, 38% denied TV privileges, 23% lectured, and 20% used time-outs.

A follow up 1992 survey shows: 38% use time-outs, 24% lectured, 19% spanked, and 15% denied TV privileges (Wall Street Journal, April 13, 1993).

While no one method is guaranteed to be effective 100% of the time, each can be right or wrong depending on the occasion, and the consistency with which discipline is administered.

Dr. C. Henry Kempe, a pediatrician at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, first used the term battered-child syndrome. The term child abuse covers at least three separate entities: physical assault, physical neglect, and emotional abuse and neglect. In the first of these the child is a victim of an act of aggression.

These case histories are typical of thousands: Case 1: Police found a nine-year-old girl in a closet measuring twenty-three by fifty-two inches, where she had been locked for half of her life. She weighed only twenty pounds and stood less than three feet tall. Smeared with filth and scarred from parental beatings, this child had become irrevocably mentally damaged. Case 2: An eleven-year-old boy was brought to a San Francisco hospital suffering from severe malnutrition. He weighed forty-four pounds, had a body temperature of eighty-four degrees and was in a coma. The suspicious marks on his wrists and ankles were related to his mother's and her boyfriend's immobilization of the boy for hours on end by means of handcuffs, chains and locks.

The second variety of child abuse, physical neglect, is probably many times more frequent than either the medical profession or the police can document. The third form, emotional abuse, is not only difficult to define but more difficult to detect and prove—after which comes the very difficult task of rehabilitative therapy . . . To begin to grasp the enormity of the problem, consider that in 1972 there were 60,000 child abuse incidents which were brought to official attention in the United States. Just four years later, in 1976, the number that received official attention passed the half-million mark. Reported cases of child abuse probably represent only about half of what really occurs . . . An especially alarming form of dehumanization is the apparent increase of incest. Dr. Harry Giarretto, director of the pioneering Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Center in San Jose, California, says that incest is an epidemic in America. Dr. Amanat, who heads up the Sexual Abuse Committee in Saint Louis, believes that 40,000 of the 1,000,000 victims of sexual abuse a year are victims of incest. Some say that incest is the most frequent unrecorded crime in this country and much more common than general child abuse or child neglect (Schaeffer 29-31).

We see an article like the one that follows far too often:

The beating started at dinner time, when 6-year-old Malcolm Jones refused to do his homework. By the next morning he was dead, covered with blows from a belt and a packing-crate board, the victim of what police called four hours of "torture." And his great aunt and guardian Mae Robertson, 48 was arrested on suspicion of murder (The Sacramento Bee, September 13, 1995)

Reports of child abuse in the United States have grown from 6,000 in 1963 to 1,477,000 in 1983 to 2,936,000 in 1992 (Social Work Research).

California reported over 500,000 incidents of child abuse in 1989. The types of abuse in order of the highest number of reports are as follows: General neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, caretaker absence, severe neglect, emotional abuse, and exploitation (The California Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Law, April 1991).

I have also learned abuse can be added to the list of the many reasons children leave the church after they grow up and leave their parent's home. This is not to say abuse is involved in all cases, or even in very many cases, but I know from my work through the years this can be a major contributing factor.

It far too common for sin to be blamed on someone other than the sinner. Just as Adam blamed the woman for his sin (Gen. 3:12), abusers often blame the one they are abusing with such reasoning as : "I had to hit my spouse. She deserved to be hit just like my mom used to." "I had to beat my children just like I was beaten as a child." Contrary to popular belief, abuse is not genetic. It is not a disease that can be inherited or caught. It is not a personality trait that some possess and others do not. It can, however, be learned.

Dr. James Dobson writes:

We parents develop our child-rearing styles primarily from watching our own mothers and fathers who served as role models. Even when we disliked what they did to us, we were influenced by the standard they set. "This is how the job is done," they seemed to say. Thus, when we are grown and have children of our own, our tendency

during times of frustration and stress is to imitate what we learned at home. More than 60 percent of abusive parents were themselves abused as children . . .

Even though we understand its cause, child abuse cannot be tolerated. Its effect on a developing youngster can be devastating. That's why I recommend loving toughness when one parent observes consistent violence being inflicted on a boy or girl by the spouse. What one permissive parent may interpret as child abuse may be, in fact, good discipline by the other spouse. The ideal approach is for mothers and fathers who disagree on techniques of discipline to discuss the matter with a wise, neutral counselor who can mediate the conflict.

But let's be realistic. There are hundreds of thousands of homes today where one parent is aware of injustice and cruelty on the part of the other. Perhaps the father overreacts in response to routine childishness, beating the kids in anger or vindictiveness. Or maybe a mother is thrashing a colicky infant or punishing an older child too severely. What is a concerned parent to do under those circumstances? If he goes to the authorities, he threatens to destroy his home and incur the wrath of his spouse. Furthermore, the family's reputation in the community will be tarnished and their friendships undermined. Often, the price is too great and the mother or father chooses not to pay it. Therefore, their little children suffer the brunt of this injustice without advocacy.

Worse yet, I have become aware in recent years that many mothers knowingly permit their husbands to abuse their daughters sexually for the same reasons! I have seen numerous situations where a little girl was expected to relieve the sexual pressure on her mother by satisfying the father's passions. Unbelievable, you say! Hardly! It is estimated that 20 to 25 percent of all females in this country were sexually abused as children, most of them in their own homes (154-156).

H. Norman Wright writes:

Abusiveness is a learned behavioral response. It is neither a disease nor a personality defect. All people are capable of and have the potential for violence. Excessive anger is not inherited. This helps couples realize they are responsible for doing something about their behaviors.

"Abuse" can be defined as any behavior that is designed to control and/or subjugate another human through the use of fear, humiliation and verbal or physical assaults. In a sense, it is the systematic persecution of one family member by another.

During recent years, researchers have been able to answer most of our questions about the circumstances leading to, and involving, abuse in marriage.

Where does most marital violence occur? Usually in the home and most often the living room or the bedroom.

Is there a safe place within the home? Strange as it seems, the bathroom becomes the safe place where family members take refuge. It's usually the only room that has a lock on the door.

Are certain times more vulnerable for violence to occur? Most couples become involved in abuse between 6:00 PM and midnight. Other common times are weekends, Christmas and New Year's Eve and Day.

The evening meal can create an abusive climate because of family tensions. During the dinner, family members often tend to complain about their day. Many of the conflicts begin about control of the children, money matters running second.

Does abusive behavior become more severe over time? A serious finding is that as the frequency of abusive episodes increases, the more severe the episodes become.

A couple's working pattern seems to contribute to the likelihood of abuse. Abuse is more common when the spouses work on different rotating shifts or when both are unemployed. Abuse is also more likely to happen when the wife is pregnant (242-243).

Wright further states "There is a distinct pattern to abuse and especially marital abuse." This pattern includes what Wright calls "mutual dependency, limited endurance and remorse and repentance" (243-244).

Mutual Dependency or the "Tension-Building Phase" is when

... the woman senses her mate's increasing tension. He is "edgy" and perhaps challenges her and tells her she is stupid, incompetent, etc. The woman may internalize her appropriate anger at the man's unfairness and experience physical effects such as depression, tension, anxiety and headaches. As the tension in the relationship increases, minor episodes of violence increase, such as pinching, slapping or shoving (Van De Kamp).

Limited endurance or the "Acute-Battering Incident" is when

... the tension-building phase ends in an explosion of violence. The woman may or may not fight back. Following the battering, she is in a state of physical and psychological shock. The man may discount the episode and underestimate the woman's injuries (Van De Kamp).

This is then followed by remorse and repentance also known as "Loving Reconciliation."

During the last phase of the family violence cycle, both parties have a sense of relief that "it's over." The man is often genuinely sorry for what happened and is fearful that his partner will leave him. He apologizes and may "shower" her with love and praise that helps her repair her shattered self-esteem. He tells her he can't live without her, so she feels responsible for his well-being and guilty for her actions and blames herself for what led up to the abuse (Van De Kamp).

Then, the cycle starts all over again, often with ever increasing violence.

Why would anyone stay in a situation like this? "While reasons cover the range from children, love, guilt, fear, pride, embarrassment, financial dependence—or a combination thereof—it is very possible the woman is unaware that she may be locked into a violence cycle" (Van De Kamp).

An article in *Personnel Journal* states:

The Office of Criminal Justice calculates that three to four million women are battered each year. Indeed, according to the U.S. Surgeon General's office, domestic violence is the most widespread cause of injury for women 15 to 44—surpassing car accidents, muggings and rapes combined. And although women in traditional relationships are

the most common victims of domestic violence, this social disease strikes down others as well. Men are abused by female and male partners, parents and siblings beat children, youngsters abuse elders and even roommates can strike each other in anger.

The broken bones and scarred psyches of domestic violence don't remain at home, either. Domestic violence takes a shocking toll in the workplace—in lost productivity, increased health-care costs, absenteeism, and sometimes workplace violence. One estimate by the Bureau of National Affairs rings up a price tag to corporate America at \$3 billion to \$5 billion annually—a piece of change too hefty to ignore (p. 64).

Nothing has raised our awareness of spouse abuse more than the O. J. Simpson trial for the murders of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. Whether you agree with the verdict in the murder trial or not, there can be no doubt Mr. Simpson was an abusive husband, and the authorities were really lax in dealing with the situation. Long before football star O. J. Simpson was arrested following the murder of his wife, he was known to the police in the community where he lived. His wife had called for help eight times before the 1989 night when police arrived at Simpson's door to investigate a report that he had blackened his wife's eye, split her lip, and choked her. The football legend told the officers, "This is a family matter. Why do you want to make a big deal of it?" Those words, says columnist Anna Quindlen, speak for thousands of other batterers "who think it is unworthy of public notice they assault the women they live with, bully them with words, silence them with looks, finally shut them up with their fists" (Collins 270-272).

How Can Preachers Help a Family Deal with Abuse?

Obviously, a preacher can and should be someone to turn to for help with this burden, but please be warned, this is not an easy problem to deal with. This is not the same as studying with a person who has a question about a Bible verse or a doctrinal issue. A preacher can't share a verse or two and the problems disappear. To help a family through an abuse problem is a long-term commitment that often is filled with much more disappointment than joy for all involved. The family member or members who have been abused must receive special help and attention. The person who is the abuser, the criminal, must receive special help and attention. And the rest of the family must also receive special help and attention.

If this sounds quite complicated, it is. But there is more. Minor children are given protection under the law. So it is very likely any child abuse case a preacher deals with will need to be reported to the proper authorities. Helping abused children may involve knowing what foster home they have been placed in if the children are removed from the home for their own protection. Helping an abuser can involve helping him arrange for separate living quarters or bail to get out of jail. Helping the rest of the family may mean helping them deal with the shock of all the other "help" they have received.

At least in California, and I presume most other states, preachers have an obligation to report child abuse to the proper authorities. In California, preachers as a group are not specifically named as legally mandated reporters, however, the state guide on *The California Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Law* states:

Clergy are legally mandated reporters only if they are acting in the capacity of a mandated reporter (e.g., psychologist, teacher, marriage, family and child counselor . . .) at the time they receive the information that causes them to suspect child abuse. Mandated reporters must identify themselves when making child abuse reports, however they have immunity from criminal or civil liability unless the report is proven to be false and the person reporting knows it is false (5, 17).

I would not advise attempting to ignore this law. The guide further states:

A person who fails to make a required report is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in jail and/or up to a \$1,000 fine. He or she may also be found civilly liable for damages, especially if the child-victim or another child is further victimized because of the failure to report (5).

While preachers are required to report abuse, whether or not a problem is abuse becomes a judgment call. I once had a parent confess to spanking a child excessively. I talked very sternly to the parent to warn them of the consequences of continuing in that practice and gave them some alternative punishment methods to use. I chose not to report the incident. As it turned out, I was wrong. My warning was not sufficient help to stop the behavior. School teachers later reported the problem. Can you imagine how I would have felt had I learned a child had been permanently injured or even died because of me failing to report? As it is, the abuse continued longer than it should have.

We must also do what we can to help the abuser. The way a preacher can help is by insisting that the proper authorities be called and the person starts getting the help they need to be rid of this sin in their life. In California, mandated reporters "must clearly understand that his/her responsibility is to make the assessment, determine if 'reasonable suspicion exists' and then report. Therapists are not responsible to investigate or collect evidence. The investigation (in the case of child abuse) is conducted by Child Protective Agencies" (The California Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Law 10). If the problem is spouse abuse, local law enforcement will conduct the investigation. Many times the spouse has the option of whether or not to "press charges." While that, too, becomes a judgment call, I would usually encourage charges be filed so the family can receive the maximum protection the law allows.

Many times the abuser and their family will want to hide the problem and may even beg the preacher to not to turn them in. Please don't fall for that. If a problem has been going on for years, mere discovery is not enough to stop the problem. Also, the abuser and their family will likely beg the preacher not to tell the church. What I have done with this request is tell the leaders of the congregation about the problem and leave notification up to them. What I personally recommend depends on the situation. For example, if a confessed child molester is in the congregation, I want every parent to know. But if parents inappropriately punished their child once, I would not feel the same. Or, if a husband was not treating his wife correctly, while I might choose to share that with congregational leaders, I would want it kept quiet if at all possible.

Preachers must not lose sight of sin when dealing with a problem of abuse. It will be everywhere he turns, perhaps in every family member. The temptation will be to

ignore it and hope it goes away. I'm sorry, but that is not realistic. We must recognize abuse of any kind as sin. It may be habitual sin, but it is still sin. It may be sin learned as a child being repeated as an adult, but it is still sin. The worst thing to do is to ignore the problem and hope it will go away. Remember, the last thing an abusive individual wants is publicity, but that is exactly what they need. They need exposure. Their deeds that have been committed in darkness are evil (1 Jn. 1:5-6) and must be brought to the light. Remember, people cannot grow and develop in the darkness of evil, but only in the light. That is why God's discipline is so wise:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mt. 18:15-17, KJV).

Preachers must educate themselves about abuse in all its evil forms. Take a class, go to the library and read some books, or buy some books to read, look in the phone book and call Child Protective Services in your area and ask for information, call or visit a shelter for battered wives and ask for information. All of these sources can help educate a preacher in what to look for and give suggestions of what to do.

Preachers must not gossip about these problems. While some may have a "need to know," most don't. I advise that we don't use the problems we encounter as examples in our sermons or in casual conversation. Professional care givers are bound to confidentiality except in those areas where they are required by law to report a problem. Preachers may need to talk to congregational leaders to inform them of a problem, or they may need to talk to someone for advice on how to handle a situation, or they may need to report the problem to the proper authorities, but I do not believe these situations should be discussed in vivid detail with everyone the preacher visits.

Preachers should not attempt to handle a problem they are not equipped to handle. While that may be obvious, it needs to be understood. I have had some success working with individuals who are also seeing professional counselors. The professional counselor provides educated opinions and experience in dealing with similar situations. I provide the spiritual side and filter the advice they are given through God's Word. There are also educated individuals in the church in various parts of the country who will gladly act as advisers to anyone who calls for help.

How difficult these situations can be is illustrated by a situation described by Dr. James Dobson. A wife (Laura) is beaten regularly by a husband who has a violent temper. Each time the husband insists the altercation was her fault. No one knows of the abuse. Dr. Dobson responds:

As I see it, Laura only has four alternatives in response to her circumstance. They are:

1. Remain silent at home, walk on cracked eggs, and be the eternal conciliator. She is taking this approach now, but it is not succeeding . . . For the long term, this is not the answer.

2. Divorce her husband. As a Christian, I agree with Laura that divorce is not the solution to this problem. Our purpose should be to change her husband's behavior, not kill the marriage.
3. Proceed with an emotional divorce, remaining married but keeping herself detached and independent from her husband. This form of emotional isolation will shield Laura from psychological pain, but it will make for a terrible relationship. I don't favor it.
4. The love must be tough response. This is risky and psychologically expensive, but it is my choice and my recommendation. In essence, Laura is being emotionally blackmailed by her husband. He is saying by his behavior, "Do what I wish or I'll beat you." She must break out of that tyranny while she's still young enough to cope with the consequences. This might be accomplished by forcing the matter to a crisis. Change of behavior does not occur when waters are smooth, as we have seen; it sometimes happens after a storm. I would suggest that Laura choose the most absurd demand her husband makes, and then refuse to consent to it. Let him rage if he must rage. She should prearrange a place to go and ask friends or relatives to step in for assistance at that critical moment. Separate living quarters may be necessary until her husband settles down. He should be made to think that he has lost his wife over this issue, and in fact, I would recommend that she not return until there is reason to believe that he is willing to change. If that takes a year, so be it. When (and if) her husband acknowledges that he has a severe problem and promises to deal with it if she'll come home, a period of negotiations should follow. One of the conditions for reconciliation is competent Christian counseling for the psychological problem that is now apparent to everyone but the husband (146-150).

Dr. Dobson makes the distinction between a repetitive situation like the one just described and the instance where "a man can become so enraged that he does something he is immediately sorry for and would never do again." He also addresses the situation where the woman deliberately provokes her husband into striking her so she can then have power in the relationship and can publicly embarrass and humiliate her husband (150).

Next, what should Christians do and not do when they find out about abuse in another Christian home?

Abuse must not be ignored. Think of it and treat it like the worst problem the church has ever encountered. Don't even think of keeping abuse a secret even if those involved have begged for confidentiality. Abuse is not a secret that should be kept. If anyone agrees to keep the abuse a secret they are aiding and abetting horrible sin that will most likely continue into the next generation of the family. I know of families in the church who are in their fourth generation of abuse. While abuse is not a secret that should be kept, it must be shared appropriately. If Christians find out about abuse in another Christian home I suggest they discuss the problem with a preacher or church leader and enlist their help in following the steps in Matthew 18 about successive discipline steps in dealing with the sin.

It may be the abuse that is discovered is a generational problem that is being continued in the family. Don and Jan Frank write:

We have found that victims tend to marry victims. We find also that spouses of victims who were sexually abused usually fall into four categories:

One, they were sexually, physically or emotionally abused themselves.

Two, they grew up in an alcoholic home or a dry alcoholic home.

Three, they grew up in a rigid, oftentimes "religious" home.

Four, they came from an emotionally deprived home. (151)

Here is advice from H. Norman Wright:

If anyone is currently being physically abused, the person needs to take the necessary steps to be removed from the setting where the victimization is taking place. (This is assuming they have tried on their own through proper confrontation or using a family or friend's intervention program and nothing has changed.) Each person is a valuable, chosen person and the person's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. No one deserves abuse. The person needs to go immediately for professional help.

To help an abused person, (whether spouse, child, or older person) the following steps must be taken:

Find out what the laws are about abuse and what legal steps can be taken. The abused person needs to know her legal status and options, spouse abuse or child abuse laws, police procedures and victim options. A safety plan needs to be devised for the abused person. This should include a safe environment—one that is accepting, non-threatening and protective. A plan must be developed to get to the safe environment, including the best timing, transportation, money, clothes and so on. Developing a network of other people to rely on and who can support the abused person is important (244-245).

Let us not forget the Bible pattern for relationships in the home: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph 5:25, 33; KJV).

God's rule for our homes is for them to be filled with love and respect following the example of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). But, even when a home is filled with love and respect, people can make mistakes and be overtaken in a fault. We need to restore them gently, considering ourselves lest we also be tempted (Gal. 6:1), realizing that we are also capable of the same sin.

God's pattern that Paul shares with Titus about those who are older advising those who are younger (Tit 2:2-6) is also God's rule for the home. In the extended family, experienced grandparents with the wisdom of their years can help young husbands and wives and parents deal with potential problems in their relationships. Tragically, with our families scattered to the four-winds across the country, and many times around the world, those who could help are not near enough to help. That means the congregation's leaders must make sure to provide for these needs and make sure they are met.

One of the fascinating facts of inspiration is that God allows us to see people as they really are. We see Adam and Eve, the climax of God's creation at their best and also at their worst when they sinned. We see Moses, the most humble man on the face of the earth as he disobeys God, strikes the rock and as a result is denied entrance into the promised land. We see David, a man after God's own heart lust after another man's wife and commit murder. We see the bold, courageous Peter deny Christ and get carried away over the false doctrine of circumcision. And when we hold ourselves up to the mirror of God's Word, we see someone who is painfully human and prone to sin. We need to be willing to see ourselves in as realistic of a light as God allows us to see the people in the Bible. The fact of the matter is, we sin too. And many times our sins are just as bad as the sins of Bible characters. In fact, most of the time, they are the same sins. For many years Christians have been coping with abuse. It is time to stop coping and start the painful process of recovery; then grow enough to be able to prevent the problem in the church before it ever starts.

Sterling writes:

Denying the existence of sexual addiction and the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse will not make these problems go away. Being properly informed, and then using such information in a positive and constructive way can make a difference" (10)

May God bless us to be strong enough to make a difference.

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Sexual Moral Crisis

Raymond Fox

Introduction

- Sexual crisis in the secular world:
 - Because of the lack of moral education.
 - Because of the lack of consistent moral standards.
 - Because of the rejection of any moral standard and the support of a subjective view of truth.
- Sexual crisis among Christians:
 - Lack of sufficient education for young people in the physical and moral aspects of sexuality.
 - Insufficient training in dealing with sexual temptation.
 - Parental responsibility for the education of their children.
 - Cannot depend on the schools to educate your children in sexuality.
 - Secular education will not reinforce Christian values and subtly teaches values that are inconsistent with Christian moral principles. ("Values free" is *not* free of values.)
- If parents leave sexual education with schools then children will not learn:
 - God's view of human sexuality.
 - How to overcome sexual temptation.
 - Morally sound behavior for dating and preparation for marriage.
 - Teaching at different stages of physical development. We do not teach long division in mathematics by just one quick session, any questions?
 - Parent's role modeling of respect, modesty, self-control, and romantic love.
- Solving the crisis through education:
 - Sexuality is a taboo subject of course in the pulpit but on the other hand in nearly every environment we are in, the world's view of sexuality confronts us. We are used to looking to the pulpit for the spiritual answers but if we cannot talk from the pulpit about these serious and pressing issues, then we will have to find another forum, whether public or private to get the information to parents about what they need to be teaching their children. The facts is the many parents do not know.
 - The following categories in the sexual education of our young people are three areas that need special attention to avoid crisis.
 - Every parent needs to formulate a plan to teach their children not only to keep them from temptation as a young person but also to help them remain faithful to their spouse when they are married.

I. Education in physical development:

A. Levels of sex education:

1. Most students in California receive instruction about sexuality when they are in the fifth and tenth grades. Parents can ask that their children be excluded in order to teach on this subject at home.
2. You might think that your children are too young to understand, but they are constantly absorbing information from their surroundings. If you do not teach them, they will receive their instruction from someone else. Children begin to learn principles and values at an early age. Unfortunately, by the time you decide to teach them about sexuality, they may already have their minds made up.
3. Young toddler: can learn the privacy of sexuality. At bath time a child can learn the correct names for parts of the body. They can learn to talk about their bodies only in private, in home with Mom or Dad. They can also learn it is wrong for people to touch them in certain ways.
4. Grade school child: differences between males and females and the basic facts of reproduction. The average age that children can comprehend this information is ten years old. Just one talk is not sufficient since, after a period of time, new questions arise. One author suggests that one way to start this talk is by saying, "I want to talk to you about something very special and very holy. Do you know how babies are born?" (*Decent Exposure*, C. Marshner). Use a film or a book with pictures on their level to illustrate your talk with them.
5. Teenager: sexual development of the body and God's plan for sexuality. You can begin the talk by saying, "Before you grow up anymore, I want to make sure you understand why God made your body the way he did. Talk about the physical changes of puberty, both male and female to resolve the mystery and point the child towards God's plan. As they progress through puberty they need to learn how to control their sexual thoughts and at the same time understand the beauty of sexuality for marriage. They need to learn rules and guidelines for dating that will keep them safe from temptation.
6. Teaching about sexuality is not a one-time endeavor but must continue as the child develops physically and emotionally. If you feel embarrassed, just remember that once you bring the subject up in an open and frank manner, the subject will always be open, and will become easier to discuss thereafter.
7. Creating an atmosphere of open communication early in their development is important in order to prepare for the dating years when many questions, concerns, and fears arise.

B. Reading sources to help parents. *The Wonderful Way that Babies are Made*, Larry Christian (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, 1982); *Preparing for Adolescence: Straight Talk to Teens*, Dr. James Dobson (Regal Books, Ventura, Calif., 1978); *How to Help Your Child Say "No" to Sexual Pressure*, Josh

McDowell (Word Books, Waco, Tex., 1987); *Talking Together About Love and Sexuality*. Mildred Tengbom (Bethany House, Minneapolis, Minn. 1985).

C. Physical consequences of immoral behavior.

1. Unfortunately, just as children of an alcoholic suffer from the sins of others, in like manner someone may suffer from the sexual sins of other people. Suffering does not indicate guilt.
2. Sexually transmitted diseases: proof that sexual promiscuity is not God's plan.

II. Moral education:

A. God's view of sexuality.

1. Sexuality does not *produce* intimacy, but is an *expression* of intimacy between husband and wife.
2. The fact that Christian leaders have not addressed the issue in any terms has contributed to the general thinking that sexuality, even within marriage, is something wrong, period. But this is not what the Bible teaches.
3. Hebrews 13:4. The "act of marriage" is sacred in God's sight.
4. Genesis 2:22-25. The Lord brought Eve to Adam. They felt no shame in the presence of each other. No one to observe them and no prohibition had been given concerning sexuality. "Adam knew his wife." (Gen. 4:1) "To know" in this sense is appropriate language to describe the intimate and sacred mutual knowledge gained through the act of marriage.
5. Proverbs 5:1-23 is the advice of a father to a son to control his sexual passions and reserve them only for his wife. The implication of the passage is that sexual love in the confines of marriage is appropriate and the plan of God.
6. 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 states three principles concerning God's plan for sexuality:
 - a. Marriage is the God ordained place for the fulfillment of sexual passions.
 - b. In marriage each partner forfeits control his or her body to the other in an unselfish manner.
 - c. One is not refuse to meet the needs of the other.
7. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. Exercise self-control in order not to commit sexual immorality instead of giving self to passions.
8. Mt. 5:28-29. Looking with lustful thoughts at a woman who is not your wife is sin. (Literally: "looking at a woman for the purpose of desiring her.")
9. Song of Solomon.
10. Premarital sexuality is fornication, even though a couple may think they are in love. Without marriage there is no bond and no commitment.

B. Correct behavior for unmarried people.

1. Morally sound behavior for dating: where to draw the line. (The issue is really a cultural perspective and not some physical or moral need that a couple has to participate in for the purpose of expressing feelings. There are other ways to feel intimate and share one's self, especially through communication.)
 - a. Safe intimate zone: Being together, hand holding, simple kiss (peaches)
 - b. Danger zone: prolonged kissing, French kiss, petting.
 - c. Drawing the line at safe intimate zone avoids frontal body contact and consequent arousal.
 - d. Men and women are usually aroused at different phases: men through French kissing and women through petting.
 - e. Petting is fornication without penetration (Mt. 5:27-30).
 - f. The momentum is not easily stopped after entering the danger zone.
 - g. The sin of defrauding another is committed by arousing one another and then not righteously fulfilling those desires (1 Thess. 4:3-7).
 - h. The two main misconceptions:
 1. That sexual petting can easily stop before intercourse is committed.
 2. That sexual activities other than intercourse are somehow less immoral.
2. Abuse of dating as only a means to physical arousal.
3. Alternative to dating: "courting".
 - a. Substitute for the "dating game."
 - b. Dating can create emotional commitment and wounds of rejection over and over again.
 - c. Meaning of courtship: If a young man wants to take someone's daughter out, he contacts the father first. The father and the young man spend time getting to know each other through conversation and shared activity.
 - d. Father explains that the young man must be spiritually and financially prepared to marry his daughter if they fall in love. If not, then do not bother beginning a relationship until he is so prepared.
 - e. Means no courtship during high school, and perhaps college years, since the boy must be spiritually and financially ready for marriage.
 - f. Dating is a series of short term relationships that do not prepare for the long term relationship of marriage.

- g. Courtship is not only sexual but emotional abstinence.
- h. Courtship allows young people to get to know each other without sacrificing their physical and emotional integrity.
- i. Courtship brings Dad into the picture and takes some of the pressure off the young person. Parents can get involved in better understanding the person who is interested in their young person since it includes spending time with the family.
- j. Share in public activities together with family or friends and go on walks or picnics in public places but with a measure of privacy to talk.
- k. Disadvantage: there will be limited selection of potential spouses and those potential ones will have to have some commitment before they ever start to go out with each other. (However, this may be the beauty of courtship in that time and emotions will not be wasted on the wrong person.)

l. References:

- 1. **Dating vs. Courtship.** Paul Jehle, Plymouth Rock Foundation. (800) 210-1620.
- 2. **Passion and Purity.** Elizabeth Elliot, Revell. (800) 759-4569
- 3. **Guidelines for Courtship and Preparation for Marriage.** Jeff Barth, Parable Publishing House. (800) 426-2002.

- 4. Secondary virginity: a commitment to purity after having committed fornication can reestablish feelings of confidence and self-esteem.

C. Combating the false moral standards of the world.

- 1. Explaining the emotional and social results of immorality.
- 2. Guidance in the viewing of TV, movies, reading literature (romance novels).
- 3. Making certain that our youth participate in wholesome, pure entertainment.

D. The emotional consequences of immorality.

- 1. Lowered self-esteem since have given the most precious gift to someone who has little importance or commitment. With lowered self-esteem come many other personality problems.
- 2. Depreciation of the act of marriage.
- 3. Later communication problems and feelings of guilt in subsequent relationship.
- 4. Difficulty with trust and confidence.

III. Spiritual education

A. Preparing for dating.

1. Character traits necessary for dating need to be developed in the years prior to dating. Such traits as respect for others, self-control, responsibility, unselfishness, spiritual priorities over physical, material values are necessary in order to handle the temptations that dating could present.
2. Decide beforehand when your young person can date and under what circumstances. Unfortunately, in many families dating just suddenly begins without much forethought on the part of parents and not much preparation or commitment on the part of young people.
3. Dating age depends on maturity level and on age (at certain ages dating alone can develop a commitment to one individual that is not necessary because marriage is so far in the future and commitment should not be a concern at an earlier age.)
4. If the purpose of dating is to get to know members of the opposite sex then activities such as group get togethers can accomplish this.
5. Levels of activities:
 - a. Going out with friends of the same sex.
 - b. Going out to a chaperoned event with mixed group without the company of a specific person.
 - c. Going to a chaperoned event or group activity, but in the company of a specific person.
 - d. Attending a group activity with the company of a specific person without a chaperone.
 - e. Going on a date with one or two other couples.
 - f. Going a date alone but to a place where physical intimacy is not possible.
6. Gauging emotions and commitment.
 - a. Dating should be limited at certain ages, because there is no need for commitment at such a young age when marriage is so far in the future. Dating is limited because commitment is limited.
 - b. Learning to gauge emotions is important in dating since a relationship should not develop if two individuals are not spiritually, emotionally, and financially ready for the commitment.
 - c. Levels of intimacy or emotional commitment:

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1. Share facts and information.
 2. Share opinions expressed by other people.
 3. Share one's own ideas and opinions.
 4. Share information about yourself in regards to values, dreams, and goals.
 5. Share deepest feelings and emotions. (Preparation for marriage.)
 6. A sexual relationship does not create intimacy, communication does.

B. A vow of purity.

1. Paul gave Timothy, as a young man, a very simple but powerful instruction: "Keep yourself pure!" (1 Tim 5:22)
2. Upon entering the dating years young people need to make a clearly expressed commitment to keep themselves pure.
3. Parents can help them make this commitment, to vow themselves to purity before marriage. Plan a special occasion between father and son or mother and daughter. Choose a nice restaurant or some memorable place where the two of you can spend a quiet evening of conversation together. Explain to your son or daughter how much you respect their Christian character. Talk about the maturity required for the privilege of dating. Discuss the purpose and guidelines for dating and why self-control is so important. Then ask them if they are willing to make a vow to the Lord to remain pure. Pray together, allowing them to make this vow to the Lord. Richard Durfield, who founded an organization called For Wedlock Only suggests giving your child a simple gold ring as a token of this vow. Then when they are married they can present this ring to their spouse on their wedding night.
4. Suggested reading: **Raising them Chaste**. Richard and Renee Durfield, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, 1991.

C. Dealing with temptation.

1. Most importantly parents need to explain how sexual temptation works in order to not be deceived by it.
 - a. The emotional train that cannot be stopped so easily.
 - b. Understanding the nature of sexual excitement, that these emotions are not easily controlled and therefore participation in activities that create sexual excitement amounts to causing another person to stumble and putting one's self in dangerous circumstances that lead to sin.
2. Decide beforehand what kind of behavior is permitted and what is not, in view of the way sexual temptation works.

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3. Plan ahead of time what you will do on a date and where you will go and then keep to this plan.
 4. Limits on dating should include avoidance of places or circumstances that could lead to intimacy, such as dark movie theaters or parked cars.
 5. Training the heart and mind.
 - a. Controlling thoughts by replacement and prayer.
 - b. The value of a person is not physical.
 - c. Self-worth is not determined by winning the intimacy of someone of the opposite sex.
 6. Positive peer pressure: Make certain that your young people associate with others who have the same expressed commitment to purity. (The expression of commitment is essential. No assumptions can be made, for even children brought up in Christian homes do not always share this commitment.)
 7. Reinforcing the positive aspects of God's plan through conversation about how to follow God's plan in marriage.
 8. Being accountable to someone you can trust to give you biblical counsel without breaking confidence.
 9. Let people know what you believe.
 10. Carefully choose whom you will date.
 11. Envelope everything in prayer, including the date.
- D. Parental encouragement of chaste conduct.
1. Inviting friends from world over for pure entertainment.
 2. Making sure that Christians can be together to participate in pure entertainment.

Conclusion:

- Education is the key to crisis.
- Parents must take their full responsibility for education.
- As church leaders we need to help parents find the necessary resources and give them the necessary tools. 753 Saucito Ave., Salinas, California 93906

Understanding Proverbs 22:6

Alan Bonifay

In his book *The Strong Family*, Chuck Swindoll recounts an amusing anecdote about raising children which he attributes to Mark Twain. Mr. Twain is supposed to have said something like this:

Things run along pretty smoothly until your kid reaches thirteen. That's the time you need to stick 'em in a barrel, hammer the lid down nice and snug, and feed 'em through the knot-hole. And then about the time he turns sixteen, plug up the knot-hole (59).

I am sure that most of us have had days when such humorous advice would have seemed both sage and practical. If Twain had been serious, we would think he knew pathetically little about raising children. Things do not run along pretty smoothly until children reach the age of thirteen. In addition, issue must be taken with anyone who honestly believes it would even be possible to stuff a thirteen-year-old boy in a barrel, let alone feed him through a single knot-hole. At his wits' end and at the close of a frazzling day, Mr. Twain was, no doubt, making a valiant effort to recover his sense of humor.

Of considerably more valuable help in the parental responsibility of raising children are the principles, proverbs, commands, admonitions and illustrations of God's Word. Parenthood can be the most energy-draining/unvigorous, frustrating/satisfying project one ever enters upon. It is demanding, difficult, sometimes discouraging and on certain occasions confusing. It requires flexibility, availability, sacrifice and cooperation. But it is not impossible. And it is worth every bit of the effort and sacrifice. It will take huge quantities of time; careful, even minute, observation; diligent study, both of the children and of God's Word; prayer; concentration; help from above; and, yes, wisdom. But nothing can compare with the joys of rearing children who dedicate their own lives in obedience to God. The vast majority of the time when parents yield themselves to the authority of God, the teaching of God's Word, and the careful instruction of their children by word as well as by example, the results of their efforts will be faithful, obedient, committed children, who will carry on to a new generation the same commitments of their own parents. One of the proverbs instructing parents in their labors is found in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it. What a wonderful, insightful, hopeful statement! And yet how misunderstood and misapplied! As Chuck Swindoll noted:

The common interpretation of that verse goes something like this: Be sure your child is in Sunday School and church. Be sure and teach him a lot of Bible verses and hymns. Make sure he learns the Ten Commandments, a few prayers to be used at mealtimes, at bedtime, and in case of emergency. If possible, send him to a Christian school, see that he attends a Christian camp each summer and enforce your rules and regulations with unbending strictness. Because, after all, the kid is going to grow up and rebel. For sure, he will sow some wild oats. But when he is finished with his fling, when he's old and gray-haired, he will finally come back to God. You can count on it! (61-62).

Apart from the obvious references to such unscriptural practices as Sunday School, Christian schools, and Christian camps, this whole approach to Solomon's parable is wrong-headed, as Mr. Swindoll goes on to explain. However, it is not unlike many explanations heard from our own pulpits, the only difference being that in our case heavy doses of unmitigated guilt have been heaped upon the heads of parents already struggling under a grief that can hardly be assuaged. You might have heard something like this:

The Bible says that if parents teach and train a child in the right way he will not depart from it. It does not say he probably won't depart from the faith. It says that he will not depart. If a child does depart from the faith then the only conclusion that can be reached is that he was not trained up in the way he should go. In other words, the plain teaching of God's Word reveals that if a child leaves the church it is because of the failure of his parents.

The interpretation mentioned by Swindoll is wrong for at least three reasons. First, it gives a false hope. Many children who rebel against all that their parents stand for do not ever return. Many of them die while they are still running away from the truth. Second, such a view is empty of any real comfort or blessing. The return it forecasts is too distant and too unlikely to encourage real hope. Third, it simply will not hold water exegetically.

The interpretation often heard in our own pulpits is wrong also for at least three reasons. First, it misunderstands the nature of proverbial wisdom. Second, it flies in the face of other passages which teach that each person is held accountable by God only for his own actions. Third, it unwarrantedly and unjustifiably heaps guilt upon the hearts of many fine parents who did all they could to train up their children in the way they should go—only to have those children choose of their own volition to rebel against the will of God.

In order to arrive at a more accurate assessment of what this verse teaches we want to consider briefly the nature of proverbs and an examination of the key words themselves. Then we will consider five plausible interpretations of this proverb. Next, we will list several passages of Scripture detailing parental responsibility and accountability. Finally, we will notice several Biblical examples demonstrating that Proverbs 22:6 is a general rule—"a rule of thumb" we might say. It is not a legal guarantee. It is not an absolute divine promise. Then we will close with an exhortation to parents concerning their need to actively accept responsibility for training up their children in the way they should go.

The Nature of Proverbial Wisdom

The book of Proverbs belongs to a genre of Hebrew literature known as wisdom literature. Even though a significant portion of the Bible is devoted to wisdom writing it is often either misunderstood or misapplied by Christians, and the benefit intended by God is often lost. When properly understood and used, however, wisdom literature is a helpful resource for Christian living. When misused, it can provide a basis for selfish, materialistic, short-sighted behavior—just the opposite of what God intended.

What exactly is wisdom? Briefly, "wisdom is the discipline of applying truth to one's life in the light of experience" (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All it is Worth*, p. 187). Wisdom is not something theoretical and abstract. Wisdom exists when a person thinks and acts according to the truth as it has been learned through experience. A wise person is one who is able to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical way. Getting the job done in a responsible, successful manner is his chief aim. Wisdom literature, then, tends to focus on people and their behavior—how successful they are at applying the truth, and whether or not they are learning from the experiences they are having.

Wisdom in Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is the primary locus of prudential wisdom—that is, rules and regulations people can use to help themselves live responsible, successful lives. Proverbial wisdom concentrates primarily on practical attitudes. Old-fashioned basic values are the thrust of proverbial teaching. Fee and Stuart note that:

No parent wants his or her child to grow up unhappy, disappointed, lonely, socially rejected, in trouble with the law, immoral, inept or broke. It is neither selfish nor unrealistic for a parent to wish a child a reasonable level of success in life—including social acceptance, freedom from want, and moral uprightness. Proverbs provides a collection of pithy advisory statements designed to do just that. This is no guarantee, of course, that a life will always go well for a young person. What Proverbs does say is that, all things being equal, these are basic attitudes and patterns of behavior that will help a person grow into responsible adulthood (195).

In Hebrew, proverbs are called *meshallim*—figures of speech, parables, or specially contrived sayings. A proverb is a brief particular expression of a truth. Fee and Stuart explain:

The briefer a statement is, the less likely it is to be totally precise and universally applicable. We know that long, highly qualified, elaborate, detailed statements of fact are not only difficult to understand but virtually impossible for most people to memorize. So the proverbs are phrased in a catchy way, so as to be learnable by anyone. Indeed in Hebrew many of the proverbs have some sort of rhythm, sound repetition, or vocabulary qualities that make them particularly easy to learn. Consider the English proverbs "Look before you leap" and "A stitch in time saves nine."

The repetition of single-syllable words beginning with "I" in the first case, and the rhythm and rhyme of single-syllable words in the second case, are the elements which give these proverbs a certain catchiness. They are not as easy to forget as would be the following statements: "In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances and options." "There are certain corrective measures for minor problems that, when taken early on in a course of action, forestall major problems from arising."

These latter formulations are more precise but lack the punch and effectiveness of the two well-known wordings, not to mention the fact that they are much harder to remember. "Look before you leap" is a pithy, inexact statement: it can easily be misunderstood, or thought to apply only to jumping. It does not say when or how to look,

what to look for, how soon to leap after looking, and it is not even intended to apply literally to jumping!

So it is with Hebrew proverbs. They must be understood reasonably and taken on their own terms. They do not state everything about a truth but they point toward it. They are taken literally, often technically inexact. But as learnable guidelines for the shaping of selected behavior, they are unsurpassed (196).

Some Hermeneutical Guidelines

Fee and Stuart suggest four primary rules for the correct interpretation of proverbs and then provide a nine-principle summary at the conclusion of their chapter on wisdom literature.

1. Proverbs are not a legal guarantee from God. They provide a wise way to approach certain selected practical goals but do so in terms that cannot be treated like a divine warranty of success. The particular blessings, rewards and opportunities mentioned in Proverbs are likely to follow if one will pursue the wise courses of action outlined in the poetical, figurative language of the book. But nowhere does Proverbs teach automatic success (198).

2. Proverbs must be read as a collection. Each inspired proverb must be balanced with others and understood in comparison with the rest of Scripture. The more in isolation one reads a proverb, the less clear its interpretation may be. An individual proverb, if misunderstood, may lead you to attitudes or behavior far more inappropriate than would be the case if you read Proverbs as a whole . . . By failing to balance proverbs against one another and against the rest of Scripture (let alone common sense) many people do themselves and others great injustice (200).

3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not to be theoretically accurate. No proverb is a complete statement of truth. No proverb is so perfectly worded that it can stand up to the unreasonable demand that it apply in every situation at every time. The more briefly and parabolically a principle is stated, the more common sense and good judgment are needed to interpret it properly—but the more effective and memorable it is. Proverbs tries to impart knowledge that can be retained rather than philosophy that can impress a critic. Thus the proverbs employ so many poetic devices and such a vivid imagery (201).

4. Some proverbs need to be “translated” to be appreciated. A good many proverbs express their truths according to practices and institutions that no longer exist, although they were common to Old Testament Israelites. Unless you think of these proverbs in terms of their true modern equivalents (i.e. carefully “translate” them into practices and institutions that exist today), their meaning may seem irrelevant or be lost to you altogether (202).

The following summary will help anyone to make proper use of proverbs and be true to their divinely inspired intent:

1. Proverbs are often parabolic, i.e. figurative, pointing beyond themselves.
2. Proverbs are intensely practical, not theoretically theological.
3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.

4. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior—just the opposite!
5. Proverbs strongly reflecting ancient culture may need sensible “translation” so as not to lose their meaning.
6. Proverbs are not guarantees from God, but poetic guidelines for good behavior.
7. Proverbs may use highly specific language, exaggeration, or any of a variety of literary techniques to make their point.
8. Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life, but are not exhaustive in their coverage.
9. Wrongly used, proverbs might justify a crass, materialistic lifestyle. Rightly used, proverbs will provide practical advice for daily living (203).

The Meaning of the Words

There are four terms in Proverbs 22:6 upon which the meaning of the verse turns in: “Train up,” “child,” “in the way,” and “old.”

“*Train up.*” According to Brown, Driver and Briggs (hereafter abbreviated BDB), the verb “train up” or “dedicate” derives from a word meaning “to rub the palate of a child with chewed dates.” They quote R. Dozy, an Arabic lexicographer, saying that this word describes a midwife rubbing the palate of a new-born child with oil before it begins to suck. They also quote E. W. Lane, another Arabic lexicographer, who indicates that the word means to make experienced or submissive as one does a horse by a rope in its mouth. Under Proverbs 22:6, BDB give: “train, train up a child. The second definition is to dedicate and is used of a formal opening of a new house; dedicate or consecrate” (The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon 335). Gesenius’ lexicon adds: “To put something into the mouth, to give to be tasted; then by a common metaphor in which taste is applied to understanding. . . To imbue someone with any thing, to instruct, to train up. . . Proverbs 22:6 ‘train up a child according to his way’ as to his manners and habits” (292). With these definitions agree both Wilson (Old Testament Word Studies 451) and Harris, Archer, and Waltke (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament 301, hereafter abbreviated TWOT).

Ted Hilderbrandt, writing for *Grace Theological Journal* (Vol. 9, Issue 1, 1988, 3-19), makes some interesting and dissenting observations. He believes that the main import of the Hebrew word is not train up but dedicate or initiate. He bases his view on the fact that in all four of the other passages where the same verb is employed the reference is to dedicating or initiating the use of some building and is usually accompanied by great celebration (6-7). In addition, he also notes that all eight times the noun form is used the meaning of dedication celebrations is affirmed. Mr. Hilderbrandt believes that etymology has been overemphasized in defining this word. He says,

Yet to suggest that the assumed etymological root determines or shades the meaning of the word in Prov. 22:6 is like saying that when one uses the word “cute” it is shaded by its early Elizabethan root meaning of “bow-legged.” Thus it cannot be assumed that etymology determines current meaning/usage. One should be doubly leery about

reading in a suggested etymology when none of the biblical usages has anything to do with such sensual, cuisinal nuances (5).

While Mr. Hilderbrandt's views are thought-provoking and appear to be lexically sound, his position is so lacking in scholarly support that I am not yet ready to accept it. The translators seem universally satisfied with "train up," as do most of the scholarly commentaries.

"Child." According to BDB the Hebrew describes a boy, a lad, a youth, and occasionally a retainer. In the Scriptures it is used of a child yet unborn (Jgs. 13:5, 7, 8, 12); of a newborn (1 Sam. 4:21); of a three-month-old infant (Ex. 2:6); of a child not yet weaned (1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 8:4); of a lad just weaned (1 Sam. 1:24); of young Ishmael (Gen. 21:12); of Joseph at seventeen (Gen. 37:2) and thirty (Gen. 41:12, 46); of a lad of marriageable age (Gen. 34:19); of a warrior, Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5, 12); and of a personal attendant, household servant (Num. 22:22); also of a retainer, follower (Gen. 14:24) (654, 655).

Wilson defines it more simply as a young man or a child (76). TWOT says that:

While reference to a youngster of ages between weaning and (especially) marriageable young manhood is primary. . . the titular use of 2 Kings 19:6, "the servants of the king of Assyria," and soldier (1 Kings 20:15) must also be recognized (586).

"In the Way He Should Go." The ASV footnotes Proverbs 22:6 "in the way" and suggests "according to his way" as an alternative rendering. Similarly, the Amplified Bible paraphrases "and in keeping with his individual gift or bent."

According to Gary Hall (*Christian Standard*, Vol. 10, p. 394, May 10, 1992),

A few translations. . . offer a different nuance, suggesting that the "way" is not the way the child should go, but a way suitable to him. Thus the New Jerusalem Bible (Catholic) has, "Give a lad a training suitable to his character. . . ." An old English translation, the Geneva Bible of 1560, has "Teache a childe in the trade of his way . . ." (also the German translation of 1967).

Delitzsch reads, "Give to the child instruction conformably to His way." He comments:

The instruction of youth, the education of youth, ought to be conformed to the nature of youth; the matter of instruction, the manner instruction, ought to regulate itself according to the stage of life and its peculiarities; the method ought to be arranged according to the degree of development which the mental and bodily life of the youth has arrived at (Vol. 4, p. 725).

While he is not clear about it, Delitzsch seems to believe "His way" refers to God's way, for he capitalizes "His." Yet his comment seems to support the alternate rendering.

J. M. Fuller writing in the Bible Commentary edited by F.C. Cooke gives:

Initiate, and so, educate. . . according to the tenor of his way, i.e. the path specially belonging to, specially fitted for, the individual's character. The proverb enjoins the

closest possible study of each child's temperament and the adaptation of "his way of life" to that (63).

Moses Stuart signs on to this view in his commentary, saying: "[the Hebrew] is very significant here. It means the bent of his mind or inclinations, the capacity which he has to pursue this occupation or that" (338). He hates to depart from the standard English version which has given rise to so many wonderful sermons, yet:

... the Hebrew can be made to mean no more, than that the child should be educated or trained up for usefulness, in such a way as the bent of his genius (his own way or the way which he chooses) indicates that he ought to be trained (339).

Before you discount this view because it differs from what you have always heard, you might consider that Jay Green's Interlinear Hebrew, Greek and English Bible translates the Hebrew here, "Train up a boy on the mouth of his way. . . ." Moses Stuart advises that "an interpreter's business is rather to inquire what is said, than to conjecture, however ingeniously or piously, what ought to be said" (339).

Interestingly, Chuck Swindoll supports the view of training according to the child's bent. He cites Proverbs 30:18,19 as a supporting argument acknowledging that an eagle has a certain "way" of flying just as a ship has a certain relationship with the sea. In the same way, a serpent on a rock has an intriguing way, as does a man with a maid. He concludes, "wise are the parents who believe that and adapt their training accordingly. . . . Wise are the parents who learn their children's bents and train them accordingly" (63-64).

"Old." According to TWOT, this word "is a stative verb which . . . denotes the state of being which follows being young" (249). TWOT goes on to reveal Scriptures which indicate the word actually means old and advanced in years so that prospects of marriage and child-bearing have ceased. Gray hair appears. Sight fails; mobility declines; falling is a danger, and death is an imminent prospect (249). However, it is noted also that in Proverbs 22:6 the grammar of the verb "denotes the aging of persons" rather than old age itself (249). Gesenius attests to this, saying that in Proverbs 22:6 it means "to grow old, become aged" (187). BDB give "show age, grow old. . . said of a youth, Prov. 22:6" (278). In the Pulpit Commentary, H. D. M. Spence says: "This way, this education in accordance with his idiosyncrasy will bear fruit all his life long; it will become a second nature, and will never be obliterated" (422).

Five Plausible Interpretations

From all of these exegetical studies scholars have deduced five plausible interpretations.

1. The Way of Righteousness. This view teaches that if parents do their job of training correctly, then when a child is old he will be faithful to God's way. From this general statement three variations may be adduced. First, the ultra-conservative view, which in essence teaches that if parents do their job right the child will certainly become a Christian when he reaches the age of accountability and he will never depart from the

right way. The corollary to this view, of course, holds that if your child fails to obey the gospel, or having done so, falls away, then it is due to your failure as a parent.

The second variation is the mildly hopeful view. If you train him up correctly as best you can, then he may fall away but when he is an old man he will surely return to the truth. And even if he does not return, when questioned, he will acknowledge the right way and exonerate his parents.

Both of these scenarios fall by the wayside as unscriptural and unreasonable. A third variation is more successful. The idea here is that if a parent trains his child up in the right way then usually he will abide faithful. However, this is only a general rule of thumb and does not hold true in all cases. If a child falls away after he has become an adult the parent is not necessarily to be held responsible in any sense. However, in every sense the child is held responsible. In other words the behavior of a responsible adult is not necessarily a comment on his parents' training skills.

2. *The Personality View—According to His Way.* According to this view the stress is on the parents' recognizing the child's personality bent and adapting their training appropriately, so that their training channels the child in the best way for his personality. This view recognizes the individuality of each child and the impossibility of training every child in the same way. The idea is to provide maximum development for the child's whole personality rather than focusing entirely on his moral-religious development.

3. *The Economic View.* "Train up a child in the way he should go" for these advocates means to train him for the trade for which he shows the best aptitude. Then when he is "old", i.e. an adult, he will not depart from his training. That trade will provide his living for himself and his family.

4. *The Young Squire View.* This view indicates that a child should be trained according to all of the previous views. However, Proverbs 22:6 refers to this trained child when he is on the brink of adulthood. At that time he should be dedicated or initiated into his new adult responsibilities. He should be sent forth with a celebration and fanfare just as Solomon dedicated the temple.

5. *The Ironic View.* This view suggests that Proverbs 22:6 is neither a promise nor a general rule but a warning. Its message is ironic. If you train a kid according to his own selfish notions—letting him have his own way in all things—then when he is old (read: adult) he will assuredly remain a self-centered spoiled brat. The idea taught by irony is that parents must not do this.

Synthesis and Evaluation

In the final analysis, what shall we make of all this lexical information and these multiple interpretations? In the end I suppose you must make your own decision. However, let me sort through all of this as best I can.

First, there is every reason to recognize this Proverb as a simple "rule of thumb." It is a general rule that will hold true in most cases. It is not a legal guarantee from God.

It is not an absolute divine promise. It was not given to provide a club for the proud and self-righteous so that they might beat down those parents less fortunate in their child-rearing adventure. It is given to encourage parents to apply themselves diligently to the task at hand in order to secure the spiritual, moral, financial, physical, social, and psychological future of their children to the limited degree one can provide for another's future.

Second, there can be little question that all five of these views are taught in God's Word—if not expressly then implicitly. However, the thrust of the proverb probably does not cover all of these explanations. The first two spins on "The Way of Righteousness View" (1A, B) seem to me to be contrary to the Christian spirit. Consequently, I believe them to be both unscriptural and unreasonable. "The Ironical View" (5) also seems most unlikely. Irony is not the teaching medium of choice in the proverbs, and it is opposed to the optimistic outlook that Proverbs has on the teachability of the child.

"The Economic View" (3) is generally encountered in older works. It seems both dated and out of touch with the thrust of the proverb. However, in any case, it is included in "The Personality View" (2). "The Young Squire View" (4) is interesting and worthy of study, but is so devoid of both translational and scholarly support as to be doubtful.

In my opinion the reasonable spin on "The Way of Righteousness View" (1C) harmonizes well with "The Personality View—According to His Way." I do not see that one precludes the other. The idea is that parents should diligently apply themselves to training their child in the way of righteousness; so that his moral and spiritual future will be secured. In doing so they must adapt their training so as to accommodate his personality. They will need to recognize their child's gifts and bent in life. They must train for the maximum development of the child's whole personality and not merely his moral-religious development. However, Proverbs 22:6 is only a general rule of thumb. As the child matures he becomes more and more responsible for his own actions. Parents are not necessarily responsible for one's fall from grace, though they may share in it. Sometimes when a child departs from the faith it has no bearing on his parents' training skills. I believe this can be demonstrated from the Scripture. Before that, however, let us note other Scriptures which detail parental responsibility and accountability.

Parents Do Have A Responsibility to Train Their Children in the Way They Should Go

In establishing that Proverbs 22:6 is only a general rule of thumb we do not wish to either minimize or trivialize the grave responsibilities facing all parents among God's people. Proverbs 22:6 is not the only passage in God's Word that requires parents to actively train their children. The following list of verses is sufficient to establish the points of parental responsibility and accountability. First, we will sail through a list of proverbs promising blessing and threatening curses from God. Then we will consider

several other passages from other books of the Bible. Time fails of complete exposition, but we will observe several salient issues relative to our subject.

God's Blessings to Parents

Proverbs 10:1a "A wise son brings joy to his father . . ."

Proverbs 23:24-25 "The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice."

Proverbs 29:17 "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul."

Proverbs 31:28 "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

God's Curses to Parents

Proverbs 10:1b ". . . but a foolish son brings grief to his mother."

Proverbs 17:21 "To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool."

Prov. 29:15b ". . . but a child left to itself disgraces his mother"

These passages reveal the blessing that diligent parents who train their children according to God's Word receive when those children choose to do right and walk according to God's way. They also reveal the misery attendant upon parents whose children either were not disciplined, or after being trained properly, choose to do wrong and walk in sin. Keep in mind that the entire book of Proverbs is aimed at those who are young. Proverbs 1:3-4 says the book is written: "For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair, for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young." The point is that parents who diligently train their children will generally be honored by their faithful obedient children. Parents who fail to discipline their children according to God's Word will generally suffer miserably at the hands of foolish, unfaithful children. By the same token, children who submit to their parents' training will be a joy to their parents. Children who do not submit will disgrace both themselves and their parents.

Parental Accountability

The Word of God unequivocally establishes that God does hold parents accountable for training their children.

Psalms 127:3 "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

Exodus 20:12 "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy day may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

Ephesians 6:2-3 "Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth."

It is worthy of note that all of us recognize these last two passages to be general rules that are not true in every case. Some children who honor their parents die young. Some children who are a disgrace live long. In general, however, a child who honors his parents lives longer because he is kept safe by their wisdom and because he lives as his parents do.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 And these words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Herein lies the problem for most parents with disobedient, unfaithful kids: the Word of God is often not treasured up in their own hearts, let alone taught diligently to their children. This requires a tad more than going to church three times a week and worshipping according to the pattern. The parent Moses describes here is consumed by God's Word. He is one who openly communicates what he has learned to his children and thus his children are trained in the way they should go. There is no room here for all of the busy-ness we immerse ourselves in. This is going to take huge quantities of time. Parents must study and learn and apply to themselves and then teach diligently on every occasion. God's Word must be supreme in their lives.

Ephesians 6:4 And ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Colossians 3:21 Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

Notice that it is fathers whom God holds ultimately responsible for the discipline and training of children. It is not mothers. Also, note the demand for consistency and justice in raising children.

Luke 2:51-52 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Two points are salient here: First, Jesus' parents demanded obedience of him—"was subject unto" is literally "to render obedience to" (Analytical Greek Lexicon, 419). In order to be successful in their training parents simply must demand obedience from their children. Second, Jesus' parents did not focus solely on one facet of His development. Rather they trained his whole personality. Jesus grew in wisdom—that is, first in knowledge then in practical application of knowledge to life. He grew also in stature—that is, he developed physically. In addition he grew in favor with God—in other words, he learned God's Word and developed spiritually. Finally, he grew in favor with man—that is, his parents saw to his social development. Parents must adapt their training to the child's bent or personality but their training to is be well-rounded.

I am sure other Scriptures could be produced and perhaps other points could be elicited. The point is that God's Word does insist that parents have a responsibility to train their children. God holds parents accountable for their responsibilities. However, children must finally become accountable for themselves. And, sadly, some, in spite of all, choose to live in sin. Happily, that is not generally the case. In the vast majority of situations children diligently trained in all facets of life will walk according to their training.

***Biblical Examples Revealing That Proverbs 22:6
Is a General Rule, Not a Legal Guarantee***

In the Old Testament there are numerous examples which illustrate the fact that Proverbs 22:6 enunciates a general rule but does not constitute a legal guarantee. Care must be taken to not take a position relative to Proverbs 22:6, the logical consequence of which contradicts other passages of Scripture. In other words, we cannot teach a view of Proverbs 22:6 which undermines the biblical principle of personal responsibility before God. In the day of judgment parents cannot answer for their adult children and children who are accountable cannot excuse their behavior on the basis of the training they did or did not receive from their parents.

Eli and Samuel. The cases of Eli and Samuel are interesting in this light. The children of both of these men were rebellious and sinful children. According to 1 Samuel 2:12, "the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:11-25). However, Samuel's sons fared no better. 1 Samuel 8:1-3 says:

And it came to pass when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. and his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

The most interesting point of this comparison is that God held Eli personally responsible for the wickedness of his sons, but there is no indication at all that Samuel was held responsible for the behavior of his wicked sons. Why is that the case?

The Scripture provides several clues as to why Eli was deemed responsible for the behavior of his sons. 1 Samuel 3:13 says of Eli: "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

Clearly, Eli could have restrained his sons but he did not. The half-hearted complaint that Eli made against his sons was too little, too late (1 Sam. 2:22-26). However, it is also worthy of note that God told young Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:13 that Eli well knew the iniquity of his sons. That brings to mind the message of judgment pronounced against Eli by a man of God in 1 Samuel 2:27-29:

And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharosah's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the

house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

You will remember that when the report of the deaths of Hophni and Phineas and the capture of the ark of the covenant reached the ears of Eli, he fell backward from his seat and "his neck brake and he died: for he was an old man and heavy" (1 Sam. 4:18).

Notice that the judgment pronounced by the man of God charges Eli with kicking at God's sacrifice. Why? For two reasons:

1. He honored his sons above God, and
2. Along with his sons was making himself fat by partaking of the meat his sons were extorting from the Israelites.

Eli was held responsible because he was aiding and abetting his sons in their sins.

Samuel, on the other hand, was not held responsible by God for his sons' wickedness. When his sons sinned Samuel had no part in it. When Samuel died all Israel mourned (1 Sam. 25:1). Samuel's children were free moral agents and they chose to do wrong. Their father was not held accountable and his leadership was not annulled.

The Soul That Sinneth It Shall Die

Ezekiel 18 teaches the same lesson learned from the comparison of Samuel and Eli. Ezekiel begins by pointing to a righteous grandfather (18:4-9). His son, however, did not walk in his father's steps but was evil (vv. 10-13). His father's righteousness is not credited to him. "He shall die; his blood shall be upon him" (13b). This man begets a son, the grandson of the first man. This grandson walks in righteousness. His father's wickedness is not held against him (14-17). In verse 20, Ezekiel concludes:

The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

Overcoming Bad Parenting

There are several examples in Scripture of children who overcame bad parenting and lived good lives. Consider Hezekiah: his father was the wicked Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16) who "did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God" (2 Kgs. 16:2). Ahaz offered one of his sons up as a human sacrifice (v. 3) and worshiped idols (v. 4). By contrast, Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kgs. 18:3-8).

Consider Josiah: his father Amon "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord as his father Manassas did" (2 Kgs. 21:19-26). Amon was an idolator. "He forsook the Lord God of his fathers." On the other hand, Josiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kgs. 22:2).

Rejecting Good Parenting

There are also examples in God's Word of children who rejected good parenting. Consider the first man described in Ezekiel 18:4-9. His description fits that of a good father. Yet, his son rebelled and rejected his father's teaching and his father's way of life.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 provides for honorable parents to report a disobedient child who would not yield to their chastening to the elders of the city who would then have the rebellious child stoned to death.

And what shall we make of God, whose children (the Israelites) rebelled against Him in spite of all He could do? (Ezek. 20:19-21; Deut. 32:5,6; Mal. 2:10; Isa. 64:8).

Proverbs 22:6—A General Rule; Not A Legal Guarantee Consequently, Parents Must Accept Their Responsibility

The fact of the matter is that there are times when parents are to be blamed for how their children turn out. But there are also times when children must bear the responsibility of their own sins. We cannot look at someone's unfaithful children and conclude automatically that they failed as parents. The Scripture does not support such a view. Each case must be considered on its own merits. Proverbs 22:6 is a general rule; not a legal guarantee.

Still, parents must actively accept their responsibility to train their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord." To effect this we need church leaders like the Bible describes. We need grandparents who continue to help their children as their children become parents. We need men and women of God who will diligently apply themselves to the study of God's Word; who will teach their children what they have learned by word as well as by example. We need parents who will apply themselves with single-minded determination to the task of becoming the best parents possible. We need people who will depend on the Lord God of heaven and will pray incessantly to him for themselves and their children. We need parents with courage, conviction, devotion, discipline, humility and above all, love. May God bless you in all your efforts to raise faithful, responsible and productive children. 523 Jessie Ave., Manteca, California 95337-5510

Wayward Children

Wayne McKamie

There is pain in the process of parenting—from birth pains to facing every hurt and pain our children experience in growing up, and, eventually, to the pain one feels when the cord of adulthood is cut as the child steps out on his own. Sooner or later parents get initiated into the painful years—a long process of hurt, growth, and hopefully, reconciliation. Indeed, if any two words in the human language go together, they are pain and parents.

But, I wish to discuss a deeper pain, a deeper hurt—the unrelenting pain of feeling that we have failed as a Christian home. We took them to worship every time the doors opened for services. Indeed, in many cases, from childhood they knew the Holy Scriptures that could make them wise unto salvation. We knew the joy of seeing them obey the Lord in baptism. And all seemed to be going well until, one day, it all fell apart.

It may have been a call from a well-meaning friend or brother. “Your son ran away today and left no address.” “Your daughter has been arrested, sir; you need to come down.” Or it may have been a call from a son or daughter saying, “I’ll be living with a friend of mine; I won’t be home anymore.” A sobbing daughter admits a pregnancy. A son confesses his homosexual activity. You look into eyes that are glazed; your son or daughter is in the world of drugs or alcohol. Or the day when that lovely child, the joy of your life, looks at you through strange eyes and with the voice of a stranger says, “I don’t believe in your God anymore; it was your faith, it was never mine; I’m bored with church and those hypocrites.” At that moment you cannot believe what you are hearing. You feel everything in you die.

What happened? Where did we go wrong? What’s wrong with our family? Why must this happen to us? Most of your questions will seem to have no answer at all. You find it difficult to go on. Hurt and shame cover you like a garment. A unique loneliness comes into your heart. You are embarrassed, humiliated, disgraced. Fear fills your heart as you think of facing your peers and your associates—fear of rejection, disrespect, disapproval, and especially the fear of pity from others. Other than death, nothing is so painful as the rejection parents feel when a child leaves in anger and rebellion. When your own ignore, reject, and trample underfoot the standards and faith for which you have given your life, you hurt.

Into the depths of your hurt and despair, comes Satan. He fills your heart with “Why should you go to church?”; “No one will listen to the likes of you”; “You are a failure; curse God and quit.” And you are tempted. You feel that you cannot go on. Quoting for others, for myself, for us all: “My worst fears as a parent were suddenly realized”; “I had to force myself to go to church”; “I wanted to stay home and hide”; “I hoped no one would stop me and want to discuss the matter”; “I felt everyone in town knew”; “How’s this going to look to our friends, and to the enemies of the church?”

Several steps in this painful process are predictable.

1. It's a pain and hurt for which there is no pill.
2. You can grow (unless you are very careful) to hate the whole sorry situation.
3. You may blame yourself, or even your spouse with "You're too strict"; "You're too lenient"; "You're never home when the crises come," etc.
4. You can hate yourself, feel helpless, inadequate.
5. You will hate what it does to the rest of your family.
6. You will hate losing your wife or husband into months of deep depression.
7. Most of all, you will wonder "Why? Why?"

The circumstances and causes may vary, but the parental self-doubt and hurt are always there. The crisis is a personal one as well as a family one. You judge yourself guilty and you hurt.

But the unique loneliness you feel is not unique, and like Elijah, you are not alone. Every Christian parent of a wayward child has been down that road. The pain is the same; the process is predictable. When you walk the valley of this death, it is the same for all. It matters not whether you are from a despised or respected family, rich or poor, in ancient times or now, preacher or not. There is no monopoly on parental pain. At this moment we all know young, hurting parents who wrestle with problems of teenagers; and we all know mature Christians whose non-Christian middle-aged children give cause for sadness as they see them rearing grandchildren who may never know the Lord's church.

After the initial shock, pain, and sorrow, comes the realization that this isn't going away. Life must go on. How do we regain our equilibrium? How do we live again? How can we save this child? How can we keep our home together and save the rest of our family? How do we live with the guilt? *Must we live with the guilt?* The answers are in the Word of God. There is indeed a word from God. Deuteronomy 29:29—"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the word of this law."

According to the Oxford Universal Dictionary, "wayward" means "those who go contrary to the wishes or advice of others or to what is reasonable; intractable, self-willed; conforming to no fixed rule or principle of conduct." According to the Bible it means "overtaken, astray, wandering, turned out of the Way" (Heb. 12:13).

There are several ways for a child to become wayward. They may be "overtaken in a fault" (Gal. 6:1), they may wander away (Lk. 15:4-6), or they may be led away (2 Pet. 2:1; Acts 20:30). Among the manifestations of waywardness are quitting the Church, attendance being erratic or not at all, or the wayward may continue to attend services while living in sin (Lk. 15:25-29). Whatever the condition or manifestations, when we speak of wayward children we are speaking of sheep—sheep that are astray, wounded, and wayward—but still sheep.

What are the reasons for wayward children? What causes this problem of problems? Why does this crisis occur? Sometimes we as parents just fail. We didn't teach as we should, we didn't train as we should; in short, we didn't lay the groundwork as we should. In those things written for our learning and admonition (Rom. 15:4), we learn that sometimes humans just fail. Eli failed with Hophni and Phinehas. His sons were wicked "sons of Belial" and vile (1 Sam. 2:12). And while Eli could have used parental, judicial, and religious authority, "he restrained them not" (1 Sam. 3:13). David was a great man in many ways. On the battlefield he had no equal; on the throne he was blessed of God; as a leader, as a writer, he was far above others, yet David died in the heart of a rebellious son (2 Sam. 18:33; 19:4). Samuel was a great, good, and godly man, but for some reason his sons, Joel and Abiah, "walked not in his ways, went after lucre, took bribes, perverted judgment" (1 Sam. 8:2-3). Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kgs. 21:2) and led God's people into idolatry.

Parents often fail in the rearing of their children, but it is evident from the Bible that children often fail. In some instances they didn't receive the teachings as they should, they didn't use the training given as they should, and they didn't choose to build upon the foundation provided. In the case of Samuel and Eli both had ungodly children. Eli is blamed; Samuel is not. Evidently, Samuel attempted to restrain and teach, but with no success.

The children of Eli and Samuel were from different families, but all of us have known instances where children in the same family with the same parents, the same teaching, the same training, turned out differently. Adam and Eve's two sons, Cain and Abel, are a good example of this. Surely the factors of individuality and free will loom large in this, as well as heredity and environment. Individuality is a factor in choosing a way of life and will influence formation of character. In the will of every child there is a power which cannot be forced; it can only be won. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). We can lead a child to that door, but the child must pass that way of his own will.

There are those who "will not come to Me"—such rebellion can thwart the worthiest and wisest influences. Solomon, the son of David, forsook the council of his father David (1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron. 7:17), and "turned his heart away after other gods" in flagrant disobedience (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). The divine writer observed that it was "when Solomon was old" that this occurred (1 Kings. 11:4). Did David not "train him up in the way he should go," or did Solomon not receive the instruction? The Bible says "he turned away"; he became wayward.

The question of parental-child responsibility and the lengths of such responsibilities are difficult to pinpoint. For example: Solomon's statement in Proverbs 22:6 provokes many questions: How long is the training to occur? When and while he is a child at home? Until he reaches the age of accountability? Until he is grown? Until he reaches maturity? Or would the training cease when he is married? Solomon's statement stands upon the fact that he deals with fruition of earlier training becoming mani-

fest later. There is no doubt that one is not likely to leave it. Whatever the full impact of this passage may be, one thing is certain, it does not teach the impossibility of apostasy.

In any study of parent-child relationships, 1 Chronicles 28:9 should not be overlooked. "And thou, Solomon my son, *If thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever*" (Cf. Rom. 11:22; Gal. 5:4). David, the father, was giving instructions to Solomon while his son was "yet young and tender" (1 Chron. 29:1). The baton was about to be passed and David makes it very clear that Solomon is responsible for his own actions and that God would so deal with him. Evidently, the relations of parent and child exist so long as both shall live, but the relationship changes. We are to honor our parents as long as they live, yet the manifestation and fruition of that honor changes as the child matures and as the parent grows old. From conception, we are parents; we are responsible for the new life, for the child until he comes to years. Marriage and family is God's idea and to Him we are responsible in that He claims our children as His heritage (Ps. 127:3).

While all parents are not seeking the eldership in the Lord's church, there are some valuable truths to be gleaned from the Lord's ideal for His children. From Paul's words to Timothy and Titus we learn that experience with a family is critical to understanding how to take care of the church of Christ (1 Tim. 3:4-5)—one who "rules well his own house," has his children in subjection with all gravity, and "has faithful children not accused of riot or unruly." All of the above seems to indicate actions and behaviors while in the household of the parents.

It would appear from both Old and New Covenants that when young men or young women leave their parent's authority, they are then responsible for their own actions. Jeremiah said, "In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jer. 31:29-30). This statement about individual responsibility is immediately followed by another great prophecy about the passing of the Old Covenant and the coming of the New. In Ezekiel 18:20—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son . . ." What's the message? When we have come to years, God will deal with each person as responsible for his own actions.

Insight in this study can be gained in learning how God deals with His wayward children. He has ever loved us and provided for us even before we were born (Rom. 8). The call of the gospel was provided, and in responding, we were begotten and born (1 Cor. 4:15; Jn. 3:1-10). As newborn babes we were given the sincere milk of the Word that we might grow (1 Pet. 2:2).

Consider the example in the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11ff. When confronted by his son, the father could have invoked the law of Deuteronomy 21, or he could have turned him over to his fellow citizens, but in an unprecedented move, he divided unto him his estate. Upon "gathering all together" the son took his journey

and squandered everything in riotous living. Eventually, having spent all and realizing his loss of money, friends, and home, he came to himself. He resolved to return, to go, and to confess his sin and unworthiness to be as a son in his father's house. The Scripture says "and he arose." On the way home weighty thoughts surely filled his mind about what kind of reception he would receive from his father, his brother, and his fellow citizens. Verses 20-24 reveal that "while he was yet a great way off" his father saw him and ran to meet him. Contrary to every custom of the day (elderly, wealthy men did not run), in an unprecedented act of forgiveness, his father ran to him, embraced him, kissed him. The young son's confession was cut short by the commands: bring forth the best robe, place a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet, and kill the fatted calf. All the signs of sonship were restored.

Our response to the penitent wayward child is not always as the father's; there is another response. When the elder brother heard the reason for the sounds of festivity, he refused to go into the father's house. This itself indicated a deep, serious breakdown of relations; it was, in fact, a serious public insult to his father. Verse 28 unfolds an amazing thing. The father comes out and entreats him. This was a totally unexpected, unprecedented move. Even then the father finds only rebuke, as his son displays the attitude of a slave: "I have served you . . . never disobeyed." He charges his father with favoritism. "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends . . . This thy son [he refuses to acknowledge him as a brother] which hath devoured thy living with harlots . . ." Notice the father's response: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

Lessons from Luke 15 are so vital to our study, our hearts, our homes, and to our congregations. Ponder them seriously.

1. The father had the type of home that would loom large in the prodigal's mind even though far away.
2. The prodigal had known a home that would eventually draw him back. The consciousness of home would make him realize what loss and lostness was all about.
3. Home didn't fall apart when he left. This was so vital. Home was still there.
4. The father left the line of communication open (the porch light on), but he did not change his standards or give up on his beliefs.
5. The father didn't cause him to leave, didn't throw him out, and he did not go after him. This staying home manifested great discipline (it's easier to go than to stay). He didn't go after the prodigal, but he was ready to receive him at any time.
6. Other children in the family should not have to suffer for the mistakes of the prodigal. The return of the prodigal, however, did not diminish the rest of the family.

7. The father's love was never thwarted by time nor deeds. How long he was gone and the magnitude of all he did is not revealed. But the father had never given up. He refused to believe that the final chapter had been written.

We have learned that God is a father, and that He is the God of the lost and the found, the dead and the living. We have learned to face it like it is: if we have wayward children, we have wayward children. We face it not as it was, as it ought to be, or as we wish it were; we face it as it is. The embarrassment of an ungodly child must never manipulate us to cover up or justify sin. We have learned that others wrestle with the same problems. They either have, do, or likely will; it is common to man.

What are our needs? We need a loving, caring, needy, sharing fellowship of supporting Christian brothers and sisters who can understand what hurting parents and children are going through. Sometimes we fail here. We are not bearing one another's burdens as we should (Gal. 6:2). Watch for signs of these problems. Weep with those that weep. Watch for lost sheep and work with them; be on the lookout for hurting sheep and lambs.

Injured sheep and strays aren't likely to come to you. Go after them. Your friendship can leave a person stronger. Your friendship can help overcome a temptation. Your friendship can salvage a hurting parent or a wayward child. Jonathan was a friend who strengthened David's hand in God (1 Sam. 23:16). Naomi was a friend, as well as a mother-in-law, who strengthened Ruth (Ruth 1:16-17).

What have we learned? God help us when we become more concerned about what others think about us than we are about our own children. Beware any solution that sows anything with our children that excludes undying love, and an absolute determination to save them. May we as a brotherhood love our children—pray, pray, and pray again for them. May we make every effort to bring them back. *They are ours*. We are in this together brethren. These are *our children*; they are the Lord's children.

Thus saith the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord: and they shall come again from the lord of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border (Jer. 31:16-17).

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From Internal Strife to Open Schism

Bennie Cryer

I must confess to you that I am extremely frightened as we begin our study today. I am not frightened by the prospect of standing before so many august personalities. I am not even frightened by the prospect of being questioned by you at the end of my discourse, although I know some of you will ask me questions about my subject that I will not be able to answer adequately. I am frightened because of the consequences I have seen in our brotherhood that resulted from studies of the very subjects we are entertaining today. Through improper studies and interpretation, a few of our preachers, some of whom I ran with for many years, have left our ranks and embraced digression, denominationalism, and such like. A number of brothers and sisters who were near and dear to me went out from us and, today, count themselves as our enemies to the point that they make fun of us and ridicule us as nothing more than a small faction that exists in ignorance.

I am comforted by the fact that we can know God's will on this subject in a proper way and, united, we can do all to the glory of God. I am consoled today by the presence of so many gospel preachers, teachers, and church leaders, in whom I have confidence and who have studied this subject to the extent that they know and practice God's truth on it. My prayer is that I may adequately present this study in a way that will sanctify God's side of this important subject.

In the guidelines provided by those who organized this study it was suggested that I discuss the following points:

1. How does a church get from internal division (1 Cor. 1:10) to open schism (1 Cor. 11:19)? In the discussion of this question, I plan to define the important words. Proper definitions will help immensely in reaching the proper understanding of the subject.
2. What are some signs that internal division is occurring?
3. What are additional signs that an open schism is developing?

How Does a Church Get from Internal Division to Open Schism?

Instead of "open schism," "heresy" might be a better word to use here, as we shall see by definition and by scriptural usage. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:18-19, both words are used—"division" from *schismata* and "heresies" from *hairesis*:

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

From verse 18 we learn that the members at Corinth had come together in one assembly. Though they were together bodily, there were divisions or schisms among

them. This word is defined by Vine's as denoting "a cleft, a rent, then metaphorically, a division, dissension."

Examples of the literal use of this word are found in a few Scriptures and a study of them will help us understand the figurative use of the word. For example, Matthew 9:16: "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse." *Schisma* is translated into our English word "rent." It describes a tear in the garment under consideration. In other words, the entire garment is there but a tear has occurred for some reason. Without proper procedure and material the tear could become worse. In the Gospels, this word is used tropically in John 7:43, 9:16, and 10:19. I will notice only the first one: "So there was a division among the people because of him" (Jn. 7:43). *Schisma* is translated "division" in this verse and signifies that the division existed in this group of people. In verse 40, some thought Jesus was the Prophet. Verse 41 indicates that some thought that He was the Christ, but others did not think Christ would come out of Galilee, since the Scriptures said He would come out of Bethlehem. Thus, there were schisms among the people.

In the Epistles this word is used in 1 Corinthians 1:10, 11:18, 12:25. Note the first passage:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Again, this word is translated "divisions," and Paul incorporates all the differences indicated by its usage in the Gospels. To avoid "schisms" they were to have three things: (1) the same speech, (2) the same mind, and (3) the same judgment. Where any one of the three was absent, a schism would exist. Paul forbids schisms in 1 Corinthians 12:25—"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." The emphasis is placed on the word "same" in this verse. If they did not have the same care, thoughts, or anxieties about each other, there would be schisms.

I think we can conclude from these definitions and examples that schisms can develop in a group when their thinking is not the same on whatever subject may be under consideration. This may cause a tear or rent in the group, but an actual split has not occurred. Such is the meaning of the word "division" in 1 Corinthians 11:18. This meaning is different from the current definition and usage of the word "schism." **Webster's New World Dictionary** defines this word:

1 A split or division in an organized group or society, esp. a church, as the result of difference of opinion, of doctrine, etc. 2 the offense of causing or trying to cause a split or division in a church. 3 any of the sects, parties, etc. formed by such a split.

This definition more accurately describes the scriptural meaning of our next word "heresy."

In verse 19, Paul uses the stronger word "heresies." This is a word that takes the rent or tear in a garment and completes it until two or more pieces are formed. For example, take a piece of paper and tear it a little. This is a "schism." Now, continue the tear until there are two pieces of paper. The one who makes the tear worse and creates a second piece is a "heretic." The thought or idea (the schism) that is pushed to the point of open division then becomes "heresy." Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words defines *hairesis* as denoting "a choosing, choice; then that which is chosen." Schisms may exist in a local congregation. When one or more members decide to choose one of these schisms and develop another group based on this tear, they are heretics. The schism may then be referred to as "heresy," because a "sect" (from same word as "heresy") has developed. The Sadducees were a "sect" of the Jewish religion (Acts 5:17). In Acts 15:5, the Pharisees were called a "sect." Even Christianity did not escape being described as a "sect" by those who did not understand its makeup (Acts 24:5, 14). I call your attention to the last mentioned verse: "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

Just because someone calls us a "sect," this does not make us one. If someone calls us a "sect" or refers to our beliefs as heresy because we believe and practice those things taught in Scripture, then, like Paul, we can confess that "after this way so worship we the God of our fathers."

Incidentally, isolation from other groups is not always bad, as is well illustrated by Paul's word in the above text. Often, members have been made to feel guilty by our exclusiveness. Let it be remembered that our Savior, who prayed so fervently that we might be one, said, "for it must needs be that offenses come" (Mt. 18:7).

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Mt. 10:34-36).

Paul echoed these words in 1 Corinthians 11:19. He wrote, "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

Folks just do not seem to realize that division is sometimes necessary on this account. God does not approve of everybody. Those whom God approves often find themselves isolated from others. By this, it can be known whom God approves and whom He disapproves. John, the apostle of love, presented a similar thought in 1 John 2:19:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

I do not think this verse needs any comment. There should not be any guilty feelings simply because we are isolated from other groups. In fact, we must isolate ourselves, or return to the very things the brotherhood opposes.

Heresies always come from following the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-20). We will need to remember this as we discuss the steps that lead to such factions. Webster's definition of "heresy" is:

1 a) a religious belief opposed to the orthodox doctrines of a church; esp., such a belief specifically denounced by the church b) the rejection of a belief that is a part of church dogma 2 any opinion (in philosophy, politics, etc.) opposed to official or established views or doctrines 3 the holding of any such belief or opinion

This current definition of heresy seems to fall short of its first century meaning and usage, where the religious beliefs were carried to the point of complete separation, such as the division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Before going to the next point, another phrase found in 1 Corinthians 1:13 needs to be considered: "Is Christ divided?" The word "divided" comes from *merizo* and is defined as "to part, divide into," in the middle voice it means "to divide anything with another, to share with." The word generally means "to divide" (Vine's). An excellent example of the meaning of the word is found in Mark 6:41, where Christ employed five loaves and two fish to feed the five thousand men. Mark wrote about the fish: "And the two fishes divided he among them all" (Mk. 6:41). We can visualize a piece of the fish being broken off and given to each of the five thousand men gathered there. Paul is arguing in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that Christ is not like those fish—He cannot be broken into parts and each faction receive a part of Him. This phrase emphasizes the point that the schisms existing in Corinth could lead to open division or heresy.

So a congregation goes from internal division to open division by someone taking a schism and pushing it to the point of forming another group. Paul condemned this action. Therefore, there must be some way to recognize schisms in the Lord's church so that we can avoid formations of sects.

What Are Some Signs That Internal Division Is Occurring?

Each time a heresy develops to fruition, people generally reflect afterward about the things that happened to bring it about; but after the heresy exists it's too late to do much about it. Therefore, it is necessary for congregational leaders to keep their eyes open for any signs of a developing schism. Those of you who direct the affairs of a congregation, are not there just to unlock the doors of the building, appoint song leaders and teachers, and select which preacher will hold your meeting four years from now. There are some schisms you may choose to ignore, but most must be recognized and dealt with immediately. Generally, a heresy occurs when church leaders bury their heads in the sand and act as if nothing dangerous is happening. Or, they begin to think that the existing differences are temporary and will soon vanish.

A heresy will not develop unless its seeds have a proper environment in which to grow. In other words, a congregation can easily prepare the soil, till and fertilize it, so that heresy can reap its awful harvest. They can do this without realizing the consequences of their actions or lack of actions.

Before we study the indicators that a division is growing within a congregation, let us briefly look at some signs that indicate a congregation is husbanding schisms and divisions.

1. A congregation prepares the seed bed for schisms and heresies when it does not work properly and does not have proper goals. When I was just a boy, my father plowed with a team of mules. Preachers would come to hold the annual big meeting at the congregation we attended, and would try to get us all to work harder for the Lord's cause and to do more. They would warn us of impending troubles and difficulties if we did not heed their admonitions. Since about all who attended were farmers, they would use the following illustration. When you are using mules to pull your plow, they do not kick and fight each other so long as they are pulling. If they stop pulling, they will start biting and kicking at each other. If you want the biting and kicking to stop, just start them to pulling again. How wise the use of such an illustration as that!

Now, I do not want to be accused of calling our church leaders and preachers mules, but the fact is, we all know a few that are as hard-headed and stubborn as mules. There are some members who possess similar characteristics. We have some in our congregations who you must keep pulling or they will start biting and devouring one another.

Someone might say, "I do not think that is entirely true, because we meet three times each week, have two gospel meetings each year, and help support more than one preacher here in America and foreign countries as well. How can you say we are not pulling?" Well, there may be a certain amount of pulling going on, but not in the area that stops trouble. When a congregation has schisms, you can always find abnormal growth in individuals. They remain children and act like it. To warn of this danger, Paul wrote:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:14-15).

Paul here gives some of the reasons why God gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their basic work is described in verse 12: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The functionaries mentioned are given for the purpose of "perfecting" the saints. That is a large part of their work. This means that if you are a preacher, elder, or teacher, you are going to be mending and repairing each saint, that is each member of the church, in order that they might do the work of the ministry, and edify, or build up.

the body of Christ. This is the type of pulling I am speaking of and it is not done by just meeting three times each week, having two gospel meetings, and helping support one or more preachers. It is done by the members wanting to grow and these leaders wanting to help them grow. If the members do not have this normal development process nurturing them, a huge vacuum is created in their spiritual interaction with other members and the world. Jesus gave a parable illustrating what usually happens at this point:

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first (Mt. 12:43-45).

The man in this parable was mended. The unclean spirit had gone out of his life. However, the vacuum was not filled with something else. The house was just swept and garnished. The unclean spirit returned to this man and found a good, clean place. It gathered up seven more unclean spirits and entered into this man. The result was devastating. The man was worse off than before. Many people obey the gospel and become members of the church. Unless we have the time to prepare them for their ministry, more evil things will begin to possess them. These evil things are delineated by Paul in verse 14. They are subject to: "every wind of doctrine," "the sleight of men," and "cunning craftiness." If they remain children, they cannot properly deal with any one of these three things. They are suitable for Satan to use to bring about a division.

2. *A church is cultivating a seed bed for schisms and divisions when they do not deal with problems immediately.* As we have mentioned, there may be some problems you can ignore, but most, if not dealt with immediately, will grow. I know of one preacher who did not deal with a problem when it began. He called me up wanting to know what to do, because now he had five problems that had grown out of that one. I appreciate the attitude of one of the preachers here today who, in dealing with a brother who was on the verge of teaching a false doctrine, informed him that he would not get off the property that day until it was settled.

3. *Too often, the church leaders are the problem.* They are still acting like children. They have not had adequate training to know how to deal with schisms. In fact, sometimes they are the ones who create and encourage them. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

4. *The seed bed for schism is further prepared by having a membership that will not manifest a submissive spirit.* Rather, they are like the rebellious son who decides that his authority is equal to the authority of the parents. Therefore, he can go, come, and do as he pleases. The reason Paul connected the word "carnal" with divisions in the church at Corinth is found in Jude 8-10—

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

When members speak evil of church leaders and reject them without proper procedure, they are doing the very thing Jude speaks of here. This spirit and these actions did not come from above, but from the flesh. They are carnal.

Signs That Indicate Schisms Exist

Now, assuming that the leaders of a congregation are doing their proper duties and members are responding correctly, what signs should they be looking for that indicate schisms exist?

1. *Differences of thought among members of a congregation.* Each heresy begins with a thought in someone's mind that is different from the thoughts of some of the other members. These thoughts may involve things of indifference or things of a doctrinal nature. The thoughts may even involve personalities, as we shall see. Conception of a division has now taken place. The gestation period may be long or it may be short. It may even be aborted. If a prospective division is handled at this point, the damage to the body of Christ can be minimized. If it is not correctly dealt with, the congregation will begin to develop abnormally.

To show the connection between "thoughts" and "schisms," let us again note 1 Corinthians 12:25: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." The word translated "care" in this passage is the same word translated "thought" in Matthew 6:25: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink . . ." This word, *merimnao*, conveys the thought of anxiety. Vine writes that it "signifies to be anxious about, to have a distracting care." If we do not think properly about our brethren's welfare, we have raised a schismatic red flag. If we have an anxious and distracting care about a different doctrine involving digression, denominationalism, fellowship, etc., we are holding up a sign that should read, "Danger—schismatic at work." If we are preoccupied with some matter of indifference, it is a signal that we could create a tear or schism. The tear may not be very large at first, but all of us must remember, though it be but a matter of indifference, the tear can be made worse.

I once worked with a congregation that had gone through a shattering experience like this before I arrived. A brother, along with his family, had long entertained erroneous views about digression. In order to meet regularly with this congregation he agreed not to worship with digressive churches and to keep his beliefs to himself, both privately and publicly. This worked well for awhile; however, the brethren had forgotten a proverbial statement—"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). Soon, he could contain himself no longer and began "talking up" his beliefs.

Eventually, he was forced to leave the congregation, but took some of the other members away with him.

2. *Preoccupation with thoughts about some things that are different from his brethren.* Seldom does one with this characteristic become humble. The natural progression is toward arrogance. Paul had this in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 4:18—"Now some of you are puffed up" (KJV); "Some of you have become arrogant" (NIV). In other words, they were lifted up with pride. More than one who went away from us has explained to me that he has surpassed me in knowledge, and when I reached his level of understanding, I would understand why he left us and went into digression and denominationalism. When a person possesses knowledge with this attitude, he has written across his forehead, "I am a schismatic." "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:1-2).

3. *Hurt feelings because of unwise or harsh words.* The hurt is intensified by exclusion from the participants in the schism. There is a communication break-down.

What is happening at this point might better be described by using a family that has painfully discovered it has an abnormal situation because of hurt feelings. A father might promise his son to take him fishing, to a ball game, or some other event that the son enjoys. When the time comes for them to go together, the father might decide he needs to work, or instead of going with his son, decides to do something else with one of his friends, such as playing golf. As a result, the son has hurt feelings. One of the signs of hurt feelings in a son or daughter is a lack of communication. If parents tell me they cannot communicate with their child, I ask them if they have hurt the child's feelings in some way. If this matter is not properly resolved, the child will continue to develop the schism in the family by becoming ungrateful and refusing to submit to the parent's authority in various ways. They then decide that their own authority is equal to or superior to their parents'. They do their own thing when they want to and for as long as they want to. This rebellious attitude causes them to associate with friends the parents do not approve of. These friends are usually rebellious children from other families. It is amazing how quickly they can find others with the same feelings they have. Finally, they separate themselves from the family.

It is no wonder that Paul describes those involved in the several schisms existing at Corinth as immature, "even as . . . babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). They were acting as rebellious, immature children. They hurt the feelings of other members and their own feelings were easily wounded. Each step taken in a schism makes it more difficult to repair the rent. Solomon wrote, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle" (Prov. 18:19).

4. *There must be someone to rally around.* It may be one or more persons per schism. Paul described this indicator: "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:13).

McGarvey and Pendleton in *The Standard Bible Commentary* wrote,

The pride of Corinth showed itself largely in philosophical conceit, and the citizens who vaunted their superior intelligence were divided into sects, of whom Aristotle, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, and later philosophers, were the heads. The church became inflated with this same intellectual vanity, and apparently sought to make Christianity the rival of philosophy by exalting her humble teachers to be heads of religion-philosophical sects, and rivals of Christ himself.

It is no wonder that Paul had to spend the rest of this chapter plus three more dealing with their philosophical desires and their penchant for following men. These were carnal ideals and desires, so Paul further instructed them by writing:

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? . . . And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another(1 Cor. 3:3-4a, 4:6).

In Numbers 16, Dathan, Abiram, On, along with 250 princes, chose Korah in a schism that related to the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Korah was the one around whom they rallied. It is essential to have someone to rally around if a schism is to grow into a heresy. This schism was brought to a permanent end when God opened the earth, and it swallowed the leaders, their families, and all that appertained unto them. Then fire came from the Lord and consumed the 250 princes who offered incense. In addition, 14,700 died by plague because they did not like the way the Lord had handled the matter. Not all schisms are handled in such a final way, though we might wish some of them were. Bro. Homer Gay is reputed to have said the following words about a congregation with schisms in it: "What this church needs is some good funerals." Now, whether he said this or not, it expresses the way God handled that schism in Numbers 16. Today, it is not the people who need to be killed; what needs to die is the natural desire to follow men and our fleshly inclinations instead of Christ.

It is rather easy to find a man to rally around when the occasion presents itself. This is because of a false notion about the nature of religion and man's natural feelings about it. In discussing the reasons for the existence of sects, Albert Barnes wrote in his comments on 1 Corinthians 11:19—"The love of power and popularity. Religion may be made the means of power, and they who have the control of the consciences of men, and of their religious feelings and opinions, can control them altogether."

Diotrephes had fallen into this trap and seemed successful in usurping power in religion that was not his:

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not con-

tent therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 Jn. 9-10).

If you want to create a sect it is easy to find a Diotrophes in the church today. There are those who desire preeminence over their brethren, because of the flesh and immaturity. But it is not easy to find a Paul who can stop schisms before they develop to maturity. This step is about as far as a schism can go without becoming a heresy. In fact, we might call it a transitional sign or indicator that a heresy is developing. Beyond this step, there is generally no return to a unified group.

Additional Signs That An Open Schism Is Developing

The word "open" is used before schism in this heading to indicate that a heresy or sect has developed. We have already seen four steps that have gotten us to this point. (1) We have seen that differences in thought about a subject are necessary. (2) Then, because of preoccupation with these thoughts, wrong attitudes develop. (3) Through a lack of wisdom and proper consideration of others, feelings are hurt. (4) The group with similar feelings and thoughts begins to polarize around the ones they believe are leaders of the group. We continue our count of these signs under the new heading.

5. *When leaders are selected by the group, the intensity in differences increases.* John wrote about Diotrophes:

Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 Jn. 9).

This is the second time I have introduced this verse. This time I want to emphasize the job description a group gives to the one or ones around whom they have rallied so that pressure can be intensified. John uses active verb forms to describe the "deeds which he doeth." And John would remember these deeds when he arrived. First, John would remember Diotrophes' prating against the apostles, using malicious words. "Prating" means "to talk nonsense" (Vine). This is what he was doing in bringing false accusations against the apostles. The idea is that he was chattering and babbling on and on about this matter. That is his job. He has to exert pressure on those who do not agree with him. Second, John would remember Diotrophes for not receiving the brethren. Verses 5-7 indicate that many brethren had gone forth to preach. Evidently, Diotrophes had refused to permit the church to help them financially in this effort, and that responsibility had been taken by Gaius as an individual. If the preachers did not share his thoughts and actions, he would not receive them. Third, he refused to permit others to receive them. How this reminds us of days gone by, when those who believed in using more than one cup, Sunday Schools, and such like, would bring pressure upon the few in a congregation who opposed these innovations! This pressure increased until they cast us out of our buildings so that they could put their little cups on "new carts," so to speak. I want you who would dilly-dally around with those folks to remember that. It can and will happen again, if they have their way about it.

6. *The leaders begin to put pressure on others to make a choice.* These "choices" are illustrations of the literal meaning of the word "heresy," and becomes the sixth sign or of impending division. These leaders are not unlike those who, through a wily use of mob psychology, influenced the people to turn against Christ and cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The people made a choice. "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). It seems the Jewish people have gravely suffered for almost two thousand years because of that choice. The consequences of their choice ought to make each of us more careful in making our choices, especially during times when there is church trouble. I have seen the hurt brought about by such choices. Brothers and sisters become estranged. I have seen parents and children on opposite sides of church schisms and heresies. Sometimes there is no reconciliation. Both sides could have chosen truth. David wrote, "I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me" (Ps. 119:30).

In the Canadian Rockies, there is a stream called Divide Creek. At a point in its course, the creek divides around a large boulder. Waters which flow to the left of the boulder rush on into Kicking Horse River and finally into the Pacific Ocean. Waters which travel to the right flow into the Bow River which courses into the Saskatchewan River, on into Lake Winnipeg, the Nelson River, Hudson Bay, and into the Atlantic Ocean. Once the waters divide at the rock, there is no turning back. Our study has now brought us to a similar boulder we might denominate as "Separation." This is the final step we shall study.

7. *Separation.* Sometimes the new group attempts to form another congregation. It might be in another community, or across town. I know of one that went just one city block away. Regardless of how far or near they go, they are heretics in the full sense of the word, if they are not approved by God.

My prayer and hope is that as the dark and stormy clouds of schisms and heresies gather around a congregation, recognition of these signs and indicators, along with the use of much wisdom, will help cause rays of peace and unity to shine brightly in each leader's and member's heart. And that God will be glorified by all, that the world would better believe that God sent Jesus Christ, because His mind is in us. 2340 Sanguinetti #104, Stockton, California 95205

Profile of a Schismatic

Allen Bailey

I am honored to participate in this 1995 Preachers Study in Arlington, Texas. I offer a special word of appreciation to Brethren Mark Bailey and Joe Norton for asking me to participate in this study on "Crisis in the Church." I hope and pray that my thoughts will serve beneficial to this study.

I want to state first that this is a very subjective topic. By that, I simply mean that the material produced in this presentation will be determined by and emphasized by my personal perspective, ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc. I will align my thoughts with the New Testament Scriptures.

My approach to this topic is the identical approach I take with counseling people. I have people call from the community from time to time who ask, "Do you do premarital counseling, marriage counseling, etc." My response is that I am not a state licensed counselor and have no formal training. The counseling that I do is one hundred percent biblically based. I will take this same approach to today's topic. Perhaps a professional counselor would give you a profile from their massive research that would be helpful, but this presentation will be information provided from the Great Physician.

In my research, I have talked to counselors, medical doctors, a psychologist and a psychiatrist; and the consensus is that there are no absolutes regarding a profile of a schismatic. For example, one hot-tempered person may cause a congregation great grief, while another hot-tempered person may not cause the same congregation trouble. I cannot say that all hot tempered brethren will, without fail, cause a schism in the body of Christ. We will discuss this more in the body of the lesson.

This topic is a much needed topic because some church leaders have been faced with unfortunate circumstances that demanded immediate action. But what should be done? A congregation with brethren who avoid conflict at every turn could have a serious problem when the time comes to deal with a divisive person. When a divisive person afflicts a congregation, there will be conflict, disagreement, and sometimes very stern words will have to be spoken. When these actions are in defense of the church, they must be delivered without respect of person.

Defining "Schism"

New World Dictionary of American Language:

schism (siz'm; now occasionally skiz'm)—1. a split or division in an organized group or society, especially a church, as the result of differing of opinion, of doctrine, etc. 2. the offense of causing or trying to cause a split or division in a church. 3. any of the sects, parties, etc. formed by such a split or division.

New Testament Usage:

schisma [Strong, #4978] The Greek word “skisma” is used eight times. “A division, dissension.” (A) In Jesus’ parable of sewing an unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Mt. 9:16; Mk. 2:21), it is a tear or rent. (B) In three references in John when the Jews were disputing over who Jesus was, the translation is “division” (Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). (C) In Paul’s reproof of wrangling in the Corinthian church, the translation is “discord” or “division” (1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18; 12:25).

From these verses and other relating passages, we will draw our conclusions regarding the “profile of a schismatic.” By letting the Bible interpret the Bible, we learn what a schismatic is, what offenses they cause, how destructive they are in the body of Christ, and many other words of wisdom from God above.

From our brief word study it is clear to see that a schism designates a division within the church, a disruption of harmony and coordination.

There should be no schism in the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor. 12:25).

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another (KJV).

... so our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other (NCV).

... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (NIV).

“Discord” is probably a better translation in this context. It may be expanded to, “be no quarreling among the members . . .” The word translated “care” has a positive meaning. The phrase “may have the same care for one another” may be rendered as:

“may exist for the good of all” (parts) or “may have love and concern for each other.” An alternative translation model for this verse is: God did this so that the parts of the body may not quarrel with each other, but that they should have the same care (or concern) for each other (**A Handbook On Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians**, pp. 286-287).

A Profile of Schism in the Church

(1) *Doctrinal Conflict.* Doctrinal differences in the church are very serious. They need to be dealt with immediately so souls are not lost. Paul said,

Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

(2) *Personality Conflict.* Most divisions in our brotherhood are over personality conflicts and not doctrinal conflicts. Personality conflict is the discord created when

certain individuals are not getting along and people began siding with one person against another. The Bible clearly directs how to handle these conflicts (Mt. 5:23; 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-5).

(3) *Leadership Conflict.* This conflict occurs when certain members of the congregation strongly express their dissatisfaction and disagreement with the leadership of a congregation. Serious problems also occur when one leader has unresolved conflicts with another leader.

(4) *Racial Conflict.* This tension is created by the prejudiced and biased attitude of certain church members concerning relationships with people of another race. Generally, when this subject is addressed, the discussion centers on black-white relations. It is wrong for whites not to accept blacks or any other race, and it is just as wrong for blacks to act like they are better than whites. I know of white Christians who give strong indications by using racial slurs that they are prejudice against blacks, and I know of black Christians who give equally strong indications of prejudice against the white race. Jas. addresses the subject of showing respect of persons by stating "ye commit sin" (Jas. 2:1-9).

(5) *Moral Conflict.* This conflict surfaces when certain members either promote questionable lifestyles or indulge in immorality which is in direct violation of New Testament principles (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21).

New Testament Examples

(1) Paul rebuked Peter at Antioch because he refused to eat with Gentile Christians. Paul withstood Peter to the face, for he was to be blamed (Gal. 2:11-21).

(2) Some false teachers went out from Jerusalem in Acts 15 preaching, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved." Paul and Barnabas dealt with them head on. They visited the home congregation and decisive action was taken by the apostles and elders to resolve this erroneous teaching.

(3) Diotrephes refused to receive some faithful Christians and John let it be made known that he would deal with the matter when he arrived, saying, "I will remember his deeds which he doeth" (3 Jn. 10).

(4) Demas was a co-laborer with Paul, but his mind turned to the evils of the world. Paul states "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul exposed him and did not want his influence to hurt the work of the church or faithful Christians.

(5) Paul directly warns the Ephesian elders, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-31).

(6) Jesus gives us a much needed principle in Matthew 12:25, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."

(7) The Apostle Paul forthrightly states in Romans 16:17-18, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

Whenever a schism is in the making, quick and decisive action is necessary. The way to be prepared for these unfortunate situations that crop up from time to time is to decide now how you will deal with an adulterer, a false teacher, a trouble maker, etc. and follow through with your actions if and when the occasion presents itself.

These New Testament examples demonstrate that problems facing the church should be dealt with and not left alone to fester up, thus causing serious division in the body of Christ. We will be held accountable to God how we deal with these matters.

Who Are Schismatics?

(1) Church members who go astray from the truth and faith will cause conflict (1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Tim. 2:18, Tit. 3:10, 2 Pet. 2:1).

(2) Permitting the influence of evil into fellowship will cause conflict (1 Tim. 4:1; Eph. 5:16; 1 Thess. 5:22).

(3) The misleading of people concerning the will of God will cause division in the body of Christ (Jas. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:3-5).

(4) Denying Christ will cause conflict (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Tim. 2:12; Tit. 1:16; 2 Jn. 1:9-10).

(5) Unfaithfulness to Christ will cause conflict (2 Tim. 2:13; Rev. 2:10; 1 Cor. 15:58).

(6) An unholy life will cause conflict (2 Tim. 3:2).

(7) Rebellion toward God will cause conflict (Tit. 1:10).

(8) Defiling one's mind with ways of the world can cause conflict since it will cause a person to lose a sense of rightness (Tit. 1:15; Phil. 4:8).

(9) Any unrepented sin can and will cause conflict in the body of Christ, because it gives sin the opportunity to surface in the lives of other Christians (1 Tim. 5:24; 1 Cor. 5:6).

(10) Materialism will cause conflict (1 Tim. 3:3; 6:9-10; 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:2). "Love of money is the root of all evil" is not only true in the world, but also true in the church.

(11) Idleness among church members will cause conflict (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:11).

(12) Foolish and ignorant speculation by certain church members will cause conflict (2 Tim. 2:23).

(13) Selfishness on the part of certain members will cause conflict (2 Tim. 3:2).

(14) An arrogant spirit by certain church members will cause conflict (2 Tim. 3:2). When a Christian who sins refuses to admit guilt and confess wrongs, the problem is compounded.

(15) An unloving spirit toward one another (2 Tim. 3:3; 1 Cor. 13:4-8). Church members who express no compassion, no affection, and no respect for others are characterized as having an unloving spirit.

(16) An irreconcilable spirit by certain church members will cause conflict. It is very regrettable when certain members of the church refuse to resolve conflict though an irreconcilable spirit (2 Tim. 3:3; Mt. 5:23; 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 6:1-5).

(17) Those who despise good done by certain church members will cause conflict (2 Tim. 3:3). When church members exemplify negative attitudes such as envy, jealousy, strife, etc. toward wholesome expressions of kindness, gentleness, patience, etc., it breeds conflict.

(18) The hypocrisy of liars will cause conflict (1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 3:5,13; Rev. 21:8). A lie can easily damage the character and influence of an innocent person. God hates lying (Prov. 6:16-19).

(19) Gossips and busybodies in churches will cause conflict (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3; 2 Thess. 3:11).

(20) A negative and argumentative spirit by members of the church will cause conflict (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:14; Tit. 1:10). Most problems congregations face would be resolved if we would become more positive. Negative attitudes create tension in the congregation.

(21) Stereotyping people causes conflict (Tit. 1:12) "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons" is a stereotypical expression. The expression, "guilty by association" applies here. This attitude leads to ill-feelings, misunderstandings, and strife which causes conflicts.

(22) When Christians are disrespectful to their brothers and sisters in Christ, it causes conflict (1 Tim. 6:2).

(23) When Christians get entangled with the ways of the world, it causes conflict (2 Tim. 4:10; 2 Tim. 2:4; Mt. 13:22). Remember Christ's warning, "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word."

(24) Members of the church who are brutal in conduct will cause conflict (2 Tim. 3:3). If people are extremely cruel or harsh in their relationships with others, it will naturally result in conflict. Harshness, resentment, cruelty, hatred, etc. have no part in a Christian's heart.

(25) Some people pride themselves on finding problems and bringing them to the battlefield, opposing church leaderships, etc. This attitude promotes division in the body of Christ (2 Tim. 3:8).

(26) Those with factious spirits will cause division in the body of Christ (Tit. 3:10-11; Rom. 16:17-18).

(27) A spirit of deception in certain church members will cause conflict (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:6, 13; Tit. 1:10). When a person deliberately deceives others it can and will cause division in the church.

(28) One who constantly finds fault with everybody and everything is a person to watch, for they will cause strife in the congregation.

(29) Women who try to rule the congregation through their husbands are out of place. Women have their roles, but decision making for the church is not one of them (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12).

(30) Desiring preeminence (3 John 9). One who has this attitude of "having to be first" can cause much difficulty for himself and others.

(31) A youthful pride, if not controlled, will cause division. A statement I heard once was indicative of this: "We are not the church of tomorrow, we are the church of today." Statements like this are obviously coming from a troubled person who will cause difficulties if not controlled.

(32) Leaders of congregations who "drive" the membership instead of "leading" them will cause problems. The old adage: "You can drive a team of horses to water, but you can't make them drink" is appropriate here.

(33) Forming a conspiracy with other brethren against one or more in the church is divisive in nature.

(34) One who does not esteem others better than himself (Phil. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:13; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). Some today have the attitude that they are more spiritual than others. Self-righteousness is wrong.

(35) When a person chooses to be "conservative to the point of being radical" and pushes his opinions to the point of looking down on others and criticizing others who do not conform to his way of thinking is a divisive person (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8, 9, 10).

(36) Those who are always asking "foolish and unlearned questions" the Bible says "gender strife" (2 Tim. 2:23).

(37) One who thinks of others "above that which is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). It is not a matter of who believes something that makes it right or wrong, but what Scriptures teach. A serious concern of mine is the ongoing expression brethren make, "Brother (name a preacher) says this is okay. All that is important is what saith the scripture."

(38) A whisperer or backbiter is a schismatic in the body. When someone lowers his voice, looks around, and begins, "Don't tell anyone about this, but . . .", here goes

another gossip session. Stop this person in their tracks, make them prove their statements, and follow Bible precepts. Do not listen to a bunch of garbage (Rom. 1:29-30).

(39) An observable negative behavior seen in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1) the formation of cliques. In the process, they became divided. People who form cliques often gossip behind people's backs, which is also a sin. This sinful behavior has been seen by preachers of the gospel in our day and time, and it is wrong. A clique is a small, exclusive circle of people.

How Do We Deal With Someone With These Characteristics?

(1) Establish a list of characteristics that seem to fit those who have caused division in the church and teach on it frequently in the congregation. With this teaching needs to come the message of how to deal with these problems.

(2) "Warn the unruly." When we see actions indicate a divisive situation, then we should knock on their door and talk to them early, not to make charges but to "nip the problem in the bud." This step could be considered "operation prevention." Remember the adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

(3) The congregation's leadership should be on their guard and not receive people who wander in from other congregations. Too many congregations are so eager to increase their membership that they ask no questions and just open their arms to anyone who wants to come there to worship. Always, always, always, do a character check up and see if they are "recommended by the brethren" (Acts 15). If a brother is not recommended by the previous congregation, send him back to resolve the conflicts and/or evaluate the situation before accepting him in.

How Do We Approach A Schismatic About His Problem?

Paul advised, "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject (Tit. 3:10). Whenever there is a divisive person in the congregation, give that person a firm stern warning and let him know this is the "first admonition." You convey the message that you will monitoring the situation and any promotion of division will be dealt with decisively and immediately.

Paul also wrote, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). And to the Thessalonians, "Warn them that are unruly" (1 Thess. 5:14).

Conclusion

At the present time, it seems that many of the congregations across the land are experiencing an unparalleled epidemic of church conflict. Such on going conflict and division in the body of Christ robs Christians of an effective and fulfilling life in Christ.

My heart is made heavy when I hear of congregations splitting in Alabama, Missouri, Arkansas, and yes, even Texas. Division is deplorable and souls are going to hell over this action if proper actions are not taken.

In attempting to understand why division occurs, we must begin by looking at ourselves. Am I responsible, in any degree at all, for creating an atmosphere of unrest in the congregation or in the brotherhood? What should I do to correct my own personality quirks? Remember, "He who lives in a house of glass does not cast stones." You may be saying, Don't look at me for this problem. Brethren, I know the easiest thing for everyone to do is to blame someone else for the turmoil. Please, let us be honest with ourselves and "examine ourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Rather than blaming each other, let us roll up our sleeves and practice New Testament Christianity. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Esteem others better than yourself. Do not show respect of persons. Never say something about someone you have not said to their face. All those private conversations and meetings that go on, those of which no one knows but you and those invited, remember, God knows it all!

I do not have the final answer to this complex problem. I do have confidence in my fellow preaching brethren, elders, deacons, and congregational teachers that if we work together to the common goal, peace is obtainable and souls will be saved.

Let us conclude with Paul's message to the Ephesians:

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

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Alternatives To Impending Division

Clovis Cook

It is highly important, if not imperative, that some foundational material be laid out for a comprehensive understanding of this subject.

The noun form of the word "alternative" means, "A choice between possibilities." The adjective form, "Allowing or furnishing a choice" (Webster's)

We recognize the possibilities of several choices, but an alternative being a choice does not include division as one of the choices. An alternative furnishes a way around division. It is a prevention. And since division in the body of Christ is wrong according to the Scriptures, surely, there is a scriptural alternative to this sinful act! This is what we are looking for.

The verb form of the word "division" means, "To separate or become separated into parts. To disunite."

It is understood that Paul had been to Corinth, and had established the church before he wrote his first letter (1 Cor. 2:1). It purports to have been written upon the eve of another visit—"But I will come to you shortly" (1 Cor. 4:19). Apparently, Paul stayed in Asia or other parts, and while he was yet in Ephesus, before departing, he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. However, between the time Paul set up the church in Corinth and the time he wrote the letter, probably A.D. 57, it had been reported to him that there were divisions among the members at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11). So Paul wrote a letter in which he addressed this issue. Paul condemned their divided condition. "Now I beseech you . . ." (*parakalo de humas*). This is an old and common verb used over one hundred times in the New Testament. It means, "to call to one's side." Paul is saying, "I call you to stand by my side." In seeking the alternative to division which he laid down in so many words.

As a first alternative to division, Paul exhorts the Corinthians "that you all speak the same thing"—a present active subjunctive which signifies "that ye all keep on speaking the same thing." From the very beginning, language has served as a carriage, while words became the passengers. "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Gen. 11:1). Our speech is made up with words which ride on the wheels of language, and these words can be defined to explain our thoughts. Since there is a space or gap between all spirits—"For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man that is in him" (1 Cor. 2:11). However, if you choose to divulge your minds thoughts to me by the use of words, which we both understand, you bridge the gap between us, and close the space. (See *Witness of the Spirits* by James W. Zachary.)

Robert Milligan, in the *Scheme of Redemption* writes, "When God spoke to man, he spoke for the purpose and with the design of being understood. The contradictory of this proposition is an absurdity." Also, "Fundamental facts and principles of the Christian faith, are not, therefore, proper and legitimate subjects of debate."

So one alternative would be to *talk, talk, talk*. If you develop hard feelings, or have animosity against one or more members of the body of Christ, "Go to him (or them)" and talk it over. Don't run off into some corner and pout, and don't see how many members you can line up with you who would be willing to split the body of Christ. You do your neighbor good when you point out to him the error of his ways. A man once said that he had cut a hole in his neighbor's house top—but he didn't think that he had done him any harm—because his house was on fire. So, do we wait until a crisis develops before we look for an alternative?

We should educate our members in the alternatives before trouble looms over the horizon—we should know where the water spigot is before the house catches on fire. Timothy was told to teach and to exhort, and to warn them that would not consent to wholesome words, "even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (the very words of God), that discipline would be forth coming. "From such withdraw thyself" (1 Tim. 6:2-5).

Paul said, "If any man teach otherwise . . ." That is, if they do not teach practically; do not teach such as would promote serious conduct, but rather "wholesome words" that have a direct tendency to heal the soul. We are not required to consent to just any words, but only the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. To these we must give our unfeigned assent, for it is the doctrine according to godliness. Those who refuse to do this are "proud, contentious, unlearned, and do a great deal of harm and mischief to the church, knowing nothing. Observe, commonly those are most proud who know the least, for with all their knowledge they do not know themselves" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on 1 Timothy 6:1-5). We have by no means exhausted the full scope of Paul's Alternative No. 1, set forth in 1 Corinthians 1:10-11.

Paul offers a second alternative, when he says, "But that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind . . ." (1 Cor. 1:11). "In the same mind" must mean "be of one mind." "Finally, be ye all of one mind . . ." (1 Pet. 3:8). By the same mind, that is, by mutual good affection, for the same mind, in the sense of the same opinion, is not to be expected in any great society. We have the same direction "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another . . ." (Rom. 15:5), this expressed, the same disposition towards one another (Macknight). Be of one mind—live in peace.

Now let us suppose that division has come to our home congregation, and two or more of the brethren cannot agree on who or what caused the division. Obviously, these brethren are not of the same mind. To be of the same mind or to be of one mind must mean one and the same. One thing is certain, where division exists, such division is wrong; both cannot be right. Both could be wrong. So what should be done?

If it is a matter of a misunderstanding over what someone might have said—"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Cor. 13:1). If the Scripture is being misapplied—"To the law and the testimony" (Isa. 8:20). If it is a matter of rhetoric, then it is a grammatical matter.

As a third alternative to division, Paul says, "... and in the same judgment." Here in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul equates "same judgment" with "same mind." If you be of the same mind, it is hard to believe you would not be of the same judgment.

By the same judgment denotes that practical judgment which precedes volition. The meaning is, that in our deliberations we should yield to each other from mutual affection, and from a love of peace. Accordingly, the heathen moralists described true friendship as cemented by the same inclinations and aversions (Macknight on 1 Corinthians 1:10).

Former President Jimmy Carter, one of the seven most influential men in the world, is considered to be a very effective arbitrator for peace in troubled countries. And to what does he attribute his success? He says, "When I arrive in such a country I look for a commonality— something both sides want most, and through peaceful dialogue I show how both sides can be winners if we will work for the things both sides want most. Which of course, should be peace in all cases."

A Few Observations

All too often in matters of division the act is performed before the thinking. James wrote, "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Jas. 1:4). In this passage James teaches that patience perfects Christian character. When division occurs, if the after-thought could have been the fore-thought, it is possible that the division could have been prevented. For example, if after the division has taken place, you should hear someone say, "We didn't think that it would turn out as it has" or "Our intentions were good." This is indicative of little or no fore-thought before the act. It has been my observation over the years, that too many times the act precedes the thinking, and too few times is patience allowed to have its perfect work, or to be exercised.

Let us look at the picture. Now the body is one (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13). These passages prove that fact. A. T. Robertson gives us a graphic picture by way of comparison of the one body to a block of wood. Schisma, is from schizo, "to split." In the papyri it is used for a splinter of wood. Now, a splinter does not separate itself from the main block, but as the result of some force. Therefore, a splinter, being no more a part of the block of wood from which it was separated, it becomes "a splinter group." Now they who drive the wedge to split the block or log, Paul said, should be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17). This is what must be avoided at all cost. "There are six things the Lord hates, yea even seven . . . he that soweth discord . . ." "Discord" is the seed of division (Prov. 6:16-19).

Now we turn our attention to the four questions submitted to me as a part of my subject.

1. *When a crisis develops in a congregation, is division ever justified?* If the crisis developed over an error in either false doctrine or practice, obviously, the error must be corrected. If correction isn't effected, then it seems to me that discipline is the only alternative. I'm not sure that division is ever justified in the body of Christ, except for evangelical growth and maturity. If a congregation has sufficient numbers, and lead-

ership it is scriptural to branch out. Robert Milligan, in the Scheme of Redemption, writes:

That a body of believers composed of an indefinite number of members may, for the sake of order, convenience, and efficiency, be divided into as many congregations beyond what is really necessary. We must not loose sight of the fact that, "in union there is strength and in division there is weakness.

The expression that we sometimes hear, such as, "peaceful division" is difficult for me to comprehend. E. G. Sewell says, "There is no authority for a congregation of Christians to divide. Wicked men should be separated if they cannot be reclaimed, but never array Christian against Christian. Purify the body—not divide it" (*Questions and Answers*, p. 184).

2. *If yes, who determines whether the division is right or wrong?* If the party that is serving as an arbitrator is talking to the group that pulled away from the church, one question might decide or answer this question. "When did the church decide to start a new congregation?" If the answer is, "They never did," then we have a problem. If a new group has started meeting elsewhere and the church never agreed to do it, nor condoned it, there is a division. The rules governing division apply—the offenders should be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17).

3. *What should be the reaction of other congregations?* Paul authored the Epistle to the Romans. The same author writes in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38: "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored." Every congregation is told to do the same thing towards those that cause division.

4. *How should other congregations decide who or what preacher to accept when conflicting views are given over a congregational division?* Division in a congregation is not axiomatic. It is the result of a cause, that is, a person or persons. The effect of not exhausting every possibility for peace, can lead to division. The involvement of preachers in such matters presents a sad state of affairs. Preachers have those whom they love, a dear friend or even a relative, who are among that divisive splinter group who stepped across the line. It is hard for him to believe such people could be wrong. Regardless of what the situation may be, we come to a matter introduced by the Apostle John that must be dealt with. In 2 John 9-11, the authenticity of Christ and the doctrine of Christ is the main point of John's reasoning: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

I have a King James Version, and under verse 10, which I have just cited, Zondervan Publishing House (the Bible publisher) lists Romans 16:17. I think the passage is well placed because I believe division is sinful and those who cause division commit an evil deed.

Now let us see what a few of what may be called our better expositors, commentators, and translators say.

The “doctrine of Christ” is rendered “teaching of Christ” in many versions. If the group that separated from the church, and who established another location for the purpose of worship were made to see the error of their way, and eventually repented and made confession of faults (which, by virtue of such action was an admission of being wrong), what about the preachers who aided and abetted them while they were in the wrong? To bid them God speed, according to H. C. R. Lenski, is to “wish them well,” or even to say, “peace be unto thee.” Preachers who will do this without meeting with both sides to ascertain, to the best of his ability, who is right and who is wrong; or forms his conclusion based upon hearsay, or by hearing only from one side, disqualifies himself as a fair and impartial judge in the matter.

For fear in error you abide.

Be sure and hear the other side.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Prov. 18: 13). The Amplified Old Testament reads, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth the facts . . .” John Locke said, “He who judges, without informing himself to the utmost that he is capable, cannot acquit himself of judging amiss.”

This passage, 2 John 10, applies to any errorist who comes unto you, and to those who have fractured and divided the body of Christ. To bid God speed, or accept them, makes one partaker of their evil deed.

Ever since I was a boy preacher, I have deplored and despised division and its perpetrators. Division is not conducive to peace and tranquility: not pursuant to unity in the bond of peace. It destroys the Christian spirit, it hardens the heart, sets daughter against mother/mother against daughter, etc. There is no end to the hurt and shame! Let us stop it.

Having discussed many aspects of this important subject, it yet remains unexplained in minute detail. The annals of exploration and research in the field of reality, philosophy, and Scripture are wide open, and to annotate each of them would require volumes, and neither space nor time would be well spent in doing so.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:9). Greater is he who pursues peace when differences arise than he who arbitrarily, by whim or caprice, chooses division over unity. Shall the foot say to the hand, because you cannot walk on your hands thirty miles in a day, I have no need of thee? Shall the eye say to the ear, because you cannot see, I have no need of thee? Paul paints a gross picture in 1 Corinthians 12 of a body with one arm, one foot, one eye, and one ear. What a picture of mutilation, distortion, amputation, and butchering of the body. If this sort of thing is allowed, then in the words of Paul, may I ask, “And if they were all one member, where were the body?” (1 Cor. 12:19). Now since the members are all set in the body as it pleased God, who are we—because we may have animosity in our hearts against one or more of the brethren, or we have a personality clash, or we think that somebody needs an attitude adjustment—to begin (in the words of the late Tom

Allington) to “lop” them off one by one with the sword of division? As Abner of old once said, “Will the sword devour forever?” Will we never learn?

Some advice:

Plain talk and a good understanding makes a good relationship;

Restore in meekness (Gal. 6:1);

Let patience have her perfect work (Jas. 1:4);

Let the Bible speak in all matters (1 Pet. 4:11);

Let nothing lead to vain glory or strife;

Do not wait to see which way the wind is blowing before restoration—the glory or credit will be vain!;

Do not sweep matters under the carpet—you will face them again.

In summation, let us see what the Scriptures have wrought or hammered out for us on this subject.

1. Division is wrong in the body of Christ (Rom. 16:17). The word “mark” means, “To look, watch, as a warning to those who cause division” (W. E. Vine). And to “avoid” them means, “give them no countenance, and have no religious fellowship with them” (Adam Clarke). As Ronny Wade said, “Avoid them does not mean fellowship them” (Fourth of July Meeting, 1995). And I also agree with his question and answer column, in *Old Paths Advocate* of April 1995—“He who caused division (Rom. 16:17) as a disorderly walk (2 Thess. 2:12).” But we must remember that in this passage, Paul said, “. . . from such withdraw thyself.”

2. In 2 John 10—“bring not this doctrine” is a phrase referring to “the teaching of Christ,” as in the preceding verse 9. “Doctrine” is from *didache*, “doctrine which hath been taught” (Strong’s, p. 23).

3. Abraham said to Lot, “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee.” Jesus prayed that all those who believed on Him through the Word “might be one” (Jn. 17:20-21). He also said, “Every house divided against itself shall not stand.” What more can we say?

If my spirit bears witness with the Spirit Himself, that I am a child of God (Rom. 8:16), it must mean that I am walking in the light as God is light (1 Jn. 1:7). But, no, there seem to be some, apparently, who think the only way to have peace is through diversity. It appears that some think the keys to the kingdom (Mt. 16:19) have been transferred to them, and they own the kingdom of God, and they have power to “open and no man shutteth, and shut and no man openeth.” A sheep has strayed from the flock, we hear a faint cry coming from the waste land—a lost sheep is crying to return to those of his kind—he wants to rejoin the flock.

Consider the son who left his family (Lk. 15), but in time wanted to come back home. The father was looking and waiting. But the older brother, who was immature

in his thinking, didn't want to let him back into the family. "He made his bed, let him lie in it," seems to have been his attitude. While the angels are rejoicing in heaven over one that has repented, and the shepherd is rejoicing because he has found the sheep that went astray, and the father kills the fatted calf because his dead son is alive, some seem to attach little or no significance to the matter. Minds that have failed to appropriate the value of unity of two, and the sad shameful, hurtful, state of division, have failed to comprehend the broad foundational teaching on this subject, "Two are better than one" (Eccl. 4:9). The writer points out the strength and unity of two, and the weakness of each if they divide. Isn't it about time, brethren, that we become realist and face this problem spiritually? Isn't it about time that we recognize division as sin?

Isn't it about time that we avoid those who cause it, unless they are reclaimed? Isn't it about time that we recognize preachers who align themselves with such splinter or divisive groups, as a partaker of their evil deeds? Doesn't the Bible teach us precisely about all these matters? I believe so with all of my heart.

The fruit of the Spirit, whether it is man's spirit, or the Holy Spirit, "is joy and peace." Do we cry "Peace! Peace!" when there is no peace? "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceable with all men" (Rom. 12:18). May God help us to walk in peace, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. In Bible history, both ancient and modern, God's inspired pensmen have plead for peace and unity. Finally, upon these facts, brethren, I rest my case. *12913 Highway 64, Lebanon, Missouri 65536.*

The Evangelist's Role in Divisive Situations

Edwin Morris

Division is condemned in the Scriptures. All Christians are to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). From the teachings found in the Scriptures, the Evangelist has a responsibility to help to settle problems in the church.

In Old Testament times, Ezekiel said the priests were to settle disputes.

[A]nd they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments; and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths (Ezek. 44:23-24)

Now we are all priests, so Paul could say: "I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?" (1 Cor. 6:5).

The Apostle Paul instructed Titus: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5). Also in 1:13—"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2—"Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." Also 1:3—"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge them that they teach no other doctrine."

Problems in the church should be worked out as soon as possible. But why do Christians not try to work out their problems? There are several possible reasons.

1. They hope they will work themselves out.
2. They would rather not get involved for fear of criticism.
3. They do not have confidence they could help solve the problems.
4. In the interest of their own desires they want to avoid any inconvenience to themselves.
5. They want to be on the side of the majority and those who appear to have the most power.
6. They are indifferent and weak and are willing to tolerate the rule of those exercising power.

No congregation is exempted from church problems:

1. Problems will come to every congregation; the size does not matter.

Evangelist's Role in Divisive Situations

2. Problems often comes as a surprise and unexpectedly.
3. Problems cause the congregation to turn its attention to the problems and they lose sight of the purpose of the church.
4. In most cases the results are disunity and disfellowship.
5. Scars and memories are left that may last for many years.

What are some scriptural guidelines an evangelist can follow when he is called in to assist in a divisive situation?

1. The evangelist must be guided by 1 Timothy 4:12-16.

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

He must be an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, giving attention to reading, exhortation, and teaching; giving himself wholly to the work that his growth might be manifest to all.

2. The evangelist must let it be known that he loves those on both sides and that he wants to help. Paul said in Philippians 2:2, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Verses 19-22 of the same chapter read,

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheous shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Jesus Christ. But you know the proof of him, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in gospel.

3. Remove all preconceived ideas and opinions from your mind. Be ready with an open mind to hear both sides before making a decision. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Prov. 18:13).

Adam Clarke comments,

This is a common case; before a man can tell out his story, another will begin his. Before a man has made a response, the other wishes to confute piecemeal, though he has had his own speech already. This is foolish to them. They are ill-bred. There are many also that give judgment before they hear the whole cause, and express an opinion before they hear the state of the case. How absurd, stupid and foolish!

"Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (Jn 7:51). There first must be a proper hearing. The man charged must first be heard, i.e. given an opportunity to make his defense. Only after the evidence is in, including that of the man himself, after the court knows and has been able to make a just finding in the case, is the verdict rendered.

The condemnation of Jesus by the Jewish council was a violation of every rule of right. He was not arraigned, was not heard in self-defense, and not a single witness in His favor was brought forward.

4. *Do all things without partiality.* "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:15). They were not to be partial to the poor because of pity; nor to adorn the person of the mighty, i.e. the powerful, distinguished, exalted by favoring them in the decision. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21).

The meaning is "without previous judgment"—without any prejudice on account of rank, wealth, personal friendship, or preference beforehand. Without partiality, that is, without being inclined to favor one party or person over another. There should be no purpose to find one guilty and another innocent, no inclination of heart towards one which would lead us to resolve to find him innocent, and no dislike for another which would resolve to find him guilty.

5. *Do not let family or personal ties influence the spiritual decision you are to make.* "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me" (Mt. 10:37). Jesus points out that we are to love Him, His word, His commands, etc., more than we love our physical relationships. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Jesus points out that we are the same in the spiritual realm with no physical ties. For example, in the physical realm, Frances is my wife, but in the spiritual, she is my sister in Christ the same as any other sister. So in spiritual decisions, or in judging, I could not let the physical relationship guide me or influence me in making the decision.

6. *Be willing to sacrifice to have peace.* Notice Genesis 13:1-8.

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cat-

tle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

Abraham told Lot (1) we are of the same family, (2) we worship the same God, (3) we have the same promises, and (4) we look for the same end. Why then should there be strife? If it appears to be unavoidable from our present situation, let that situation be instantly changed, for no secular advantages can counterbalance the loss of peace!

Where Should the Evangelist Stay During this Time?

He should not stay with anyone involved in the problem. It would be best for him to stay by himself in a motel or private room. This way there is no basis for suspicion that he is favoring one side or the other. Paul said "Providing for things honest in the sight of the Lord and men" (2 Cor. 8:21; Rom. 12:17). There is no place more important to practice this principle. It requires us to manifest a spirit and a deportment that shall be lovely and comely in the view of others; such as all men will approve and admire. The apostle wisely cautions us to provide for this, i.e. to think of it beforehand.

Should Other Congregations be Informed of the Division?

This cannot be answered with a direct yes or no. Since there are different types of a division it would usually depend on the circumstances of the division, how widespread it is, and how it affects other congregations. Let us notice at least three types of division.

1. *Clear doctrinal differences (Rom. 16:17).* In this case, at least one side is wrong (it is possible both sides are wrong), and those in the wrong or trouble-makers must be rebuked.

2. *Conflicts over matters of judgment.* The classic example here is Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). The point here is that no one is wrong unless they push the matter to the point of trouble, then both sides are wrong. In Acts 1:20-26, they could have had trouble, but they acted wisely. Their procedure would be appropriate in any matter of judgment. The problem in most conflicts of this type is that they try to impose their judgments as if they were matters of law.

3. *The most common type of conflict is struggle over who is going to be the greatest, i.e. struggles over power.* The disciples argued over it repeatedly, the last time during the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:24)—"And there was also strife among them, which of them should be counted the greatest" (see also Luke 9:46-48; Mt. 20:20-24). The problem here is that no one wants to admit that they are struggling for power, like the disciples refused to tell Jesus.

And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace:

for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest (Mk. 9:33-34).

These disciples wanted to know who was going to be the greatest. Jesus told them that that was not the most important question, for unless they repented, they would not get into the kingdom at all. In this type of conflict, both sides are wrong. Today, brethren often try to cover up their power struggles with "bogus" doctrinal issues.

What are members of other congregations to do when different evangelists have opposite views of who is right and who is wrong?

If the evangelist will follow the guidelines that have been set out above, they will agree most of the time. The evangelist should realize that everyone involved should be ready to admit their wrongs and make amends for these wrongs. Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door to reconciliation. Too many times, brethren do not want to forgive others. Jesus said in Matthew 6:14-15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive men not their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Also, in Matthew 18:21-22, it says, "Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven."

All Christians should be willing to bear whatever pain, heartaches, criticism, discouragement, etc., that it takes to work things out, because afterwards there will be great rejoicing and the former things will be forgotten. Jesus taught this in John 16:21-22.

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

Finally, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). 10520 N. McKinley, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73114

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The Unity of the Spirit

Ronny F. Wade

One of the best known verses in the entire Bible is Psalm 133:1—"Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." There are some things that are good for us, but are not pleasant, and some things are pleasant, but they are not good. Unity, however, carries a double blessing—it is both good and pleasant.

Unity Is Good

Unity is good, in the first place, because God requires it. He has clearly stated His will in His Word. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul condemned the divisions existing in the Corinthian church. His closing admonition in 2 Corinthians 13:11 is an indication of his deep concern for their spiritual welfare when he charges them to "be of one mind, and live in peace."

Unity is also good because it gives stability to the church. Serious problems are abundant in churches torn by strife and division. The opposite, however, is generally true of those congregations where the "unity of the Spirit" is kept "in the bond of peace." The early church of Acts 2 was strongly motivated by the "togetherness" of their convictions and practices (2:42-47).

Unity is good because it gives influence to the church. Nothing is more devastating to the cause of Christ than a badly divided church. A divided church wields no influence, no power, no effective outreach to the lost.

Unity is good because it increases our influence with God. The more influence we have with God, the more we have with the world. When the church is in harmony with God's purposes, it is amazing what can be accomplished. Heaven's blessings are poured out upon us abundantly.

Unity Is Pleasant

It is pleasant to church members. Nothing is more upsetting than the spirit of strife. A bickering, fighting, divided church is a place of agony and pain. What enjoyment comes from unity and harmony!

It is pleasant to preachers. They can work, visit, and discharge their duties without being accused of taking sides.

It is pleasant for angels to look upon. The angels rejoice when sinners repent (Lk. 15:10). Nothing is more fulfilling than to know that the gospel is being preached and sinners saved. How sad when Christians spend their time and energy fighting each other rather than the devil.

I. The Importance and Advantages of Unity

God's Word emphasizes the importance of unity.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me (Jn. 17:20-21).

Only a few hours before our Lord went to the cross to give His life for the sins of all men, He lifted His eyes to heaven and prayed for the unity of all believers. No person in the shadow of death spends His time praying for trifles.

A. The unity of saints is the will of God. The Lord prayed for saints to be united. Division is not an option. Contentment with division is not acceptable. We cannot pray "thy will be done on earth" (Mt. 6:10) without praying for the unity of the saints.

B. The unity is limited to those who believe on Jesus. There can be no unity between Christians and non-Christians. Note 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1—"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? . . . "

C. The unity of saints is to be like that between the Father and the Son. Not an organic unity, but one of will and purpose. They work in harmony, in the same mind and judgment. There is no discord between them. They cooperate in the same work. The saints are to be one in the same way.

D. This unity will lead to the conversion of the world. "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:21). To the degree that the church is divided, Christians are responsible for the infidelity of the world.

II. Division in a Congregation is a Violation of the Unity of the Spirit.

A. We often think of division in terms of two congregations that cannot get along, or two or more factions (groups of churches) that are divided by some difference. However, in the Scriptures much of what is said relative to division refers to division within a local church. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, we read,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

The division in Corinth continued according to 1 Corinthians 11:18, and manifested itself in their observance of the Lord's supper. At this time, there were not two separate groups. They evidently continued in one group, but badly divided. In verse 19, Paul envisions the possibility that open division would eventually result, by stating: "For there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." McGarvey comments.

The word division used in the verse above (v. 18) was a milder term than "factions" found here. The former represented parties separated by present or at least very recent dissensions, while the latter described matured separations and looked toward permanent organizations (Commentary on First Corinthians, p. 115)

Both situations are sinful.

E.G. Sewell took the position that "There is no authority for a congregation of Christians to divide. Wicked men should be separated if they cannot be reclaimed, but never array Christians against Christians. Purify the body, but do not divide it" (Questions Answered, p. 144). Good advice. Many problems resulting in division could be avoided if they were addressed in a scriptural and judicious manner. Instead of dealing with the problems, however, men find it easier to divide. When division happens, those responsible must be dealt with in a scriptural manner. They must either repent or be disciplined so that the church can go forward in the discharge of her duties.

From Paul's writings the following points are evident.

1. Christ expects doctrinal unity. The people of God are to speak the same thing, and be joined together in the same mind and judgment. The idea that we can no more think alike than we can look alike, is false. We are to be guided in our thinking by the Scripture.

2. Christians are to be speaking the same thing. How do we do this? The context of 1 Corinthians helps us understand how we arrive at the oneness demand by the scripture. The man who confines himself to the revelation of God has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). To be of the "same mind" Christians must have the "mind of Christ," i.e., confine themselves to the revelation of God's Word. By so doing, we can reach the same judgment. To deny this is to deny the possibility of doing what God commanded us to do.

B. Truth should be the preliminary goal of all who serve Jesus. The practice of truth is a fundamental pre requisite to unity.

John 8:32 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.

Nothing can be clearer from the Bible than the fact that God's people must know the truth, teach the truth, practice the truth, and be united in the truth.

To contend that unity can be achieved on any other basis other than truth flies in the face of God's Word and common sense as well.

Two ships filled with cargo were headed from New York to England. The compass on one of the ships broke. They notified the other that they must depend upon their compass for navigation. The captain of the second ship instructed a sailor to clean the compass and have it fully operative because it was doubly important now. However, though both ships were united that England was their goal, they arrived at the African coast. When the compass was checked, it was discovered that in cleaning it, a piece of the knife blade had broken off and distorted the compass. Being united in goal was of small comfort to these captains and their crews. They had followed an erroneous compass and arrived at the wrong destination.

We must all be in tune with, and led by the Bible, before we can have true unity.

III. God's Picture of the Church Emphasizes the Importance of Unity.

- A. The church is pictured as God's kingdom (Mt. 16:18). But every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation (Lk. 11:17).
- B. The church is pictured as God's family (1 Tim. 3:15). But a house divided against itself falleth (Lk. 11:17).
- C. The church is pictured as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23). But we are baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). "But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. 12:20).
- D. The church is pictured as the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-23). Surely, Christ has but one bride.

IV. God's Strong Condemnation of Division Emphasizes the Importance of Unity.

All sin is condemned, but no sin is more frequently denounced or more severely condemned than that of division. It is included in the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-20). It is labeled as carnal in 1 Corinthians 3:3. We are instructed to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). A factious man is to be refused after and second admonition (Tit. 3:10). There is no way one can respect the Word of God, without recognizing the seriousness and sinfulness of religious division.

V. The Curse of Division

- A. Division means ruin. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation" (Mt. 12:25).
- B. Division destroys peace. Confusion and every evil work live where strife is (Cf. Jas. 4:14-17).
- C. Division displeases God. God hates one who sows discord (Cf. Prov. 6:16-19)
- D. Division causes people to avoid the truth. Some, instead of avoiding those who cause divisions, try to avoid Paul's teaching in Romans 16:17. Division has kept thousands from obeying Christ.

VI. The Causes of Division.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). The clear implication of this verse is that there are certain behaviors that interfere with peace and the peace process. As Christians, we are to confine our behavior to those things that belong to or make for peace.

The practical rule implied here is that, when anything is morally indifferent to me, before I act on that conviction, I must ask how such action will affect the peace of the church, and the Christian growth of others (W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, p. 706)

Let us now notice some of the behaviors that interfere with the maintenance of peace.

- A. Isolation. When we isolate ourselves from those with whom we differ, we have no hope of achieving unity. We should strive to communicate with them and understand them, and they should do the same for us in return.
- B. The pride of knowledge and lack of humility—a know-it-all attitude. To admit that one might not know it all is far from renouncing truth. Humility demands that we keep an open mind, that we keep studying and growing.
- C. The mistake of assuming good motivation for ourselves while attributing evil motivations to the words and actions of others. Such usually leads to division and not unity. To charge others with a conspiracy to conceal, lying, misrepresentation and other sinful and sinister attitudes, only drives the wedge deeper.
- D. The use of caustic and hostile terminology. We should always give others the benefit of the doubt. Always be absolutely certain of the facts; then express, in love, what we have to say. We should never misrepresent another person. In so far as possible, always deal only with issues and not personalities.
- E. The love of pre-eminence. The disciples of Jesus contended for a place of honor. Some today are willing to destroy the kingdom for power and prominence. How different the behavior of our Master! He washed the disciples feet, instead of demanding attention from them. He became a servant (Jn. 13:4-5; Phil. 2:3).
- F. A lack of gentleness in dealing with others. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). We should always deal with people in the spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1).
- G. Giving too much allegiance to certain individuals (1 Cor. 1:10).

VII. How May We Keep the Unity of the Spirit?

- A. By realizing that the Holy Spirit makes incumbent upon each disciple the duty of "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). This is not an option. It is a duty. "Endeavoring" means, working to this end, making haste and diligence. Delightfully cherish every opportunity to guard and

preserve the unity into which the Spirit leads us. "Keep" means, in the sense of maintaining with watchful care. "Bond of peace" is the dative singular of *sudesmo*, which "defines the locale or sphere in which the unity under consideration is kept" (*Expositors Greek Testament*, p. 321). There can be no unity in the absence of peace. Where there is strife and envy, there is every evil work.

- B. By adopting the correct attitudes and actions toward one another as well as the Word of God. "Forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2b). "Forbearing" means, patiently enduring one another in love. We are to be gentle and easy to be entreated and refuse to be contentious (Jas. 3:17). We may contend without being contentious. We may disagree without being disagreeable.
- C. By bearing with each others infirmities (Rom. 15:1). We are "not to please ourselves." We all have infirmities, but we see others' easier than our own. It is the mote in our brother's eye syndrome.
- D. By bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
- E. By loving one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22). When you meet an offending brother,
 - 1. Speak a kind word;
 - 2. Show a kind deed (when opportunity presents itself);
 - 3. At least three times a day, pray God that if he is right you may be convinced of it, and if not, that God may give you charity and give him grace. When you do these things hatred will dissipate, anger will flee, and love will abound.
- F. By refusing to be oversensitive: don't wear your feelings on your sleeve.
- G. By refusing to gossip and slander others (1 Tim. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:15).
- H. By our willingness to suffer wrong at the hands of brethren (1 Pet. 3:17). "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" (1 Cor. 6:7; see also 1 Corinthians 9:12). *P. O. Box 10811, Springfield, Missouri 65808.*