

12/6/87 Welch WVa

1

AN EXEMPLARY PASTORATE

Text: "Our coming to you was not in vain...for you are our glory and joy." I Thess. 2:1 and 20.

Scripture Reading: I Thess. 2:1-12, 19-20.

To paint a picture of an exemplary pastorate, put together the first and last verses of First Thessalonians, chapter two. Blessed is any minister of the Gospel who can echo these words of Paul: "For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain...for you are our glory and joy." His ministry in Thessalonica may have been no longer than three weeks, yet in what is perhaps the very first of all the New Testament books, we have a glimpse of the intimate relationship of a beloved pastor and a believing community in Greece around 50 A.D.

At this installation service, what message is appropriate for your pastor whom I know quite well since he is my brother-in-law, and for ~~a~~ congregation where I know no one? Jim's father, father-in-law, and three brothers-in-law...have all been Presbyterian ministers, and he himself has served five pastorates...what counsel could we give him about shepherding? Surely a stranger whose ministry in American churches has been less than three years cannot presume to instruct this church with her illustrious history of nearly 100 years! Yet on a day which represents a new beginning it behooves us to measure ourselves by an exemplary pastor of long ago who could tell his Thessalonian friends, "Our coming to you was not in vain" and by a congregation to whom he could write, "You are our glory and joy."

I. Paul's ministry ... not in vain. Had he forgotten how enemies at Thessalonica had accused him of being a revolutionary whose Gospel had "turned the world upside down," stirred up a riot and forced him to flee the city? No indeed! Memory of that experience merely emphasized the colossal impact of three Sabbaths of "teaching and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2,3) Why was this ministry "not in vain?"

1. There was boldness in preaching. Having just been beaten and jailed in Philippi for preaching the Gospel, it took courage to preach that same Gospel in Thessalonica again, but that did not deter Paul. Our American society with its fondness of tolerance and human rights does not treat its preachers with such physical roughness but amid our materialism, our intellectualism, and our spiritual complacency there are unsympathetic ears, there are hearts that reject the truth, and tongues that

can cut and hurt. People often shrug off or repudiate a Gospel that demands repentance for sin, faith in a crucified Saviour and obedience to a risen Lord. The bold proclamation of the old old story of Jesus and His love, takes courage because it invites ridicule, resentment or rejection...but, as in Thessalonica, it constantly "performs its work" (v. 13) among those who receive it with joy. Paul was bold in the Gospel, convinced that he was elected by God to be a steward of the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

How easy it would have been in a city where many prominent Greek men and women "received the word with great eagerness" (Acts 17:11) for Paul to have compromised his teaching, win the applause of these listeners with flattery or with words which made them feel good, and thus enjoy their hospitality and generosity as his successors in the ministry have often been tempted! Yet I am sure that along with all he could say about the love and grace and forgiveness of God, he did not hesitate to include the same unpopular message he preached later in the court of Caesarea to Felix and Drusilla about the righteousness God demands, the self control he requires in resisting the wiles of the Devil, and the judgment to come for those who wilfully reject the salvation offered in Christ. He would never have proclaimed a Gospel of mere sweetness and light, or of self-improvement fads, or the "lets have a good-time" country-club atmosphere popularized in some modern pulpits. No, he preached with boldness the pure Gospel without omission or distortion merely to court favor with his hearers. He was answerable only to God.

2. There was gentleness as pastor. It's easier to picture Paul as "bold" than as "gentle...like a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." As a great apostle he could have asserted his authority, swung his weight around, made all kinds of demands. Instead he was like a gentle and loving mother full of fond affection for his children in the faith at Thessalonica. Paul was literally in love with that church to which he wrote with the terms of endearment and ardent expressions of a lover to his beloved. In Korea, children from the earliest age are taught to give and receive gifts with both hands. Paul's was a two-handed giver. He spoke of imparting not only the Gospel itself with one hand but "but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us" with the other hand. Like the Good Shepherd, he was willing to sacrifice himself...his very life for the flock. So anxious was he to serve rather than to be served that he worked "night and day"...enduring labor and hardship...so as not to be any burden to his converts. Separation was so painful that he had to send Timothy to bring back news of his friends. In that congregation there must have been good and bad, docile and wilful, obedient and disobedient, but this pastor loved them all. He would not let programs or projects, professionalism or his

own priorities stand between himself and God's children in the church! If Paul was here today he would be rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep. He would promote and participate in the "fellowship of the saints," with whom he would love to sing, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love!"

3. There was exemplary personal behavior. Both God and the Thessalonians could witness, said Paul, "how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers." Would that all of us preachers could always make that claim! The events of 1987 have dramatically reminded us Americans of how essential it is for our leaders, whether in government or in the church, to be upright and blameless before God and man! Thank God that for every pastor or politician who disgraces a position of trust by immoral behavior, intemperance, or flouting of all decency and law...there are hundreds who never make the headlines but serve as honorable examples to others. How wonderful if all pastors could emulate Paul who humbly confessed that he was "the chief of sinners" yet also proudly claimed exemplary behavior..."devout, upright, and blameless," before the Thessalonian Christians. Thus he could he claim the right not only to love them as a nursing mother cares for her own children, but also to "exhort and encourage and implore each one of you as a father would his own children." Babies in the faith need the tender loving care of a mother, but young adolescents and even adults in the church need a father's counsel and wisdom and example. Like a good father raising teenagers, Paul was a model for all pastors by exhorting his charges in the Christian faith, encouraging and comforting them in the adjustments to the life in Christ, and most of all testifying to the end that they might mature into worthy citizens of the kingdom of God. Most significant of all was his own rich spiritual life, a life of prayer, consciousness that he was "in Christ," and that he was called of God. All could recognize that he was a true man of God. Only by exemplary behavior and piety himself had he earned the right to exhort as he did later in this letter (5:11) "abstain from every form of evil." No wonder that Paul as preacher and pastor could claim, "Our coming to you was not in vain."

II. Paul's church...his glory and joy. The Thessalonian church demonstrated that a successful pastorate is a two-way affair with parts played by both the pastor and by the people he serves. Paul could scarcely restrain his enthusiasm in praising that church, beginning his letter with thanks to God for their "work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." God had enabled those Christians to give exemplary response to every aspect of His ministry.

1. Bold Gospel preaching was received as the word of God. "When you received from us the word of God's message," says Paul in 2:13, "you accepted it not as the

word of men but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." How miraculous is the power of God's Word! Elsewhere Paul exclaimed: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Here is the miracle of miracles repeated over and over again. As a former missionary in Korea, I can testify that this miracle does not depend upon the eloquence or persuasiveness or beautiful voice or attractive personality, or education or brilliance of the preacher. We have seen that Gospel bear fruit when related by ignorant grandmothers and enthusiastic but untrained young people as well as great preachers. But as the snow and the rain come down from heaven to water the earth and cause it to bear and sprout so that Word had performed its work in the hearts of the Thessalonians who believed, causing them to turn from idols to serve a living and true God. The account of Paul's visit in Acts 17 notes that they "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" They not only listened to the preacher, but they accompanied this with study of God's Word themselves...there is even a hint here that they were checking up on their preacher's accuracy...which ought to keep any pastor on his toes too! How blessed is the church, where the Word of God is not only accepted as fully authoritative, and given a central place, but also under the supervision of the Holy Spirit is heard, read, studied, believed and obeyed!

2 Pastoral care like that of a loving mother was matched by congregational harmony. Wouldn't every pastor long to write thus to his church as did Paul (Thess. 4:9-10): "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you brethren, to excel still more." That last phrase tells us we can never have enough love within the Christian fellowship...even in Thessalonica where it was so evident! Unlike some other churches to which Paul wrote, there is no evidence here of dissention, bickering, self-seeking, jealousy...yet he implores: "excel still more...live in peace with one another." Nothing can bring greater joy and peace to a church than when not only the pastor loves the sheep, but also her members forgive one another in the spirit of Him who has forgiven us in Christ Jesus, and are more anxious to serve than to be served, and whose love evidences the true "fellowship of the saints." Paul adds an intriguing touch in 5:12: "Appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction...esteem them very highly in love because of their work." Preaching and the pastoral labors of visiting, of comforting the sick and the troubled, and all the duties of leadership exact and exhaust spiritual and emotional energies in ways unrealized and unseen by

others...but deserving both the appreciation of the congregation and their prayers as well. Paul adds this plea: "Brethren, pray for us." (5:25) A minister may fail because he receives too much praise, but never because he receives too much prayer. This appreciation extends to all faithful church officers, Sunday school teachers, youth advisors, leaders in the women's organization, musicians, treasurers, secretaries, custodians. What harmony there is in the church governed by mutual love, mutual serving, and mutual appreciation of each part of the body by all other members!

3 Paul's exemplary behavior was imitated by his readers. In chapter 4, Paul writes: "We request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel more and more." Again, no criticism, but Paul repeats "Excel more and more." He points out that "this is the will of God, your sanctification," and briefly reminds the Thessalonians that this involves the sanctity of marriage relationships, diligent and honest labor to make a living, and praise-worthy deportment in society. More than in most of his writings, in this letter the Apostle seemed to govern every teaching and every exhortation with a constant reminder that Jesus Christ will come again...an often neglected, but none the less essential doctrine. He wrote to the Thessalonian Christians not only to correct some misunderstandings about the Second Coming, but also to instruct about its implications for living lives in full readiness to receive our Lord when He comes. He reminds his readers that we "are all sons of light and sons of day," and with the help of the Holy Spirit must conduct ourselves as lights rather than stumbling blocks. Paul calls each of us, whether in the pulpit or in the pew, to exemplary Christian living before a crooked and perverse generation, ~~society~~ and to ^{be} in readiness for full accountability before the Judge of all the earth in the day when he comes to judge the quick and the dead.

Conclusion. With bold preaching of the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ and a congregation who received that message as the Word of God, with pastoral care described as like the tender love of a mother for her children matched by a harmony and joy among Paul's spiritual children, and with exemplary personal behavior on the apostle's part imitated by the praiseworthy upright living of the saints of Thessalonica...no wonder the writer of this affectionate letter exclaims: "Our coming to you was not in vain...(and)...who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." May God bless the pastorate of His servant in these churches, so that his coming will not be in vain, and that for him and especially before the Head of the church you may be a glory, a joy, and a crown of exultation!

I. An Exemplary Missionary I Thess. 2:1-12

Text: "Our visit to you was not in vain." I Thess. 2:1

"Our visit to you was not in vain." At the end of a day or ^{would that every missionary could make this} a career, ^{of accomplishments} can we claim ^{the same?} I Thess. 2 provides a check-list for us to follow, from the pen of "An Exemplary Missionary." Tomorrow we will consider "An Exemplary Church" based ^{the rest of II Thess} largely on ^{attempt to} chapters 11, 12, & 5 but not ^a engage in full discussion of Paul's teaching about the second coming of our Lord, certainly uppermost in his mind as he wrote. No matter ^{how} successful he is, every missionary can seek to be a better one, and any church with which he labors, no matter how admirable, can become a more glorious member of the body of Christ!

Paul's missionary horizon was always expanding, but the vision of a man from Macedonia gave it world-wide dimensions by moving him into the realm of Alexander the Great who ^{had} set out to conquer the world three centuries before. William Barclay tells us: "The full name of Troas was Alexandrian Troas. Philippi was called after Philip, the father of Alexander. Thessalonica was named after his half-sister... Alexander was the first and the greatest of the universalists. He had said himself that it was his aim to 'marry the east to the west.'" As Paul sailed to Macedonia, would he ^{not} ask himself: "Why can't the Gospel of the greatest King of all conquer the whole world, too?"

Rome divided Macedonia into three districts, and to the capital of each Paul headed: Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. His keen eye spotted strategic points: Antioch, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and ultimately Rome. ^{he was living and} If Asia were unevangelized in 1986, he would jet to Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai, Hong-kong, Singapore and Manila. Freed from jail in Philippi he hurried down the ^{Roman} Egnation Highway through Amphipolis and Apollonia about 90 miles to Thessalonica. It takes less time to fly from Seoul to New York than for these missionaries to walk between each of these places. But the highway traffic impressed Paul with the importance of this great land link between the east and

and west...tourists, traders and troops were ^{travelling} moving between two continents before his very eyes. Thessalonica with its 200,000 citizens sat astride this first century expressway of which its main street was a part. Paul could envision the Gospel moving from here westward toward Rome and eastward toward what later was called Constantinople. Mt. Olympus could be seen in the distance; hot springs were nearby. At the head of a gulf was ^{this} a fine harbour, used centuries later as an Allied base of operations in World War I and ^{in WWII} seized by Hitler for Strategic purposes. Like a general, Paul saw world conquest!

Thessalonica had an immense Jewish population, and in their large synagogue Paul reasoned "for three Sabbaths from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying: 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'" "God-fearing Greeks" and "leading women," ^{already} disallusioned with pagan gods and led of the Holy Spirit to seek the true and living God, were won by the power of the Gospel. Revival broke out with "a great multitude believing." Lest failure to achieve such instant ^{spectacular} success give us an inferiority complex, remember that Paul's hearers ^{already} knew the Old Testament and its Messianic predictions and were prepared to accept the brilliant reasoning and exposition of a well-trained scholar like Paul. This is in marked contrast to the cool response of the agnostic Athenians who knew little or nothing of the Scriptures.

But non-believing Jews could not stand by and lose membership to an heretical Pharisee! Gentiles were infuriated that a wandering guru had hypnotized their wives and friends. With a crowd of rowdies and punks from the market place they mobbed the house of Jason who played host to the apostles. Jason could have been a Greek but was more likely a Jew who had assumed this common name. He became the prime target of the demonstration and was forced to post bond guaranteeing the immediate departure of the apostles. Thessalonica was a Roman

city with special privileges, virtual autonomy...but like any totalitarian state, Rome could not tolerate sedition and riots. The howls of the mob, "These men who have upset the world have come here also," could not be ignored for fear of Imperial wrath. Little did they realize just how their world was being turned upside down! I think Paul had a sort of insurance policy which made Jason rather than himself the target. When the Philippian authorities had discovered how they had illegally beaten this Roman citizen and wanted him to leave quietly, Paul demanded that they personally apologize and ^{publicly} release him. This was not arrogance, but ^{to} ~~showing~~ the magistrates they could ill afford to mistreat Philippian Christians thereafter with ^{out} the risk of Paul taking legal action against them. No doubt the Thessalonian city fathers had heard all about this and took care not to get into the same predicament ^{by taking Paul}. ~~Now~~ Paul had the common sense to know ^{when it} ~~it~~ was time to leave, and moved on to Berea. But forever (as to any good missionary) this new church would be like a child to him, never to be forgotten, always dear to his heart. Later from Athens he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, and when he rejoined Paul in Corinth his report occasioned this ^{epistle,} possibly the earliest ^{of} New Testament writings, and the first of Paul's letters which we have, written in about 50 AD.

Timothy's report ^{contained} ~~gave~~ three main points: (1) The Thessalonian Church was in excellent condition; (2) False rumors and accusations about Paul were being circulated; (3) There were misunderstandings about the Second Coming. Chapter two reflects the second of these. Politicians are not the only targets of mudslinging. God's people in general, and ^{His} ~~his~~ ministers and missionaries in particular, are often the butt of unreasonable, harsh, or untrue gossip or accusations. Paul was human too, and these reports must have hurt him deeply. His defense reveals a lot about this "exemplary missionary" as he gives at least five reasons why, as he put it, "our visit to you was not in vain." The best defense against all slander and abuse is the exemplary life of ^{any} ~~the~~ Christian...doubly so for the missionary! Paul had only to remind his readers of

facts they already knew. Some people punctuate nearly every sentence with a careless, "you know" but Paul was in dead earnest when he used that expression nine times in this one letter plus "you recall" (once) and "you are witnesses" (once), ^{and "God is witness" (twice)} Would we want to remind others to jog their memories as to all they know about our previous conduct? ^{Eight} Six of these expressions are in 2:1-12 alone: "You yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain." Why?

[1] We had boldness. (2:2) Having been badly beaten and jailed in Philippi, it took remarkable courage, ^{for the apostles} to preach in Thessalonica. The brutal police of the day had left them bruised, bleeding, and sore. Elsewhere they had been victims of mob violence, but for the first time they had fallen into the hands of the law. Thessalonica promised more of the same, especially since reports of trouble in Philippi would follow them. Yet Paul declares: "We had the boldness in our God to speak to you the Gospel of God amid much opposition." No one could accuse the plucky apostle of being a coward. He was confident that God had provided him with this spirit of boldness.

An exemplary missionary has courage...courage to accept the call of Christ to leave home and family, courage to travel to ^{foreign} ~~strange~~ places and adapt to strange languages and cultures, courage to risk life in unstable social and political conditions, and most of all courage to preach good news to those who regard it as bad news. Many years ago a seventy year old minister, Rev. Kim Ung-gyu, told me how ^{he led a gang of} ~~as one of the village~~ ruffians ~~he led a gang~~ in stoning their first missionary visitor, Dr. L. O. McCutchen of Chonju. He watched Dr. McCutchen walk through the village, ignoring his tormentors, enter a certain home, sit down on the floor, and bow his head in prayer. Young Kim was so amazed he quit throwing stones, went to the meeting that night, was converted, and served many years as a minister of the Gospel. Few of us have had such experiences, but I always admire the boldness of our "chun-do-sas," the front line troops penetrating unevangelized territory battling with mu-

dangs and headstrong tradition-bound village "yew-jies." The courage God now expects of us is to boldly proclaim His word amid growing materialism, national pride, and sophisticated intellectualism. Unsympathetic ears, outright rejection, or ridicule can cut and hurt. It takes a special kind of boldness "to speak...the gospel of God"...yet that is the first priority of our calling. Because each missionary differs in temperament, and witnesses under varying circumstances, the ~~boldness~~^{courage} required may not always be the same, but may each of us be given the "boldness of God" for our task in our day!

2. We spoke not to please men but God. (2:3-6) Reports of charges against Paul not only from outside but even within the Christian circle hurt Paul deeply, as it does any missionary today. Listen to Phillip's paraphrase^{of his answer}: "Our message to you is true, our motives are pure, our conduct is absolutely above-board, We speak under the solemn sense of being entrusted by God with the Gospel. We do not aim to please men, but to please God who knows us through and through. No one could ever say, as again you know, that we used flattery to conceal greedy motives, and God himself is witness to our honesty. We made no attempt to win honor from men, either from you or from anybody else, though I suppose as Christ's own messengers we might have done so." Any missionary victim of character assassination^{who can make making this claim} ~~claiming this~~ need not fear the final verdict.

The ancient world was full of travelling fakes whose deceitful tricks and personal magnetisms ~~hypnotized~~^{led astray} the unsuspecting. Paul's ~~instant~~ spectacular success in Thessalonica left him open to charges of error, impurity, deceit, use of flattery, personal greed, desire for glory...exactly the accusations against religious quacks now. Paul's defence ~~reflects~~^{suggests} temptations to which every missionary is subject. How easy to say what people want us to say and enjoy the compliments or material rewards...especially in a culture where flattery and bribery are highly developed fine arts! How easy to justify shady means to obtain what are perceived as good and righteous ends! How simple to twist or withhold facts to get ourselves out of a box! How natural to stand on our

prerogatives as ambassadors of the Head of the Church and representatives of a powerful sending ^{organization} ~~church~~ and expect honor and privileges! Like Paul, some of us have been falsely charged, especially when caught in the cross-fire of church controversy, yet often we must plead guilty as charged.

The heart of the defense of the exemplary missionary is in verse 4. First, Paul claims God's approval...a word meaning to examine, prove, such as testing the genuineness of metal. Second, he claims that God has entrusted him with the Gospel...a sacred and precious trust Paul often mentions as in 1 Tim. 1:11. Third, he was conscious of God's all-seeing scrutiny as He "examines our hearts." Approved, entrusted, examined! ^① Conviction of our calling, our ^② commission to preach the good news, our ^③ responsibility under God...these shield from temptation to ^{the} misconduct of which Paul was accused, and enable us to speak by word and deed so as to please God rather than men.

3. We were gentle (2:7-8) It's easier to picture Paul as "bold" than as gentle. "as a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children." To be aggressive in moving into new places, dogmatic in proclaiming God's truth, dynamic in leadership, and yet ^{to} be loving, kind, considerate, and gentle was quite an accomplishment! A mother with her babe at her breast illustrates ^{tenderness} 100% love and affection. Look at the endearing terms in verse 8: "Fond affection for you," "imparting not just the Gospel but our own lives," "you had become very dear to us." Literally in love with his church, Paul used the ardent expressions of a lover to his beloved. Like the good shepherd he was willing to sacrifice himself...his very life, if need be, for the wee lambs...these new babes in the faith. He loved all his children, good and bad, docile and wilful, obedient or disobedient, and he could be enthusiastically in love with all his churches at one time. His love was not simply for the institutional church, but for every member whose names he often mentioned in his letters.

How easy for the missionary to become a dictator rather than a nursing mother!

Many of the charges made elsewhere against missionary "paternalism" or "colonialism" may not be as true of missionary methods in Korea, but as individuals how easy to become petty tyrants or empire builders, to dictate, to be overbearing, or wrongly assertive in our approach. "We've got the know-how, the right way, you learn from us!" Better to imitate Paul, "But we were gentle among you." Let's not let ^{our} programs, ^{or} projects, ^{or} professions, ^{or our own priorities} stand between us and God's children in the church! This means spending time with the church, working within her framework, knowing her saints, recognizing her virtues and understanding her shortcomings. ^{weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice} Blessed is the missionary who through many close experiences with churches finds them holding a special place in his heart so that he ^① loves to be with them, ^② to do things for these fellow Christians, and ^③ to sacrifice for their happiness. Here is the "fellowship of the saints" ~~crossing~~ boundaries of race and time and space. An exemplary missionary loves the church! "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love!"

[4] We worked night and day. (2:9) Paul worked to earn his own board and keep so as not to be a burden to the Thessalonians (see II Thess. 3:8) As a Jewish tent-maker he could report to the local Jewish ^{guild} ~~union~~ hiring office and sign on for temporary work. To counter the charge of being in the missionary business for personal financial gain, he declared: "You recall..." how we took care of our own needs!" People are quick to discern between one who preaches the Gospel from pure and selfless motives because he is called of God, and one who serves because it is a way to enrich himself...and church history is stained with the records of too many hirelings who care more for themselves than for their sheep. A first century instruction book called the Didache states: "Let every apostle that cometh unto you be received as the Lord. And he shall stay one day, and if need be, the next also, but if he stay three days he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goeth forth, let him take nothing save bread, till he reach his lodging. But if he ask money, he is a false prophet." (B. 221)

Our support may come from the home church, but let not any of us impose on the

the generosity of others. Unlike Paul, we are employed servants of a sending church, but must still exercise responsible stewardship. His words open up the highly sensitive area of missionary finances...how we handle personal living expenses, our standard of living, our sharing of material assets, our expectations of local self-support...infinitely more complex matters now than in Paul's day. I do not propose to discuss them now, except to say, let not financial questions ^(or land, buildings & equipment) destroy any relationships so that the Gospel proclamation is threatened! Paul's principles are clear: (1) Hard work so as not to be dependent upon others; (2) Willingness to suffer...even if the beds are not soft or the food plentiful; (3) Concentration upon the all-important objective of proclaiming the Gospel. Four times in 2:1-12 the Apostle refers to "the Gospel of God" (vs. 2, 4, 8, and 9). No valid charge of financial irregularity can be made when ^{whatever material resources we have} ~~all such matters~~ are subject to the urgency of preaching the good news.

5 We were devout and upright and blameless. (2:10-12) Can we make this claim?

Under fire of false accusations, Paul twice reminds the Thessalonians of his record: "You are witnesses" ^{"and so is God"} (v. 10), "you know" (v. 11) what our behaviour was.

1:5 says, "you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

Here ^{2:10} is a triple declaration that he was personally ^① pious in his devotion to God, ^② upright in obedience to the laws of the land, and absolutely ^③ blameless so that there were no grounds for censure by anybody. On the contrary he offers a triple claim: ^{in v. 11} We ^① "exhorted," we ^② "encouraged" and we ^③ "implored" each of you as a father would his children...affirmation of a paternalism free from its modern odium. If Paul could speak of his friends as babes in the faith with the endearing terms of a nursing mother, he could also use the figure of a father dealing with young adolescents. We don't know if he had children, but he would have been a good father raising teenagers, as he says in verse 11:

^① by guiding them by exhorting them in the Christian faith, ^② comforting them ^{with encouragement} in their adjustments to a new life in Christ, and, most of all, by ^③ testifying (the meaning of his last word) to the end that they might mature into worthy citi-

zens of the kingdom of God.

Verses 10 and 11 remind us of the close tie between what people see in our way of life and the impact of what we teach with regard to the Christian faith. Here I stand condemned myself knowing that it was far from always that people could see that I was ^①"devout," ^②"upright," and ^③"blameless" so that they would heed my ^①"exhorting," ^②"encouraging," and ^③"testifying." Conduct, attitudes, language, or behaviour that go unchallenged and unnoticed in others are always under sharp and critical scrutiny in missionaries! Anything that appears unfair, selfish, contemptuous, unfeeling, over-bearing, unreasonable, irritable, contentious, unkind...and a whole string of other faults...can mar, or negate, the best efforts and intentions of anyone with the most orthodox theology and the highest training and skills...and what one of us has not experienced shame because of our failings? Paul ~~could~~ ^{laid} claim to have tried to follow his own admonition in I Tess. 5:11, "abstain from every form of evil." Our goal must be no less, through the power of God's Holy Spirit in our lives!

Conclusion: In this passage an exemplary missionary has given every missionary a check list. May we use it not to evaluate others, but ourselves!

1. We had boldness (or courage)
2. We spoke not to please men, but God.
3. We were gentle.
4. We worked night and day.
5. We were devout and upright and blameless.

May God enable us to score along with Paul the right to claim: "Our visit to you was not in vain!"

Prayer: "May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." I Thess. 3:12-13.

II.

An Exemplary Church
I Thess. 1:1-10, 2:13-20

Text: "You are our glory and joy." I Thess. 2:20

"You are our glory and joy!" ^A high compliment from an exemplary missionary to an exemplary church! Not only so, but these words highlight "our first direct look at a believing community, which is functioning as a Christian church in the secular society of Greece around 50 A.D." (Ralston LBC 9). Anyone seeking to imitate the ^{Apostolic} ~~earliest~~ church finds his model in the Thessalonian church as it existed scarcely 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. Here ~~is a~~ ^{vitality} ~~freshness~~, ^A ~~liveliness~~, and exuberance ~~which~~ won the affection and admiration of the apostle so that he exclaimed: "You are our glory and joy!"

^{tenderness} ~~is shown by~~ ^{is shown by} This ~~also explains~~ ^{Paul's} anxiety over their welfare during his absence, and ^{by} his eagerness to revisit Thessalonica. He counted separation as a personal loss: "We brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while...in person, not in spirit...were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you...I Paul, more than once, yet Satan thwarted us." (2:18-19) In 3:11 he prays that God would allow such a visit." In some unexplained fashion Satan had so far prevented this. Possibly there was criticism by his enemies that after the riot in Thessalonica Paul had simply run away, deserting his flock, whereas actually he had been forced to leave for the safety of those new Christians. To return too soon would again threaten the church with persecution. Paul's prayer was not answered until some years later at the end of his third missionary journey. Meanwhile, the next best thing ^{this hand delivered} was ~~a~~ personal letter expressing his affection and longing.

Thus, because "he could endure it no longer" (3:1) he sent ^{his} ~~a~~ representative, young Timothy, whom Paul delighted to compliment with his highest recommendation... "our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ." I remember doing the same thing with personal agents during the Korean War when

not only was my own safety as an American risky^{in rural areas}, but also village Christians could suffer reprisals from nearby guerilla units who heard of ^{my visit,} ~~this contact~~. ~~He sent Timothy to~~ ^{could} strengthen and encourage their faith in the midst of affliction, ^{as well as a report news.} ~~and to bring back news~~. What satisfaction ^{Paul} ~~he~~ must have felt when Timothy brought "good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you!"(3:7) No wonder he exclaims, "Now life is really worth living, knowing that you are standing firm in your faith!"(3:8) Figuratively speaking, Paul kicks up his heels with glee and a great burst of thanksgiving to God.

What caused all this joy? Notice we have called this an exemplary church, not a perfect church. There is no perfect church this side of heaven. We see many resemblances of the Korean Church to the one in Thessalonica, but she is not perfect either. ^{Thus,} ~~But~~ it does us good to hear of an exemplary church, a ^{pattern} ~~model~~ to imitate, and to examine positive ^{qualities} ~~factors~~ rather than voice negative criticisms. Chapter one, and two verses in chapter two, are Paul's words about an exemplary church; chapters four and five are Paul's words to an exemplary church.

I Paul's words about an exemplary church. Even his ^{usual} ~~customary~~ greeting is descriptive: "the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The word for "church" could describe any kind of assembly, but he defines it as one which acknowledges God as Father and Jesus Christ as Lord ...the basic creed of any true church, anywhere, anytime. The Apostle gave thanks to God for such a church, implying ^{that he} ~~daily~~ ^{daily} prayed not only for that church as a whole but ^{also} for each of his friends individually. ~~He gave~~ ^{His} ~~thanks~~ ^{were} for the ^① report, the ^② receptiveness, and the ^③ reputation of the Thessalonian Church.

^{of their spiritual status}
1 The report (1:3) "Bearing in mind your work of faith, and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father." These familiar words are a favorite text of preachers at church ^{or anniversaries} dedications. They reflect the ^{character} ~~nature~~ of Paul's own ministry among them. It

is often pointed out, ^{that} there here is another example of his use of "faith, love, and hope" together as in I Cor. 13:13. ~~As a preacher myself,~~ I wonder if these words were not the three point outline of Paul's oft-repeated favorite sermon!

A. Your work of faith. Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, the long promised Messiah, now understood as God's appointed sacrifice for our sin ^{and} accepted as Lord of our lives...this faith had brought a commitment to live and work for Him. The work of these saints was not "in fear of the whip, in hope of gain, nor from a grim sense of duty, but was inspired by this faith." (Barclay 217) ^{Their} ~~A~~ faith was not mere intellectual ^e ~~a~~ acceptance of creeds and confessions but
→ a way of life that finds glory in drugery, that moves mountains, that brings the victory that overcomes the world. Today those words would apply to the faithful Sunday School teacher struggling with squirming little boys Sunday after Sunday, to lonely Korean evangelists and their wives who endure physical hardship and discouragement in miniscule remote rural churches, and to millions of unsung saints the world over whose daily lives as new creatures in Christ are a "work of faith."

B. Your labor of love. Timothy must have reported examples of such love. ~~Later, in his letter,~~ in 4:9, Paul again mentions their love, saying that he really didn't even need to exhort them to love, a rare compliment from one who elsewhere had to so strongly urge this Christian grace. Why did he speak of the "labor" of love? Love is not always easy, especially under the handicap of hardship ^{and persecution}. Very often love takes real effort and sacrifice with awareness that there may be no tangible rewards. Many years ago we ^{sometimes} ~~often~~ saw ~~a~~ demented persons left in rags and filthy by the side of the road to be taunted and teased and abused by uncaring bystanders...something we fortunately don't see any more. Once I passed by such a person with an elder who was constructing our new house. Elder Kim told me that some people in his church in Seoul were doing something about such cases. They took them to their homes, bathed, fed,

and clothed them, gave them rest, listened to their troubles, and in four such cases had restored two to normal sanity and helped one other. Here was a "labor of love..." typical of an exemplary church!

C Your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. These words introduce the great theme of this letter...Paul's emphasis upon our Christian hope in the return of Jesus Christ. His readers were constantly threatened by persecution; they were surrounded by temptations to revert to the immorality and idolatry of their environment. Yet rather than being shaken or led astray, or becoming discouraged or depressed, ^{or disillusioned} these Christians were steadfast...enduring, with unswerving loyalty to their faith, because their eyes were fixed on a great hope...not mere wishful thinking, but a sure conviction that the Lord would return as He had promised. Peter called this a "living hope" (I Pet. 1:3), and the writer of Hebrews called it "an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast." (Heb. 6:19). Paul reminds his readers that this hope is not ^{derived from} ~~an~~ human ^{insight} ~~initiative~~ but is "in the presence of our God and Father, knowing brethren beloved by God, His choice of you." "Beloved," and "chosen," and in "God's presence"...unquestionable guarantees surrounding the Christian hope!

Here is the hope to sustain during tribulation, to cause conduct acceptable to God while we watch & wait to connect us of the resurrection to do all we can for this week while it is day

2 The Reception. (1:5-7) Paul next commends the Thessalonians for how they had received His preaching of the Word. 1:5-6 and 2:13-14 are both a claim for the authority of Paul's message and praise for how it was accepted...two facets of the same jewel. From Paul's viewpoint, the Gospel was preached with full conviction of its absolute truth confirmed on the one hand by the power of the Holy Spirit in effecting belief ^{in his hearers,} and on the other hand by the character and conduct of the ones who preached it ("You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." 1:5b) Furthermore he could praise his readers for accepting the Gospel not as ordinary words, or as the words of mere men, but "for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

This exemplary church had received God's Word, even though to do so had brought on persecution and sufferings particularly at the hands of their Jewish neighbors. Paradoxically all this tribulation was being endured with joy of the Holy Spirit. Their reception of the Gospel even enabled them to imitate Paul (1:6) and to imitate the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea (2:14). Here was high tribute to a mission church...a "receiving church", if you please...they became imitators of the faith, hope and love of both the missionary and of the "sending church" as well. What greater source of satisfaction and thanksgiving could any missionary ask for?

3. The Reputation. (1:8-10) "You have become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia." (1:7) Word has spread to Philippi, to Berea, to Athens, to Corinth, "and also in every place"...perhaps even to churches in Asia Minor and Judea. "Why, we really don't have to say anything more" says Paul who used a similar expression in 4:9 and 5:1 and then went on to say more anyhow! Because of surprisingly good inter-church communication in those days, ~~Paul had heard from other places,~~ ^{as reported back to Paul} a glowing three-fold reputation: (1) how you received us and our message; (2) how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and (3) how you are waiting for the return of Christ who was raised from the dead and who delivers us from the wrath to come. *...in many ways a fair picture of the Korean Church.*

Paul was ~~still~~ dismayed at the abominable idolary he ~~had~~ witnessed in Athens, and the cold reception to his message there. To hear that in Thessalonica where all the old pagan gods and the accompanying immoral practices were universally followed, this little band of Christians had the courage to renounce their heathenism and turn to the living God, ^{who is} not represented by wood and stone gave the Apostle unbounded joy. The reference here must be to Gentile converts rather than to Jews who had never worshipped ~~images~~ ^{but who} and already worshipped the true God. We Westerners cannot possibly grasp the terrible wrench this involves for those who turn from idolatry, renouncing allegiances of culture,

and family as well as religion. We ~~can only~~^{must} humbly admire the courage of thousands around us who have followed the example of the Thessalonian Christians. For the Thessalonians, the sacrifice involved in renouncing idolatry, was more than compensated by their firm expectation that the Lord would return... in this hope they waited with patience + courage. A good report of their present spiritual status, a reminder of how they received Paul's Gospel preaching, and a glowing reputation...here is what Paul could say about an exemplary church. Now we turn to

II. Paul's words to an exemplary church. (Chap. 4-5). Unlike in some of his other letters, we cannot detect here any actual rebuke or criticism, but rather his earnest desire for an even more exemplary church. Here are warnings against temptations by which they are surrounded, exhortations to even more exemplary Christian living, and instruction in a doctrine about which there was some misunderstanding. For a church, ^{whose members are still babes} ~~now~~ in the faith, ~~still as weak as little babes~~, it is remarkable that we find expressions such as: in 4:1 with reference to pleasing God, "just as you actually do walk, that you may excel still more", or in 4:10 in the matter of practicing love, "to excel still more," or in 5:11 where he says "encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." Surely Timothy's report did not picture perfect conditions in the Thessalonian church. He would confide with Paul all the low-down of possible weaknesses, dangers, signs of potential trouble...there was plenty of ^{need} ~~room~~ for ^{caution and} improvement even in an exemplary church. Look at some of these:

1. Purity 4:1-8 is a challenge to sexual purity. There is no accusation of immorality, but Paul well knew its constant temptation, especially for Gentile Christians in a society with no conscience in such matters at all. Living in Corinth, ^{to which} where ~~his~~ later letters reveal so much of this problem even in the church, may have prompted Paul to this forthright warning to the Thessalonians. He reinforces his words by claiming that he spoke "by the authority of the Lord Jesus" who had even warned against impure thoughts. Over in 5:22, Paul exhorted, "abstain from every form of evil." If Paul spoke out so boldly a-

gainst sexual immorality^{even} to the Thessalonian church, what would he have to say today? "Listen," he says, "we are not called for the purpose of impurity (as can be said of many pagan cults) but in sanctification"...to a holy style of life and thought, separated from worldly lusts." "Furthermore, to reject this teaching is not to reject my human words but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."(v.8) "Do not quench the Spirit," he adds in 5:19. Failure in these matters is to throw cold water on God's Spirit who lights our way in purity.

2 Love of the brethren. (4:9-10) Evidently the Thessalonian church already had an unusual reputation for love which extended even beyond their own circle "toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." His remark that they "have been taught of God" reminds us of John's words: "Love is of God" and "We know love because he first loved us." In praising this church for their practice of Christian love, Paul can only urge them "to excel still more!"

3 Work with your own hands. (4:11-12) Paul's own example had demonstrated the dignity of labor. There is a hint here, reinforced by stronger words in II Thessalonians, that some of his readers were so confident of the immediate return of Christ that they had stopped working. Paul reminds them that work is necessary so as to be independent of outside support, and to be able instead to contribute to the needs of others so as to show active Christian love. We are reminded of his words in Eph. 4:28: "Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need."

4 Comfort and encourage one another (4:13-5:11) The second coming of our Lord is by far the most important theme of the Thessalonian letters, and we cannot now give it full and adequate consideration. There were those who were concerned about the fate of saints who died before the Lord returned. Paul assured them that those who have died are now asleep in Jesus, a term which brings deep comfort to thousands in the knowledge that loved ones are at rest

in the Lord, awaiting their own resurrection to share in the welcome of Jesus Christ when He returns. Here Paul makes three great affirmations which all true Christians believe: (1) Christ will return in glorious fashion; (2) God will raise us from the dead; (3) As a result we will be forever with the Lord. Regardless of the schedule or nature of those events, these are the essentials. With this hope, Paul encourages his exemplary church: "Therefore comfort one another with these words"...as indeed they have comforted millions ever since.

But there was also need to squelch undue speculation about when the Lord would return. Paul reminded his readers of the words of Jesus Himself, that this event would occur without warning, at a time when He would not be expected, so that our obligation is to be "alert and sober," "having put on the breast-plate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation." (5:8)... words which remind us of both I Cor. 13:13 and Ephesians 6. Phillip's paraphrase vividly expresses Paul's magnificent declaration of the relation of our Lord's death and resurrection to the daily mutual encouragement of saints to one another: "For God did not choose us to condemn us, but that we might secure his salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. He died for us, so that whether we are 'awake' or 'asleep' we share his life. So go on cheering and strengthening one another with thoughts like these, as I have no doubt you have been doing."

5 Appreciate your leaders. (5:12-13) Paul was not referring to himself, but to the congregational leadership which had emerged, possibly appointed by himself. The church was too young for Paul here to discuss church government as he did later, but he urges that leaders be respected, esteemed, and loved for their work to which God had appointed them. When he exhorted, "Live at peace with one another" he laid down a principle for harmony, ^{with and among church leaders} which by itself would create an exemplary church! Blessed indeed is the church, ^{which heeds this admonition!} ~~with this atmosphere!~~

6 Final words of general advice. (5:14-24) There is material here for at least

14 whole sermons. No wonder Paul concludes with prayer, knowing that only God can create this kind of church: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." No matter how exemplary the church...every congregation...every individual Christian...must pray that God ~~will~~ ^{will} by His Spirit ^{work} daily that we may be "without blame" at the coming of our Lord. Verse 24 affirms what the whole Bible affirms, that God will complete in us what He began when He called us: "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." Not our efforts, but God's power builds exemplary Christians and exemplary churches.

Conclusion. We return to Paul's words at the end of chapter 2. As a missionary, what reward or glory did he anticipate? Only that when the Lord returns he would find these beloved converts with him in the presence of the Lord! When that day comes, what will be the glory and joy for us missionaries? Not the beautiful and spacious church edifices, not the great universities and seminaries and hospitals, not the programs and projects ^{but will all be left behind} all of us hold so dear, ^{with "the Gospel of God"} ...no!, it will be to greet those whom in some way we have touched [^] and who as a result share our eternal joy. "For what is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

Prayer: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." I Thess. 5:23-24

ABOUNDING MORE AND MORE

Text: "...we beseech you, brethren, that you abound more and more.." (I Thessalonians 4:10b)

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 9:8; Philipians 1:9; I Thessalonians 4:1, 9-10.

How do we exhort those who are doing a good job already? Certainly not with criticism, or with scolding, or with demands. Rather we should do it with commendation and encouragement. That is exactly how the Apostle Paul addressed the Christians in two of his favorite churches, at Philippi and Thessalonica, beseeching them to "abound more and more." That word "abound" was a favorite of Paul and it is translated in various ways such as "in abundance," "sufficient," "richly," "increasingly," or "to excel." It means literally to "exceed a fixed number or measure." To abound is to "overflow" as in the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm, "My cup overflows." The word itself is derived from the Latin meaning "to rise in waves."

Paul loved the Christians of Phillippi and Thessalonica, and his letters to them reflect that. Of the Philippians he wrote: "My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown," (4:1) and to the Thessalonians: "You are our glory and joy." (2:20) It almost seems out of character for a stern apostle to use endearing terms like these words to his friends: "We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we are well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." (I Thess. 2:7-8) Paul had a true pastor's heart and his earnest entreaties to his children in the faith to "abound more and more" reflect his concern for their continued and increasing Christian growth and maturity. He pleads that they: (1) "abound more and more in love," (2) "abound more and more in the work of the Lord," and (3) "abound more and more in hope."

I. ABOUND MORE AND MORE IN LOVE. "This I pray," wrote Paul to the Philippians (1:9) "that your love may abound still more and more." and to the Thessalonians, "May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you." (I Thess. 3:12) Notice the Apostle did not here command his readers to love...rather, he asked God to cause their love to "abound more and more." Most, if not all, of us have a "head knowledge" of the love we Christians ought to have. But only God can give us the love in our hearts that abounds more and more so that rather than making a lot of noise about love, we actually practice it.

A century ago, Henry Drummond preached a famous sermon entitled "The Greatest Thing in the World" where he likened the central section of the famous love poem in I

Corinthians 13 to light passing through a prism and separating into the glorious colors of the "spectrum of love" with nine ingredients. "Love suffers long" is the first. Then "love is kind" of which Drummond wrote: "The greatest thing a man can do for His Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children. I wonder why it is that we are not all kinder than we are. How much the world needs it. How easily it is done. How instantaneously it acts. How infallibly it is remembered. How superabundantly it pays itself back...for there is no debtor in the world so superbly honorable as love. Love never fails. Love is success, love is happiness, love is life. Love, I say with Browning, is the energy of life." At the end, how we have loved will be a major question as we face our Lord for a final accounting. May we pray with Paul that God will cause our love to "abound more and more."

II. ABOUND MORE AND MORE IN THE WORK OF THE LORD. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," Paul wrote in I Cor. 15:58, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." These words come at the end of Paul's great treatise on the meaning of the resurrection of Christ as the assurance that we too shall rise from the dead on some future day which no speculation can hasten...but the practical concern of the moment is what we should be doing right now, which is "abounding in the work of the Lord." In another place (I Thess. 4:1) he exhorts "to walk and please God...that you may excel (or abound) still more." Our whole manner of life is what he is talking about.

Now these words don't mean we should be spending every minute tending the orphans, feeding the poor, healing the sick, doing personal evangelism or preaching...as an important part of the "work of the Lord" as they are. But "abounding in the work of the Lord" means that all we do is done to the glory of God, to bring Him honor, to reflect His ways..whether our accomplishments are small or great, humdrum or spectacular. Paul's first readers had to tend shops, sail ships, till the soil, raise children...and perform all the other chores we have today. He knew there are practical limits to what we can do in the more narrow interpretation of the "work of the Lord," but there is no limit to increasing, to overflowing, to "abounding" in making the quality of every aspect of life pleasing to God and recognizable as such by the world about us.

III. ABOUNDING MORE AND MORE IN HOPE. Abounding in love has to do with the heart...our attitudes and relationships with others. Abounding in the work of the Lord has to do with our feet (where we go) and our hands (what we do). Abounding in hope has to do with our outlook, our sense of confidence, our assurance, our reliance upon the eternal trustworthiness of God. Romans 15:13 is another great prayer of

Paul: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." It is easy to confuse faith and hope. Faith is an acceptance of all that God gives us in Christ Jesus; hope is the confident outlook on life, present and future, which comes from total commitment to God.

Hope is not just wishful thinking, such as "I hope the weather is good tomorrow." No, it is the confidence that God is taking care of His world, taking care of me, and taking care of my future. The outlook in Paul's world was just as gloomy and foreboding as what we see in the newspapers or on TV today, but God gives us faith and He gives us hope which totally transforms the picture. Hope gives us joy and peace for today and confidence for tomorrow. A missionary in Africa had to send his children to Germany for education and shortly afterward his wife died. A heathen friend asked, "How can you bear all that?" The missionary replied, "Oh, I know that I shall see my loved ones again, even if thy have died." The astonished native replied, "You Christians are to be envied...you can see through the horizon." What a wonderful definition of Christian Hope...one that serves in every aspect of life even in the face of the unknowns of the future. As Peter wrote in I Peter 1:3 "God the Father...has caused us to be born again to a living hope."

CONCLUSION. Abounding in love, abounding in good works, and abounding in hope sound like good intentions, but they can only be actually realized when in faith we accept something else which abounds and is the springboard from which they may be carried out. Paul has also told us in II Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." John Bunyan, famous for writing Pilgrim's Progress, preached a famous sermon 300 years ago entitled "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners." Without that "abounding grace," each of us modern sinners is absolutely helpless. That "abounding grace," the undeserved favor of our Heavenly Father works in two ways for us.

1. God's "abounding grace" allows Him to forgive and save and restore us to Himself through the sacrificial death of His only Son.

2. God's "abounding grace" continues to flow into our lives daily through innumerable blessings, not merely physical and material, but those which give us joy and peace and the desire to live obedient and holy lives.

May God's grace, then, abound in the hearts of each of us, and provide the sufficiency (all that we need) to abound to every good work...for His glory.

The Second Coming

REV. JOSEPH B. HOPPER

Text: I Thessalonians 4:13-5:6.

We Christians observe Christmas and Easter as the days when Jesus was born and when He rose from the dead after dying on the cross. But since He has not yet returned to earth, we cannot celebrate any special date for His return. We must remember it every day. This doctrine deserves our attention, especially because it is denied by some and twisted about by others.

THE SECOND COMING A FACT.

Just as we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He was born of a virgin, that He lived a sinless life, that He worked miracles and spoke wonderful words, that He died for our sins and rose again and ascended into heaven . . . just as we believe these things, so we know that He is coming again.

Jesus Himself repeatedly told His disciples that He would some day return to the earth. As He ascended into heaven, angels told the disciples that as He ascended so He would some day return. All through the New Testament, the Apostolic writers everywhere affirm this great hope of His return.

Yet there are those who deny this truth entirely, or explain it away, perhaps by saying that the sending of the Holy Spirit fulfilled this promise of Jesus. Others, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and 7th Day Adventists, teach in strange ways that Jesus has already come. Even here in Korea, such teachings are heard.

Some years ago when I was preaching in the San-tong church an old man came in and sat at the rear of the church. He had on his horse-hair hat and a long white robe. His hair

was done up in a top-knot tied with a great piece of amber. When I spoke to him after the service, he handed me a piece of paper, like a tract. "What is this?" "It is an announcement," said he. "What does it announce?" "It says that Jesus has come back to earth," he replied. "Oh, then where has He come?" "To Soonchang."

Friends, when Jesus comes, it will not be necessary for old men to run around with announcements. He will come as the Scriptures teach.

THE TIME IS UNKNOWN.

This is a secret known only to God the Father. Men have tried for ages to determine this date in advance, but Jesus told us that only God knows. Hence His coming is always a possibility. Paul says that His coming will be like that of a thief in the night. If a thief expects to enter your house, does he send word like this: "I am coming tomorrow night at midnight to steal all your possessions?" No indeed, he comes when you least expect him. So will it be with the coming of Christ.

Several years ago a missionary in Mokpo sent word to a certain church that he would visit there the following Sunday, arriving Saturday afternoon by boat. Mokpo is by the sea-side, and often travel is easier by water than by land. But that Saturday the missionary was busy and could not catch the little boat. When the villagers saw that he didn't come, they assumed he would not come at all. But Sunday morning, the missionary drove his jeep a long way to reach that church. Just before getting there, whom should he meet by the road but the leading deacon of the church, taking his ox to market in

the nearby county seat. Thinking the missionary wasn't coming he was breaking the Sabbath. That was between men, but suppose he had met His Lord returning to earth. Would he not have been ashamed to welcome Him?

Not long ago the chief of police of this province made an inspection of the country police stations. He travelled in his jeep at night. When he reached Kalam it was the middle of the night. Alighting from his jeep, he went into the police station and found everyone asleep. So he picked up the caps, pistol belts, and whistles which the policemen wear, put them in his jeep and drove off. What punishment do you suppose those men got for being asleep rather than on guard?

Paul tells us to be awake prepared for the coming of the Lord. I believe the reason Jesus gave us no date for His return was so that we would expect Him every day. Otherwise we would put off repenting of sin and leading holy lives until the day before His arrival.

THE MANNER IS AS HE WENT.

I can tell you nothing about the manner of His coming except what is in the Bible. Men have conjectured about this, to no avail. The angels said that He would come as He had ascended. I Thess. 4:16-17 speaks of angels, of a trumpet sound, of Jesus coming in glory, of men rising to meet Him in the air. What does all this mean? We may not be able to understand now all these details, but certainly He will come in the glory of His Father, and we shall meet Him in that glory.

Some will say, "But this is scientifically impossible!" Science is doing

so many wonderful things these days, things that we read about in the newspapers and hear over the radio, that such a Second Coming does not sound so strange as it would have sounded ten years ago. But we do not depend upon scientific explanations. We believe in an Almighty God. If God can create all things by the Word of His power, it is an easy thing for Him to send His Son in the fashion described in the Scriptures.

For those who have rejected Christ, His coming will be a day of terror. Paul pictures this in I Thess. 5, say-

ing that for them "there will be no escape." But for all who believe that Jesus has died for their sins, who accept Him as Saviour and try to live as He requires, it will be a day of joy and the beginning of an eternity with the Lord.

WE MUST BE READY.

For you and me this is the most important consideration. It is like waiting for an important guest whose time of arrival is unknown. If the guest says, "I am coming in December," we get ready on the first day. If he

doesn't come we prepare the second day, and so on. We clean our yards, re-paper our walls, prepare special food, and make sure our best clothes are ready. For the coming of our Lord we prepare our hearts as most people prepare for an important guest. We cleanse them and make them fit for the coming of the guest.

Two years ago, some missionary ladies were in the Chunju market. Seeing a crowd nearby, they went to see what was going on. It turned out

(Cont. on p. 8, col. 2)

The Spirit As Guide

REV. JOHN DeSANTO

The phrase "This is the way, walk ye in it" seems to have little meaning to many of today's students. Even teachers of Christianity in churches and schools deny, by their actions and advice, that the will of God can be clearly known to an individual beyond doubt. The Church's trust in the Holy Spirit as Counselor appears to have been replaced by a mass of vocational literature and aptitude tests. We do not mean to say that these do not have their place in the guidance of an individual, but only that they are not of primary consideration.

One of the main sins of the scholastic denominations is that at times we think ourselves as having more wisdom than the Holy Spirit. We have become so intelligent that the profound, and yet simple, direction by the Holy Spirit as delivered to the Apostles in Scripture is counted by us as inadequate. Although we do not confess this with our lips, yet many of our recent seminary graduates confess it by their pedantry in the explanations of simple Christian truth.

Today we seem to boast in the answer that "We have no pat answers." We look with disdain upon those denominations that tell their people, "Trust the Spirit, read the Scripture, pray and your problem will soon be solved." We seem to think ourselves superior because "We have no packaged program," and at the same time we look with contempt, and a little jealousy, upon those churches and or-

ganizations which are giving clear-cut direction to the youth of today.

We are sometimes like the disciples who came to Jesus and said "Lord we saw some who were casting out devils in Thy Name who were not of us and we forbade them. I wonder if the reason the disciples forbade them was because they were jealous of such faith in men who were not 'in' with the Master?"

When people came to Christ for answers and for help did He put them off by saying, "I have no pat answer for you?" Did He confound them with a philosophical exposition of the import of the question they were asking? Did He then say, "So now, you see, the answer that I give you may suffice this time, but may soon be inadequate?" No, the statements of Jesus Christ are timeless. The answers He gave are still good for today and tomorrow. And in those subjects on which Christ made no pronouncement He emphatically said, "The Spirit will lead you into all truth."

Existentialism mixed with a compound of Christianity will not meet the needs of the searching heart today. The doctrine of existentialism, in its deepest sense, has changed itself to "honest doubt," dressed itself in the garment of Christianity and is passing for "deep" Christian experience, when it is nothing more than an excuse by which students and teachers may postpone direct involvement with the Holy Spirit of God. Like men who

know that the ocean can hold their craft, that in the middle there are greater fish, yet who are afraid to be tossed about, we sail our craft in the shallow water and the fish we catch are incomparable to the ones we could catch.

Why? Why do men remain in the shallows when the deep affords a greater catch? Why will men bow to an existential experience rather than to the Holy Spirit? It is because of the "offense of the Cross!" The words of Christ, "The Servant is no greater than his lord," becomes a reality only to the one whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit. When we are His, however, we experience the fulfillment of the other promises of Christ. We know the satisfaction of being in His will, a sense of true accomplishment, and because we have left all we will "receive a hundred fold more both in this life and the life to come!"

"This is the way, walk ye in it," can be a realization to every Christian at any age. The formula for knowing the will of God is the same now as it was for St. Paul, Augustine, Calvin, Knox, and Wesley — prayer, reading of Scripture, trust, prayer and more prayer. And let us emphatically add — hard work and a fearlessness to do the revealed will of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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With Greater Strictness

DR. L. NELSON BELL

Teaching carries with it a grave responsibility. The Apostle James states flatly: "*We who teach shall be judged with greater strictness,*" and the essential rightness of this is evident when we realize that teachers are engaged in molding lives. What is thought, believed, and what should be done in life — these things fall within the province of teachers.

A teacher exerts great influence, either for good or evil. If he lacks convictions, that lack will be imparted to those who are taught. If he has a strong faith that faith will be in evidence and will bring a blessing to those exposed to it. If the teacher has accepted error instead of truth this error will have a way of seeping out to those in the class room.

In other words, a teacher deeply influences the lives of those whom he teaches and for that reason stands continually under the judgment of God for a strict accounting of his stewardship.

It is true that the best teacher is the one who induces his students to think for themselves, but no one should be so naive as to assume that this thinking can occur in a vacuum,—consciously or unconsciously students are led in their thinking and the one who leads has a grave responsibility that he lead aright.

In the realm of science, creative thinking proceeds from known facts, although the validity of these facts can and should be tested. It is through experimentation in the various branches of science that discoveries and progress are made. New achievements result from bold adventuring into the yet unknown.

But let us beware of using the meth-

od of experimentation in the spiritual realm without reference to a higher law. God has given to men certain revelations of Himself — in nature, in the Holy Scriptures and through His Son, and these become the subjects of faith. True, faith becomes experimental from the human standpoint when it is put into practice, but there must be faith, not just experimentation. "*God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" precludes a test-tube faith. He must be accepted as God, above all else, by faith. Our Lord's reference to the faith of a little child is pregnant with meaning.

Not for naught does the writer to the Hebrew Christians say: "*For whosoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*" How foolish then is that university professor who recently said that parents were unfair to their children who taught them that the Christian faith is the only right way of life!

The Bible makes it clear that children are to be taught the reasons for faith. "*And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your children,*" is the method by which children come to understand the way of life. "Pedagogically unsound?" By some modern methods, perhaps, but woe to those children who are left to decide for themselves without the blessing of parents or teachers who are believers and who try to transmit the convictions of their faith to plastic minds.

In the realm of Christian education "teaching" is the imparting of truth, not the presentation of a set of alternatives from which the student may

choose. In the philosophical realm a set of arguments, pro and con, may be the basis from which opinions are formed. But in the realm of the Spirit God has given us certain undebatable truths by revelation, which we as Christians are to believe and which we in turn are committed to pass on to others.

The process requires a form of consecrated dogmatism, based not on the opinions of the teacher but on the clear affirmations of God's Word from which proceed Christian convictions. Only those who accept revealed truth, and can affirm its reality with the conviction of those who know, are in a position to pass on the Christian faith to others.

Paul is a supreme example of a man of faith teaching the content of and reasons for that faith to others. Writing to Timothy he says, "*And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*"

And speaking of Timothy: were his parents and grandparents unfair in teaching him the complete reliability and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures? Paul thought not but rather gloried in the young minister's background — "*And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*"

Such teaching is only too rare today. Some teachers of religion glory in unsettling the "immature faith" of their students. Some even boast that they aim to destroy their students' presuppositions in order that they may "find a stable faith for themselves." Would that these men would read and ponder Paul's words to the Galatian

Christians: "But the man who is unsettling your minds, whoever he may be, must bear God's judgment" (Gal. 5:10 NEB).

If Judaizers stood under judgment so too do those who unsettle the faith of young people today. Our Lord spoke these solemn words: "But if a man is a cause of stumbling to one of these little ones who have faith in Me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Little wonder that James tells us that teachers shall be judged with the greater strictness — they have in their hands the eternal destinies of those they teach. Paul warns Timothy: "Timothy, keep safe that which has been entrusted to you. Turn a deaf ear to empty and worldly chatter, and the contradictions of so-called 'knowledge,' for many who lay claim to it have shot far wide of the faith" (I Tim. 6:20,21 NEB).

This is no defense of "robot Christians." Nor is it an attack on honest teaching. Rather it is a plea that God's revealed truth shall be taught as such and not be made the subject of questioning doubts. Let the student form his own faith on the basis of the truth. But let it be the truth of God! We would speak out against the substituting of human opinion for divine revelation — the propagation of a form of religion divested of spiritual content and power, which ends its hope

in this world and measures all its activities by human standards.

Are we speaking to a relevant issue? We are. Many of our finest young people today are sitting under teachers who offer little evidence that they are possessed of any firm convictions regarding the content of the Christian faith. Two young women were recently talking together. Both were from Church-related schools and both had the background of Christian homes. One confessed that she had come to reject great portions of the Bible. She now conceived the supernatural and miraculous to be simply "symbolic." God and His power had, in her mind, been reduced to the human level. She had come under teachers who had themselves rejected the integrity and authority of Holy Scriptures in favor of cleverly devised substitutes. The other young woman had an unimpaired faith because her teachers were faithful.

We are not judging teachers. They, along with all who teach, will be judged with greater strictness because they have chosen teaching as their profession. They will be judged by whether they have engendered faith, or destroyed it.

SECOND COMING—from p. 6

that President Yoon Po-soon was paying an unexpected visit to the market. No one had cleaned the walk-ways.

The merchants had no time to put specially nice goods on the counters, or push the blackmarket items under them. President Yoon saw the market exactly as it usually is, because he was not expected. The next morning as I drove to Kunsan I found the highway neatly scraped and swept. Every hundred yards a man stood guarding the highway. In every village the school children were lined up beside the road with their flags. Why? Because President Yoon was expected along that road . . . in fact some of the children mistook my jeep for that of the President and waved their flags. But it was only the missionary! See how differently they had prepared than the people in the market. How much more should we Christians prepare for the coming of the King of Kings . . . like those people along the highway rather than in the market.

I am very much opposed to drinking wine. There are many reasons for not drinking, but isn't this the most important: Suppose I drink a lot and lose my senses. While in this state, if the Lord should return, how could I meet Him with joy? There are many other reasons against drinking, but to me this is the most important. The same thing is true of all other sins. How ashamed we would be if He should come and find us in sin! I hope that when He comes I will be busy preaching in some church or about some other work of the Lord. The best way to prepare for His coming is to be busy doing His work.

We don't know how long it will be before the Lord returns. I have a feeling that His delay is to give us an opportunity to witness. His last words to the disciples were that they were to witness to Him to the ends of the earth until He returned. That is our task, and it is as yet unfulfilled. Those who hear this message and have not accepted Him as Saviour: now is your opportunity to prepare for His coming by taking Him as your Saviour. Those others who have believed for a long time, take hope and courage knowing that the troubles of this world are temporary and that soon, whether we live or die, we shall all rise to meet our Lord returning in all His glory.

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The Rev. Mr. Hopper is a missionary of the Presbyterian Church, US, in Korea. This is a sermon he has actually used on several occasions there.

THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD

"Supernatural in Origin,

Eternal in Duration,

Inexpressible in Value,

Infinite in Scope,

Regenerative in Power,

Infallible in Authority,

Universal in Interest,

Personal in Application,

Inspired in Totality.

Read It Through,

Write It Down,

Pray It In,

Work It Out,

And Then — Pass It On."

—Author Unknown.

by J. Hershey Longenecker

Once upon a time a group of men at a Church conference were approached by a very earnest man who asked them one by one, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is coming back today?" The first one answered, "I think not." The second man gave the same answer, "I think not." Likewise the third and the fourth and every one until the last answered with the same words, "I think not." Then the questioner looked at them solemnly and said, "Think it over. The Lord Jesus said, 'In such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.'"

Is Jesus Christ coming again? Jesus and the New Testament writers say that He is coming again. And Jesus warned us to be ready for His coming. He said, "Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."

If you were to be asked today, "Do you think Jesus is coming again any time soon?", would you answer, "I think not?" Multitudes would give that answer today. Some people do not believe ~~He will~~ He will ever come. That is an awful mistake.

Jesus Christ is coming again. He said He would. His coming is the Blessed Hope of His people. When we stand by the graves of our loved ones we can rejoice. When Jesus comes again they will be raised from the dead, and they and we shall go with Him to His Home forever.

The Church in Thessalonica had a problem. It seems that there were rich and generous Christians in that Church. They gave liberally to the Church, and the Church gave liberally to the poor. But there were lazy people who would not work. They were waiting for the Second coming of Christ, or that at least is what they said. So Paul in his second letter to Thessalonica spoke sharply about this. "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. II Thess. 3.10-12

In I Thess. 1.10 Paul had written them about waiting for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. But Paul did not mean for them to sit and wait, but to work and wait for the coming

of Christ.

In II Thess. 2.3 Paul tells them about a falling away, an apostasy, which would come before the day of Christ. That day shall not come, he says, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

If we keep our eyes and ears open we will observe that in this year of our Lord 1966 we are right in the midst of a fearful falling away from Christ. Many Christians are not aware of the fact that the New Testament has long predicted such a falling away. About 60 years ago believing Christians were disturbed by a dangerous trend in the Church. A certain Episcopal lawyer had been a worldly-minded Church member, just a nominal Christian. He was converted and began, with his brilliant mind, to study the Bible. Then he wrote and published a number of books, one of them bearing the title, THE GREAT APOSTASY SET IN. That book by Philip Mauro fell into my hands in my teens, about 60 years ago. It impressed me so much that I have remembered the title and the name of the author all these years.

The book was based on our text for this morning, II Thess. 2.3. That day, the day of Christ, shall not come, except there come a falling away first. This term, falling away, is a translation of the Greek word, apostasiaz. For many years earnest Christians have been concerned about a falling away in the Church. The apostasy has been growing. The present GOD IS DEAD theory, one of the craziest ideas ever advanced in the name of religion, is perhaps the extreme limit to which unbelief can go. Very clearly the great apostasy which had already started 60 years ago, has been developing ever since.

But true Christians need not doubt nor fear. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of our Lord Jesus. Nevertheless the conflict between faith and unbelief becomes hotter as the days come and go, and it is well for us to recognize the present apostasy as a probable indication of the approach of the Second Coming of Christ. The day of Christ shall not come except there come a falling away first, that is, unless there is a great apostasy. Certainly the Lord's return is nearer than it ever was before. So we shall do well to remember the urgent advice of our Lord and Saviour, Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ has fallen upon perilous times. Too many church members are Christians in name only, but not in heart. So the Church is weak in its most important work of winning souls to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Instead of working diligently at the Lord's business, they love the world and the things of the world, and their religion takes second or third place in their lives. In I John we are told, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

I am not by disposition a fighter. I hate war. I do not like prize fights or football games. They are too rough. Therefore I have shrunk away from Bible texts that stress the thought of conflict. Having descended from generations of Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites, and partly under Quaker influence, I have leaned toward the side of the pacifists. I used to think I couldn't fight. But aboard ship going to Africa for the first time I had a surprising dream. It was a small freight ship. The passenger cabins had low ceilings which were nothing but the iron floor of the deck above. Mignon slept in the lower berth and I had the upper. The iron deck was too close to my bunk. One night I dreamed that some man had insulted my beloved wife. Suddenly I gave him a powerful punch right in the jaw, and found that his jaw was the iron deck and I had nearly broken my knuckles. So I learned that there must be some fight in my personality after all.

During the past year, the most painful/^{time} of my life, I have not been preaching. But I have suffered in observing what headway the great apostasy is making among churches, throughout the land. It hurt me to know of the apostasy in other denominations of the Lord's people. But it came home to me with even greater force when I realized that the apostasy is growing in unexpected ways in our own Southern Presbyterian Church. As a result certain verses of the New Testament have been speaking to my heart and calling me a coward.

Listen to these three examples. Verse 3 of the brief epistle of Jude says: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. To earnestly contend was just the thing I did not wish to do. But the verse made me feel like a coward.

Second came the advice of Paul to Timothy: (I Tim. 6.12) "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life," If you read the context you will note that this was not to fight in a spirit of anger or hatred, for Paul says to follow faith, love, patience, Meekness. But fighting in a spirit of love and meekness is probably harder than to fight in a spirit of hatred. But one way or another, I do not like contention.

Third example is what Paul says of himself as he nears the end of the road: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." When Paul said these words he was not referring to child's play. He meant that he had really fought. He was doing what Jude recommended. He was earnestly contending for the faith. Notice what he wrote to the Galatians: (Gal. 1.6-9) I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." To the Corinthians Paul wrote: So fight I, not as one that beateth the air. Paul was intensely in earnest about fighting the good fight of faith.

To avoid the charge of cowardice from my own conscience I have been compelled to make a serious decision. Because of the great apostasy which has become a threat to the future of our Church I must fight the good fight of faith, I must contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. And that is the reason for this sermon this morning. Some of you may know that I was received as a licentiate for the ministry by the Presbytery of Transylvania in 1913, and that I was ordained as a minister of the Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Louisville fifty years ago last May. When I came to the Southern Presbyterian Church I had carefully studied the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, and found in them the statement of the faith of our fathers, the faith once delivered unto the saints. In the Book of Church Order I found the system of government which I believe to be in accord with the Word of God. At my ordination I made cert-

ain vows. One of them was this: I promised to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto me on that account.

I came to the Southern Presbyterian Church because it was known as a conservative Church. I was then a theological conservative. After more than fifty years I am still a theological conservative. And I believe that a large majority of our Church members also are still conservative. But with the development of the Great Apostasy during these years some of our ministers, and some members, have become what are known as liberals.

The Presbyterian Survey, our official Church magazine, for June, ¹⁹⁶⁶ has a two column editorial which begins like this: "If you like labels, you can call the 106th General Assembly "liberal" -- and perhaps the most liberal in the history of the Presbyterian Church U.S." Another quote: "Only one vote on a major issue broke the pattern of liberal domination....." Again quote: "But on the heels of that vote came a rather surprising reversal of Assembly sentiment: an overwhelming vote to begin participating in the Consultation on Church Union with the UPUSA, Episcopalians, Methodists, and other denominations."

Until this decision by our Assembly we were not committed to enter the COCU. We merely appointed observers to attend meetings and report back to our Assembly. But the best I can understand it, the present action commits our Church to enter that union about like an engagement ring ties a boy and girl together as candidates for marriage. We are not yet married, but if we withdraw from the engagement some would hold us responsible for breach of promise.

The Survey editorial already cited said in regard to a number of decisions of this Assembly, "We took a great leap forward in this Assembly," said a young commissioner from Texas,..... "But it finally had to be this way because we younger men have been waiting a long time -- and at this Assembly we were organized and prepared and we had good leadership."

The COCU participation proposal was unexpected by many of the commissioners. They were not ready for it. I feel as if we have been caught in a snare. I hope

that God in His love and wisdom will lead our Church to withdraw before it is too late.

Again I quote from the Survey editorial, "After the 106-th (General Assembly) came to an end, an agency staff member commented that he had never seen so much activity by non-commissioners, helping to plan strategy "like a political convention."

The theory of our church courts from General Assembly down to the local Church Session used to be that we prayed for and earnestly sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making decisions for the Church. I fear that the Holy Spirit cannot be held responsible for some of the decisions made in our Assembly this year.

I have here two small books which were sent to ministers with a circular letter addressed to THE MINISTERS, SESSIONS AND MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S. These books may be ordered for 25¢ each. The Assembly's Ad-Interim Committee says,-- We urge you to study both these books, discuss with your fellow members and by your comments help us to discharge the duties the General Assembly has laid upon us.

It would be impossible for a person of my age to serve as an authority on the contents of these books. But I felt it my duty to mention this matter of Church Union as in my opinion having some relation to the Great Apostasy.

How could Church Union have any relation to falling away from Christ? You cannot take all the creeds of all these churches, all their beliefs and unbeliefs, and throw them into a melting pot and after stirring well pour out of the pot a creed that would satisfy the consciences of millions of members. Some would want the Holy Spirit left out, some would reject the Virgin Birth of Christ, some would deny the miracles etc. etc. The union would result in divisions without end. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? Many of the foundations of our faith would have to be compromised. But after we have been swallowed up and lost our Presbyterian heritage, what could we do about it? Some would preach salvation by grace. Others would insist on salvation by good works. There would be perpetual arguments which could never bring the world to salvation. I believe if the Lord Jesus were with us today He would say: That which thou already hast, hold fast until I come.

There is great danger that while the Lord's people are engaged in efforts to get all Christians to believe the same thing, the Lord Jesus may return, and many would not be ready.

Our time has gone, and I must close. Let me summarize what I have tried to say:

1. Jesus Christ is coming again. It is a sure thing.
2. His coming will be predated by a great falling away, a great apostasy.
3. We are now in the midst of a great falling away from Christ.
4. Some signs of such apostasy are these:
 - a) All sorts of worldliness have been welcomed into Christian hearts and homes through newspapers, books, magazines, movies, radio, television, and social life of forms that the Lord Jesus would surely condemn, as He condemned the adulteress Jezebel who was seducing the Church at Thyatira.
 - b) There is a fearless and determined war against the Bible as the Word of God.
 - c) Some supposedly Christian teachers have thrown overboard all of the ten commandments.
 - d) Colleges that were built with Church money have been overcome by demands for academic freedom, so some of them contain atheists who tear down both the faith and the morality of their students.
 - e) Even our own Church magazine is so liberal as to ask patient treatment for the theory that God is dead, and to give a pat-on-the-back to a great university of another denomination for harboring those who propagate that frightful theory.

This may well be the last sermon I will ever preach in this pulpit, or anywhere else, for that matter. A man of 77 lives on borrowed time. I hope you will remember that the Lord Jesus is coming again. And the Judgment Day is surely coming. Are you ready to meet your Lord?

I beg you every one to remember the words of the Lord Jesus: Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh!

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by J. Hershey Longmacker

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But true Christians need not doubt nor fear. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of our Lord Jesus. Nevertheless the conflict between faith and unbelief becomes hotter as the days come and go, and it is well for us to recognize the present apostasy as a probable indication of the approach of the Second Coming of Christ. The day of Christ shall not come except there come a falling away first, that is, unless there is a great apostasy. Certainly the Lord's return is nearer than it ever was before. So we shall do well to remember the urgent advice of our Lord and Saviour, Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ has fallen upon perilous times. Too many church members are Christians in name only, but not in heart. So the Church is weak in its most important work of winning souls to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Instead of working diligently at the Lord's business, they love the world and the things of the world, and their religion takes second or third place in their lives. In I John we are told, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

I am not by disposition a fighter. I hate war. I do not like prize fights or football games. They are too rough. Therefore I have shrunk away from Bible texts that stress the thought of conflict. Having descended from generations of Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites, and partly under Quaker influence, I have leaned toward the side of the pacifists. I used to think I couldn't fight. But aboard ship going to Africa for the first time I had a surprising dream. It was a small freight ship. The passenger cabins had low ceilings which were nothing but the iron floor of the deck above. Mignon slept in the lower berth and I had the upper. The iron deck was too close to my bunk. One night I dreamed that some man had insulted my beloved wife. Suddenly I gave him a powerful punch right in the jaw, and found that his jaw was the iron deck and I had nearly broken my knuckles. So I learned that there must be some fight in my personality after all.

During the past year, the most painful/^{time} of my life, I have not been preaching. But I have suffered in observing what headway the great apostasy is making among churches, throughout the land. It hurt me to know of the apostasy in other denominations of the Lord's people. But it came home to me with even greater force when I realized that the apostasy is growing in unexpected ways in our own Southern Presbyterian Church. As a result certain verses of the New Testament have been speaking to my heart and calling me a coward.

Listen to these three examples. Verse 3 of the brief epistle of Jude says: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. To earnestly contend was just the thing I did not wish to do. But the verse made me feel like a coward.

Second came the advice of Paul to Timothy: (I Tim. 6.12) "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life," If you read the context you will note that this was not to fight in a spirit of anger or hatred, for Paul says to fellow faith, love, patience, Meekness. But fighting in a spirit of love and meekness is probably harder than to fight in a spirit of hatred. But one way or another, I do not like contention.

Third example is what Paul says of himself as he nears the end of the road: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." When Paul said these words he was not referring to child's play. He meant that he had really fought. He was doing what Jude recommended. He was earnestly contending for the faith. Notice what he wrote to the Galatians: (Gal. 1.6-9) I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." To the Corinthians Paul wrote: So fight I, not as one that beateth the air. Paul was intensely in earnest about fighting the good fight of faith.

To avoid the charge of cowardice from my own conscience I have been compelled to make a serious decision. Because of the great apostasy which has become a threat to the future of our Church I must fight the good fight of faith, I must contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. And that is the reason for this sermon this morning. Some of you may know that I was received as a licentiate for the ministry by the Presbytery of Transylvania in 1913, and that I was ordained as a minister of the Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Louisville fifty years ago last May. When I came to the Southern Presbyterian Church I had carefully studied the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, and found in them the statement of the faith of our fathers, the faith once delivered unto the saints. In the Book of Church Order I found the system of government which I believe to be in accord with the Word of God. At my ordination I made cert-

ain vows. One of them was this: I promised to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto me on that account.

I came to the Southern Presbyterian Church because it was known as a conservative Church. I was then a theological conservative. After more than fifty years I am still a theological conservative. And I believe that a large majority of our Church members also are still conservative. But with the development of the Great Apostasy during these years some of our ministers, and some members, have become what are known as liberals.

The Presbyterian Survey, our official Church magazine, for June, ¹⁹⁶⁶ has a two column editorial which begins like this: "If you like labels, you can call the 106th General Assembly "liberal" -- and perhaps the most liberal in the history of the Presbyterian Church U.S." Another quote: "Only one vote on a major issue broke the pattern of liberal domination...." Again quote: "But on the heels of that vote came a rather surprising reversal of Assembly sentiment: an overwhelming vote to begin participating in the Consultation on Church Union with the UPUSA, Episcopalians, Methodists, and other denominations."

Until this decision by our Assembly we were not committed to enter the COCU. We merely appointed observers to attend meetings and report back to our Assembly. But the best I can understand it, the present action commits our Church to enter that union about like an engagement ring ties a boy and girl together as candidates for marriage. We are not yet married, but if we withdraw from the engagement some would hold us responsible for breach of promise.

The Survey editorial already cited said in regard to a number of decisions of this Assembly, "We took a great leap forward in this Assembly," said a young commissioner from Texas,..... "But it finally had to be this way because we younger men have been waiting a long time -- and at this Assembly we were organized and prepared and we had good leadership."

The COCU participation proposal was unexpected by many of the commissioners. They were not ready for it. I feel as if we have been caught in a snare. I hope

that God in His love and wisdom will lead our Church to withdraw before it is too late.

Again I quote from the Survey editorial, "After the 106-th (General Assembly) came to an end, an agency staff member commented that he had never seen so much activity by non-commissioners, helping to plan strategy "like a political convention."

The theory of our church courts from General Assembly down to the local Church Session used to be that we prayed for and earnestly sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making decisions for the Church. I fear that the Holy Spirit cannot be held responsible for some of the decisions made in our Assembly this year.

I have here two small books which were sent to ministers with a circular letter addressed to THE MINISTERS, SESSIONS AND MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S. These books may be ordered for 25¢ each. The Assembly's Ad-Interim Committee says,-- We urge you to study both these books, discuss with your fellow members and by your comments help us to discharge the duties the General Assembly has laid upon us.

It would be impossible for a person of my age to serve as an authority on the contents of these books. But I felt it my duty to mention this matter of Church Union as in my opinion having some relation to the Great Apostasy.

How could Church Union have any relation to falling away from Christ? You cannot take all the creeds of all these churches, all their beliefs and unbeliefs, and throw them into a melting pot and after stirring well pour out of the pot a creed that would satisfy the consciences of millions of members. Some would want the Holy Spirit left out, some would reject the Virgin Birth of Christ, some would deny the miracles etc. etc. The union would result in divisions without end. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? Many of the foundations of our faith would have to be compromised. But after we have been swallowed up and lost our Presbyterian heritage, what could we do about it? Some would preach salvation by grace. Others would insist on salvation by good works. There would be perpetual arguments which could never bring the world to salvation. I believe if the Lord Jesus were with us today He would say: That which thou already hast, hold fast until I come.

There is great danger that while the Lord's people are engaged in efforts to get all Christians to believe the same thing, the Lord Jesus may return, and many would not be ready.

Our time has gone, and I must close. Let me summarize what I have tried to say:

1. Jesus Christ is coming again. It is a sure thing.
2. His coming will be preceded by a great falling away, a great apostasy.
3. We are now in the midst of a great falling away from Christ.
4. Some signs of such apostasy are these:
 - a) All sorts of worldliness have been welcomed into Christian hearts and homes through newspapers, books, magazines, movies, radio, television, and social life of forms that the Lord Jesus would surely condemn, as He condemned the adulteress Jezebel who was seducing the Church at Thyatira.
 - b) There is a fearless and determined war against the Bible as the Word of God.
 - c) Some supposedly Christian teachers have thrown overboard all of the ten commandments.
 - d) Colleges that were built with Church money have been overcome by demands for academic freedom, so some of them contain atheists who tear down both the faith and the morality of their students.
 - e) Even our own Church magazine is so liberal as to ask patient treatment for the theory that God is dead, and to give a pat-on-the-back to a great university of another denomination for harboring those who propagate that frightful theory.

This may well be the last sermon I will ever preach in this pulpit, or anywhere else, for that matter. A man of 77 lives on borrowed time. I hope you will remember that the Lord Jesus is coming again. And the Judgment Day is surely coming. Are you ready to meet your Lord?

I beg you every one to remember the words of the Lord Jesus: Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh!

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