

# Foundation of Faith

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## Church *life*

Dead Christianity  
The Family of God  
Christians Must Change  
The Secret of a Growing Church

SEPTEMBER 2022

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## Editorial

*Dear Reader,*

*The apostle Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians by expressing our greatest need: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13: 14).*

*We are His believers, His redeemed flock, His church saved by the Son of God through His precious blood. Without God’s grace and love, and without the companionship of the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible for any of us to live the way God calls church members to live.*

*Just as the Lord Jesus selected those with a variety of skills and talents as the first twelve apostles, each of us today is different from others in our congregation. Nonetheless, we all started out the same way: unsaved, not believing, and deluded by our desires.*

*Around the world, our congregations consist of people from all corners of the earth by God’s design and according to His Word. How is it possible, despite all the differences in God’s church, to honor Him by living in one spirit, with one purpose, in one faith, and being a blessing in this lost world?*

*The answer, dear Reader, is found in a new life, possible only if we are born again, at which point our old life ends.*

*We can prepare to become useful in the Kingdom of God by praying, reading the Bible, and having fellowship with others. The ideal is that we, “speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4: 15). Yes, the head must be Christ, not a person or organization, but Jesus, our Lord and Savior. “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11: 36).*

*H. D. Nimz*

# Dead Christianity

Many years ago in a Jutland church, one could consistently observe the congregation adhering to the custom of bowing reverently toward the left in front of the church. A new pastor arrived. He too observed this and asked the reason why they did it. Among the younger ones, he was told they had no idea why, since they were simply following the tradition modeled by the older people.

He asked the older people, who said they had never given it any thought. It had always been done and therefore it must be the right thing to do. Everyone bowed, but no one knew why.

After a few years, the church needed some repairs. Finally, the mystery was solved. When the plaster was removed, an old, still well-preserved picture of Mother Mary with the Christ Child was found on the left side of the church door. So that was the reason. Before the Reformation, people had bowed before the image. Later, it was plastered over and forgotten. But everyone still bowed down, although no one knew why.

Unfortunately, we cannot deny that the Christianity of many peo-

ple models this repetitive pattern. They bow in faith but do not know why. A person does what others do, sings what others sing, prays what others pray, believes what others believe, without being convinced of the truth they believe. Where does this come from?



The Scottish preacher, Thomas Guthrie, a well-known and faithful witness to Christ, once heard a surprising confession from a dying man, known as a regular church attendee. He was astonished, there-

fore, when the terminally-ill man, evidently troubled by the state of his soul, uttered, "I have not heard a single sermon."

At first, Guthrie thought the man was not thinking clearly. Yet, upon closer examination, the dying man's introspective reflections

led to a remarkable result which can also serve as a lesson for us. The sick man repeated, "It is as I said. I have not heard a single sermon. True, I was present at most of them. But as soon as you began to preach, I let the business of the past week occupy my thoughts and accordingly made plans for the new week. So I remained empty."

Truly, this is how we too can remain empty, and the grace extended to our seeking souls remains unclaimed. Read what Jesus says in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:11-15) about

what happens to the Word of God when it is sown in hearts. What is the soil of your heart like? Does the Word find entrance and germinate, grow, and produce fruit? May your Christianity be alive! ■

# The Foreigner on the Train

*“I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” (Romans 10: 20)*

A dark-skinned man traveling from London to the coast had taken his seat in the coach of a passenger train. Since he appeared to be unwell, a lady in the same coach suggested to her travel companion that it would be good to share the gospel of Christ and His saving grace with him. She thought this man may have been from India, perhaps even an idol worshiper. The lady's traveling companion, assuming the man probably understood English, handed him a tract. In the meantime, a conversation began among the travelers about missions and the need to do more to save the heathens.

The man thanked the old lady in very well-spoken English and read the pamphlet. But then he remarked that the tract was not clear on the way to get to heaven.

“Is there not a book that perhaps would show a poor sinner how to be saved?”

The lady answered him, saying that there was indeed a book—the Bible. However, she did not have one with her.

She added, “If you read the Bible and pray, you may be sure of going to heaven.”

Since no one could produce this precious Book, the same man

pulled a Bible out of his own pocket and handed it to the lady. He asked her to show him where it said one could be saved through prayer. The lady searched in vain and replied, quite embarrassed, that she could not find that particular passage. Surely it was written somewhere that one who repents sincerely and prays earnestly will be saved.

The man then mentioned that he really wanted to know how long a person had to repent and how long a person had to pray to be assured of going to heaven. The lady became quite flustered and returned the Bible to him. She said she could not find that scripture either.

At that point, the man opened his Bible and said to the lady who had been interested in his salvation, “Is this the passage you wanted to show me?” He read, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). And then, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24).

This was indeed the right scripture. The man then gave the lady the serious advice that it was a matter of believing to be saved and not just praying and repenting.

The stranger then added, “This poor man speaking to you can testify, in full assurance of faith, I am saved and have a place in heaven through the work the Savior accomplished on Calvary's cross.”

At that point, he was interrupted by a traveler who shouted angrily that he was not there to listen to such speeches; here was neither the place nor the time. Those belonged in church on Sundays, not in a passenger train.

The foreigner, now in his element, continued to proclaim to the astonished travelers the unfailing counsel of God. He spoke of God's infinite love revealed in His Son being given to mankind. He spoke of the love of the Son, Who freely gave Himself to do the will of God and thereby made a way to heaven for those who once lived in sin.

What does God's Word say? “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight” (Luke 10:21). ■

# The Family of God

In Galatians 4:21–30, the apostle Paul shows the Galatians what the Scriptures say about the law and the church, i.e. the family of God.

We all know what a true family is: a wonderful, tight-knit community filled with love, where all members help each other to the best of their ability. However, there is another type of family of far higher standing and far greater significance: the family of God.

This family of God, His church, is visible to the world. It made its debut at the first Pentecost in Jerusalem, when the Lord revealed Himself to the gathered disciples and blessed them with the Holy Spirit. Ever since, the family of God has always been visible to the world.

In Revelation 21:3, we read, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.” God Himself is the Father of this heavenly family, which He founded through the blood of His beloved Son. Because He paid such a high price for His family, it is extremely valuable in His eyes, and He wants to make it glorious. The family of God is not a human institution or church because it belongs only to God.

He is the head and sole ruler of His people, and His people allow only God to lead them. All honor is due Him, the Head. Let us worship only Him and not any person, regardless of title.

Because this is the church of the Most High, its character must

be godly, holy, and without stain or blame. Only then is it pleasing to the Lord.

If God is our Head or our Father, who is our mother? In Galatians 4:26, God’s Word tells us that “the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.” The heavenly Jerusalem is the legitimate mother who is recognized by God and does not acknowledge any human institutions. Unfortunately, the church of God nowadays is too often misunderstood and too rarely recognized. This church was purchased through the blood of Christ and is led through the Holy Spirit.

The family of God also has many children. In Revelation, John saw a multitude of countless people from all nations. Yes, God has children everywhere in the world.



The church of God confidently bears His name. Many Christians today place enormous emphasis on self-assigned denominational descriptors. Some say the name does not matter. While it is true that the name of your church will not get you into Heaven, it is also true that, if you are a child of God, you will value His name and live in a way that honors Him. God wants to help us in this.

The church of God is a nurturing mother. In her care, we can grow and thrive; truth is the food she offers her children. In the broader Christian sphere, there are a lot of false beliefs, which is why there are so many “sick” Christians whose growth has been stunted. So, dear Soul, be careful about where you find your food. Not everything available is good for you.

The Lord does not want His children to join just any human community. He wants to raise them Himself and in accordance with His Word and Spirit. He teaches them to pray and to obediently fulfil all of God’s wishes. How often has He already told you that you will not prosper in the place where you think the food is good? And yet, people often avoid fellowship with children of God in the church of God.

Who are God’s children? The family of God consists only of those who have been born again. True salvation is the only way to join the family, and staying in the family means aiming to always do God’s will. The desire to do something for the Savior fills the hearts of God’s children and motivates them to glorify Him in everything

they do. These are joyful children, free from all bondage and overwhelming passions.

In the family of God, there is wonderful harmony and order, since God is a God of order. This is apparent in creation, of course, but becomes especially visible in the church of God.

The first law in the family of God is love. Our hearts must be filled by love for the Lord and for our sisters and brothers. In this family, we support each other with God’s love in all its fullness, a love that suffuses the hearts of His children through the Holy Spirit.

Dear Reader, are you a member of God’s family? Do you appreciate and love it? Then remember, there is only one family of God. ■



# Christians Must Change

**I** hold a deep personal conviction that Christians must change. Why? Many professing Christians share a fundamental misunderstanding of the true nature and original purpose of the New-Testament Church.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said He would build His Church, a unique organization founded on a unique connection between Christ and His followers.

## Jesus Preached Repentance

When Christ founded His Church, He sent out His twelve apostles, at another time seventy disciples, to preach about repentance, conversion, and the kingdom of God. These were the main themes of the gospel.

He commissioned His apostles to go into all the world and to bring to all nations the good news He had taught them. Read the gospels, the message of Jesus, and compare them with the lessons taught or omitted today. Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all things” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus began with a sermon of repentance. Some “Christians” by name have not heard a traditional, powerful sermon on repentance for a long time. People often hear that they should try to become

better, to overcome fear and stop worrying and start living. But Jesus taught repentance. He says, “But unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Peter says in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

If any church preaches salvation without repentance and faith in Christ, then it needs transformation because it does not represent Christ and His gospel in the right way.

## Sin Must Be Overcome

Secondly, the Church must teach and emphasize the New-Testament principles of Christian living. Tolerating sin in the lives of professing Christians must cease, for the New-Testament church stands in consistent rebuke against sin.

Jesus came to save people from sin. May the Lord provide more preachers called, equipped, and inspired by God to dare to rebuke sin and unrighteousness, regardless of where it is.

Peter could have let Ananias and Sapphira get away with their hypocrisy. However, he rebuked them publicly. Far too easily, many professing Christians get away with their habits and views, even though they are





not right before God. They must be rebuked, regardless of their economic status. If sin is not overcome, it spreads or multiplies.

### **Never Take the Gospel Lightly**

Anointed by the Holy Spirit, Stephen, the first martyr, exclaimed, “*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you*” (Acts 7:51). This was a public speech, and Stephen was stoned for it. Clearly, direct and open preaching is necessary for people to see the truth!

The church must never take the gospel lightly. A gospel that is not for discipline, consecration, and full surrender to Christ is a disgrace and mere pretense. A gospel that does not stir a man to his innermost being and inspire him to the highest aspirations is deceit. Church membership without conversion is dishonorable for Christianity, for it misrepresents the gospel of Christ.

To present the gospel as an easy path is a distortion of Christ’s message. Jesus spoke of leaving father and mother and giving up houses and lands if one wants to be His follower (Matthew 19:29). He spoke of taking

burdens upon ourselves, turning the other cheek, and walking the second mile (Matthew 5:39, 41).

### **Money and Possessions**

As Christians, we must change our attitude toward money and possessions. The church is not a social club where members pay a small fee to remain in good standing. The church is the army of the Lord, equipped for a fight to the death against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Everything important and meaningful to us should reaffirm our consecrated commitment to the battle of justice against injustice. Such a war cannot be financed with mere cents or alms. The church’s goal to liberate the whole world cannot be achieved through second-rate efforts or ambiguous loyalty.

Christ demands our best. Tragically, some Christians consider their material possessions as their own, though they are entrusted to them only as temporary administrative property. Their financial plans should only be made by looking over the shoulder of God Himself.

As good stewards of God, we should work with the sure knowledge that God has 100% control over our



assets. *If the world is to be won to Christ in this generation, our own convenient agenda must be replaced by one of consecration and self-denial.*

We must not make a half-hearted surrender but should completely consecrate ourselves and all our wealth to God. Christians who live to fulfill their own selfish purposes must change.

### **Bad Feelings and Resentment**

Yes, Christians must change. People who harbor ill will, or negative thoughts must let them melt away by the love of God. The Christian spirit is a spirit of forgiveness. Oversensitive people must put their proud, confident selves to death. People who wallow in self-pity need to throw off their childish attention-seeking and wake up, for they are not able to fight the spiritual battle the way they should.

Further, Christians need to change some ideas in how they plan and implement worship services. All planning in the church should be aimed at winning souls and establishing them in the truth of God. A healthy Christian salvation experience, worshipping together, and working together for the Lord deepens the fellowship of God's children. In this, all three elements are needed together. Our spiritual experience must be lived out in practical service to God and fellow men. We must be the hands and feet of the gospel, solidly equipped and faithful in service.

### **Worship Services**

Unfortunately, worship services sometimes fall far short of reverently glorifying God and His Son.

Worship must once again become the center of our common encounter with God. In order to do this, we must know His will and worship Jesus Christ for His great work of redemption. In worship, the eternal grace of the Father must be revealed to us; He must penetrate our souls with the revelation of His immortal love and show us His holiness. Worship must show the worthiness of God again and must not merely be about following religious formulas.

### **Religious Rituals**

Religious rituals and habits can easily be perceived as worship, but sometimes they have nothing to do with worship at all. True worship leads us to holy ground where we "take off our shoes" and stand before the Almighty, deeply moved and trembling in love and adoration.

In worshipping, we should always hear the bright trumpet call to service and faithfulness, to offer God an overflowing love, and to have a Christ-like concern for others.

Worship must again become a clear, refreshing stream flowing from the heavenly source—a stream that cleanses our soul, clarifies our view, and provides us with all-sufficient grace, courage, faith, and strength, for whatever cross we have to bear or whatever work we have to do.

True worship is like an oasis in the desert of sin, like a quiet forest meadow, like a still water where the soul is refreshed in the Lord before going back to the battle line.

### **The Bible—The Empowered Guide**

Lastly, thousands of Christians need to change their attitude about the Bible. This ancient book, inspired by God and still inspiring today, must be taken off the shelf, dusted off, and put into daily use.

We may have read a lot about the Bible. Now it is time to study it in depth, because this is the book of God, the revelation of His will for us.

The Bible is the heavenly blueprint showing us the way of salvation. The Bible is God's response to sin. It demonstrates the purpose of Golgotha and the empty tomb. The gospel is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

The Bible must again become what it hasn't thoroughly been for a long time in our generation: the Christian's manual and the church's authorized guide. Preachers and listeners must again recognize its value and power revealed only by hearing and accepting its truth—God's truth.

"Preach the word," Paul said to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:2). No other preaching has as much power as biblical preaching. Christians must change.

The fires of a holy revival can be rekindled. New strength can be found, and new victories can be won.

How much do we want to work and give? How much do we want to risk for stirrings to begin and to have souls find God? Where is our place when the final battle is fought between right and wrong, between God and the gods of this world?

Are you a member of the New-Testament Church? What stance are you taking? Is God calling you to change, and are you willing to?

Dale Oldham

# The Secret of a Growing Church

| *What are the conditions and barriers to healthy church growth?*

If a church is growing, there is a reason. Likewise, if a church is dying, or not growing, there is also a reason. Let's stop attributing growth or decline to mere chance, and let's try to find their root causes. Then we will have more growth and less decline. If a child is not growing, there is a reason for this. If the cause can be determined and a remedy exists, we should administer the remedy, so the child will grow. This also applies to spiritual matters.

Is our congregation growing or declining? If we expect revival and want souls to be saved, we need a living, victorious church as a foundation. It is useless to try to lead sinners to repentance by having them adapt legalistic forms of behavior, or by simply having them make an empty confession in order to draw them into fellowship. In many congregations there is too much indifference, which will never overcome the resistance of a sinful heart to seek the Lord. Someone may see and be convinced of their need for salvation, but although they are "almost saved," they are not truly born again. They cannot tell you why they do not attain spiritual life, but they don't receive salvation. Why not? What is the reason? There may be too much deadness in the congregation for the Holy Spirit to work freely and effectively. The work of the Spirit is being hindered. Therefore, it is difficult to pray powerfully for souls in the face of such obstacles. This is to some extent the cause of many unfruitful revival services. The Spirit cannot do His work.

Let us be a living, victorious, Spirit-filled church. Let us be a church with a burden for lost souls. Let us be willing and ready to deny ourselves and bring personal sacrifices for the cause of God's kingdom. That is the only way to move the world and win people for Christ, the difference between a growing and a declining church.

What is the secret of a growing church? A successful evangelist said this about the early church on the

day of Pentecost: "See the congregation in this time of revival. The believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were not worldly. They were at work daily. They did not shy back from bringing sacrifices. With the Word of God in hand, they went out through the world and preached Christ. They believed the Word completely. They preached the cross of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, and the judgment to come. They preached that souls were lost and that Christ came to seek what is lost and to save from sin. They preached that there is no other name under heaven wherein we can be saved, other than in the name of Jesus. They gave themselves fully to saving souls and did not let other things distract them from this task or to use up their time or energy. They invited everyone to salvation, preached openly, and proclaimed salvation through Christ to all."

In our minds, let's go back to that time and read the account once more. Let's think about what it reveals. Acts 2:42-47 states: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Here we see a rapidly-growing church. The text gives us certain key words that unlock for us the secret of their growth: "in one accord," "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," and "all who believed were together." They fasted, prayed, denied themselves, ►

and gave themselves practically and spiritually to save souls. If we follow their example, souls will be won, the church will receive new life, and will grow and flourish.

The secret to being a church that experiences revival lies in the powerful words that the apostle Paul says of the churches in Macedonia: “They first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5). If we want to have revival and to be a growing church, we need this resolve. As members of the church, we need to first dedicate ourselves completely to Christ and to the task of winning souls for Him.

While the church sleeps, precious time is being lost, and millions of souls are perishing. It is inconceivable that a congregation would have little or no in-

crease in souls saved year after year. There is no excuse for this. We are saved to serve others and reach others for Christ. It is our duty to reach out to a lost world. In order to do this, we must first be truly saved ourselves and on fire for the Lord. We need to be an evangelistic, soul-saving church, or else we will cease to exist. There is no other way to stay alive except to be active in doing God’s work. The situation is serious and urgent. As a church, we must not sit in complacency while the world rushes toward hell. Every second, a soul is going to eternity. We need to wake up, take hold of the message of life, and bring it to a lost and dying world. On the Day of Judgment, we will stand before the Lord and give account to Him. ■

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## Prayer— The Mission of the Church

**R**arely is one led to Christ and saved from sin without God using someone else. Therefore, it is the task of the congregation as a whole, as well as the individual members, to pray for sinners so they recognize their lost condition.

“Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38) is an exhortation for congregations that still applies today. Even the sick and weak should see it as their duty to pray for laborers in God’s vineyard.

I know of a student who had every prospect of graduating with distinction from medical school. He was expected to have a brilliant career as a doctor. But one night, just before his final exam, he totally sur-

rendered his young heart to the Lord and received the wonderful gift of salvation. With some uneasiness, he wrote to his mother that he now wanted to serve the Lord in full-time ministry. She had sacrificed a great deal for her son to study medicine. Yet the letter was no huge surprise to her. She boarded the next train and went to see him. Then she told her son that years ago she had sent his outgrown clothing to a faraway mission station. At the same time, she had asked the missionary to unite with her in praying that one day her son would become a preacher.

A congregation that persists in earnest prayer will seldom have a vacant pulpit and empty seats. The congregations of today, like those of the early church, need

to learn to pray. They must return to close and heartfelt communion with God as it occurred in the apostles' time.

Prayer is the power of all work within the church. Without prayer, the church is prone to difficulties and failures. Spiritual life can grow cold and even die. But where a church abides in persistent prayer, it will grow.

Prayer is the first and most beautiful identifier of a consecrated life. Through prayer we receive strength from God. We communicate with God because He speaks to us. He shows us His thoughts, His desires and intentions. Through prayer, He molds our character to be more like His.

"And as He [Jesus] prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became* white and glistening" (Luke 9:29). True and humble prayer brings a bright glow to a weary face. All fear, grief, and pain give way to a soothing, refreshing calm. Prayer connects us to God's throne.

In February of 1861, a terrible storm raged along the coast of England. Eighty-one boats sank in a single day. The "Rising Sun," a two-masted sailing ship, also sank, leaving only the two masts sticking sadly out of the water. The crew barely managed to save themselves in the storm-tossed rigging. The wind intensified, the waves rolled higher; how long would the crew be able to hang on? Suddenly, there was a new, violent crash. The mast groaned and snapped. The sailors were tossed into the raging sea. Just then, a lifeline was thrown from the shore to save the shipwrecked. Then the second mast fell. Too late! Silently, the rescue team began retracting the rope. "A wasted effort," they thought. Suddenly someone shouted loudly, "Pull! Pull, there's a man hanging onto the rope!" Joining forces, they brought the injured man ashore. It was the cabin boy, barely sixteen years old, who had escaped certain death. When his chilled body had warmed up, he opened his eyes. His first words were, "Mother prayed for me!"

It is so important for the church to always remain at its post praying. Then many a mother's son or daughter would be snatched from the lusts of this world, from the clutches of Satan. We can save the lost only through prayer. If we fail to pray, the battle is lost before we have begun. But thanks be to God, He gives us strength in all things.

The church is the link between the Holy Spirit and the sinner. Therefore, it is precisely the church that needs a special measure of strength from above. We re-

ceive divine power and help through prayer. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit is moved to work on the sinner and lead him to repentance.

"But tarry . . . until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) is a command also applicable to the church today. If we obey this command, victory is brought to the fight for the gospel. If in our day there is a noticeable lack of divine power and strength that filled and permeated the early Christian church, it may be due to failing to follow the divine command to "tarry."

The responsibility lies with us. Either we have to bear it now or on Judgment Day. Aware of the great responsibility, I have also become bolder in my increased need to draw strength from above.

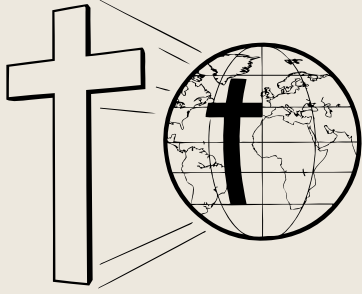
Brothers and sisters, in the fight for the truth, we must win the victory. We need heavenly power to win immortal souls for the Lord. We can win the victory if we want to. Why don't we pray right now? Scripture tells us, "now;" the blood of Christ says "now;" our sense of responsibility for lost souls tells us "now."

One dark, stormy night, a man attempted to cross a lake in a small sailboat. A sudden wave knocked his boat over. An experienced swimmer, he tried to reach the shore. But the night was dark and the sky overcast, and he had lost his sense of direction. He struggled in the freezing water and swam with all his might. As the cold and discouragement weakened his strength, his strokes slowed. He sank. "Daddy, Daddy!" came the cry over the stormy sea. There, once more, drawn out: "Dad-dy! Dad-dy!" Concern for her father had driven the little daughter into the stormy night. The sinking man's body shuddered. "Dad-dy!" His child! New life flowed through his body. He pulled himself together, swam toward the voice, and collapsed safely at the shore.

Believe. The words of your prayers, the plea for the rescue of a sinking friend or neighbor, will rise to the Father, no matter how stormy the night. They may feel discouraged and in despair right now. Instead of heading to the shore of salvation, they may be swimming deeper into destruction. They may be drowning. Then God will listen to your plea and save them. Your silence would have been their certain death!

As a church, let us unite in earnestness and bring our petitions to the throne of God. God will send a powerful answer.

F. Martin



# Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs  
Kitchener, ON

## Offended by the Sermon?

*Jesus said in Matthew 11: 6, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” This is indeed so. Blessed is such, not only here, but also eternally. For anger toward Jesus and His word has severe consequences, even into eternity.*

Being offended by a sermon is nothing new. Even Jesus had to deal with this, as is clearly shown in Matthew 15:12–14. There have always been different audiences listening to the preaching of God’s Word. While some were moved, edified, and blessed, others felt convicted and went away offended. Our Lord Jesus experienced this, and it has remained unchanged even today.

### **There is a reason people are offended by the effect of God’s Word.**

- God’s Word is light, and light exposes and punishes.
- God’s Word is like a fire and convicts the conscience.
- God’s Word is truth, and truth often wounds and hurts.
- God’s Word is a judge of the thoughts and senses of the heart, and this judge either finds us guilty or exonerates us.
- God’s Word is life and spirit, and this spirit convicts and creates clarity.

This is the profound effect of divine preaching, and it cannot fail those listening, who must either accept what they hear or completely reject it.

In Matthew 15, it was the Pharisees who took offense at Jesus’ preaching. Again, their anger was caused by Jesus’ words. They had accused His disciples of not washing their hands before eating. Jesus rejected some of their statements and clearly showed how they set aside God’s commandments to make their own rules. He convicted them of their hypocrisy and reminded them of what Isaiah said: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from Me; and in vain they worship Me. Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men” (verses 8–9).

Although Jesus was not finished, He addressed the crowd, making it very clear that it isn’t the food entering the mouth that makes one unclean, but what comes out of the mouth, such as untruths, hypocrisy, and false teachings. He did not address these issues gently, since evil had to be firmly removed by the root. So being offended was completely understandable. The disciples heard about it and said, “Do you also know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” Regardless of the concern of His disciples, Jesus said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted” (verse 13).

Jesus meant the Pharisees when He referred to the “plants.” “Let them alone,” He continued in verse 14. “They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” Falling into



the ditch would be the end of the leaders and their followers, and sadly, Jesus saw the ensuing consequences. The disciples may have been horrified at their Master's attitude. He had been so understanding and benevolent with the tax collectors and sinners, but He dealt ruthlessly with the spiritual leaders. These were not leaders in Jesus' eyes, but deceivers!

Being offended by God's Word is not harmless. I am reminded of an experience I had on one of my ministry trips. With the local pastor, we went to visit a sawmill. There, we met a man who was known to my colleague. After a short conversation, the brother handed him an invitation to the worship service. The man was furious and started swearing at us. A lot of bitterness can dwell in a man's heart against God and His Word. Sadly, we said goodbye and started on our way home.

Being offended by a sermon can harden our heart, and many a person has gone to the grave with this anger. It is inconceivable that someone with such offense can live quietly or even die quietly. Therefore, these

people are really to be pitied because they make it so difficult for themselves and are lost forever.

Jesus so often tried to help the Pharisees. He wanted to convince them of the truth of the gospel and lead them to faith. But since He saw them become more and more hostile towards Him, He warned them with an especially serious word: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12: 31–32). In such a case, conversion becomes impossible because the reviving Spirit withdraws forever. That is where constant offense at God's Word can lead.

Are you also suffering from being offended by God's Word? You can become free as long as the Holy Spirit is still speaking, admonishing, and striving for your salvation. Open your heart to Him and become free!

## Preparing for a New Path

**B**eginning a school year or a new season can be simultaneously uncertain and exciting. New schools, new jobs, and making decisions can be stressful, especially knowing that the choices we make in our youth have a big impact on our future.

We took a trip to Jasper, Alberta, this past June. If you're not familiar with it, Jasper is in the Rocky Mountains and is a beautiful place to enjoy nature. On this particular trip, we saw deer, wapiti, mountain goats, black bears, and even one grizzly bear (thankfully from inside the car).

We did a beautiful hike, and I recently thought about how the process of planning for and going on a hike contains some lessons that can apply to a new adventure or chapter in life.

### Avoid the "Bears"

"Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9b).

Early in the season, and with lots of snow yet to melt on the mountains, bears were emerging from hibernation, looking for food. We knew we could reduce the chance of encountering a bear on the hike by staying in a group and choosing a trail that was busy and well-marked.

We aren't immune to temptation, but we can do our best to "avoid the bears." Some choices can lead us into more temptation or spiritual danger than others. For example, choosing a career that surrounds you with the pulls of the world, or a school where you will have no support from other Christians, is like going on a solitary hike knowing there are "bears in the area."

Surround yourself with God's family and prayer support during this important time in your life!

### Weigh the Options

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

We used an app to find a hike that fit our preferences for length and difficulty. Prior to making a decision, I scrolled through photos and read reviews of people who had done the hike before us to see what their experience was like.

When making a decision regarding the future or a career path, think about your gifts and talents. How can you honor God with your talents and your life? We

will not have a flashing neon sign or a voice telling us exactly what to do. Instead, we need to rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit, principles from God's Word, and wise counsel. Ask the advice of a trusted Christian mentor or someone who has been through a similar decision or challenge. Then, we make a choice and follow God step by step!

### Prepare

"Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Any length of hike requires some preparation. We wore good footwear, brought extra layers in case of weather changes, and packed food, water, and bear spray. Physical exercise leading up to the hike was also helpful.

"Rejoicing in hope,  
patient in tribulation,  
continuing steadfastly  
in prayer."  
(Romans 12:12)



Often in a more difficult season full of change and uncertainty, we rely more on the preparation and habits that were formed in easier seasons. Learn to trust God in small things. Abide in Him and turn your thoughts to Him often. Be faithful in service and prayer. Then, even when a new challenge demands lots of our attention, we have a foundation built on God and are equipped for a challenge.

#### **Hold Your Own Plans Loosely**

“There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand” (Proverbs 19: 21).

On this particular hike, I was following a GPS map on my phone, and even though the trail was well-marked, I kept checking to make sure we were on track. Despite my efforts, we ended up looping back on a narrower trail that went the same direction as the main trail. It bothered me, and I tried to figure out where we came off the main trail. The thing was, this smaller trail was beautiful, and I should have enjoyed it sooner rather than focusing on the fact that it wasn’t the trail I had mapped out.

If you’re starting a new chapter with school or a career, remember that God will lead it in the best way if you’re following Him sincerely. The path often looks different than what we envisioned, but step back and enjoy what is beautiful and good about it.

The Bible mentions paths dozens of times, and one of the most memorized verses, Proverbs 3: 6, says “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

Our part is to acknowledge *Him* in our decision-making, day-to-day life, and future. God’s part is that *He* directs our path and will be with us each step of the journey.

Moni Taron  
Edmonton, Alberta

## The Bible— An Indispensable Help

For me, the Bible is the Word of God revealed to mankind through the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the Holy Scriptures have become a guide for me to Jesus Christ and therefore to God.

The Bible is my comfort in all the sorrows and griefs of life, my support in temptations to do evil and in struggles in my life of faith.

It helps straighten me out when I am guilty of sin and rebukes me when I have disobeyed God.

It gives me the knowledge of God’s will and sound Christian doctrine, shows me the answers to some difficult questions of life, and inspires me in my work for God.

In my career, too, the faith I have gained through the Bible is very important to me. I have reason enough to praise and glorify God, Who has given me faith in Him and thereby given my life true meaning.

*Dr. Alfred Lechler*



## The Forbidden Sermon

The whole village of Balchigen was excited when the announcement came that an American missionary was coming to preach. Several of the people had heard him in a neighboring village and were full of enthusiasm.

The missionary's friends looked forward to his sermon with bold anticipation. When the missionary finally arrived, he bent his knees in silent devotion. But soon the solemn silence was interrupted by the heavy footsteps of a policeman. To the horror of those gathered, he strode in military fashion to the table where the missionary was kneeling.

When the missionary rose, the policeman handed him a letter in stiff officer fashion. The agitation among those gathered betrayed not only respect but also fear of authority.

The missionary seemed to have no idea of the seriousness of the situation as he received the letter with a friendly bow and politely thanked the officer. He opened it while the assembly waited for the contents with impatience and anxiety. Slowly, he began to read:

*Dear Sir,*

*The congregation of Balchigen is a peaceful, Christian congregation*

*and is well cared for spiritually by the Honorable Pastor of the state church and must not be disturbed in any way by the ravings of American sects. In the name of the law, I forbid you to preach in this congregation now and forever.*

R. W. Warner  
Mayor

With deep sadness, those gathered looked at the missionary. On his face, however, rested an undisturbed peace, and around his mouth hovered a smile that they could in no way understand.

They knew the mayor never tolerated circuses or other shows in the village, and he kept strict order. Even more, he tried to appear a good Christian and a man of honor. Of course, he never attended the services in the state church, because the pastor was a hypocrite, he said, and preached to others what he himself did not practice.

Obviously, nothing could be done against the mayor's order, and the commotion among those present as the policeman strode back to the door clearly betrayed their intention to put a positive spin on the bad situation and to leave.

The missionary sat down. Slowly, he opened his mouth and began in a solemn tone:

"My dear friends! As you see, the Honorable Mayor has forbidden me to preach to you. Since the Bible says, 'Be subject to rulers and authorities,' we must obey. But how about staying together for an hour

"I forbid you to preach in this congregation now and forever."

of conversation? We could bless one another by telling each other of our experiences. If you don't mind, I will begin by telling you what I would have preached if dear Mr. Mayor had allowed it."

Meanwhile, the policeman took a seat on a chair near the door offered to him by the building's owner.

"If I had been allowed to preach," the missionary continued, "I would have begun our service in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Then we would have praised God with the beautiful and precious song, 'I Worship the Power of Love Revealed in Jesus!'" He then recited the entire song with great emphasis.

"If the dear mayor had not forbidden me to preach, we would have bowed our knees and pleaded to our dear Savior not only for a rich blessing for us and all the dear inhabitants of the village but especially for the mayor. I would have chosen this text: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' (John 3:16).

"If it had been my privilege to preach to you, I would have drawn your attention to the fact that our eternal wellbeing is contained in these few words. The world, that is, sinful humanity doomed to eternal ruin, is redeemed by the boundless love of our God, on the one condition that it believe in Jesus Christ. Dear Ones, this Word is so meaningful and important, so unspeakably glorious and precious, that it should be written in letters of gold, framed in diamonds, and hung in ev- ▶

ery home as a sign of blessing for every person. I would have talked about the topic, 'The Love of God, the Source of our Salvation.'

"First, how hopeless our lives would be without this love of God, second, how great and exalted the love of God is, and third, that it is our privilege and duty to accept it for our salvation."

The missionary now went into details but did not forget to interject from time to time, "If the dear mayor had not forbidden me to preach." The words flowed from his mouth as sweet as honey. At the same time, he knew how to present the truths of the gospel so convincingly that his listeners were shaken as if by tremendous thunderclaps, and their eyes reflected the luminous rays of lightning that were shining through their innermost being.

"It is God's will and His servant's fondest wish and prayer that dear Mr. Mayor also be saved," he said, as a broad-shouldered man with a scowl and clenched fists appeared at the door.

The missionary interrupted his narrative and, rising from his chair, addressed the newcomer, "Come here, Brother, here's a place for you!"

Bewilderment swept over the assembly as the mayor walked toward the missionary and sat down on the empty chair.

The missionary, however, resumed his topic as if there had been no interruption. "If the dear mayor had allowed me to preach, I would have tried to prove to you from the Word of God what I have just said. You remember how while the brute soldiers were nailing Him to the cross, our Lord and

Savior said prayerfully, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' May our heavenly Father, the God of all grace, also forgive our dear mayor, for he knows not what he does."

For a few moments, the mayor's red face lost color, his clenched fists lost their threatening pose, and his gaze, directed to the ground, now wandered unsteadily back and forth until his eyes met the policeman. A new anger seemed to twitch through his whole body. Outraged by the policeman's silence and even more by the missionary's speech, the mayor had apparently come himself to emphasize his order and enforce obedience and seemed only to be waiting for the appropriate moment.

However, the missionary's face still reflected an undisturbed peace and heavenly tranquility. His entire focus was concentrated on the topic of his narration. Whether he recognized the mayor or not was and remained an unresolved question to those assembled.

While the assembly anxiously awaited the outcome of the matter, the missionary calmly but firmly and emphatically finished his story, still mentioning the mayor's ban.

After he had finished, the missionary encouraged those present to now also speak about something from their Christian experience. Anyone who felt an urging should take the liberty to say something from his experience for the benefit and edification of his fellow Christians.

The sheepish, downcast eyes of all present, however, indicated that no one felt an urge. As the missionary let his eyes wander back and

forth, he noticed a certain restlessness in his neighbor to the right, which he seemed to interpret as an urge to talk. "I believe our brother here has something to share with us from his Christian experience," said the missionary, extending his arm to his neighbor for a handshake. "What is your name, Brother?" he asked in his affectionate way.

"Rudolf Warner. I am the mayor," he said in a biting tone.

"I am glad to meet you!" said the missionary with exuberant joy. "God bless you! Now, be free to tell us something of your Christian experience." The missionary grasped the mayor's reluctant hand with a firm squeeze.

The mayor rose and cleared his throat. He repeated this several times. His face flushed red, only to disappear just as quickly and give way to a pale color. His lips quivered, and his voice seemed to fail him.

"Please feel free!" encouraged the missionary.

After a most awkward pause, the mayor finally opened his mouth: "I - I - I - you - you - you are truly a man of God, and - and you can come and preach for us again," he stammered. Then he tried to express some apologies but was interrupted by the missionary.

Arm in arm, the two walked together to the mayor's house, where the missionary enjoyed a hospitality that he had rarely received. Every time the missionary came to Balchigen, he was the mayor's guest. And during the services, the mayor sat at the missionary's right hand as an attentive listener. ■

## A Long Night

In a village in Africa there once lived a boy named Caffre. Nearby lived some missionaries where he sometimes went to hear the gospel preached. Most of the time Caffre tried to do as the missionaries taught, for the missionaries said that was what God wanted people to do. However, he was not a Christian, and at times his desire to do wrong was stronger than the desire to do right.

The missionaries had beautiful horses. Caffre had often seen the beautiful horses and he longed to have one of his own. The desire to have one grew and grew until he decided to steal one. There was no one to enforce good laws, so the natives often stole the missionaries' horses.

One night after his family was asleep, Caffre slipped away from home and headed toward the missionary compound. Before arriving at the compound, he came to an open field where the horses had been tied to graze. Being careful to stay in the shadows of the trees surrounding the clearing, he watched the horses grazing, until he had made his choice. Then seizing the rope, he led his choice horse into the forest, where he mounted and galloped away toward the village. He felt the strength of the horse as it took great strides through the trees. The reflection of the moon off its mane caused it to look like strands of precious gold.

He felt like a king, until he heard a voice saying, "Thou shalt not steal." Caffre looked all around. He stopped the horse. He looked around again and not seeing nor hearing anyone, he called into the dark-

ness, "Who is it?" No answer. He called again, "Who is speaking?" Silence. "I've heard those words many times from the missionary," he said. "But when he speaks, I don't feel like I do now." He looked around again. "This must be the voice of God," he said. He got off the horse and rubbed his hand over its velvet coat and through its long, silky mane. "What a beauty!" he said petting it. All the while he admired the horse, a great war raged inside his mind. "Take the horse back," something warned. "Don't be a coward, take it on home. They won't punish you," the other voice said. "Take it back." "Take it home." For an hour or more Caffre stood near the beautiful horse wondering whether to take the horse home or back to its owner. At last he mounted the horse and rode away. Carefully he tied it where he had untied it several hours earlier. All the way home he promised himself he would do right from that night on. He slipped back into his house and to bed, but he couldn't go to sleep. The remainder of the night he thought about the other sinful things he had done.

The next morning he took one of his cattle to a nearby village and sold it. With the money he bought some clothing like the Christians wore. "I will dress right and go to church every Sunday," he told himself. He did. But all that did not make Caffre a Christian. Neither did it wash away even one of his sins.

One day Caffre came to Jesus and confessed his sins, then he received forgiveness and the burden of guilt finally left his soul. He became a joyful Christian and a blessing to his people. ■





## Help Them Make It a Habit

**A** young Christian man who attended university and worked on the side for additional income still regularly attended Sunday services and prayer meetings.

Once, when he was asked why he attended all the meetings when he was so busy, he quickly replied,

“Why? It’s such a habit for me; it comes naturally to me, I think. Even as a child, my parents always took me along, and I grew up knowing it was important and right.”

There is power in habit, whether good or bad. Therefore, it is of such great importance for those who

work with children to help them develop good habits. One of the best habits parents can plant and nurture in their children is the habit of regular church attendance.

“But,” someone might object, “I am not in favor of taking my children to services too often. If I force them to attend services now, it will be too much for them, and when they are independent, they will want nothing to do with it.”

Strangely, you only hear this objection when it comes to religion. But when school attendance, music lessons, or chores in the home are involved, there is a fundamental difference of opinion.

When a child does not want to go to school, parents go to great lengths to paint in his or her mind the great value of attending school. They emphasize the importance of education. Yet when it comes to attending church, they so often neglect to defend its importance at all. How sad! Is it any wonder then that many children get the impression that church services are unimportant and that you don't need to go if you don't feel like it?

Of course, good parents do not “force” their children to go to church services with them. They take them from their earliest childhood, and when the children grow up, it is normal for them to continue to attend services.

The parents' conviction about the importance of this matter is then often transferred to the children. Respect for the house of God comes naturally.

Other parents may say, “What value is there in taking children to church services? After all, they don't understand what is being preached.” This argument is a misconception. Even if the services were conducted in a foreign language, the children would still come under the influence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The whole atmosphere has a beneficial effect on their growth: the sincerity of the people, the spirit of devo-

tion, the joy in the singing. Such impressions influence the children more than we are usually aware.

Children often understand more of the services than we realize. If we took the time to ask them questions about it, we could probably make some interesting observations.

After a church service, a mother once overheard her three-year-old boy echoing the preacher's tale of the prodigal son to his playmates.

After an evangelistic service, an eight-year-old girl playing church with her little friends spoke forcefully to the small crowd, “You can't get into the church by coming to services on Sunday mornings or by signing a membership card. You have to be saved!”

Young children hear more than we think. They are more easily influenced than we imagine. Everything

they see and hear makes a stronger impression on them than on adults. They are still at such a tender age that their whole environment influences them greatly. Every service the children attend will reinforce good impressions.

Still other parents

object: “I don't take my kids to the services because they get so tired.” If that is your fear, why not take some preventive measures and put the children to bed a little earlier than usual on Saturday night?

No doubt, many a child may complain of tiredness when getting ready to go to church. They know very well that in response to this complaint, the parents may leave them at home to play, and perhaps the parents will even stay home with them.

May God open the eyes of all those who are molders of young souls to the importance of eternal things.

If the value of a soul, the certainty of eternity, and the possibility of eternal separation from God burn clearly in our souls, we will try with seriousness and zeal to make the holy influences of the house of God and the Word of God important to our children. ■

“One of the best habits parents can plant and nurture in their children is the habit of regular church attendance.”

# Can We Experience Revival?

**E**vangelistic meetings were scheduled in a church, and a revival was expected. The evangelist who was invited came at the appointed time. The meetings were held, and the revival came to an end. What were the results? Nothing. Why? Had the time of revivals passed?

We can still experience revival in our time if we want it enough to wrestle in prayer. We can have a revival if we pay the price. It is not the unsaved of the world who must pay this price but the saved, the church. The church must accept the burden of God-given responsibility to pray and wrestle with Him for the salvation of immortal souls.

## The Need for Revival

The great necessity is obvious. We need only to look around a little to see the low spiritual state of those who profess to be Christians, the carelessness and indecision among the unsaved, and the appalling lack of morality in many places. The influence of the media, the superficiality of many religious leaders, the alarming conditions in schools, the ungodly morals, the unbelief coming in like a flood are enough reasons to break our hearts. We live in a time of feverish pursuit of riches, regardless of how they are obtained, in a time of indifferent consciences, growing selfishness, and screaming godlessness. If we look around us just a little, we see this is indeed the case.

In view of these facts, clearly something must be done immediately to control the progression of sin. God has done His part: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He could do no more.

The responsibility now rests on the people of God. If people are to be saved, they must believe. If they are to believe, the good news must be brought to them. Who shall bring it to them, if not those whose hearts are inflamed with the love of God and a great burden for lost souls! This burden for salvation of the lost comes only through earnest prayer.

Years ago, when special evangelistic meetings were planned in a certain place, the members were handed a slip of paper with the following five challenging questions:

1. Do I desire revival so much that I pray continually and earnestly for it?
2. Do I desire revival so much that I search my heart and ask God to fix what displeases Him?
3. Do I desire revival so much that I attend prayer meetings even if it requires a sacrifice of time and convenience?
4. Do I desire revival so much that I seek opportunities to talk to and pray for the unconverted?
5. Do I desire revival so much that I pray and work for it, even if the answer does not come immediately?

Do these questions affect you so much, dear Reader, that you immediately and prayerfully consider them? If so, it would be reasonable to assume you answered them affirmatively. If you say "yes" to each and every question, then I dare say revival will come.

What preceded the great revival on the day of Pentecost? Was it not the events of the Passion Week and the responsibility placed on the disciples by the Master, the command to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, and the earnest prayer in the upper room? We need not wonder that a nation "was born at once" and that the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved.

Think of the mighty Reformation of the sixteenth century. Much wrestling in prayer preceded it. It was Luther's habit to spend three of the best hours of the day in prayer. He was not alone. Thousands groaned and wept. In the huts of the Black Forest, in the Swiss mountains were hearts that burned for the Lord's cause. Indeed, almost everywhere in Western Europe the distress of souls was felt, and the cry for deliverance went up to heaven. No wonder the Reformation came. What was accomplished in the most unfavorable circumstances of the past can certainly be accomplished now. The call goes out to us. What should we do to experience revival?

Nothing would please God more, and nothing would be more conducive to the growth and prosperity of the church, than a deep, spiritual longing for genuine revival and a holy zeal and desire for the salvation of many souls. We may lament that we are too few and do not have the resources to bring about a great evangelistic campaign for the salvation of the lost. But let



us remember that more valuable than large numbers, than wealth and organization, is the blessing of a sincere, deep, genuine spiritual awakening in the church. God is on the side of right and will give success to any

sincere effort on our part to bring souls into His kingdom. Let us stand under the burden as a whole church. Let us pray persistently, wrestle, work, and believe that the Lord can give us revival even today. ■

## Think About It

“I would like to ask you for just one small favor, Karl,” said an older man on his deathbed to his son.

His dull eyes shone once more as he looked with both love and concern at the youthful and robust young man at his bedside.

“It would be a comfort to me in my last hour if you would promise me something. Surely you won’t refuse your dying father’s last request?”

The son, deeply moved, bent down to him and grasped the trembling hand. Sobbing, he assured his father that, whatever it might be, he would like to fulfill his wish.

“My wish,” said the father, “is that after my death you should retreat to the solitude of your room for half an hour every day for six months, just to think.”

“What shall I think about?” asked Karl.

“I will leave that up to you,” replied his father.

The young man could not refuse such a simple, easily fulfilled final request from his father. In the days when his father was still healthy and strong, Karl had not felt much guilt about ignoring his wishes and commands. He had avoided his presence, had thrown his teachings to the wind, and had already gone far in foolishness, vanity, and sin in the company of immoral companions. But his childlike love had not yet completely dulled in him. As he sat at his father’s deathbed, no sacrifice seemed too great to make up for the past and to ease his father’s last moments. He almost felt unpleasantly deceived when he heard this insignificant and seemingly meaningless request from his father.

“Is that all you want me to do?” he asked. “Of course, it shall be done. I give you my word, Father; not a single day shall pass in which I do not comply with your wish.” To validate that his word was sacred to him, he pressed his father’s cold hand to his lips.

Another short hour later, his father’s weary spirit went to rest in the arms of his Savior. He had lived a God-fearing life here on earth and now dwelt eternally in heaven.

Karl now became an orphan. At first, the change that had occurred in his circumstances and his concern for business took up all his thoughts and all his time. But he faithfully fulfilled his father’s last wish. Since the topic of his thinking was not prescribed to him, Karl had no desire to use this half hour of solitude for his own spiritual growth. He was not interested in altering his usual comfortable way of life.

As time went by, however, these lonely moments awakened serious thoughts in him. In his silence, a voice from the unseen world summoned him to think. It also occurred to him that he had an immortal soul, an important thought indeed! He soon forgot he had only been assigned a half hour of solitude. Sometimes he paced up and down his room for hours, thinking of his immortality. “God and man alone are immortal,” he said to himself. “What a noble being man is!”

Suddenly, the thought came to him, “But the demons are immortal too!” He almost shuddered, and his thoughts multiplied in his soul. His mind turned away with earnestness from the fleeting dream of this time and toward the hereafter with its eternal reality. Daily and increasingly, he was convinced of this truth. Heaven, hell, the Last Judgment, but above all, the thought of where he would spend eternity were now the things he pondered. These overwhelming thoughts confused him at first. But then he thought of the revelations God had given to man.

For the first time in his life, he saw the usefulness and necessity of the Bible as the Guide for mankind. He read it earnestly every day with prayer, and the Holy Spirit blessed his reading. Eventually, his conscience awakened, and in his misery, he sought help where it could be found—in the blood of Jesus Christ. ■

# Death and Life in a Christian Congregation

*“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: ‘I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. . . . You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.’” (Revelation 3: 1–6)*

Our Savior Himself addressed this message to the church of God in Sardis. He also wants to show us how God deals with all churches that resemble the image of the church in Sardis. Unlike other churches, this one had lived for many years in complete peace and perfect tranquility, undisturbed by anything. It was not troubled by persecutions, sufferings, struggles, or tribulations. Its members lived as good citizens and were generally esteemed by their neighbors. They did not oppose the paganism that was all around them, and it seemed that they “kept peace with everyone,” but in a wrong way.

They did much good, were known as benefactors, and possessed other excellent qualities, all of which seemed to indicate a healthy, growing, and flourishing Christian life. Yet it was not so.

The Sardis church had demonstrated many long years of undisturbed peace, comfortable tranquility, and outward prosperity, which had not afforded it a single opportunity to prove its virtues and its spiritual gifts.

The greatest danger for a child of God is the long, undisturbed influence of the world. Churches that have never had to go through storms, struggles, or persecutions are in great danger of falling into sluggishness and secularization.

The most valuable thing a person and a congregation can lose in long years of undisturbed rest is spiritual vitality. The soul grows best in times of challenge, of temptation, in times of struggle. Only in this manner is it able to grow and be strengthened. Therefore, if we desire true spiritual life, we must reject all comfort and ease. God’s Word tells us, “We must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14: 22).

In the church at Sardis, there were many things that could have been considered signs of true growth. The services were held regularly, and the church increased in numbers. By their exemplary life in the world, all had earned the honor and respect of their fellow men. The plight of the poor was managed in a charitable way. Much good was done. Signs of life! But Christ, Who is not satisfied with an outward appearance, Who can see into hearts, Who also distinguishes the inner motives, pushes away all these outward signs of apparent life. He examines the spiritual life of the church and finally has to say, “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

There were no public grievances against the church in Sardis. The church was regarded by others as a living member of the great family of God. And yet, sure harbingers of

the approaching end had crept in. Lacking spiritual vitality, the mark of death reigned in the church as a whole, and perhaps in the preacher in particular.

The remarkable thing about the church at Sardis was the heavy condemnation, although its members did no particular wrong. All seemed to be grounded in firm faith. Their conduct was not offensive, and yet the Lord said they were dead.

Christ seemed to take little notice of their good and commendable qualities. He searched them and looked behind their facade. He tore down the veil that made the church seem so flawless to the outside world. He saw the end of life and the beginning of death. May we always remember that Jesus Christ remains the same and that He knows the true condition of every church.

But to the glory of the church at Sardis, there were, nevertheless, still some who possessed true spiritual life. The eye of the Lord had still beheld a few who had not defiled their garments, whose resolution to serve and love God was still steadfast, who were still faithful. To them He could send the comforting message, “They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”

We should not so easily forget this valuable lesson by observ-

ing the condition of the church at Sardis. It should serve to make all present-day churches realize that this message concerns them personally as well. I believe with the apostle Paul that it was “written for our admonition.” We are in no less danger today than the churches in Asia Minor were then. Jesus always cared deeply about the spiritual welfare of His people, and still does today. He encourages the good, but He punishes the wrong and exposes it everywhere, even if He finds it hidden in a Christian congregation.

Dear brothers and sisters, the eye of the Almighty is always on us. Are we ready to let Him examine our work in every detail? May He uncover our motives and examine our conduct in every respect. What is the true state of our church? Let us be honest with God and with our own hearts.

Oh, may everyone who professes to be a Christian awaken and realize that what other people and good friends think of our spiritual condition is not as important and crucial as what God Himself says. What God thinks of us should be of utmost importance to us. Does the Spirit of God testify to our spirit that we are redeemed and may be called children of God? God wants to give us an awakening in our lives and in our congregations so we can grow and prosper spiritually. ■

## *In the House of the Lord*

In the house of the Lord, I love to be  
Where the people of God sing loud and free,  
Where the songs rise to heaven in unity  
And reach God’s throne in sweet harmony.  
That is the place for me;  
In the house of the Lord, I love to be.

In the house of the Lord, I love to be  
Where love and unity richly dwell;  
No ear has heard and no tongue can tell  
The fullness that God has for you and me.  
His grace is sufficient and free;  
In the house of the Lord, I love to be.

In the house of the Lord, I love to be  
Where the narrow way is clearly proclaimed,  
Where sinners repent and are set free.  
God saved my soul; it was not in vain.  
I love the Word,  
This double-edged Sword, a voice from the Lord.

In the house of the Lord, I hear His Word;  
It is food for my heart and my soul;  
In darkness my light, my star in the night,  
My strength when the sea billows roll.  
I hear this Word for me  
In the house of the Lord, where I love to be.

In the house of the Lord, I love to be;  
May His Spirit of peace guide and comfort me.  
As the storm clouds around me increase,  
May I be strengthened by the Spirit of peace.  
Whatever my lot should be,  
Where my Savior is, I long to be.

*W. Horn*

# *Zion*

I love you, oh Zion, fair city of God!  
So holy, so glorious and built on the Rock  
By Jesus, your Savior, your Founder and King;  
Salvation the fortress that protects those within!

I love you, oh Zion, safe haven of rest,  
No sin can be found in this city so blessed!  
United in Spirit, without strife or hate,  
True love, joy, and righteousness reside in your gate!

I love you, oh Zion, to you I'll be true!  
My gifts and my time are committed to you.  
To draw to the Savior poor souls lost in sin  
Shall be my life's purpose, for Jesus, my King.

Oh, church of the Highest, your beauty pure and rare,  
Your heavenly Glory is magnified there.  
Oh, church of the Highest, I consecrate my all:  
To serve you with honor, fulfil your heavenly call!

*Marlis Henkelmann*

