

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

Prescriptions of Christ (Part 3)

INTERNATIONAL BOOKLET #22

## **Introduction**

This is our third and final booklet on the "Prescriptions of Christ". If you have not read the first two, I encourage you to obtain those, as I believe it is vitally important that we receive Prescriptions from God and His Word for problems and challenges we face and not from the world. When we are not feeling well and need a doctor we do not go to lawyer or even a dentist. We need a doctor and search for a doctor to get the right "prescription".

God's Word provides divine prescriptions for us all. In this third booklet on Christ's prescriptions, we are going to study God's prescriptions; for discovering His guidance, for recovering our real identity, for coping with anxiety, for finding true peace, for learning how to pray and for being obedient to God. Now, open your Bible and we will find prescriptions from the risen, living Christ, Who is the truly great Physician.

It is my prayer that the Mini Bible College broadcast and this booklet will get you into God's Word and God's Word into you, because it is in His Word that we can find His prescriptions that will guide us into all truth.

## **Chapter One**

### **"Prescription for Guidance"**

While serving as a pastor for nearly five decades, the question I have been asked more than any other has been: "Pastor, how can I know the will of God?" Sometimes, the

question has been related to a "fork-in-the-road" decision, and there have been times when the question has been, "How can I know the will of God for my life?"

While answering these questions many times over many years, I have focused twelve steps we should take when we need to know the will of God. These twelve steps are not a precise formula that will immediately and clearly lead us to the specific will of God, but they do outline some issues that should be considered when we are trying to align our wills with the will of God.

In the Bible, the first time God speaks to fallen man He asks man a question. That question is: "Where are you?" The second time God speaks to fallen man He asks man another question. That question is: "Who told you?" The first question implies that we are to be somewhere and we are not always where we should be. According to the second question, God is asking us: "Who are we listening to?" and telling us where we are, relative to where we should be. This means that divine guidance is one of the first truths God shares with us in the Bible.

These two questions from the third chapter of the Bible are a prescription for divine guidance like it was, because God wants us to understand divine guidance as He prescribes it today. When we know where we are and where we should be spiritually, we should realize that we are not getting that information from people - that spiritual direction is coming from God.

In the Bible, the Hebrew of this second question is literally, "Who made you know ...?" When you realize that God is making you know where you are and where you should be, you may not be comfortable explaining that to others by saying "God told me." You may be more comfortable quoting this truth more accurately by explaining, "God has made me know that I am not

where I need to be at this point in my life."

The story is told of an admiral in the United States Navy who was on the bridge of his flagship in stormy weather when he received this message: "Admiral, we have picked up a blip on the radar screen and we are on a collision course with. What do you advise?" The Admiral responded, "Send them this message: "You are on a collision course with us. Please alter your course fifteen degrees to the north."

A few minutes later the admiral was informed that this message was received: "Affirmative. We are on a collision course. Please alter your course fifteen degrees to the south." The admiral ordered this message to be sent in reply: "This is Admiral Peter W. Johnson, United States Navy. I strongly advise you to alter your course fifteen degrees to the north."

That message received this response: "This is Seaman First Class Willard P. Sawyer, United States Coast Guard. I strongly advise you to alter your course fifteen degrees to the south." When the admiral received that reply, he was obviously agitated and dictated this message: "I order you to alter your course fifteen degrees to the north. Please acknowledge. I am an admiral in the United States Navy and I am giving you this order from my flagship."

After a short pause, this message was the response: "I strongly advise you to alter your course fifteen degrees to the south. Please acknowledge, I am a Seaman First Class in the United States Coast Guard and I am standing watch in a lighthouse!"

When our Omnipotent God makes us know where we are and where we should be, there should never be any doubt about who must alter their course. We must submit to His direction as He makes us know where He wills us to be every day.

### **The Will of God for Our Character**

There is a very real sense in which the will of God for all disciples of Jesus Christ, is the application to our lives of the essence of The Ten Commandments and The Sermon on the Mount. The Apostle Paul focused that dimension of the will of God when he wrote to the Thessalonians, "For this is the will of God for you, even your sanctification ..." (I Thessalonians 4:3).

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he did not bring with him "The Ten Suggestions." The Ten Commandments represent the will of God for the character of the people of God. The Sermon on the Mount is the pinnacle of the revelation of God regarding the character of every disciple of Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which the whole Bible was written because it is the will of a Holy God that every man and woman of God might be perfect in character and thoroughly equipped for every good work God wants them to do (II Timothy 3:16-17).

It is important to understand that The Ten Commandments and The Sermon on the Mount do not tell us to live out the character they profile for us so that we might be saved. These teachings of Jesus and commandments of Moses are given to us from God that we might know how saved people should live because they are the authentic people of God. In that sense we can say that the will of God for the character of all the people of God is the same.

### **The Will of God for Our Career**

David writes that the steps of a godly person are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23). He also tells us that before he existed, God had every day of his life scheduled. (Psalm 139:16). David also tells us in his Shepherd Psalm that God is with him, goes before him, and pursues behind him in a way that makes it impossible for him to escape his Shepherd's personal interest in his every move (Psalm 23).

This intimacy with God is obviously not only to be the experience of David, but can and should be the experience of every child of God. "Every time a tiny sparrow falls dead from a tree, God goes to the funeral." This is a paraphrase by an evangelist from another generation of the teaching of Jesus, that not one tiny sparrow drops dead from a tree apart from the Father's will (Matthew 10:29).

The application Jesus makes to this teaching is that since two sparrows are sold for a penny, and we are of far greater value to God than a sparrow, if God has a will regarding the details of the life and death of a sparrow, we can be sure He has a will regarding every detail of our lives.

In this teaching about the sparrow, Jesus affirms David's revelation of a personal God Who cares about the small details of our lives, schedules every day of our lives, and directs our steps. He reinforces that emphasis when He tells us in the same passage that God cares about the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30).

The Apostle Paul obviously agreed with Jesus and David when he wrote that even though good works do not save us, we are saved for good works, which God in His providence has determined that we will do for Him (Ephesians 2:10). He writes that from the time he was converted on the road to Damascus, his magnificent obsession was to grasp the purpose for which Jesus Christ grasped him (Philippians 3:12). He also exhorts us to "... prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves toward the goal of spiritual maturity." Romans 12:1,2)

I have observed above that in the first verses of the Bible, Moses told us there is a place where God wills us to be, and God will make us know when we are, and when we are not in that place. When we consider these declared values of Jesus,

Moses, David, and Paul, we should be greatly blessed to know that our God is a personal God, and He personally cares about us as individuals. According to these channels of inspired revelation, God numbers the hairs on our heads, orders our steps, schedules our days, and has a will for our characters, our careers and every important decision we make as we live for Him in this world.

### **Step One**

#### **Believe there is a will of God for your life.**

A good place for us to begin to seek His will for our lives is to believe there is such a thing as the will of God for our lives. The fact that there are more than sixty billion fingers in this world and no two of them are alike suggests that God has a unique plan for each of us. Today, DNA goes far beyond our fingerprints as another eloquent witness of the miracle that we are all unique, and that God does have a unique plan for each of individual lives.

Even with salvation, we do not automatically have that plan. One of the first byproducts and purposes of our salvation is that we recover the will of God for our lives. It is my prayer that these twelve steps I am now about to share with you will guide you toward the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God for you personally. The first step in that recovery is to believe that God has such a personal plan for you and me.

## **Step Two**

### **Be willing to do the will of God**

This second step is the most important of the twelve steps I plan to share with you: Be willing to do the will of God. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He taught them to pray, "Thy will be done." When Jesus prayed in the garden the night before he was crucified, He showed His disciples how to pray when He sweat drops of blood and prayed, "Not My will, but Your will be done." (Matthew 6:10; 26:39; Luke 22:42-44.)

When Jesus gave us a principle that shows us how we can know that His teaching is the teaching of God, He also gave us a principle that applies when we are seeking to know the will of God. The principle is simply this: "If any man wills to do, he will know." (John 7:17) These few words of Jesus have placed in our hands a key that can unlock the will of God for our lives.

According to the Apostle Paul, knowing the will of God for our lives does not have to be difficult or complex. God does not deliberately complicate or obscure His will. The difficulty is not the will of God, but your will and my will. As Paul tells us how we can know "the good, acceptable and perfect will of God," he begins his prescription for knowing God's will by telling us to throw our hands up and offer an unconditional surrender of our wills to the will of God. He writes: "Present (surrender) your bodies as a living sacrifice to God ..." (Romans 12:1-2)

Our unconditional surrender to God will simplify our quest to know the will of God. Through observation, experience, and study of the Scriptures, I have come to the conclusion that the biggest obstacle in knowing God's will for our lives is not the will of God, but our own wills. God does not reveal His will to people who refuse to do His will.



### **Step Three**

#### **Be open to what the will of God may be.**

A woman once asked her pastor not to confuse her with Scriptures because she had already decided what she was going to do! A man who is paid huge sums of money as a consultant told me recently, that much of the time when he is paid his large fees, his clients do not really want the consultation for which they pay him. They simply want him to affirm what they have already decided to do.

The will of God is frequently out of our reach because we have our own agendas in place when we come to God "seeking" His will. If our minds are set like concrete as we inquire about His will, we are not really seeking His will. We are actually asking God to bless our will, our agenda and the way we have already decided we want to go.

### **Step Four**

#### **The Word of God**

Isaiah tells us there is as much difference between the thoughts and ways of God and the way we think and do things, as the heavens are high above the earth. Isaiah's philosophy of ministry was to preach the Word of God because the Word of God establishes an alignment between our thoughts and the thoughts of God, our ways and the ways of God, and our wills and the will of God (Isaiah 55:9-11).

This great prince of the prophets is actually telling us why he preached the Word of God. According to Isaiah, if the people of God sincerely want to know the will of God, Who does

not think or act as they do, they simply must spend much time in His Word.

I once heard Billy Graham tell of boarding a plane before he was as well known as he is today. Upon entering the plane he greeted an old pastor friend who was sitting already seated, reading his Bible. The old pastor completely ignored Billy. When they had been in flight for about an hour, the pastor came back to where Billy was seated and greeted him enthusiastically. He apologized for ignoring Billy earlier. He said, "When I pray, I am talking to God, but when I open God's Word, He talks to me. He was talking to me when you spoke to me and I could not interrupt God to talk to Billy Graham."

Thomas A' Kempis opened his Bible every morning with this prayer: "Let all the voices be stopped. Speak to me Lord, You alone." If we sincerely want to know the will of God, we must be able to hear from God. We should ask God to speak to us as we open His Word. That is why we must spend time in the Word of God when we are seeking to know the will of God.

### **Step Five**

#### **Prayer**

When we must know the will of another human being, what is the first step we take? Our first thought is usually that we must meet with that person and have a conversation with them. When a man is in love and decides he wants to marry a woman, his first thought is that he must meet with her and have a conversation with her. When we seek to know the will of God, our first thought should be that we must meet with God and have a conversation with Him.

There are two dimensions to every good conversation. Every good conversationalist knows that the most important dimension

of a conversation is when the other person is talking. These two distinct dimensions of conversation must be in place when we pray and when we open God's Word. If you do not know how to pray, think of prayer as simply meeting with God and having a conversation with Him. When we pray, the most important dimension of that conversation is obviously not when we are talking to God, but when God is talking to us.

The apostles, with honesty and humility, asked Jesus to teach them to pray. In response to their candid confession and request, Jesus gave them the Disciple's Prayer (Luke 11:1-5; Matthew 6:8-14). That prayer was a prayer and an instruction about how to pray. When you pray, use the Disciples Prayer as an instruction to guide you when you talk to God. Then, open your Bible and ask God to speak to you.

This guide for your conversation with God was not intended by Christ to be prayed over and over again thinking, that by many repetitions of this prayer, God will be pleased. Jesus included instruction here that clearly shows that this was not His intention. Also, I believe it is important to note another instruction Jesus gave on how we should not pray. There are some people who believe that if they repeat a prayer, reciting the same plea over and over, God is more likely to hear and answer.

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:7, 8)

## **Step Six**

### **Examine Your Motives**

Do you want to know God's will for your life because of what is in it for you or because of what is in it for God? Motives are very important to God. The Word of God associates our motives with our hearts and the Bible tells us that - above all things - our hearts are deceitful. Jeremiah tells us our hearts are so deceitful that only God can know them (Jeremiah 17:9,10). The Apostle Paul writes that it is only after God has exposed the hidden motives of our hearts that our works will be judged (I Corinthians 4:5).

When Jesus faced the cross He prayed: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 'Father, glorify Your name!'" We then read that the voice from heaven spoke saying essentially, "I have glorified My name before through Your life and I will glorify it again."

Based on this passage, a very godly man wrote that we should all pray this prayer: "Father, glorify Yourself and send me the bill. Anything, Father - just glorify Yourself!" These words of Jesus, and the paraphrase of these words I have quoted, describe the motivation we should all have for wanting to know the will of God.

Do we want to know the will of God for the glory of God, or for our own glory and personal gain? Our answer to that question will be very important to God when our works are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ. It is very important that the motives of our hearts should therefore be to glorify God, as we seek to know the will of God in our daily lives.

## **Step Seven**

### **Evaluate Your Gifts**

According to Paul, if we sincerely want to know the will of God, once we have surrendered unconditionally to the will of God, and have been transformed by the renewing of our minds, and have determined that the world is not going to squeeze us into its mold, we should discover our spiritual gift patterns. Then we should offer those gifts to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-8). This spiritual discipline will lead us into the heart of the will of God.

A mentor of mine long ago liked to say, "It should be obvious that God has not called a one-legged man to be an Olympic sprinter." Once we take an inventory of our natural and spiritual gifts, as faithful stewards we should accept the limits of our limitations and also accept the responsibility for our abilities.

John the Baptist is a good example of a man who practiced both these spiritual disciplines. John knew who he was and he knew who he was not. He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord." (Mark 1:3) That was who, what, and where he was to be. He knew that life was too precious to be anything less than that voice crying in the wilderness. And he also knew who he was not. (John 3:27-36, Mark 1:7, 8)

I have known believers who suffered much needless pain because they would not accept the limits of their limitations. When we are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, however, most of us will suffer agonizing shortfall because we did not accept the responsibility for our abilities. Like the unprofitable servant in the Parable of the Talents, we believe

we are not gifted and we bury the talents we have been given (Matthew 25:14-30).

### **A Spiritual Gift Inventory**

I have seen many believers who are frustrated because they either do not know their spiritual gifts or are not exercising them. The following is a good guide for taking an inventory of the spiritual gifts we have been given by the Holy Spirit.

1. Acquaint yourself with the biblical descriptions of spiritual gifts. There are about twenty or twenty-one of these spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. I personally do not believe the list of spiritual gifts that can be compiled from various Scriptures is intended to be a complete list by the authors of these Scriptures. My sense is that they are simply saying, "For example," when they list and describe spiritual gifts.

2. Believe you are gifted. The Twelfth Chapter of First Corinthians is the most important chapter in the New Testament on the subject of spiritual gifts. As you study that chapter, observe how the word "every" is emphasized. When you summarize this great chapter, you must conclude that all born-again believers are spirituality gifted.

3. Consider the ways you are effective and fruitful in your local church. All the gifts of the Spirit are given to edify, bless, challenge, instruct, equip, encourage and inspire other members of the Church. Therefore, your local church is the place for you to discover, identify, exercise, and develop your cluster of spiritual gifts.

4. Distinguish between natural abilities and spiritual gifts. Your natural abilities are the pattern of gifts and talents you inherited by virtue of your physical birth and your genetic heritage.

There is a sense in which these gifts become spiritual gifts when you consecrate them to God. For example: If someone has a beautiful singing voice and dedicate and use that to glorify and worship God, their natural talent becomes a spiritual gift.

You inherited your spiritual gift pattern, or cluster of spiritual gifts, by virtue of your spiritual birth. When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us, He brings with Him a cluster of spiritual gifts that were not present in our lives before we were born again (I Corinthians 12).

5. Expect other members of your church to help you identify your spiritual gifts. Measure the impact of your spiritual gifts on those for whom those gifts were given. If people come to faith and become members of the body when you share the Gospel with them, you have the gift of evangelism. If people understand when you teach spiritual truths, you have the gift of teaching. One of the most important roles of the local church is to help believers identify, acknowledge, exercise and develop their spiritual gifts.

6. Find opportunities to experiment with suspected gifts and ministry patterns. How do you know you do or do not have the gift of teaching if you do not have the faith and courage to try to teach a Sunday school class or small group Bible study?

7. Give yourself time to develop the spiritual gifts you think the Holy Spirit has given you. One negative experience with an attempted Bible study does not mean you do not have the gift of teaching.

8. Hold a consecration service and sincerely dedicate your spiritual gifts to your God, Who gave you these gifts, is the power behind these gifts, and Whose glory is the purpose for all these gifts.

## **Step Eight**

### **Look for a Pattern**

Since our God is a God of order and the "thumbprint" of God can be seen in the extraordinary design of His creation, we should expect to see order and design in the way God reveals His will for our lives.

In the Book of Acts, we read that the Apostle Peter had a vision of a sheet with animals on it, which the law of Moses would not permit a devout Jew to eat (Acts 10). Peter was told three times to kill and eat those animals. He refused each time. Then, he heard knocking on the door. The Spirit told him to go with the men who were knocking, asking no questions about why they had come looking for him. Peter soon learned they were not only Gentiles. They were the servants of a Centurion in the Roman army that had conquered and cruelly occupied the land of Israel.

Peter did not think this series of events was a sequence of coincidence, but saw this sequence of happenings as a pattern of divine guidance. Peter's experience ultimately revealed the glorious reality that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not for the Jew only, but for every person in every nation on earth.

The Book of Acts tells a similar story of how Philip the evangelist was holding a very fruitful evangelistic crusade in Samaria when the Spirit led him to go out into the wilderness of Gaza (Acts 8). Even though evangelists usually go to the population centers, Philip obeyed the leading of the Spirit.

When Philip obeyed the Holy Spirit, he met the treasurer of Ethiopia who was crossing that desert in a chariot. Philip was invited to join the Ethiopian in his chariot, and he was able to lead this African politician to Christ and baptize him.



Church history tells us a strong church was planted in North Africa because of the conversion of this Ethiopian politician. The Holy Spirit brought more people to Christ in Africa through that Ethiopian than Philip could possibly have reached in Samaria. Do you think Philip thought this whole scenario was a sequence of coincidence, or a pattern of divine guidance?

These are two of many, many stories in the Bible that demonstrate patterns of divine guidance. When you are seeking God's will, look for such patterns. They may not be as extraordinary or obviously supernatural, but they will be evidences of the great miracle that God leads in patterns. Therefore, look for patterns when you are seeking to know the will of God.

### **Step Nine**

#### **Look for a Confirmation**

There are times when we should look for a confirmation as we seek to know the will of God. On our journeys of faith we often come to "a fork in the road" where we simply do not know the will of God. There certainly is no verse of Scripture that tells us to go to the right or to the left when we have no prompting or leading of the Spirit. We do our best to make the right decision, while acknowledging the hard reality that we simply do not know which way to go. Having done everything we can to discern the will of God, we journey down one road or the other.

Although there is no verse telling us which way to go, there is a verse of Scripture which can give us an insight we can use as a helpful principle when we find ourselves at this kind of crossroad. One translation of a verse in the Psalms

reads: "A person's steps are confirmed by the Lord." (Psalms 37:23) This means we should sometimes move forward into what we perceive to be the will of God, praying and looking for a confirmation.

That confirmation may be positive or negative. If everything works out and the direction we have chosen obviously has God's stamp of approval on it, we can say that God has given us a positive confirmation of His will. We have the conviction that God is saying to us, "This is the way, walk in it." (Isaiah 30:20,21) After we commit to a direction, we see evidences that the living Christ has gone before us and prepared the way for us (John 10:4).

Sometimes, the confirmation is negative and the results are the opposite of those I have just described. When that happens, we should be humble enough to go back to that fork in the road and choose that other direction.

### **Step Ten**

#### **Wait on the Lord**

God is not in a hurry. We often miss the leading of the Lord because we are running far ahead, frantically directing the Lord to catch up with us and follow us into the plan we have for our lives. That is why the expression, "Wait on the Lord," is so frequently found in the Word of God.

It takes more faith to wait than it takes to be active. God's guidance prescription for personalities like Jacob is to wait on the Lord. Jacob was missing God's will for his life because he was always running ahead of God.

Read the story of Jacob in Genesis, chapters twenty-five through thirty-two, and Paul's commentary on that story in the ninth chapter of Romans. As you read how God crippled Jacob so

he could crown him with the blessing of His will, you will see a great illustration of what it means to wait on the Lord. When a devout man is crippled, what else can he do but wait on the Lord?

In the Book of Psalms, the word "Selah" is found in seventy-three places. One modern translation for that word is, "Pause, and calmly think of that." God frequently places "Selah's" in our lives today as He leads us on our journeys of faith. God has His own good reasons for making us to be still and wait. He may want us to pause and calmly think about our priorities, our mission objectives and other issues as we experience His will for our lives.

When we encounter one of the Lord's "Selahs," we should always ask what God wants us to pause and calmly think about. And we must never put a question mark where God places a period in our journey of faith. Remember God might be using this pause in your plans to prepare you for greater things in His plans. (See the life of Joseph Genesis 39 - 41).

### **Step Eleven**

#### **Keep Moving**

The Bible is filled with paradoxes. A paradox is something that appears to be a contradiction, but when you examine it closely, you discover there really is no contradiction. There are times when a paradox is not a contradiction because the two propositions stated by the paradox could both be true. It may be that the propositions that appear to be contradictory are resolved when you realize that it is not either/or but both/and. The paradox is often resolved when we realize that it is sometimes this way and sometimes that way.

We can miss the will of God because we are in a hurry and God is not. When that is the case, we need to wait on the Lord. There are other times when we miss the will of God because we are sitting on our apathetic, indecisive, lack of faith and courage, and the Lord moves on without us. These two apparently opposite concepts are really not contradictory. It is not either/or, but both/and. The truth is that sometimes we need to wait on the Lord and sometimes we need to keep moving.

We have an adversary who does not wish us well. His first strategy is to make us into lazy, indecisive, apathetic, spiritual wimps, who miss the will of God because we lack the faith, courage, and discipline to follow the leading of the Lord. If that fails, he will turn us into obsessive, compulsive workaholics who miss the will of God because we are striving to grab those things that are out of reach and not His will for our lives - running far ahead of the Lord.

Obviously, we all need the balance between these two extremes that matures us into servants of the Lord who can discern and do the will of the Lord.

### **Step Twelve**

#### **Seek spiritual counsel**

There is a statement that is found twice in the Book of Proverbs, which reads, "In a multitude of counselors, there is safety." (Proverbs 24:6; 11:14) This proverb of the wise does not mean we should consult a multitude of counselors when we come to that fork in the road I have mentioned several times. That would be very confusing, because a multitude of counselors will give us a multitude of opinions regarding our difficult decision.

When the wise men who wrote the Book of Proverbs made these two statements, they were teaching two basic truths. In one of those proverbs they were telling us that when two nations go to war with each other, the nation with the multitude of counselors will more than likely win that war. In the other proverb, they are telling us that when we come to that fork in the road in our lives, where we need to choose which way to go, if we have had a multitude of good counselors in our lifetime, in other words, if we have had a good spiritual education, we will be equipped to make our difficult decision.

There is a beautiful passage in the prophecy of Isaiah that defines and profiles one of the benefits of a good spiritual education. Isaiah tells us that if we have had a multitude of good spiritual counselors in our lifetime, when we come to that fork in the road, we will hear the voices of those counselors saying to us, "Not that way, but this way." (Isaiah 30:20,21).

As I count my blessings today, I am so grateful that in my journey of faith, I have had extraordinary mentors who have mentored me and given me very wise counsel at critically important junctures in my life and ministry.

There are times that it is not easy to discern the will of God for your life, which is the present tense purpose of your salvation. Therefore, it is wise for you to seek the counsel of older believers who have been seeking and finding the will of God for many years.

The church is moving through this world like a convoy of ships, in perfect formation, supernaturally synchronized by the Holy Spirit. The risen, living Christ is like a "Flagship" - the commanding ship - at the heart of that convoy Who is sending signals to that convoy all the time. If you have your eye on the "Flagship" and you get your signals from Him, you will be in formation and part of His great work in this world. But, if you

do not have your eye on the Flagship and you miss His signals, the work of Christ will move on without you, while you thrash around, out of formation, never to be a synchronized part this magnificent convoy.

The people who distinguish themselves as servants of Christ are not exceptional people because they never miss a signal. However, the great servants of Christ God uses today, and has used throughout the history of the church, have always been men and women who have not received their signals from their cultures. They are and they always have been servants of the Lord who have had their eyes on the "Flagship" and have received their signals from the risen Christ.

I conclude this study of divine guidance the way I began, emphasizing the miracle that there is a place we are to be in our walk with Christ, and God wills to make us know that place. I pray that these twelve steps will help you to keep your eye on the "Flagship" - the risen, living Christ - Who will guide you into the will of God for your life, which is good, perfect and the only life that is acceptable to the God Who created, and recreated you to live that life. (Romans 12:1-2)

## **Chapter Two**

### **"Prescription for Identity"**

There is a place where God wants us to be. There is also somebody God wants us to be. I would now like to focus eight questions God asks us in the Bible that show us where, what, and especially who God wills us to be. I call these eight questions, "A Spiritual Compass." If we will allow God to ask

us these questions and prayerfully answer them, we will find ourselves in a dialog with God. This will be especially true in times of transition or when we are convinced we need to transition into a change in our lives and ministries.

The first four of these eight questions are the first words God speaks to fallen man: "Then the man and his wife heard the voice of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.' And God said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?' ... 'What is this you have done?'" (Genesis 3:8-13)

Is it not strange that the Creator is asking His creature questions? Surely the Creator knows the answers to His questions. God knows where man is. The problem is that man does not know where he is. The first thing a lost man needs to know is that he is lost. What we have profiled here is a dialogue between God and man, with God asking man questions, because man needs to think about where he is, until he realizes that he is lost and not where he should be.

Like everything else in the Book of Genesis, these questions are not only describing this dialogue between God and man like it was, but as it is today. Are you ever troubled by the feeling that God wants you to be somewhere and you are not there? Are you ever worried by the thought that you are not the person God wants you to be? You may call this an identity crisis. According to Moses, your so-called identity crisis could be the voice of God, walking in the garden of your life, challenging you with those first words God addressed to fallen man, "Where are you?"

The purpose of the first question is that God wants man to be where His Creator wills him to be. The purpose of His second question, "Who told you?" is that He wants man to be aware of the fact that his God is trying to establish a dialogue with him. God wants man to confess to whom or to what he listening, and precisely where is he receiving his direction. This second question directs Adam and his wife back to where and when they ate of the wrong tree, and they immediately knew that they were naked (7).

Before God started this dialog with these questions, He was communicating with Adam and Eve. The purpose of the second question was to make them aware of that miracle. They are not aware of the miracle that God is making them know what He wants them to know. Is it possible that you are not aware of the miracle that God is making you know what He wants you to know?

My paraphrase of the third question is: "Have you been eating from the wrong trees?" This question might also be paraphrased, "Have you been looking in the wrong places for your answers?" The trees of the garden were designed by God to meet the needs of that first man and woman. If you examine the setting in which this dialog took place, you will see that the needs of the man and the woman were to be met by the trees of the garden in a precise order of priority (Genesis 2:8, 9).

The trees of the garden were to meet the needs of the eye, the need for food and then the need of life itself. The tree of knowledge is declared off limits by God. In chapter three, when Adam and Eve sin they violate this priority prescribed by God. The first man and woman put their physical needs, or the need for food first, and they made the eye their second priority. Their need for life was never met. In place of the life God intended they experienced death and expulsion from God and the garden.



They were not only guilty of replacing God's priorities with their own, but they also disobeyed God and ate from the tree of knowledge. Adam and Eve were motivated by the thought that if they ate from the tree of knowledge they would become as wise as God. An allegorical application in much of our world today is the excessive emphasis on knowledge and little respect, if any at all, for the need of a revelation from God.

All of this is obviously an allegory. Have you ever seen a tree of knowledge or a tree of life? The truth of the trees in the garden is an illustration of a great sermon preached by Moses. Jesus will begin His public ministry by quoting from that same sermon of Moses: "... That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but ... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). The very profound truth focused by Moses and Jesus is pictured allegorically by these trees in the garden of Eden.

In the Bible, the eye represents the mind-set, or the way we see and understand things. Jesus taught: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness..." (Matthew 6:22, 23). Jesus was obviously teaching that our lives can be filled with happiness or with depression and unhappiness. The difference between these two extremes is the way we see things, our mind-set, or our outlook on life.

This same truth is taught allegorically in the Garden of Eden when we are told that these trees are to provide for our needs. The essence of the truth God is communicating is something like this: If we will come to God's Word and ask God to meet the need of our eyes, or show us through His Word how we should see things, all our needs will be met. We will have life

as God meets our greatest need, which is our need for Him to show us how He wants us to see everything.

The allegorical significance of the tree of knowledge from which Adam and Eve ate - and which God said they were not to eat of - pictures the humanistic philosophy that says, "I need no revelation from God. I have superior intelligence and that is all I need."

At the very beginning of the Bible, God is telling you and me that our Creator is aware of every need we have because He created us with all those needs. He knows - and He wants us to know - that our greatest need is the need of our eye. We desperately need to ask God to give us a revelation through His Word that will show us how our loving heavenly Father wants to identify and meet all our needs.

Like it was! Like it is! Do we interpret our needs in the light of God's Word, or do we interpret God's Word in the light of our needs? Exactly what did that original dysfunctional couple do in the Garden of Eden? Did they eat an apple? Did they have sex? A careful and thoughtful reading of this chapter, with the Holy Spirit teaching us, will reveal truth that is far more profound than these mistaken views.

God is telling us - like it was and like it is - that Adam and Eve interpreted the Word of God in the light of their needs. They put their needs first and God's revelation second. In other words, they did their own thing and then they asked God to show them His ideas about how their needs should be met.

They were very much like the average believer listening to the Word of God in our churches today. All week long they do their own thing and decide how their needs should be met. Then they come to church to hear what God says about the way their needs should be met. It should be the other way around. We

should come to God first and ask Him to show us how our needs should be met and be ready to obey.

The fourth question "What have you done?" challenged them to look back and think about their actions. The purpose of this fourth question was to draw a confession from the first couple.

In the Greek language, the biblical word "confess" is two words - the words for "speaking" and "sameness". To confess, literally means, "to speak the same thing", or "to agree with God". As our perfect heavenly Father, God knows what we have done, but God wants to hear us say the same thing He says about what we have done. Have you ever done that with your children?

I find the fifth great question of God later in the Book of Genesis. God asked an Egyptian maid named, Hagar, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8) This is the ultimate direction question. God likes to ask us this question during the last days and hours of an old year when we are in transition or believe that we should be. This fifth question challenges us to look back and then relate our past to our present and our future. The Good News begins to break through when God asks this fifth question. The Gospel (Good News) of the whole Bible is that we do not have to go where we have come from. Today millions of people believe our present and future are predicted by our past. This "paralysis of analysis" declares the bad news that we are always going where we have come from.

Although this fifth question eventually points to the Good News, it does present a grim reality. If we do not have a life changing event, then our future can be predicted by our past. The Bible teaches that people do not and indeed cannot change themselves. Jeremiah actually mocks us for trying to change ourselves (Jeremiah 2:36; 13:23). "As now, so then," is the way the old Greek philosophers expressed this reality.

The Gospel of the Bible, however, is optimistic and positive when it proclaims this glorious truth: We can come to God by faith and be changed! (II Corinthians 5:17; 3:18; Romans 12: 2)

I find the sixth great question of God still later in the Book of Genesis when God asked two brothers, "Who are you?" (Genesis 27:18,19,32-34) This question relates to the previous question by asking and answering the question, "Changed into what?" This question implies that we are to be somebody. Just as the first question implied we are to be somewhere and we are probably not there, the sixth question implies that we are to be somebody and that is probably not who we are.

When Esau was asked, "Who are you?" Esau wailed and cried because Esau had sold that identity for a bowl of soup. When John the Baptist was asked the same question, that great prophet had the right answers (John 1:19-23). He knew who he was and also who he was not. He did not allow the pressure of society to dictate or push him into claiming or trying to be someone he was not meant by God to be.

The wrong answer or the lack of an answer to this sixth question is perhaps the greatest single cause of personal unhappiness in the world today. As a pastor with five decades of experience, I can say that this also applies to believers.

If you are experiencing personal unhappiness as a believer and follower of Christ, your loving God would like to prod and urge you with this sixth question until you realize that there is someone God has created and recreated you to be. God would like to make you uncomfortable and make you think, until He uses this sixth question to make you know that you will never be happy until you can say, that by the grace of God, you are who you were created and recreated to be. (Psalm 139:16-24; Romans 12:1, 2)

I find the seventh question "What are you?" implied in statements made by people like the Apostle Paul when he tells us, "By the grace of God am what I am." (I Corinthians 15:10) He thanks God that he has not received the grace to be what he is in vain, and he exhorts us to see that we do not receive the grace of God in vain.

What we are is also implied in the biographical examples of people like Moses, whom God calls and equips to be deliverers, kings, prophets, priests and every kind of leader in the work of God. We should relate this question and its answers to the teaching of Paul that we are saved for good works, which God had planned for us when He saved us (Ephesians 2:10).

This seventh question relates to our spiritual and natural gifts, our service for the Lord in ministry or on the candlestick where He has placed us in this world. This question relates to what we do all day. Since we are human beings and not human doings, who we are is far more important than what we are and what we do all day. What we do is directly related to what we are.

The last question is "What do you want?" These are the first words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John as He recruited some disciples whom He later commissioned to be apostles (John 1:38).

When we allow God to shine these questions into all our spiritual hiding places until they show us who, what, and where God wants us to be, the critical question then becomes "What do we want?" and "How much do we want it?"

Your God has made you a creature of choice. He knows where you are, who you are, and what you are. God also knows who, what, and where He wants you to be. Because He loves you, He very much wants you to have the right answers to these questions.

God honors the reality that we are creatures of choice and there is a sense in which He will never make us give Him the right answers to these questions! Figuratively speaking, He may treat us like Jonah and send storms into our lives, or even put us in the belly of a great fish until we give Him the right answers to these questions. He may lean on us like an elephant until the only reasonable thing for us to do is give Him the right answers to these questions. He may work an intervention in our lives as He did in the life of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Because He loves us, He may make us an offer we cannot refuse, but like Jonah and the Apostle Paul, we must choose to align our will with the will of God and be who God wants us to be and do what He wants us to do.

When God made us creatures of choice, God was creating us in His image and likeness. The big creations of God like the sun, the moon and the stars make no choices (Psalms 8; 19). God's creatures in the microcosm of His creation also make no choices. The bees in a beehive and the life forms we see with the aid of a microscope make no choices.

When we observe God's creation through a telescope or a microscope, we observe order because the will of God has been imposed on those creations of God. Man is the only creation of God who was created with the ability to makes choices. Our capacity to choose is the plan of God for us. Therefore, God will never violate our freedom to choose.

At the end of the New Testament, we see the risen Christ standing and patiently knocking on the door of our lives (Revelation 3:19, 20). That knocking represents the love of a Savior Who is trying to lovingly chasten us to open the door of our lives to Him so that He can have fellowship with us. Christ will never pick the lock on that door or break that door down.

When an artist painted a portrait of Jesus patiently standing and knocking on that door, the door had no latch on the outside, implying that the door must be opened from the inside. The fact that we are creatures of choice makes this last question "What do you want?" a very profound question indeed.

Having used these questions as a personal spiritual compass for more than five decades, I share them with you hoping they may become a spiritual compass for you. I have discovered that even though the questions never change, the answers change very dramatically over the years. When you have allowed God to use these questions to make you know who, what, and where God wants you to be, remember to let your loving Creator ask you that second question one more time: "Who told you? Who do you think is making you know these things?"

### **Chapter Three**

#### **"Prescription for Anxiety"**

Shortly after World War Two, when the world began to live with the reality of thermonuclear weapons of mass destruction, that period of history was labeled "The Age of Anxiety". Those weapons are now in the hands of more nations and small, terrorist-oriented groups are trying to acquire them. Chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction have now been added to the arsenals that are horrible beyond description. When you add the threat of global terrorism to the scenario today, we are really living in an "Age of anxiety".

All over this world, people are literally experiencing anxiety attacks, because in addition to the stresses we all live

with in our personal lives, there is the cloud of anxiety caused by the world in which we all live today. If you are anxious, I would like to share an inspired prescription for anxiety with you. This great prescription for anxiety comes from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and it is a magnificent prescription.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, Oh you of little faith?



"So, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:19-34)

Jesus said, "Do not be anxious." He did not say, "Cope with your anxiety. Try to manage your stress." If you get into the original language, He is saying, "If you are experiencing anxiety, stop it."

Precisely what is the prescription of Jesus for coping with anxiety? In this passage of Scripture, you have a great study of the values of Christ. To introduce the first part of His prescription for anxiety, He focuses some of the faulty values that cause anxiety.

According to the dictionary, a value is "That quality of any certain thing, by which it is determined by us to be more or less useful, profitable, important, and therefore, desirable." In His prescription for anxiety, Jesus focuses some of the values that cause anxiety (19-21). Fragile treasures are the focus of the first step in His prescription for anxiety.

According to Jesus, there are two kinds of treasures: treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. He tells us that the treasures on earth are vulnerable and fragile. Earthly treasures are consumed by moth and rust. In other words, they depreciate, and thieves can steal them from us. But treasures in heaven are not consumed by moth and rust, and thieves can never take them away from us.

Jesus uses a word for rust that means, "That which eats." Most of the people who heard Him give this anxiety prescription, raised and stored enough food to feed their families. They knew

their food supply could be eaten by rodents, insects, and by animals. They really heard Jesus when He taught that if all our treasures are earthly and vulnerable, that can lead to great anxiety.

To present the second step in His prescription for anxiety, Jesus uses a metaphor that shows another source of anxiety. This is that metaphor that tells us the difference between happiness and unhappiness is the way we see things (22,23).

Then He attacks another cause of anxiety when He tells us that we are to serve God and Him only (24). There are two kinds of treasures and there are two kinds of masters. If we are aware of the first commandment - You shall have no other gods before me, and the truth with which Jesus responded to Satan's temptation to give Him all the kingdoms of the world, we should know that serving anything or anyone other than God will cause us great anxiety.

The prescription for anxiety is therefore the declaration of Jesus that we cannot serve two masters. The master He presents that we often serve in addition to God is one we do not think of as a master. Jesus declares that if we are serving God and money, we not only have divided loyalty but a fragile master and very faulty thinking. The word Jesus uses for money is a word that means the power of money. The addiction to making much money is a very common and deadly addiction.

The heart of this prescription of Jesus will be sharply focused for you if you consider twenty-one questions Jesus asks - directly or indirectly - in this passage of Scripture. As we have seen, God asks questions all through the Bible. When God became flesh and lived among us, He continuously asked questions. Eighty-three of His questions are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew alone. In this one passage from His teaching on the mountaintop, prayerfully find the right answers to the

twenty-one questions Jesus asks, and you will find that you will be applying a prescription that will dramatically reduce your anxiety: Where is your heart? (21) Where are your treasures? (19, 20) How do you see things? Do you have a healthy eye, or a pure outlook on life? Is your body filled with light and happiness? Is your body filled with darkness and unhappiness? Do you have spiritual "double vision" or "spiritual schizophrenia?" (22, 23) Are you serving God? (24) Are you serving money or the power of materialism? (24)

Are you anxious about your sustenance or what you are going to eat, drink and wear? (25) What is your life? (25) What is your body? (25) What is your worth? (26) What are your limits? (27) If your Heavenly Father feeds the birds, will He not feed you? (26) If your Heavenly Father clothes the lilies of the field, will He not clothe you? (30)

Is it your anxiety that solves these problems? (27) What does your anxiety tell you about your faith? (30) Do you believe your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things? (32) If you put God first and do what He shows you to be right, do you believe you can trust Him to meet your needs as you serve Him? (33)

**In summary:**

If you want to diagnose the sources of your anxiety prayerfully answer these five summary questions: What do you do all day (Your activities)? What do you think about all day (Your attitudes)? Who or what do you serve all day (Your allegiances)? What do you worry about all day (Your anxieties)? What do you want all day (Your ambitions)?

You are then ready to hear the summary prescription of Jesus for the anxiety of a believer: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things you worry about,

all day will be provided for you by your loving heavenly Father Who knows you need all these things. (Matthew 6:33-34) The pure essence of this prescription of Jesus for the anxiety of a believer is expressed by those two words: "God First!"

#### **Chapter Four**

#### **"Prescription for Peace"**

One of my favorite authors writes that for the believer, "Pain and suffering are inevitable, but misery is optional." If you want to meet a man who had every earthly reason to be miserable, open your New Testament and read the writings of the Apostle Paul. Talk about pain and suffering! In his second letter to the Corinthians, the great apostle gives us a small autobiographical window into his daily quality of life as the greatest missionary ever in the entire history of the church of Jesus Christ, when he writes: "I have worked harder and been put in jail more often than anyone I know. I have been whipped times without number and faced death again and again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me their terrible thirty-nine lashes. Three times I have been beaten with rods. On one occasion, I was stoned by a mob and left for dead (Acts 14). Three times I was shipwrecked; once I was in the open sea all night and the whole next day (Acts 27,28). I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food; I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm." (II Corinthians 11:23-27)

There is a false teaching that some are trying to promote that says that God always wants us to be well, wealthy and happy. The Apostle Paul would never agree with this teaching called "Prosperity Theology" and neither would Jesus. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble..." (John 16:31)

And yet in his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote that even in the context of his difficult experiences, he had peace ... a peace of God that "transcends human understanding," or a peace that does not make good sense - a supernatural peace. A careful study of Paul's letter to the Philippians will show us that this peace Paul was experiencing was a peace that was also linked with joy. In fact, even though his letter to the Philippians was written while Paul was in prison, that very short letter is called "The Epistle of Joy" because it mentions joy seventeen times.

If you are like me, you might read through Paul's account of these hardships and ask, "How could he possibly have been at peace while he was suffering through all those trials?" We should be grateful that the Holy Spirit led Paul to leave us an inspired answer to our question.

His answer is found in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Philippians. In that chapter, Paul writes what I call "A Prescription for Peace", which not only explains how he was able to be at peace despite his circumstances, but prescribes that quality of peace for you and me, no matter what our circumstances may be.

This quality of peace, which the Bible calls, "the peace of God," is a continuous state of peace in which God can keep a believer. Before we look at Paul's prescription for this state of peace in which the risen Christ is obviously keeping him, I want to write three instructions we simply must acknowledge and apply as we study and then apply Paul's prescription for peace

to our lives.

First, this state of peace is a peace of God that must be learned; second, it is a peace that must be received in the context of a relationship with Christ; and third, there are specific conditions that must be met as we apply this prescription for the peace of God.

### **A Peace That Must Be Learned**

As you read Paul's letter to the Philippians, be sure to make the observation that he tells us he has learned this peace. He writes: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances may be. I have learned the secret of facing plenty or poverty. I now know ..." (Apparently he did not always know.) In one translation he writes: "Everywhere and in all things, I am instructed."

I cannot help but wonder, what were the things he learned, and who was instructing him? According to Paul, he was instructed by the risen, living Christ. It is encouraging and comforting for me when I read that this peace can be learned because, if the kind of peace Paul experienced and prescribes can be learned, then I can learn to have this miraculous peace. No matter what my circumstances may be, for me, misery is optional.

By the grace of God, I did learn this prescription for peace while I was experiencing the greatest personal crisis of my life. I was a pastor, enjoying a decade of miracles in my ministry when my health forced me to give up that active ministry. While a rare and incurable disease of the spinal cord was slowly but surely forcing me to face the challenges and the limitations of spending the rest of my life in a wheelchair, or worse, I found Paul's peace prescription in the fourth chapter of Philippians. I memorized the chapter and prayed myself to

sleep at night, while meditating on the prescription for peace I was learning there. The good news here is, that if Paul can learn it and if I can learn it, you can also learn this prescription for the peace of God.

### **A Peace That is Relational**

When you meditate on the peace prescription of Paul, you soon understand that Paul has a relationship with the risen, living Christ. He also assumes that those to whom he is addressing this prescription have a relationship with Jesus the Christ. Without that relationship, it is not possible to apply this prescription for peace. This prescription is written to believers who have opened the door of their lives to a relationship with the risen Christ (Revelation 3:20).

### **A Peace That is Conditional**

According to Paul, even for someone who has a relationship with the Prince of peace Himself, the personal and perpetual state of peace known as the peace of God, will only be the experience of spiritual people who meet certain specific conditions. If you know Christ and you meet these conditions, you can experience God's peace.

I find sixteen conditions for the peace of God directly stated, or indirectly implied, in the letter of Paul to the Philippians (Philippians 4:4-13). See if you can find them as you read through this peace prescription of Paul:

4) "Delight yourselves in the Lord; yes, find your joy in him at all times. 5) Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord. 6) Do not worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, 7) and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over

your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.

8) "Here is a last piece of advice. If you believe in goodness and if you value the approval of God, fix your minds on whatever is true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and praiseworthy. 9) Model your conduct on what you have learned from me, on what I have told you and shown you, and you will find that the God of peace will be with you.

10) "It has been a great joy to me that after all this time you have shown such interest in my welfare. I do not mean that you had forgotten me, but up till now you had no opportunity of expressing your concern. 11) Nor do I mean that I have been in actual need, for I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be.

12) "I know now how to live when things are difficult and I know how to live when things are prosperous. In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either plenty or poverty. 13) I am ready for anything (or can do anything, even have God's peace in the middle of troubles) through the strength of the One Who lives within me." (Philippians 4:4-13).

### **Sixteen Conditions for Peace**

If you want to have the peace Paul is prescribing, the first condition you must meet is to worry about nothing (6). Paul did not prescribe this first condition for peace because he had nothing to worry about. He told us not to worry because worry is not only nonproductive - worry is counterproductive. Worry simply does not accomplish anything, and consumes the emotional and spiritual energy you need to cope with your problems. Therefore, Paul agrees with Jesus and tells us that we should not worry about anything.

He goes on to prescribe his second condition for peace, which is: "Pray about everything!" Although worry is



counterproductive, the great apostle knew that prayer is very productive. He knew that prayer could deliver us from the crisis that we are worrying about.

For example, Paul asked the Philippians to pray that he might be delivered from prison. They prayed and he was delivered from the imprisonment he was experiencing when he wrote this inspired letter to them. But, Paul also knew from personal experience that God does not always take our problems away.

Paul had a health problem which he described as "a thorn in the flesh." Three times he asked God for healing. This man saw many people healed as he was the vehicle of the healing power of the Holy Spirit to others. Yet, when he asked God to solve his own health problem, three times, God said, "No." Essentially, God said to Paul, "I am going to give you the grace to cope with the problem." (II Corinthians 12)

When God gave Paul the grace to cope with his health problem, he learned from his own personal experience that prayer may deliver you from your problem, or it may give you the grace to cope with your problem, but in any case, we should pray. We should always pray about everything. So, Paul's first two conditions for peace are: "Worry about nothing, but always pray about everything."

Paul then prescribes his third condition for peace when he tells us that we should think our way to peace (8). In essence, Paul tells us our thoughts are like sheep and we are the shepherds of those "sheep" thoughts. We can decide how we are going to think and how we are not going to think.

I have been told that "Five percent of the people think, ten percent think they think, eighty-five percent would rather die than think, and the ten percent who think they are thinking are merely re-arranging their prejudices and not really thinking

at all!" In his prescription for peace, Paul is challenging us to join the five percent and really think. He is prescribing that we should decide how we are going to think. Specifically, he instructs us to think about the things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and about the things we hear that are good news.

Scholars believe this part of Paul's peace prescription is a paraphrase of Isaiah who wrote: "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed upon You because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3) Isaiah cites two conditions for the peace of God: If we will keep our minds fixed on the Lord and we trust in the Lord, He will keep us in this state of personal peace.

In a dungeon in the Mamertine prison in Rome where he spent his last days on earth, before he was decapitated, this condition for peace probably became Paul's personal prescription for sanity. In the context of the unbearable stress you may have to face in your lifetime, like an ugly divorce, bankruptcy, a heart attack, a life-threatening surgery, the final stages of a malignancy, combat, or prison, I believe you will discover that this prescription can preserve your peace and sanity.

Paul and Isaiah agree that if the trust is always, the peace is perfect and perpetual. If there is no trust, there is no peace, because the peace of God is intensely conditional.

The fourth condition for peace prescribed by Paul involves action on our part. One translation of verse nine reads: "Those things which you have both learned and received (believed) and heard and seen in me, do, and (then) the God of peace will be with you." You may be asking, "Do you mean to tell me there is something I can do to attain and maintain the peace of God, especially when I am in a time of personal crisis?"

Oh, you can be assured there is! Paul prescribes a definite, active role we can play if we want to experience the

peace of God. Sometimes the "peace thief" that is robbing us of our peace is the hard reality that we are not doing what is right. When we lose our peace because we are doing the expedient thing and we are afraid to do what is right, the prescription we need is to do the right things.

His fifth condition for peace focuses a "peace thief" in the lives of believers who have suffered great loss while serving the Lord (4:8). They may reach the point of despair where they question the value of the good they have done while serving as missionaries, evangelists, pastors, or as faithful witnesses for Christ where God has placed them.

In the translation from which I have quoted, Paul writes: "If you believe in goodness ..." When you find the word "if" you should realize a condition for peace is being listed. The point is that we should believe in goodness. Other translations read: "If there be any virtue." (8)

In his inspired writings he is emphatic as he makes the point that we are not saved by good works. In those same writings he teaches that we are saved for good works (Ephesians 2:10). He is teaching here that a believer should never doubt the worth of the good they have done in a lifetime of serving the Lord.

The apostle certainly could have identified with this "peace thief." From the time of his conversion, he committed himself to doing what was good. He completely dedicated himself to the work of Jesus. And what did it get him? Prison after prison, each one worse than the last. And yet, he lived in peace. Paul had peace because he learned how to overcome the temptation to no longer believe in goodness.

This condition is included in his prescription for peace because he would spare the spiritual nobility of the church of Jesus Christ the loss of peace they may suffer if they forget

that, even though they may not be rewarded for all the good they have done for Jesus in this life, their good will be rewarded in the eternal state.

Make the observation that Paul prescribed "earnest and thankful prayer." (4:6) A sixth condition for peace is expressed in two words: "Be thankful." If aging, an accident, a stroke, or an illness are causing you to lose your faculties one at a time, you have two choices: You can focus on what you have lost, or are losing, and be depressed and angry about it, or you can focus on what you still have and be thankful.

You will find that second option to be very effective peace therapy. When you think about it, you have many blessings. You will also discover that, when you begin to focus your blessings and thank God for them, you will have moved your mind from the negative to the positive - and your peace will return.

Paul focuses a seventh condition for peace when he implies that we must learn to be patient because impatience is another "peace thief". (10, 11) Another word for the contentment Paul describes in these verses is patience. In our relationship with God, patience is "faith waiting". When we are praying for something and we think we are receiving no answer, God may be calling us to experience a quality of patience that involves our faith waiting on the Lord. In our relationships with people, patience is "love waiting".

When we become impatient with God or with people, we lose our state of personal peace. The quality of patience Paul is prescribing here is one of the nine fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). This confirms the prerequisite I shared with you that this peace of God must be relational.

The Lord wants to grow the virtue of patience in our lives in two dimensions: God wills to grow vertical patience as He teaches us to have a faith that waits on the Lord. He also

continuously wills to grow the horizontal dimension of patience in our relationships with others while He is teaching us that love waits. Our personal peace will be very fragile until we learn patience.

We learn the eighth condition for peace when Paul prescribes that we have a reputation for gentleness, meaning that we should have a gentle and meek spirit like Jesus demonstrated. (5) The concept that is conveyed by this biblical word for gentleness is meekness. This quality of meekness is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit profited by Paul in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 5:22,23).

Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is actually very close in meaning to tameness. When a powerful stallion is tamed, finally takes the bit, and yields to the control of the person in the saddle, that animal is not weak. It is meek. Its meekness can be described as "strength under control". Gentleness is a synonym for meekness. A horse that is tamed is referred to as gentle. That is what the biblical word "meek" means.

Another word that is synonymous with the concept of gentleness, as Paul uses that word, is the word, "acceptance". Many old saints with years of experience walking with God will tell us there is a very real correlation between acceptance and peace. It should not surprise us to find that correlation in Paul's prescription for peace. Peace comes and peace often returns when we accept the limits of our limitations.

For the ninth condition for peace, return with me to consider the contentment of this apostle. As we consider what this apostle has learned that has taught him to be content in his circumstances, we must conclude that from the time he called Jesus his Lord, he believed Jesus was in control of his life. He is content because he believes he is in the will of his Lord

and Savior and the risen, living Christ has everything under control.

His ninth condition for peace is an unconditional surrender to the will of Jesus Christ as our Lord. Anything less than an unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord can be a "peace thief" for those who profess to follow Christ. Much of our anxiety, or loss of peace, can be traced to the sad reality that we have never really made Jesus our Lord. We have not thrown our hands up and surrendered totally and unconditionally to Him.

Some of us are not only unwilling to do the acceptable will of Christ, we are resisting His will like a horse that is resisting the control of the bit in its mouth. If we will simply, sincerely, surrender unconditionally to His acceptable will, (if that has never happened in our journey of faith,) our unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ will move us forward into the peace of God.

A tenth condition for peace is focused for us when this great apostle writes in his peace prescription, "I have learned the secret of how to live when things are difficult and when things are prosperous, of how to face poverty or plenty." (12) Paul had learned the secret of being content in whatever state he found himself.

What was that secret? That secret was learning how to receive the grace to accept the things he could not control, believing that all those events must have His Lord's approval before they could come into his life. Paul's life is a marvelous model of a disciple who accepted the will of his Lord and Savior, whether his circumstances were favorable or extremely unfavorable.

The application of condition number ten for you and me is obvious. We can lose our experience of the peace of God because we do not receive the grace of the living Christ to accept His

will one day at a time, regardless of our circumstances.

An eleventh condition for peace is to learn how to live when things are difficult. Another way to express what Paul was writing is: "In general and in particular, I have learned the secret of facing either plenty or poverty." (4:12) When you are in a crisis, have you ever asked Jesus to teach you what He taught Paul? This is another dimension of the peace of God that must be learned. To maintain your peace of God ask Christ to teach you how to live when your life is difficult.

If you love God and are called according to His plan, God can make all the things that happen to you fit into a pattern for good. There may be nothing good about what has happened to you, but God can fit all the things that happen to you into a pattern for good (Romans 8:28). Hold that truth in perspective in every crisis you experience.

The twelfth condition for peace is to ask the Lord to teach you how to live when things are prosperous. Have you ever thought about this? It is more of a challenge to know how to live when things are prosperous than it is to know how to live when things are difficult and we are facing poverty. Most of us run to God and His Word and are deeply spiritual in the difficult times of life. But, when followers of Christ find themselves living in a time when everything is prosperous, when they have acclamation and security - that is when many believers fall. The evil one defeats many believers when they are prosperous, enjoying prosperity and the blessings of the Lord.

By example and precept, the Apostle Paul is sharing a twelfth condition for peace by telling us to ask our Lord to teach us how to live when things are prosperous. Many believers have lost their peace because they never asked the Lord to teach them the secret of holy living when things are prosperous (Philippians 4:12).

Paul focused the thirteenth condition of this peace prescription when he challenged us to never forget the nearness of our Lord (5). If you are familiar with the life of the Apostle Paul, think of what the nearness of his Lord meant to him. When he was experiencing his final, severe Roman imprisonment, it was very dangerous to visit him. And nobody did.

In His last letter to Timothy, he writes: "Everyone has deserted me." But he also writes: "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength." (II Timothy 4:16, 17) That is what he means when he writes: "Never forget the nearness of your Lord." (Philippians 4:5) When you find yourself in a crisis, or if you are in crisis now, never forget the nearness of your Lord.

This is why I have emphasized the most fundamental rule that a personal relationship with the Lord absolutely must be in place if you are serious about understanding and applying Paul's prescription for the peace of God.

The fourteenth condition for peace is to base your serenity and joy on your relationship to the living Christ. What is the foundation of your serenity and joy? If the foundation of your serenity and happiness is your spouse, your children, or some special human being with whom you have a relationship, then the foundation of your serenity is very fragile, because there is no relationship on earth you cannot lose.

If the foundation of your peace and your joy is your health, your youth or your athleticism, thousands of people, who have had a physical orientation around which their lives revolved before an illness or an injury destroyed that foundation, will join me in warning you that health, athleticism and youth are very fragile foundations for your joy and peace.

As he writes these words, the Apostle Paul is directing us



to a foundation for peace and joy that is not fragile: "Delight yourselves in the Lord; yes, find your joy in Him at all times."  
(4)

The fifteenth condition for peace in this prescription is found when Paul writes: "If you value the approval of God ... "  
(8)

The Apostle John records a profound question about approval that was asked by Jesus. He asked the religious leaders, "How can you believe when you look to each other for approval and are not concerned with the approval that comes from God?" (John 5:44)

Abraham was told by God, "Walk before Me." (Genesis 17:1) How many of us do that? How many of us really walk before God, all day long, every day? How many of us move through a twenty-four hour day holding in focus how God feels about who we are, what we are, where we are and all the things we are doing?

Every believer will have crises in life when they simply cannot have the approval of God and the approval of man. There are times when we are not able to explain to people what is going on in our lives. When those times come, if we must have that approval on the horizontal level, we will discover that the foundation of our peace is very fragile. To maintain the peace of God, we must learn to value the approval of God.

I conclude my summary of Paul's prescription for the peace of God with this sixteenth condition for attaining and maintaining the peace of God: learn what it means to rest in Christ Jesus. "The peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ *Jesus*." (7)

What does it mean to "rest in Christ Jesus?" What does it mean to be "in Christ Jesus?" To be "in Christ" is the favorite metaphor chosen by the authors of the New Testament when they

want to describe that critically important relationship to our Lord and Savior that is the most vital factor of all in knowing and maintaining the peace of God. These authors of the New Testament, especially the Apostle Paul, tell us that we are "in Christ" if we are the authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul uses that metaphor ninety-seven times in his writings.

The expression means that we are in union with Christ, as a branch is in union with a vine (John 15:1-16). To be "in Christ", means that we can draw from Him, the Vine, all the life-giving spiritual power we need for everything we do for Him, with Him and by Him, as we rest in Him. To be in Christ means to rest in His power to do the things He calls us to do all day long, every day.

I have tried to convey what it means to be "in Christ" by wrapping the concept in a package I call, "Four Spiritual Secrets." I could not function as I should as a human being and I certainly could not be broadcasting the Bible all over the world in many languages as a quadriplegic, without these insights. My four spiritual secrets are:

"It is not a matter of who or what I am. What matters is Who and what He is, because I am in Him and He is in me. Nothing depends upon what I can do but on what He can do, because I am in Him and He is in me. What I want is not important. The important thing is what He wants because I am in Him and He is in me.

When the good things happen because He has passed His life giving power through me as one of His branches, I must always remember this fourth spiritual secret, which is: "It was not a matter of what I did but of what He did because I was in Him and He was in me."

In my own words, that is what it means to "rest in Christ Jesus." So much of our anxiety, so much of our peace loss,

perhaps the greatest "peace thief" we have is thinking that we must live as Christ lived and do the work of Christ in our own strength.

I realize you could be experiencing a health crisis that has robbed you of your ability to memorize or even to concentrate your thoughts enough to pray. I would therefore like to share with you a prayer for personal peace based on this prescription. If you want to experience the peace of God Paul has prescribed for us, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

*Father, you tell us in Your Word that You can keep us in a state of perfect personal peace if we just meet your conditions for that peace. Because I seek your peace in my life, give me the wisdom to worry about nothing, and the faith to pray about everything.*

*May I have the mental discipline to think about all the good things and the moral integrity to do all the right things.*

*May I always have that incurable optimism that believes in goodness, and give me such an insight into what You have been doing, and what You are now doing in my life and in my world, that I will give thanks always and in all things.*

*May I never try to push You or run before You but always wait on You, experiencing and expressing the gentleness and patience that are the fruit of Your Spirit living in me.*

*As I sort out my priorities, may I always value Your approval of who I am, what I am and what I do, and not walk before men to be seen of men, or to please men.*

*Never let me forget how near You are to me as I draw near to You, worshipping and enjoying You each day and forever.*

*May I surrender my life to You until there is a perfect alignment between my will and Your will.*

*Give me the grace to accept Your will one situation at a time, when things are difficult and when things are prosperous.*

*By Your grace, may I learn how to prosper spiritually, and to be content when I am facing plenty, or suffering real need.*

*And finally, Father, realizing that it is not who I am, but Who You are that is important; acknowledging that it is not what I can do, but what You can do that really matters; agreeing that it is not what I want, but what You want; and remembering that in the final analysis it will not be what I did, but what You did that will have lasting, eternal results, give me that absolute trust in You and that total dependence on You that will truly rest my heart and my mind in Christ.*

*Enable me to meet these conditions for personal peace, in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, for my peace and for Your glory. Amen.*

## **Chapter Five**

### **"A Prescription for Prayer"**

There are many prescriptions for prayer in the Scripture. The Disciple's Prayer [ruthgr@uol.com.br](mailto:ruthgr@uol.com.br), taught by the Lord Jesus Christ, is the greatest one. It is the most profound prescription for prayer the world has ever been given, but it is not the only prescription for prayer in the Bible. From among many examples and teachings about prayer, there is another prescription for prayer I want to share with you. When life was very difficult for me, I discovered this prescription for prayer. This one has a metaphor that allegorically writes the prescription.

### **The Throne of Grace**

This prayer metaphor pictures for us and teaches us that prayer is like approaching a throne. This throne is called "The Throne of Grace". We read: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy for our failures and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

From this throne, God freely dispenses mercy and grace to His people for their failures and needs. So when we come to this throne, we should expect to receive mercy for our failures and grace to help us in our time of need. Mercy is the attribute of God that withholds from us what we deserve. Grace is the character trait of God that lavishes on us all kinds of blessings we do not deserve, earn or achieve by our own self-efforts.

When you come to God in prayer, are you looking for those two magnificent gifts from God - mercy and grace? The word "mercy" is found three hundred and sixty-six times in the Bible. That is enough for once for every day of the year - and it even covers Leap Year - when there are 366 days in the year.

By placing this word so many times in His Word, God is saying to us, "There is not a day you live that you do not need My mercy." How often do you thank God for mercy - for withholding from you what you deserve? My father in the Word of God, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, was eighty-one years of age the last time I heard him preach. I remember that he said, "I am now eighty-one years old and I have never been as interested in the mercy of God as I am now."

The spiritual heroes we meet in the Bible come to God praying as David prayed when he needed to confess that he had committed adultery and murder: "Have mercy on me, Oh God, according to your unfailing love; according to the multitude of

Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me."  
(Psalm 51:1-3)

Those words are the prayer of a godly, spiritual man who realized that he needed the mercy of God because he had grievously sinned. The prescription for prayer we learn at the Throne of Grace is: When we come to the throne of grace, we should come with the fullest confidence in the tender mercies of God that are based on what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on His cross.

He went into heaven for us and offered His blood there for our sins and He intercedes in heaven for us right now (Hebrews 9:11-14). His death on the cross has provided the only basis on which God can totally cleanse us of our sins. His sacrifice has accomplished our salvation forever. We can add absolutely nothing to what He did for us on His cross (Hebrews 10:17,18). When we come to the throne of grace we are to come with full confidence in that very Good News.

Grace - the favor and blessing of God that we do not deserve - is another beautiful Bible word. The grace of God comes to us in many forms. In a sense, the root word means, "unmerited favor". This definition of grace means that our sins are not forgiven because we deserve to be forgiven. Our sins are forgiven because God loved us enough to send His Son into this world to die on a cross for our salvation. However, the word means far more than simply unmerited favor.

### **Amazing Grace**

In another wonderful verse about grace from the pen of the Apostle Paul, we read: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all

things, might abound unto every good work." This is the most emphatic verse in the Bible about the grace God has made available to His people (II Corinthians 9:8).

According to Paul, God is able to make all grace (not just a little bit of grace) abound - more than plentiful (not just trickle) toward you (not just Billy Graham, the pastor, and the missionary, but toward you), that you (he repeats that for emphasis) always (not just sometimes), having all sufficiency (not just some sufficiency) in all things (not just some things) may abound - thrive and prosper (not just limping and stumbling) unto every (not just some) good work.

All grace, abounding, always, all of you, I mean all of you, all sufficiency, all things, always, abounding in all the good works God wants to do through you! The New Testament church turned the world right side up because they believed and experienced the truth Paul was proclaiming in this extraordinary verse about God's amazing grace.

That quality and quantity of grace is available to you and me at the throne of grace every time we pray. Every time we pray we should realize that this prayer metaphor invites us to come to God to receive mercy for our failures and grace to help us with everything we need to live as Christ and to serve Christ in this world.

I love God for making the throne of grace available to me. God put the throne of grace in place and He says, "Anytime you need it, it is there. Simply go to that grace throne and I will freely give you mercy for your failures and grace to help you in your hour of need. I love to open the gates of heaven for you and lavish My wonderful grace upon you."

How it must grieve His heart when we completely ignore the throne of grace He has provided for us all. Because He loves us, He has His ways of encouraging us to meet with Him there.

Scripture informs us that God's people sometimes suffer because there are times when God literally forces His people to access the grace He has made available to them.

Paul writes that God has given us access, by faith, to the grace that makes it possible for us to stand for Christ in this world, and live lives that glorify God. Then he tells us that we should rejoice in our tribulation (suffering), because it is our suffering that sometimes forces us to access the grace God has made available to us (Romans 5:2-5).

We should all rejoice and thank God for those difficult times of suffering that force us to come to the throne of grace. Without those trials we might have missed the grace we desperately need to live lives that fulfill the purposes of our salvation and glorify God.

In conclusion, have you ever accessed that throne of God's grace and mercy? If not do not put it off another day. The throne is there, God is there wanting to lavish on you His mercy and grace. If you have accepted God's amazing grace and mercy are you accessing His throne of grace every day? Are you receiving and then sharing His mercy and grace with others?

## **Chapter Six**

### **"Prescription for Obedience"**

Have you discovered the emphasis in the New Testament on the vital importance of obedience in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ? Jesus emphasized the importance of obedience more than any of the authors of the New Testament. For example: He focused and defined obedience when He asked the question, "Why



do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

When He gave His greatest discourse, His emphasis on the personal righteousness of His disciples shows the value He placed on obedience. Two of His eight beatitudes pronounced a blessing on the disciple who has a hunger and thirst for righteousness - doing what is right -, and the disciple who is persecuted for his righteousness. He adds to those beatitudes that the righteousness of His disciples must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:6,10,20).

He concluded His greatest discourse with several awesome illustrations of the importance of obedience. As He brought that teaching to a verdict with an awesome invitation, He said, "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

His final words on the mountaintop profile that metaphor of the two houses that are experiencing terrible storms. The house that collapses pictures the disciple who does not obey His teaching, and the house that does not collapse is a picture of the disciple who does obey His teaching.

He taught that the only way we can prove that His teaching is the Word of God is to come to His teaching with the will to do what His teaching tells us to do. Only the disciple who wills to do will know. According to Jesus, the knowing does not lead to the doing; the doing leads to the knowing.

Having taught by example and profound instruction that we are to wash one another's feet, and serve each other, He proclaims: "If you know these things, you will be happy and blessed when you do them." (John 13:17)

When the apostles asked Him in the Upper Room how they could have a relationship with Him after His resurrection, He told Jude that it is a matter of obedience. He told Jude and

the other apostles: "When you obey My Word, I, My Father, and the Holy Spirit will come and live in you." (John 14:22-24)

He had already stated this same truth very clearly when He told the apostles in this same setting: "If you love Me, keep My commandments and I will ask the Father to give you the Holy Spirit." (15:14) We find this confirmed in the Book of Acts when Peter announces that "He gives His Holy Spirit to them who obey Him." (Acts 5:32)

### **The Great Commission**

I have given this brief overview of these prescriptions of Christ for obedience to create a context for His greatest commandment. Jesus gave all of us who profess to be His disciples our marching orders when He met with His apostles and over five hundred disciples after His resurrection. Before He ascended, His last words to His church were: "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this - that I am with you always, even to the end of the world." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Paul obeyed the Great Commission. When he shared with the Corinthians the motivation behind the ministry that made him the greatest missionary in the history of the church, he told them that he had three absolute values: he believed that One died for all; that all were lost, and he concluded all must hear the Gospel.

He therefore lived with such an all-consuming zeal of telling the world about Christ, the Corinthians accused him of being "beside himself" - or crazy. He was defending his sanity when he wrote this great insight into what motivated the

greatest missionary the church has ever known (II Corinthians 5:13-6:2).

Toward the end of his Roman letter, he tells the disciples in Rome that he has been anxious to get to Rome because he wants them to support him while he reaches those who must hear the Gospel in Spain. While he is sharing this with them he makes an amazing claim. He writes, that if you draw a circle from Corinth to the middle of Italy, there is no place within that circle where he has not preached the Gospel.

If you get a map and plot the geography of his claim, you will realize that he is describing an extraordinary accomplishment. The church historians tell us that Paul did preach the Gospel everywhere within that circle and he did preach the Gospel in Spain, supported by the church in Rome. He had a missionary heart for the whole world. Paul and the other apostles fanatically gave themselves to preaching the Gospel of salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

What motivated the first generation of the church to preach the Gospel and make disciples around the world? I believe the answer to that question is really very simple. They really believed those three absolutes of Paul. They believed that Christ died for all, that all were lost, and that all must hear.

Why do some churches not get the Gospel out to the people who are lost in this world? Is it because they do not believe they are lost? There are many "neo-evangelical" believers today who do not believe that all are lost and that all must hear that Jesus Christ died for their salvation. But we have been given that same Great Commission to make disciples for Christ that was given to the first generation of the church.

An International Congress on World Evangelism met in 1974 in Lausanne Switzerland. Spiritual leaders from one hundred and

fifty countries came together and met around this single issue: Do we really believe the lost are lost? They unanimously agreed with those three missionary absolutes of Paul and they documented their resolve in what they called, "The Lausanne Covenant."

That Covenant is a clear statement of what authentic evangelical disciples of Jesus Christ believe about the mission of the church of the risen, living Christ in today's world. If you will study this covenant, you will find that it addresses some of the reasons why so many believers are not involved in world missions today.

I will just highlight a few points. These evangelical leaders agreed: "We believe the Gospel is God's Good News for the whole world and we are determined by His grace to obey Christ's Great Commission to proclaim it to all mankind and to make disciples in every nation."

They wrote: "The purpose of God is to call out a people from the world for Himself and send those people back into the world to be His servants and His witnesses. We confess with shame we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission by becoming conformed to the world or by withdrawing from the world. Yet we rejoice that even when communicated through earthen vessels the Gospel is still a precious treasure."

They made an affirmation about the authority of Scripture. "We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God without error in all that it affirms and the only infallible rule of faith and practice." They also resolved together: "We affirm the power of God's Word to accomplish His purpose of salvation because we believe the message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind."

They agreed that another reason why we do not see a greater evangelization of the world today as it should be, is because many believe today that one religion is just as good as another. These leaders agreed that they did not believe that any and every religion will lead to salvation and to heaven. And so one paragraph reads: "We affirm that there is only one Savior and one Gospel. Even though there is such a thing as a revelation of God in nature, we deny that natural revelation can save and we reject all of those who say that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved. All men are perishing because of sin but God loves all men and does not wish that any should perish but all should repent."

An extraordinary missionary statesman wrote: "The Great Commission is the Charter (Agreement and Contract) of the Church. Like any other organization, the church must fulfill the terms of its charter or it should cease and desist."

The most definitive statement of the covenant is: "World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world." Since they agreed that the church is at the very center of God's purpose and is His appointed means of spreading the Gospel, they add to that sentence the conviction that "The Gospel must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system or human ideology."

The covenant also resolves that: "The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing and that as missionaries, we have been too slow to equip and encourage national leaders to assume their responsibilities. In every nation and culture, there should therefore be effective training programs for pastors and laymen in doctrine, discipleship, evangelism, nurture and service. And these training programs should be

based on creative local initiatives and be structured according to Biblical standards." The consensus was that "People of any given culture know better how to reach and train their own people than we westerners do."

As I have met with spiritual leaders in other countries, I have frequently asked, "What is your single greatest need?" They have all responded the same way: "Training for our leadership. That is our greatest need." It is believed that there are about two million pastors in this world today and less than one hundred thousand of them have a seminary degree. This is true for many of them because theological or Bible education is forbidden or very difficult to obtain in their cultures.

The eight pastors who did the Mandarin translation of our Bible studies said of our survey of the Bible: "We have been looking for a tool that could be understood by the average peasant in China today. Only five percent of the people in our country have the privilege of going to college and the vast majority of people are simple peasants." They said, "We were looking for a course of study that was geared to the twelve-year-old mind. When we found your survey of the Bible we realized that we had found what we have been looking for."

That delighted me because when I became a believer, I will never forget how I searched for somebody who could make the Scripture simple enough for me to understand it. How grateful I was when as a twenty year old student I had Dr. J. Vernon McGee for a Bible professor. God used his simple and vivid teaching to open the sixty-six books of the Bible for me. For more than fifty years I have been trying to do the same thing for other young believers. This is especially true in countries and cultures where a biblical education is forbidden or very difficult to find.

The last resolution of the Lausanne Covenant affirms the only hope of the world and the blessed hope of the church: the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They resolved together: "The promise of His coming is an incentive to our evangelism for we remember the words of the Lord that the Gospel must first be preached to all nations before the end will come. We believe that the interim period between Christ's ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God who have no liberty to stop before the end." The fact that the Gospel must first be preached to every creature before Christ is coming again, should motivate us to tell others about Christ (Matthew 24:14), Mark 16:15). Peter challenges us to hasten the day of His coming in this way because Jesus is not willing that any should perish but that all should be saved (II Peter 3:9, 11,12).

The Lausanne Covenant is the doctrinal statement of International Cooperating Ministries (Some countries should not mention ICM), the ministry that broadcasts the Mini Bible College all over the world.

In conclusion, Jesus is not concerned about what we profess we know but what we do with what we know - that we be obedient as He was obedient. Jesus said to God the Father in His prayer found in John 17:18, "As You have sent Me into the world, I have sent My disciples into the world." Jesus was sent to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). My prayer is that the Mini Bible College will help equip you to take the Good News to your world.

Obedying the Great Commission is the essence of the mission objective of International Cooperating Ministries and the Mini Bible College and is also the summary conclusion of the Lausanne Covenant:

"Therefore, in the light of this our faith and our resolve, we enter into a solemn covenant with God and with each other to

pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world. We call upon others to join us. May God help us by His grace and for His glory to be faithful to this our covenant." Amen. Hallelujah!