

SO WE'RE SAVED ... **NOW WHAT?**

“... I am convinced that the greatest fear which grips Christians - paralyzing them and preventing them from fulfilling the great commission of Mt 28:19-20, accepting the ministry and appointment of 2Co 5:18-20, and serving others as 1Pe 4:10 commands - is simply the fear which seizes all of us when we attempt to accomplish something we know we are unprepared for and will surely fail at ...”

(Scripture references intended from the NIV; use your preferred translation(s) in addition.)

There can be no argument that among the self-professing Christian community of our modern-day culture, the visible and measurable evidence of true Christian faith in action (Jam 2:22) is sorely lacking. If this failure causes concern for us who are truly saved - and if we are to overcome it - we would do well to consider what has resulted since “religion” - allied with contemporary worldly philosophies and political correctness - has assigned boundaries of time and space to the exercise of “Christian faith.” Yet, is such “faith” truly saving faith after all?

In stark contrast to the biblical model, especially as laid out for us in the book of Acts, the discernible evidence and overt employment of the most precious gift we can ever hope to possess has been largely restricted to the inside of designated buildings - and then, only on Sundays, and perhaps a Wednesday evening or so. Furthermore, when this exercise of “faith” too infrequently *does* manage to escape these self-imposed boundaries, the extent of its boldness and passion is further restricted by limits of “appropriateness” so as not to cause discomfort in others.

However, when truth meets sin, discomfort is inevitable! Seeking to avoid it is not virtuous. If the message is true and the faith genuine, there *must* be abundant boldness and passion. It *must* have plan and purpose. And *God's* interests - especially His desire for the unsaved - must surely be the driving force behind the effort. Beyond the Christian's unspeakable joy, the stakes are too high, the matters too profound, and the offer too magnificent for it to be otherwise. *The consequences are eternal!*

We could spend much time examining the Scriptural and historical accounts of man's God-ordained role in spreading and preserving the gospel. We can be assured it was neither rote nor passionless! In sad irony, it is partly due to the boldness and passion of their own presentations that the numerous and various philosophies of man now enjoy acceptance in place of the truth of the gospel. This boldness and passion driving the inventors of such unavailing feel-goodism - and the eager acceptance of it by their audiences - is fueled by the natural desire of each to escape the God to whom they refuse to be held accountable (as if that were possible - Heb 4:13; 9:27; Rom 14:10-12).

The essence of this pervasive spiritual danger which lurks among us - more and more prevalent each day - is precisely this: The world's philosophies are winning the battle for hearts and minds by forfeit! The competition is not showing up! Christians, *wake up!* We are the competition! If we are on the side of God, why the reluctance, the fear, the

need for motivation, the absence of excitement, the lack of loving concern for the lost? Have we forgotten our salvation (2Pe 1:9)? Or are we among the world ourselves, rather than as we should be, merely passing through (1Pe 2:11; Heb 11:13-16)?

Still, the secular, unbelieving majority has not achieved its current level of success in the banishment of living, vibrant, working faith from virtually all aspects of our culture without some assistance. As the English philosopher Edmund Burke stated, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing!" But just how good are the "good men" who allow the travesty graphically portrayed in Heb 10:29 to continue unopposed? Though they may not be doing the trampling themselves, they may as well be since they stand by in silence, unmoved as they witness the horrific tragedy!

So then, just exactly what kind of "faith" is it which exiles *itself* to ineffectiveness and irrelevance; *itself* cooperating with the effort to ensure that it is unseen and unheard from, cowering in fear while the power of God stands at its side?

In light of these unsettling concerns, let us examine some difficulties which arise when we who are saved fail to properly exercise the faith God has given us - which, according to Phil 2:12b-13 and elsewhere, God expects us to work out in all aspects of our daily lives. As mentioned, behind this faith stands, all the while, the very power of God; the power which provides everything we require for life and godliness according to 2Pe 1:3. And vs 5-8 provide the formula for avoiding the very ineffectiveness under discussion.

(Refer to the overview of [2Peter](#) posted on this site for more detailed treatment.)

This failure to conduct ourselves in the confidence which true faith ought to engender impacts our own lives, as well as the world and others around us (Mt 5:13-16). Though we will examine the latter more thoroughly, the disciplines which provide positive impact in our own lives also produce a positive impact in the world around us - and vice versa.

In a writing entitled "[The Blessed Life](#)," F. B. Meyer makes this opening statement: "There is a Christian life which, compared to the experience of most Christians, is as Summer to Winter or the mature fruitfulness of a golden Autumn to the struggling promise of a cold and late Spring. This is what I call the *blessed life*." Meyer explains that this "blessed life" (the full enjoyment of God's presence and blessings) should be the norm and ambition of every Christian.

However, this can be achieved only as we place our full trust in Christ, working out in our daily lives the faith given us by God's grace. Meyer goes on to explain various principles and methods to accomplish this. So, before we analyze the missing Christian impact on the surrounding world, let me relate two key points from Meyer's writing.

First, he observes that Christ has bought us with His blood, but then laments, "Alas, He has not had His money's worth!" As I read that, it brought 1Pe 1:18-19 in full view. I believe we may be motivated to a more serious, more obedient, and therefore, a more effective walk in our faith if we allow ourselves to meditate on the truth of that passage.

For if the exercised faith of many of today's Christians is an indication of the value of their purchased redemption, then it could indeed have been paid for with the much cheaper perishable things of the world referred to by Peter, rather than the priceless and

precious blood of Christ. Of course, such a redemption would be worth nothing since, as Peter effectively communicates with the adjective “perishable,” the things of the world will soon enough come to nothing as well.

This begs some questions however: Why are Christians living lives which advertise a worthless redemption to a world in grave need of genuine salvation? Why do they deprive themselves of the supernatural blessings and peace which are freely included in the true redemption which the invaluable shed blood of Christ has purchased for them? Why do those who claim the power of God live in such apparent powerlessness?

The second point of Meyer’s writing I want to share is this: We cannot experience the blessed life if we are weighed down by anything which the Holy Spirit is clearly prodding us to lay aside, yet we continue to indulge. These are things which we may already be uneasy about even before we sense the Spirit checking; which cause an argument in our conscience and for which we may solicit comfort by seeking approval from others.

God’s Word often equates disobedience with unbelief. Heb 3:7-19 provides just one example. If we have true faith, however, we are able to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Though this side of heaven we can still disobey, we ought not to be living lives consistently at odds with God’s admonitions. The fullness of the blessed life we experience is diminished to the extent we indulge our own desires in opposition to His.

Recognizing that there will be times when we find ourselves wrestling with obedience (Gal 5:17) - unwilling to do what God is asking - Meyer reminds us of a familiar course available to us: We must at least be willing to ask God to make us willing to be willing! Further, if there is an area of our life, or something material, or anything at all which we are withholding from God - unwilling to give up when we know He is asking - if we know Him unto salvation, we ought to trust Him enough to ask Him to simply take it!

Now then, the issue under consideration - Christians working out their faith - inherently precludes the lost as the target audience of this writing (though God may arrange benefit in their review of it). Its admonishments and exhortations are reserved for those who are actually saved; that is, born-again by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the finished work of Christ on the cross, in perfect obedience to the Father, whose mercy and grace designed and implemented this [plan of salvation](#) on behalf of fallen mankind.

Sadly, it is quite evident to the discerning mind that in the self-professed “Christian” congregations throughout the culture of our day, there are vastly more unsaved than saved - but that should come as no surprise or shock because that is what we find in Scripture (familarly, Mt 7:13-14; more soberly and fearfully, 2Ti 3:1-7). I have often shared with folks the focus of my passion relative to my efforts to proclaim the gospel message; that is, we could spend our entire lifetimes merely evangelizing and discipling those who already willingly and regularly gather to “worship” God!

As I am writing this in early July, we have just again witnessed the numerous and elaborate annual celebrations of America’s birth. And yet, there exists without excuse in our society today (even more inexcusably among the “churched”) biblical ignorance of a magnitude our founders - a mere 200+ years ago - could never have envisioned!

Beyond shameful ignorance of core biblical truths, we find mere apathy giving way to outright and increasingly frenzied hostility toward anything which flows from the truths which God, in His goodness, has graciously provided and preserved for us in His Word. This desperate struggle to seize and destroy the sovereign authority and holiness of God has increased in intensity and will continue to do so as man repeatedly fails in his effort to find true peace - deliverance from the world's bondages - apart from God.

Indeed, man frustrates himself as he attempts to remove God from His throne - in order that he might anoint his idols in God's place. Isaiah's rendition of this would be quite humorous if it was not so tragic (44:13-20). And yet, man continues in his futile endeavor to replace God's eternal truth with some latest philosophy he has designed in the foolish hope that somehow his idols might indeed succeed in usurping God's throne!

Nevertheless, despite his best efforts, man experiences failure after failure - no peace, no deliverance. But, rather than allowing these failed attempts to drive him to the obvious and logical solution, man frantically thrashes about in a foolish and futile search for an alternate escape route, attempting to drown out the clear call of God's Word by increasing the volume of his sinful rebellion (Acts 6:8-7:58; Rom 1:18).

As a nation, we have advanced in worldly prosperity, technology and global positions of power and leadership in exponential fashion. And yet, we must confess that our relationship with the Creator of the universe, the God of all, the One whom our founders openly and always acknowledged as our Provider and Protector (no matter what the modern-day history revisionists would have us believe) - that national relationship with God has been heading, albeit more incrementally, in exactly the opposite direction!

History, of course, teaches us that this is exactly what to expect of the nations of men; it has been true of all those before us, including God's very own chosen people - first, as the delivered Israelites, then as the Jewish nation itself.

Rather than eliciting gratitude, thanksgiving, worship, acknowledged recognition of and reliance upon God's presence, power, provision, protection, sovereignty, grace, mercy, love (where does it end?), man instead ascribes his prosperity and power to his own wisdom and effort, ignoring the warning and counsel of Prov 3:5-7.

As man begins to place his faith and trust in himself, he first relegates God to a religious icon, then to myth, and ultimately, to the trash heap! My friends, as a nation we are on or beyond the verge of putting God out to be picked up with the trash, along with the rest of what we consider worthless and repugnant!

Thankfully, we of the remnant know that man's desire and attempts to do so cannot and will not succeed - God will always be God (Rev 1:8; Heb 13:8), and our faith in Him will indeed bring the promised reward (Jam 1:12; Heb 9:27-28). Though individually, we who are saved are comforted with the assurance of our eternal destiny, yet as a nation, we ought to maintain the highest state of fear and trembling when we consider the position we find ourselves in, our national attitude toward God, and the historical record of God's dealings with nations which have shown similar disrespect for Him.

So, what exactly is the challenge before us? Let me begin by asking: "So we're saved ... *now what?*" We who have been saved by God's grace ought to be influencing the world around us (Phil 2:14-15; 1Pe 2:9-12 and again, Mt 5:13-16). If we truly recognize and appreciate what we testify to in word, we will express our gratitude and thankfulness by putting our testimony into action; there will be a walk to our talk - a rigid bond between what we know, what we say, and what we do.

Nevertheless, though on one hand we ought to be making a conscious and deliberate effort, on the other - and in its ideal and ultimate manifestation - this influence for Christ should flow from us as naturally, effortlessly and unconsciously as our breathing and the beating of our hearts. Paul's descriptions in 2Co 2:15 and 3:2-3 must apply to us: We should be the aroma of Christ among those around us - and when they read what they see in our lives they ought to be reading from the pen of the Holy Spirit Himself!

Our families, friends, neighbors and co-workers should *know* we are Christians! When God creates opportunities for us to do so, we ought to be *speaking* the gospel to them in words - effectively and completely (Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3-6). But always, we must be *demonstrating* it to them in our lives! And our lives must look and *actually be* different from the worldly lives around us - not for the sake of being different, but because there is actually new life in us (2Co 5:17), and that life is Christ Himself! (Col 3:3-4)

We have been reborn, made new, and that ought to be abundantly evident to all around. We must not be ashamed to stand out - *we are standing with and for Christ!* So, let them mock us for skipping that movie, or avoiding the casino and lottery, or failing to punctuate our conversation with expletives, or dressing modestly, and all the rest of our honoring of God. For all the mockers, there may be the one or more whom God has called to witness Himself in us! We must honor God rather than fear men.

That is why it is so disappointing that many Christians of our day are known as such only inside the four walls of the building they gather in. One primary component of the remedy may be found in the instruction of Col 2:6-7. When the saved forget their receiving of Christ, when they cease to put down roots in Him and stop growing in Him, when they are not being strengthened in the faith, when they are no longer hungry to be taught and refuse to apply previous teaching to their daily lives, they certainly will not overflow with thankfulness for what they claim God has done for them.

Therefore, they stand guilty of despising the supernatural work of regeneration which God has effected in them; bored with the gift of salvation, as a new Christmas toy played with a few times. There is an inexplicable inconsistency in their lives: They say, "I'd rather have Jesus ...," but there is scant evidence that they are motivated and directed by His interests or commands! They lose their mindfulness of God's presence, are not excited by His availability to them, do not avail themselves of His standing offer which allows them to approach His throne with confidence (Eph 3:12; Heb 4:16; 1Jn 5:14), and have no burden for the eternal fate of the lost (Lk 19:10; 15:3-10).

As a result, they are becoming more and more influenced by the world, instead of the other way around. This is what is happening, in escalating fashion, to the overall "Christian" culture and leadership of our day. God's interests are not being represented and furthered. On the contrary, it is some of *Satan's* most effective work which is being

done by “Christians” and “Christian leaders” who now promulgate teaching so antithetical to biblical doctrine that it boggles the mind that such blasphemy could ever be possible! These “Christians” are giving way to worldly influences and intimidations which God commands and equips them to overcome (Eph 4:14; 2Ti 1:7-8).

So then, what exactly are the root causes of the problem? Why is the world not being influenced by the Christian community? Why are Christians failing to exercise the faith they have received to impact the world for Christ?

First, let us be honest and acknowledge the obvious. As I have been intimating thus far, most folks who claim to be Christians today are not Christians at all. In fact, a sad reality is that there is now a legitimate ignorance of what true Christianity is - and what a genuine Christian looks like. There was a time when even the unsaved had a working understanding and appreciation of things Christian, and even of God Himself - albeit limited by their unsaved status. The situation today finds us having to explain ourselves - and due to a lack of handing down of the truth when it was fresh, accurate and personally experienced (Dt 6:4-12), we are now confronted by great confusion.

We find ourselves competing with so many false inventions masquerading under the same banner we carry (2Co 11:13-15) that even with folks who are not argumentative we are often unable to communicate the genuine version satisfactorily. We continually encounter folks who have been bombarded with so much nonsense that they simply lack the desire to listen to what they understandably assume will simply be more of the same. Of course, God will hold them accountable for taking the easy and lazy way out - the truth *can* be known by those who sincerely seek it (Rom 1:18-20; Jn 20:31).

And so, we have folks claiming to be Christians who are not - many of whom rest in the false security of a salvation which will not be there for them. And we have “Christian” leaders and ministries which are not Christian at all - many of whom are not even aware of it. This first problem then, digs an even deeper hole for true Christianity. It is bad enough that these so-called Christian individuals, leaders and ministries cannot have an influence for Christ, since Christ is not in them. Worse, they present false and corrupted views of Christianity to a world which, in the first place, does not know what genuine Christianity is, and in the second, more than willingly stipulates to their legitimacy.

This willingness is easily understood, however. The world eagerly seeks to find ease and comfort in dismantling the integrity of anything to do with Christ and the truth He represents. These distorted versions of Christianity become convenient straw men; easily dismissed for the corrupted shams that they are. The sad result is that anyone making an effort to convey the truth sooner or later encounters someone whose reason for rejecting it is that God’s version is seen in the same light as the others. Usually, those folks will not allow the time or expend the effort to examine the differences.

Next, beside the “non-Christian Christians,” we have the truly saved who are immature. Of course, some of this is to be expected. Just as we mature gradually but steadily in all aspects of human development - physical, intellectual, emotional, psychological and social - so it is spiritually. In both realms, God assigns the responsibility to oversee and nurture the growth of the newborn to those who have already matured. Paul gives us the complete formula for spiritual development in Eph 4:11-16.

And so, immaturity in the Christian community is not, in itself, unexpected or abnormal. In fact, we ought to welcome it because it testifies (well, it *should* testify) to an abundant blessing of new births! However, just as we monitor age-appropriate behavior and development in physical components, there are appropriate expectations to be met spiritually. This is one of the responsibilities of Christian leaders and other mature Christians - one of the most important, and most neglected!

A major cause of this deficiency is the modern-day failure to conform to the biblical model of local church leadership and leader qualification as evidenced in Acts and explicitly taught in Paul's writings to Timothy and Titus. The "ordaining" of a clergy class and the notion of local churches administered, and congregations ministered to, by a singular or "senior" pastor with hierarchical subordinates (and/or superiors) is not the church polity taught and modeled for us in Scripture. The Scriptural concept of plural eldership is not even known or recognized by the majority of churchgoers today.

(An excellent study on this issue by Alexander Strauch is available [here](#).)

While most churches do employ some sort of "church board," these boards do not begin to approach the God-ordained model. Some churches have a "deacon board" (refusing to call anyone an "elder" who is not seminary trained). Some do have an "elder board," but their elders are not qualified according to Scripture and do not discharge the duties it calls for. Many church boards are merely composed of the most "successful" men in the church; local businessmen or others with community influence. Many of these board members are not even saved! No wonder, then, that the Scriptural responsibilities of church leadership are being neglected - leadership does not even realize what its responsibilities actually are, and is not equipped to fulfill them anyhow!

Sometime after the consummation of the Church's true founding - in the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - congregations and their leaderships entered into a grave and mutual error. Instead of relying upon and availing themselves of the power of God - the influence, enabling and guidance of the Holy Spirit - they began to depend on human leadership and organization. Leaders relished the power and prestige - congregants enjoyed delegating all the spiritual responsibilities to the leaders.

Eventually and inevitably came the painfully lamentable impediment to true relationship with God which is denominationalism. This fostered pious religiosity, calculated and unnecessary doctrinal niches, improperly revered traditions and extended hierarchical organization and control beyond the local church. As modern-day denominationalism is stagnating (appearing to be dying a slow death), we now have mega-churches, mega-pastors and mega-ministries - growing ever "bigger and greater" through mega-marketing. Yet, some of the biggest and best-marketed are the worst from the only viewpoint which matters - glorifying, honoring and magnifying God; making Him known to all in truth, motivating folks to a closer relationship with the Lord and fulfilling the God-ordained purpose for His Church.

And so, the local church continues to suffer for its rebellion against God's formula for leadership. It has become so entrenched in so much unwise operational strategy and

so many “bad habits” that it no longer recognizes its error and is seemingly hopeless to find its way out. Yet, sheep-like folks continue to dutifully attend, but for what purpose?

And therefore, because this responsibility for overseeing individual and corporate growth in the church is going largely unmet, a great portion of the spiritual immaturity in our midst today is totally unnecessary and unacceptable. We have, in our modern Christian community, members who have belonged to local churches for decades, and whose families have been members for many generations. And yet, many of these folks have the superficial, elementary understanding criticized by the writer of Hebrews in 5:11-6:2! They are unprepared and unable to represent Christ to others, whether the new believer or unbeliever. Most of them also lack the desire to do so, but where this desire does exist, it falls into the trap of Prov 19:2 and Rom 10:2.

And then, in sad irony, it is the “innocent” immature Christian who is encouraged and allowed to go forth in his otherwise commendable zealousness without the benefit which Priscilla and Aquila provided for Apollos (Acts 18:24-28). I have witnessed churches sending out their youth group to tackle what the mature adults ought to be doing!

Finally on this point, just as we have “Christian” leaders who are *not* Christians, we also have leaders who *are* true Christians but who are not mature themselves - so it is no wonder that the immature of their charge remain immature. Meanwhile, the otherwise mature members grieve the Holy Spirit as they retire within the comfortable boundaries they have set for themselves, displaying a lack of appreciation and gratitude for what God has done for them by sitting on the sidelines as mere spectators.

Thus far then, the causes of the missing Christian impact on the world around us are small numbers of the genuinely saved (though God has accomplished great things with small numbers), distorted “Christianity,” immature Christians, unsaved and/or improper Christian leadership, and ungrateful, inactive Christians. Though we could certainly identify many other causes, we will examine just one more: timidity or fearfulness.

As we saw earlier, 2Ti 1:7-8 challenges us to dismiss timidity and fear. This failing in our present-day Christian culture is particularly shameful because it exposes the shallowness of our faith. The costs and fears which paralyze today’s Christians are but a drop in the sea when compared to the issues facing the believers Paul had in view when he wrote to Timothy (and as addressed by Peter in chapter 4 of his first epistle).

Today, Christians retreat in fear when faced with such “monumental” suffering as the loss of friends, or rejection by unsaved family members, or being ostracized from a desired social circle, or loss of local church membership, or the mocking of co-workers or neighbors or even of folks they do not even know and will never see again, or criticism from church leaders or fellow members uncomfortable with their carrying of Christianity beyond the “four walls,” or the loss of employment or ... (consider the greatest suffering you or a close Christian friend or family member has experienced - though, in the flesh, my hope is that you are not one of the few who has been touched by the true suffering which is rare to us in American culture today).

We are all well aware of the costs and sufferings endured by Christians of times past and of other cultures of our own day. We should be ashamed when we consider how

easily we are scared off! Christians of the early church rejoiced that God found them worthy to suffer on His behalf (Acts 5:41-42; Heb 10:32-34) - and their suffering produced a result quite opposite that which their persecutors expected and hoped for! Rather than retreat, they went forth with even *greater* boldness and determination!

Heb 11 provides many practical examples of faith-in-action from the Old Testament. 12:2-3 urges us to consider the perfect example of Christ Himself, and vs 4 reminds us that we have not yet suffered to the point of shedding our blood. The subsequent verses provide wise and effective counsel - to simply consider all suffering as the discipline of a perfect and loving Father who desires that His children share in His holiness! If we are to fear anything, perhaps we should note the warning of Heb 10:38: If we do not want God to be displeased with us, we must not shrink back - we must live by the faith we have been given. And yet, many contemporary Christians are more concerned with pleasing men than God. Paul addresses this in Gal 1:10 and 1Th 2:4.

Still, I am convinced that the greatest fear which grips Christians - paralyzing them and preventing them from fulfilling the great commission of Mt 28:19-20, accepting the ministry and appointment of 2Co 5:18-20, and serving others as 1Pe 4:10 commands - is simply the fear which seizes all of us when we attempt to accomplish something we know we are unprepared for and will surely fail at. Just as the little leaguer melts in anxiety and fright when he is sent up to bat knowing he will strike out, today's ineffective and unproductive Christian (2Pe 1:8-9) has no intention or desire to be thrust into a role of service he knows he cannot fulfill.

To further the baseball analogy, it all comes down to this: You're one of the subs on the bench in the bottom of the ninth with the game on the line. The coach nervously glances over repeatedly as first there is 1 out, then 2. He calls the on-deck hitter back to the dugout and you know what's coming. Are you sitting up on the edge of the bench hoping he'll send you in (Isa 6:8), prepared for the challenge? Or are you shrinking back hoping he picks someone else (Ex 4:13), knowing you just can't do what the coach needs you to do? Are you like Moses, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Or are you like Isaiah, "Here I am, Lord. Send me!" Are you convinced you'll strike out? Or are you excited to be used of the Lord because you have prepared yourself in Him and you're trusting in His strength, ability and wisdom? *It's time to get in the game!*

What great irony that while even God's enemies melt in fear as they recognize His presence and power poised *against* them (Dt 32:31; Jos 2:8-24, 4:23-5:1; 2Ch 20:27-30; Mt 27:54; Phil 1:27-28), God's children should fear to move forward with that very same presence and power deployed *for* them.

This brings us now to a discussion of the solution ...

How do the genuinely saved overcome the fear of stepping up to the plate and become effective ambassadors for Christ, diligently and correctly handling the Word of God (2Ti 2:15)? How do we dare accept the awesome honor and responsibility of administering the very grace of God? For our purposes, I will simplify the solution to two steps.

The first is to purify ourselves; to consecrate ourselves to God's service (Lev 20:7). Though I am speaking to us as individuals now, as a nation this is the foremost cause of

the quagmires of our political, military and other efforts throughout the world. We are mocked, despised and hated - and one major reason is because others see us as hypocrites, seeking only our own benefit. While advancing under the banner of righteousness and claiming to represent the cause of justice, the terms of our alliances and everyday commercial, political and military dealings are themselves fraught with unrighteousness and injustice, having no semblance of or basis in the Christianity upon which this nation was founded and to which it was once overtly tethered!

And then, of course, those we seek to admonish witness this very unrighteousness and injustice flourishing on our own soil; disobedience and rebellion against God whom we claim is on our side! We ought to consider regaining some integrity by cleaning up our own house before addressing the mess in our neighbor's. Of course, that would require an earnest and complete return to God as a nation. Individually, we face the same challenge (2Co 7:1). Or do we again despise the blood of Christ (Tit 2:11-14; Col 1:21-22)? We must set ourselves apart unto God and righteousness, that we may undertake with virtue and honor the work for which God Himself has set us apart (1Pe 2:9).

Related to this is the partnering of Christians with non-Christians - either willingly, ignorant of the Scriptural warning (2Co 6:14-15), or neglecting discernment (Phil 1:9-10). Christians are using methods, engaging in activities, and employing the support of individuals or groups which are clearly not pleasing to God. But because these strategies bring worldly success to worldly endeavors, Christians of shallow or immature faith seek to achieve spiritual "success" by imitating them - just as the Israelites demanded a king because they wanted to be like the nations around them (1Sa 8:4-5).

This type of thinking is simply God being sold short; a sheer lack of faith in Him. There is so much more to be gained, abundant blessing to be experienced, and greater peace and comfort to be enjoyed by trusting and relying on Him and His ways alone!

In our individual Christian lives, we are challenged to come out from the world (2Co 6:17-18), to recognize and enjoy how God has positioned us: set apart unto Himself (Ps 4:3). We must remain in, and operate out of this position in all areas of our lives. The slightest joining with, or conformity to the world in thought, word or deed renders us impure, however slight (Jam 4:4; 1Jn 2:15-17). The best intentions and efforts for God's sake are compromised to the degree they are undertaken with impurity.

That said, this side of heaven we will always be impure - but we must not *abide* in impurity or entertain it deliberately, casually or comfortably! Ultimately, our impurity is overcome in the same manner Paul explains our incompetence in 2Co 3:4-6: God has given us work to do; He will enable us and work in and through us by His *own* holiness, righteousness and power. 4:7 reminds us that we are mere jars of clay - but we hold the pure, righteous and powerful Word of God!

On one hand, we must endeavor to keep ourselves pure - but on the other, we remind ourselves that we can only accomplish God's purposes when we allow Him to use us as He sees fit, submitting ourselves to Him in total, that He might exercise the purity of *His* holiness and righteousness in and through us! Attempting to spread the gospel without submitting to Christ will only teach others not to submit to Him as well!

Ministries and churches which allow the unsaved to become members or to assist in the furtherance of God's kingdom are intentionally spoiling the purity of the effort! That was the concern behind the counsel Paul provided Timothy in 1Ti 5:22. Similarly, individuals who seek to impact the world for Christ while partnering with impurity will find an audience only for their impurity! That is what resonates with the natural state of the lost of this world, so they will ignore or discard the rest of our message when distracted by something more appealing to their sinful nature and desire - no differently than the tossing aside of junk mail to quickly open a more exciting item which catches the eye. May God forbid that we should cause others to discard His Word as junk!

Now then, it is precisely because the banner of Christ is being carried by so many who will find themselves the targets of Mt 7:23 that we find ourselves in a culture of "easy believism" which, more accurately labeled, is simply *unbelievism*. A "cure" is sought for several undesirable inherencies of man - knowledge of His Creator, ability to distinguish moral right and wrong, recognition of his imperfect character, and others. These cause him to seek to deny, escape or somehow overcome his responsibility to God.

The "gospel" being spread throughout our culture today seeks to salve the consciences of folks who want to live lives in total contradiction to God and His Word while claiming to be His children! They rest in a false sense of security - entitled, they think, to the inheritance God has promised without meeting any of the conditions He has prescribed!

James tells us in 1:12 that God's promise is reserved for those who love Him. Jesus said to love Him is to obey Him (Jn 14:15). Yet today, the doctrines of obedience (1Jn 2:3-6), repentance (Mt 4:17), the testing of fruit (Mt 3:8; 7:18-20), the new creation evidenced in radically changed lives (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-8), the transformation brought about by the renewing of minds (Rom 12:2), and the rest of what is supernaturally accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in genuine rebirth are being watered down or ignored altogether! In their place is the "receive and believe" gospel, so as not to scare away the potential or new "believer."

Ultimately, this is merely the silly attempt of deluded and self-deceived sinners to bring sanity and peace to their lives while insanity and discord ought to be obvious as the only results to be expected of their behaviors (Jam 3:16). Nonetheless, in utter foolishness, man persists in the attempt, seeking to substitute his own terms of salvation for those God has decreed. Man decides for himself which hoops he will jump through, and the bar of entrance to God's kingdom is lowered to a level he can leap with confidence.

And so, genuine Christian evangelism finds itself competing with counterfeit offerings which the world finds much more appealing to its sinful appetite. The unwise course is to spice up or change the appeal of the true gospel - to redress, reformulate, or "modernize" it. Some Christians cringe when the world rejects the gospel as irrelevant or foolish (1Co 1:18). They see the gospel attacked and decide that they must come to its rescue. In misguided fervor, they scamper to protect the all-powerful Word with the feeble strength of the flesh! They search for ways to add fun to the gospel message, to restore its relevance, and to enhance its appeal. But the gospel *is* relevant, *as is*, and *profoundly* so! When we adjust it to fit the culture so that it holds meaning from their worldly viewpoint, we disarm it of its saving power! *Its greatest relevance is its power to save!* This relevance is universal; transcending all human boundaries.

And the *appeal* of the gospel is fixed, timeless, and magnificently purposeful! It is not a chef's offering in need of garnish or spice. The problem lies not in the appeal, *but in what is being appealed to!* The gospel will *never* resonate with the sinful nature of man. When we modify the gospel recipe to excite man's palate, it will (temporarily) satisfy his appetite while providing no nourishment! Paul's instruction to elders in Titus 1:9 applies to every Christian: We must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught! Without sound doctrine, we have nothing to minister to the lost! We must maintain the vision and the limit of our God-given mission and role. We are called to merely spread and minister the message - clearly, accurately and fully (Col 4:4; 2Ti 2:15; 4:17; ultimately, 1Jn 1:1-3). It is the role of the Holy Spirit to prepare hearts!

If it were possible to thwart the work of God, some would be doing so as they present changed hearts with a changed message. Sinners' hearts are supernaturally changed to accept and conform to the original message. The changed message will only find a home in unchanged hearts. God has prepared heart-fields to produce an abundant harvest, yet many are being planted with the seed of weeds! And some of this is being done by zealous, genuinely reborn, but immature, undeveloped Christians.

Thus, we encounter the second step of our responsibility: If we are to impact the world for Christ, we must mature as Christians. We reviewed the admonishment of the author of Hebrews earlier (5:11-6:2). Peter expresses this in his first letter in 2:2 and in the final verse of his second letter (3:18). James calls us to mature in the face of suffering (1:2-4). We have already examined the formula Paul provides in Eph 4:11-16. And Jesus Himself warns us of the dangers to expect in Lk 8:14. The recording in Mk 4:18-19 provides further insight and, if we love Jesus, ought to move us to vigilance in resisting the allures of the world.

But the concern Paul expresses in 2Co 10:15b-16a is most sobering. The absence of contemporary Christian maturity produces the very phenomenon Paul sought to avoid: When will Christians stop sapping the strength and resources of those God calls to teach them, thus freeing these teachers to move on to other hungry souls? And when will those who have been provided with nourishment - the never-ending supply of the eternally-availing Bread of Life - begin to live in the strength it provides, sharing it with others and recognizing that this responsibility is not reserved for some "professionals?"

Nowadays, however, the blame rests with both students and teachers alike. The students enjoy showing up for the same classes over and over, confident that they know all the answers and will not be challenged beyond comfort or forced to consider anything new. After all, the teacher likes them and will not issue any difficult assignments or work projects. From the other side, the teachers are assured of friendly audiences which will dutifully nod their heads and issue "Amen's" on cue. They are guaranteed that the crowds will not be hostile, express disagreement or seriously challenge them to defend their presentation beyond the provided notes. Most question and answer sessions could be easily handled by most folks in the congregation. Moreover, since the students have already mastered the elementary material being covered, it will be easy to follow the script and finish on time. No sweat on either side!

Now, just imagine an academic classroom of 5th grade students constantly repeating the 5th grade curriculum year after year, with no obligation or intent to either demonstrate or employ their 5th grade level of knowledge in their lives, or to move on to the 6th grade. Then, imagine further a teacher of 5th graders finding purpose and fulfillment in presenting the same students with the same curriculum over and over. A true teacher desires that his students move on to higher levels of knowledge, comprehension and application - and prepares himself to meet the students' ongoing, developing needs.

Compare the modern Christian environment with the New Testament record, where the believing students hungered and thirsted for more, displayed such drastically changed lives that they were easily identified and known as disciples of Christ, and went forth with excitement and joy despite persecution and suffering! And what about the teachers of that day? Did Paul and the apostles seek friendly crowds which they could count on for agreement and as a means to support their livelihood? Not hardly!

This blissful stagnancy of developmental maturity in today's Christian community has spawned an entire industry of various traveling preachers and motivational speakers, musicians and singers, and other entertainers who work the circuit like popular rock bands or comedy acts! But the great commission does not call evangelists to earn a living off the gospel message by taking turns hitting the popular spots over and over, entertaining the same crowds with the same performances and the same results! As we reviewed earlier, the commission is to make *disciples*, not customers (Mt 28:19-20) - to represent *Jesus Christ and His interests*, not self-promotion and PR (2Co 5:18-20) - and to administer *God's grace*, not books and CDs (1Pe 4:10)!

The goal is not to attract folks to social gatherings in order to make them feel better by participating in some religious activity designed to fulfill some pious objectives. No, the genuine twofold purpose is much greater! Part 1: To attract the unsaved to God and the truths of His Word in order to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work which actually, completely and eternally restores their spiritual condition in fulfillment of God's desire that they should repent and be saved. Part 2: To equip and exhort those who are already saved to assist in Part 1!

Now then, bringing the issue back home to ourselves, there are many traps of Satan which lie in the path of the zealous Christian. Notwithstanding the apparent direction of this writing, the first and surest is to convince ourselves that it is all about what we need to accomplish for God. Oh, we *will* and *must* accomplish things for Him - if indeed we are in Christ (Jn 15:8). But those things will not spring from our genuine zealousness, or the great energy of our sincere effort, or the wisdom of our carefully-planned strategy, or the earnestness of our lofty desire, or anything else which has *us* in it. They will flow from one thing alone: our right relationship with the only One who is able to accomplish anything good - God Himself. It is all about our relationship with Him - that is all He truly desires! Yet, so many Christians miss this key point and fret as Martha did in Lk 10:38-41, overwhelmed by comparatively insignificant tasks. Mary, on the other hand, chose to strengthen her relationship with God!

To illustrate, it is like the dad who asks little Johnny to help him paint the porch on Saturday morning. In the end, dad is the one who chose and controlled the project, provided what was needed, issued direction and covered Johnny's mistakes. Dad could

have done it himself. But dad is overwhelmingly pleased that Johnny responded with excitement, glee and enthusiasm when he asked him to help - not because he needed any help, but because he desired the relationship! When the project is done, dad shows off Johnny's perfect work because, with dad able to assure it, Johnny could not fail! But in fact, failure never even occurred to Johnny. He was so happy to be with his dad whom he trusted completely, that he simply did what dad asked, when he asked, how he asked and for whatever purpose dad had in mind - confident that dad was in control and knew what he was doing. Johnny was content to simply be with his dad, overjoyed that dad wanted to be with him! As children of our perfect Father in heaven, we need to understand and follow that model. *God desires relationship with us!*

Ironically, we must mature in the Lord before we can appreciate our status as His children. It is only as mature Christians that we are able to walk in and enjoy the blessing of being a child before God! The 5-year old with the "perfect" dad does not yet recognize how valuable that is. When he grows up he has a greater, fuller appreciation and understanding of it - especially as he thinks back and remembers how dad loved him and cared for him in ways he had not then noticed. Having matured, possessing fuller knowledge of his dad, he more easily and comfortably allows himself to be identified as dad's child, enjoying and relishing his status. He models himself after his dad and brags about him at every opportunity. He is not embarrassed when others notice how he does even the little things "just like dad." He is proud to belong to him!

However, Christian maturity takes time and commitment. This is essential if we are to be the aroma of Christ and the Holy Spirit's letter as discussed earlier. Time with God is paramount - developing, enjoying and employing the blessing of an ever-stronger and ever-closer relationship with the God of all (Eph 1:17). Excavating Scriptural truths for ourselves is another requisite - growing toward mastering the essential doctrines which God has provided as guideposts (2Ti 3:16-17). Putting these two to work - utilizing the gifts He bestows on us to serve Him through service to others - is God's expectation of all who claim His name. This work of personal ministry is one opportunity God uses to mold and make *us* as *we* grow more and more into His Son's image.

Yet, the Scriptures anticipate and identify the impediments to our growth and instruct us accordingly. We are to abandon the old and abide in the new; we are called to godliness. I urge the reader who has persevered thus far to examine the following Scripture excerpts in the order deliberately arranged. And I offer the exhortation of Paul to Timothy in 2Ti 2:7: Paul, nearing the end of his life - and a man of godly character and great wisdom, experience and accomplishment - would not allow his final opportunity to prepare Timothy for godly service to rest in himself. He handed off all that he could, but he urged Timothy to seek the Lord for insight into all of it. The greatest of preachers and teachers cannot customize and deliver spiritual truth to individuals as God can. And no man can open hearts or minds unto spiritual understanding - God alone does that (Lk 24:45; Acts 16:14; 2Co 4:6; 1Co 2:14).

Off with the old; on with the new

2Co 5:17; Eph 5:8; 4:22-24; 1Co 6:9-11; Tit 3:3-4; Col 3:5-8; Rom 12:2; 13:12-14; 2Ti 2:22; 1Pe 1:14; Rom 6:4-11

The call to godliness

1Th 4:7; 2Pe 3:11; Phl 1:27a; Eph 4:1; Jam 2:12; Col 3:1-2; 1Jn 1:6-7; Eph 5:15-17; 1Th 5:5-6; Jam 4:7-8a; 1Pe 2:11; 1Pe 2:1; Eph 5:3-4; Jam 1:21; Gal 5:16-17; Rom 6:12; Tit 2:11-12

Finally, as we willingly and enthusiastically give up our right to ourselves - that the entirety of our lives might be employed for God's glory and purpose rather than our own - let us adopt the attitude Jesus exhorted of his disciples in the parable of the servant:

Lk 17:10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

This writing now closes with a number of questions. However, this is not some academic test - for the reader will know the "right" answer to each. This is a self-examination, a test of our hearts. Let us answer each honestly - and when the buzzer sounds, indicating that we are out of step with God's plan for us, let us ask and allow Him to mold us and make us, that we might fulfill 2Ti 2:21.

And so, we ask ourselves: Are we growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2Pe 3:18)? Are we allowing that grace to perform its work in us; are we thinking, speaking and acting out of that knowledge? Are we recognizing and responding to opportunities to impact others for Christ which God is already arranging? Are we excited about and hungering for the opportunities He will continue to provide? Are we at the same time developing and being disciplined so that God may entrust to us even "greater" opportunities if He so desires - for *His* sake, honor and glory? Are we developing and discipling others, that they may also be noble instruments in the hand of the all-wise God - of use to Him elsewhere or partnered with us?

Do we have a passion for His great renown - not a fleeting emotional surge, but a true abiding passion which is the catalyst supplying purpose to our very existence, permeating every aspect and moment of our lives? Do we find excitement and joy in seeing Him glorified, magnified and worshiped? Do we love to point out to others His wisdom and power as we see it displayed daily?

Do we look forward to His coming kingdom with excited anticipation? Does our passion for God and His Word overflow and infiltrate those around us? Do we truly believe that the message of the gospel is the hope of the lost?

Is He not supreme in all ways - the greatest of all? Really? Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get going!